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Exceptional morphology of the Tura numerals (an Eastern Mande language).

In Tura (Niger-Congo, Mande, Eastern Mande) basic numerals from two to five behave in a rather extraordinary way as far as their morphological unity is concerned.

In order to understand better what is so strange about these numerals some preliminary remarks on their form should be made:

- (1) these are disyllabic words in the otherwise predominantly monosyllabic language;
- (2) the two syllables they consist of cannot be attached any meaning of their own (either lexical or functional) from the synchronic point of view and, therefore, they must be considered as a single root;
- (3) comparative data show rather strong evidence that it has always (up to the Proto-Eastern Mande or even Proto-Mande levels) been the case for most of them, which suggests that they should be considered as a single root from a diachronic point of view as well;

The strangeness of these numerals manifests itself in the following facts:

- (1) some of these numerals have an intervocalic voiceless consonant, which is otherwise very untypical for disyllabic words of the language (with the exception of ideophones);
- (2) the roots of these numerals, which are supposed to be a unity, can be split up by some other words;
- (3) such split of the root by the aforementioned words is possible only for numerals;
- (4) the words that can be inserted when such split takes place also form a small closed lexico-grammatical class, that of the so-called “intensifiers”, such as ‘only’, ‘also’, ‘first of all’, etc.
- (5) the syntactic position of the phrase including a numeral modified by an intensifier imposes certain constraints on the possibility of splitting;
- (6) intensifiers, as far as their semantic and formal properties are concerned, react somewhat differently to the element they modify depending on whether this it is a numeral and whether it functions as a predicate.

Those strange formal properties of numerals demand an explanation. The main idea of the explanation that I propose is that diachronically at least some of the numerals must go back to a syntagmatic construction comprising more than one word, which is no more analysable as such on the synchronic level, but manifests itself through such abnormal from the present-day language point of view process as tmesis. Some of the numerals seem to have been consequently reanalysed by analogy with the first type of numerals.

In addition, the observed peculiarities of the interaction between numerals and intensifiers turn out to be rather revelatory for the semantics of the intensifiers.