

The reconstruction of noun classification in Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages

Ines Fiedler (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

The presentation compares the synchronic gender systems of most of the Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages, revealing huge differences with respect to their design and complexity, in order to establish an improved reconstruction of the proto-system. This reconstruction aims at improving the existing one (Heine 1968) by including new data and by applying a systematic cross-linguistically oriented approach to the analysis of gender systems as proposed by Güldemann (2000) and, with a particular focus on Niger-Congo, Güldemann and Fiedler (2018). This approach consistently distinguishes the four following gender-related concepts: (a) agreement classes as the ultimate basis of the system of genders, (b) gender (classes) as reflecting the classification of nouns in the lexicon/reference domain, (c) noun (form) classes as the partial reflex of genders hosted by the nouns themselves and (d) declension classes as reflecting the morphological variation of nouns triggered by number, gender etc.. Even though Heine (1968) included agreement forms in the description of the synchronic systems, his reconstruction seems to rely mainly on noun form classes, so that it does not reflect the agreement-based proto-system of genders but rather that for declension classes. The new theoretical approach also contributes to the reconstruction of gender systems in Niger-Congo in general.

References:

- Güldemann, Tom and Ines Fiedler. 2018. Niger-Congo “noun classes” conflate gender with declension. In Francesca Di Garbo & Bernhard Wälchli (eds.), *Grammatical gender and linguistic complexity*, 85-135. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2000. Noun categorization systems in Non-Khoe lineages of Khoisan. *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 63:5-33.
- Heine, Bernd. 1968. Die Verbreitung und Gliederung der Togorestsprachen. (Kölner Beiträge zur Afrikanistik, vol. 1). Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.