

## **Abstract: “Prefix-dropping” in the Mel languages (Niger-Congo)**

The Mel languages of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia – traditionally being a part of the Atlantic subfamily of Niger-Congo (see Greenberg 1963) – are nowadays considered by many scholars to be an independent branch of Niger-Congo (cf. e.g. Dalby 1965; Hammarström et al. 2018).

The Northern Mel languages (Temne and Baga languages) show a prefixing gender and noun form morphology with a tendency towards alliterative agreement (see Wilson 1961; for the separation of gender and noun form morphology see Güldemann & Fiedler forthcoming). This morphosyntactic type is well-known from Bantu languages and was reconstructed for Proto-Bantu (Meeussen 1967). Given the overwhelming amount of research done on Bantu languages, it has been almost taken for granted that the Proto-Niger-Congo system must have been of this type, too.

Since more and more data from Niger-Congo groups outside Bantu are coming in, this view must be seriously challenged. One phenomenon related to this debate is the absence of the noun form prefix of head nouns in noun phrases extended by modifiers. This feature has already been described for Aghem (Hyman 1979) and Dakarkari (Hoffmann 1967), like the Bantu languages members of the Benue-Congo branch of Niger-Congo.

A thorough analysis of the data on the Southern Mel languages Mani (Childs 2011), Krim (Pichl 1972), Sherbro (Rogers 1967) and Kisi (Childs 1995) shows that “prefix-dropping” is prevalent in these languages, too. This talk will give an overview and offer possible explanations how the feature could have evolved diachronically. Although it seems somewhat self-evident that the prefix has been simply omitted in extended noun phrases, it cannot be excluded that the obligatory prefix-marking of the head noun in all contexts is a secondary development.

## References

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