

Proto-Bantu and Proto-Niger-Congo: macro-areal typology and linguistic reconstruction¹

Tom Güldemann

Humboldt University Berlin and Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
Leipzig

1. Bantu and Niger-Congo in their macro-areal context

1.1. Introduction

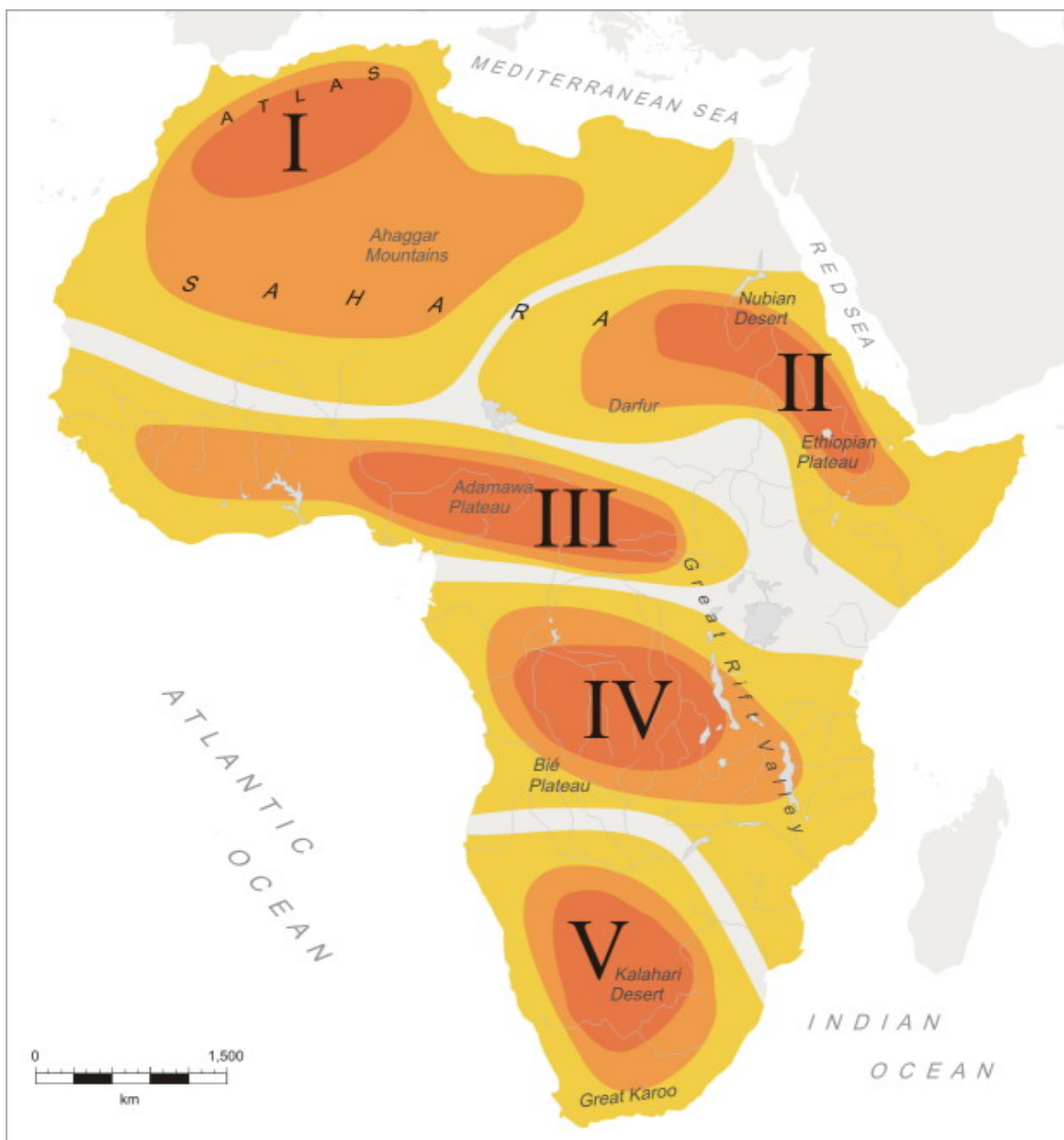
The recent past has witnessed a revival of areal-typological approaches to African languages taking up the work by Greenberg (1959, 1983) and Heine (1975, 1976) but based on a wealth of then unknown data. At the same time, historical linguistics has refined its general methodological and theoretical basis. Compare such works as Nichols (1992), Durie and Ross (eds., 1996), Joseph and Janda (eds., 2003), the first one notably also using areal linguistics for reconstructing the linguistic past. In this environment Güldemann (1998, 1999a, 2003b, 2005, 2008, forthcoming) and Clements and Rialland (2008) independently of each other have developed first hypotheses on the current and more recent macro-areal profile of Africa. Based on cross-continental surveys of diagnostic linguistic features, they established large geographical areas with some type of linguistic commonality.

In the first place such “linguistic areas” are distributions of features according to a more or less compact geographical pattern independent of any explanation. However, as soon as these distributions cannot be motivated by coincidence and language universals, a historical explanation is called for. Two historically mediated types of geographical clustering of isoglosses can be identified. On the one hand, there are areas which are not only typologically but also genealogically homogeneous. Such areas can be modelled in terms of Nichols’ (1992) concept of “spread zone”: they have been subject to a relatively recent expansion of languages of few if not just one language family. On the other hand, an area can be characterized by a geographical feature distribution that correlates little with the distribution of genealogical language groups and hence cannot be well explained

¹ This paper has been presented previously at the conference “Bantu Languages: Analysis, Description and Theory” at Göteborg University (5/10/2007), at the “Work-in-Progress in Linguistics” series at the MPI-EVA Leipzig (15/1/2008 MPI), at the ESF-OMLL workshop “New Directions in Historical Linguistics” at the Laboratoire Dynamique Du Langage Lyon (12/5/2008), at the “Linguistisches Afrika-Kolloquium” of the Humboldt Universität Berlin (12/11/2008), at the symposium “A Geographical Typology of African Languages” at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (13/5/2009), and at the Universidade Clásica de Lisboa (17/6/2009). I am grateful to interesting discussions with the respective audiences. I am also indebted to Jeff Good for fruitful comments on a first draft.

by genealogical inheritance. These are “linguistic areas” in the narrow sense in whose emergence language contact and convergence must have played a considerable role.

The African macro-areas I have proposed in Güldemann (forthcoming), to which the reader is referred for more discussion, are from north to south (I) Sahara spread zone, (II) Chad-Ethiopia, (III) Macro-Sudan belt, (IV) Bantu spread zone, (V) Kalahari Basin, as shown in Map 1.



Map 1. Linguistic macro-areas in Africa before recent large-scale colonizations (Güldemann forthcoming)

Unsurprisingly, approaches and results differ between my study and that by Clements and Rialland (2008). The overall patterns, however, are considerably similar,

giving some confidence that this kind of research is possible and yields some robust results. Of particular relevance here is that both works agree about the general areal pattern in Sub-Saharan western and central Africa. First, the large east-west oriented belt south of the Sahara-Sahel and north of the Congo Basin called by me “Macro-Sudan belt” is also identified by Clements and Rialland (2008) as their “Sudanic belt”.² Second, the southern neighbour of the Macro-Sudan belt termed by me the “Bantu spread zone” also turns up in Clements and Rialland’s (2008) study as the “Central zone”.

It is the historical relation of these two areas and the reconstruction of their major language families which is of central concern for the present paper. It is commonly accepted since Greenberg (1949, 1972) that the Bantu languages which constitute the Bantu spread zone have their closest relatives in the Macro-Sudan belt and that their modern distribution can be best explained as the result of a relatively recent expansion from a homeland somewhere in southeastern Nigeria and southern Cameroon into their modern distribution zone. I argue in the following that a comparison of the typological profile of the two areas yields results that can inform the modelling of earlier language states of Bantu as well as higher-order groups of Niger-Congo.

For this purpose, I briefly outline in Section 1 the areal profile of the Macro-Sudan belt (§1.2.) and subsequently survey the presence and distribution of the relevant features in the Bantu spread zone (§1.3) concluding that most Bantu languages deviate considerably from Macro-Sudan languages in general and its genealogical relatives located in this area in particular. Section 2 is concerned after a short introduction (§2.1.) with two specific morphosyntactic properties of Narrow Bantu by comparing in more detail its structure of the verb stem (§2.2.) and the predicate (§2.3.) with those of its closest relatives closer to or within the Macro-Sudan belt. In Section 3 I summarize the discussion concluding that Pre- and possibly Proto-Bantu more likely possessed a typological make-up similar to canonical Macro-Sudan languages and that the early morphosyntactic profile of Niger-Congo should therefore not be modelled on the structure of modern Narrow Bantu languages.

1.2. The Macro-Sudan belt

The Macro-Sudan belt as conceived here has various conceptual predecessors. Most importantly, Greenberg (1959, 1983) for the first time interpreted the then known shared features of what he called the “African core area” explicitly as the result of linguistic convergence processes. This idea has been developed further by Güldemann (2003b,

² See Güldemann (2008, FN14) for a motivation of the term “Macro-Sudan” instead of Clements and Rialland’s (2008) “Sudanic”.

2008). That the geographical clustering of the linguistic features is indeed diagnostic for long-term contact is evident from the fact that the relevant languages and families are not all related. The genealogical composition of the Macro-Sudan belt is given in Table 1. It can be seen that in both the areal core and the periphery of the Macro-Sudan belt there is a strong bias towards language families of Niger-Congo.³ In fact, apart from Narrow Bantu in the Bantu spread zone and the various families in the Nuba mountains subsumed under “Kordofanian” the Macro-Sudan belt hosts all other families which constitute Greenberg’s (1963) Niger-Kordofanian.

Table 1. Families partaking in the Macro-Sudan belt

Family	Stock	Greenberg's Supergroup
AREAL CORE		
Mande	-	Niger-Kordofanian
Kru	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Gur	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Kwa	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Benue-Congo (except Narrow Bantu)	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Adamawa	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Ubangi	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Bongo-Bagirmi	Central Sudanic	Nilo-Saharan
Moru-Mangbetu	Central Sudanic	Nilo-Saharan
PERIPHERY		
Atlantic	(Niger-Congo)	Niger-Kordofanian
Dogon	-	Niger-Kordofanian
Songhai	-	Nilo-Saharan
Chadic	Afroasiatic	-
Ijoid	-	Niger-Kordofanian
Narrow Bantu (Benue-Congo)	Niger-Congo	Niger-Kordofanian
Nilotic	East Sudanic	Nilo-Saharan

In the following I briefly repeat the areal isoglosses of the Macro-Sudan belt, mostly

³ “Niger-Congo” is used here in a narrow sense and includes Kru, Gur, Kwa, Benue-Congo, Adamawa, and Ubangi; these groups are fairly uncontroversial regarding their genealogical relationship. A similar set of families has been called “Volta-Congo” (Stewart 1976) and “Central Niger-Congo” (Bennett and Sterk 1977) after the renaming of Greenberg’s “Niger-Kordofanian” to “Niger-Congo”. Since it is unclear which of the Post-Greenbergian classificatory and terminological proposals prevail, I use Niger-Congo for a relatively clear genealogical lineage and Niger-Kordofanian for the more speculative idea of a larger genealogically intended unit - a terminology compatible with Greenberg’s original usage.

proposed as such by Güldemann (2003, 2008, forthcoming) and Clements and Rialland (2008). The features are of different type: some are extremely rare on a global scale (e.g., labial-velar consonants) - so-called “cross-linguistic quirks” (Gensler 2003); others are typologically far less remarkable but represent areal diagnostics on the continental level (e.g. word order types); finally, “subareal features” - isoglosses which are not coextensive with the entire area but confined to subparts - also need not, but can, be rare cross-linguistically (e.g., more recurrent serial verb constructions vs. rare labial flap consonants). The areal features identified so far are listed in Table 2 accompanied by recent sources with more detailed discussion and data (mostly without repeating Güldemann 2008 and Clements and Rialland 2008).

Table 2. Linguistic features of the Macro-Sudan belt

Feature	Source(s)	(Sub-area)
GENERAL		
Implosive consonants	Maddieson (2005a)	
Labial-velar consonants	Maddieson (2005c)	
Three and more level tones	Maddieson (2005d), Clements and Rialland (2008)	
ATR vowel harmony	Dimmendaal (2001), Maddieson (2005b)	
Nasalized vowels	Hajek (2005)	
“Lax” question prosody	Clements and Rialland (2008)	
SBJ-(AUX)-OBJ-V-X order	Gensler and Güldemann (2003)	
‘(Sur)pass’ comparative	Stassen (2005)	
Logophoricity system	Güldemann (2003b)	
SUB-AREAL		
Labial flap consonants	Olson and Hajek (2003)	(central African half)
V-OBJ-NEG order	Dryer (2009)	(central African half)
Serial verbs	Dimmendaal (2001)	(Gulf-of-Guinea coast)

1.3. The Bantu spread zone

The Bantu spread zone can also be characterized as a linguistic macro-area. However, it is of a quite different nature than the Macro-Sudan belt. As opposed to its northern neighbour the Bantu area involves languages with hundreds of shared linguistic features reflecting inheritance from a common ancestor language. This does not mean that language contact has not also played a role in the historical emergence of the modern geographical profile of this zone. For one thing, there has been a considerable amount of contact-induced homogenization in the area’s centre after initial colonization of early

Bantu and its diversification into hundreds of daughter languages. Thus, what Guthrie (1962) referred to as the “Bantu nucleus” and identified erroneously as the family’s homeland can, according to Möhlig (1979), be better perceived as the result of multiple contact events within a compact zone of closely related languages. At the same time, Bantu languages at the geographical periphery have to varying degrees been subject to other types of areal pressure by adopting features of non-Bantu languages, which possibly had alliance to other macro-areas. Consider, for example, Bantu languages in southern Africa having borrowed clicks, ejectives, etc. or Bantu languages in eastern Africa having shed tone as a distinct phonological feature. As to be pointed out below, such contact scenarios might even have to be entertained for the north-western periphery of the Bantu spread zone adjacent to the Macro-Sudan belt.

The base line for ascertaining the historical relation between Macro-Sudan and Bantu languages is, however, that the latter have their geographical origin in the south-central portion of the Macro-Sudan belt (Greenberg 1972). That is, they are most closely related to languages currently classified under eastern Benue-Congo, particularly Bantoid, in Cameroon and eastern Nigeria. That it has been impossible to identify an even more specific homeland area for Pre- and/or Proto-Bantu is mainly due to the fact that the exact limits of Bantu and hence its exact genealogical position are still unclear (see, e.g., Nurse and Philippson 2003: 3-10) - a problem which in fact carries over to such higher classificatory levels as Bantoid, Benue-Congo, etc.

In any case, given that all the Narrow Bantu languages in the southern half of the continent are ultimately a genealogical off-shoot of the Macro-Sudan belt it could be expected that this closely knit family also displays the majority of the features listed in Table 2 for its homeland area. However, as already pointed out by Güldemann (2008), this expectation is not borne out. In the following I survey the presence of Macro-Sudan features in the Bantu family in more detail. For this purpose, Figure 1 first gives some basic information about the major classificatory groups of Bantu; these groups have been arrived at by lexicostatistical calculations and need not form a valid genealogical tree.

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- 1 Mbam-Bubi
- 2 Northwest
- 3 Lebonya-Boan
- West Bantu
- 4 Inner Congo Basin
- 5 West-Coastal
- 6 Southwest
- 7 East

Figure 1. Basic subgroups of Bantu (according to Vansina 1995 and Bastin and Piron 1999)

The distribution of the first feature of Table 2, implosive consonants, does not give a clear geographical signal. It does not separate the Macro-Sudan belt from the Bantu spread zone, nor does it display a compact distribution within Bantu. Although these sounds are less frequent in Bantu languages, they do occur in Northwest Bantu as well as in East Bantu, both on the north-eastern coast and in the southeast (Maddieson 2003: 28-9, Clements and Rialland 2008: 58).

Labial-velar consonants show an overall clearer picture in that they are largely absent from the Bantu spread zone. They are only found in a number of Bantu languages of zones A, C and D, belonging to Northwest, Lebonya-Boan, and Inner Congo Basin Bantu, all adjacent to the Macro-Sudan belt (Clements and Rialland 2008: 43). There is only one isolated occurrence further south in Mijikenda (E70), where they developed from labialized velars.

Three and more level tones are an even rarer feature in Narrow Bantu languages, which predominantly have a simpler phonemic distinction of H vs. L or even a contrast between H only and its absence. Bantu languages with more complex systems are again restricted to the northern fringe of Bantu bordering on the Macro-Sudan belt (Clements and Rialland 2008: 73, 84). According to Kisseberth and Odden (2003: 59), there are some more exceptions further south but only on the phonetic level, like Kamba (E55), Chaga (E60), and Nguni (S40).

ATR vowel harmony is not found in most of Bantu; Hyman (1999) and Clements and Rialland (2008: 53-5) discuss the harmony types actually found in the family. There are only a few exceptions in the north, possibly as the result of secondary contact with languages having ATR vowel harmony, e.g., Nande (D42) (Maddieson 2003: 20-3).

Phonemic vowel nasalization is also rare in Narrow Bantu, although one could argue for reconstructing it for an earlier language stage (cf. Dimmendaal 2001: 374-6). Maddieson (2003: 23-4) lists Fang (A75), Gyele (A801), Teke (B70), Ngungwel (B72a),

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

Bembe (H11), Umbundu (R11), and Yeyi (R41) as modern Bantu languages with nasal vowels. Their distribution is again predominantly in the northern Bantu sphere.

Clements and Rialland (2008: 76-80, 85) have identified so-called “lax” question prosody as another promising areal trait of the Macro-Sudan belt while so far observing its absence in their available data on Bantu languages.

The presence of the word order SBJ-(AUX)-OBJ-V-X in Bantu will be discussed in more detail in §2.3. below. Suffice it to say here that it is generally absent but that some Northwest Bantu languages possess it.

As opposed to most of the above features, comparative constructions with ‘(sur)pass’ are a widespread phenomenon in Bantu, possibly representing an inherited feature. Consider the following example from Standard Swahili.

(1) Swahili (G42d, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

<i>a-na-andika</i>	<i>haraka</i>	<i>kupita</i>	<i>mimi</i>
1-PRS-write	fast	INF-pass	1S

He writes faster than me.

The distribution of logophoric systems conforms again with the general trend in Bantu languages of lacking a Macro-Sudan feature except for a limited occurrence in north(west)ern languages, which is exemplified in (2). Note that this feature should also be reconstructed for Proto- and/or Pre-Bantu according to Voorhoeve (1980).

(2) Akɔɔse (A15b, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

a. *à-hóbé* *ǎ* *á-kàg*
1-said 1:QUOT 1-should.go

He said that he (someone else) should go.

b. *à-hóbé* *ǎ* *má-kàg*
1-said 1:QUOT LOG-should.go

He said that he (himself) should go. (Hedinger 1984: 95)

The picture regarding the sub-areal Macro-Sudan belt features is as follows. Labial flap consonants are virtually non-existent in Narrow Bantu except for an isolated occurrence in Nyanja (N31a) and Shona (S10).

Regarding verbal negation in Bantu, such surveys and comparative treatments as Westphal (1958), Kamba Muzenga (1981), and Güldemann (1996: §4.7, 1999b) have firmly established that the most common pattern is morphological marking on the verb. The affix position is before the verb stem, either in absolute word-initial position or between the subject prefix and the extended verb stem (including the object prefix). This particular alternation is largely tied to different functional aspects of the clause context (Güldemann 1996: §4.7, 1999b) and is an old pattern in the family reconstructed by

Meeussen (1967: §7.6).

(3) Shona (S10, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

a. <i>ndaí-dá</i>	ha-ndaí-dá
1S:HAB-want	NEG-1S:HAB-want
I used to like	I did not used to like (Dale 1972: 266)
b. <i>ndí-pé</i>	ndí-sa-pé
1S-give:SUBJ	1S-NEG-give:SUBJ
I should/may give	I should/may not give (Dale 1972: 264-5)

The above comparative Bantu studies have also observed a number of exceptions to or at least deviations from the common verbal-prefix negation (recurrently so in Tanzania, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo); this is confirmed by Dryer's (2009) survey. These less typical types of negation can be variably expressed by a sentence-final function word, a free function word after the verb, or a (verb) suffix; the first and last cases are illustrated in the following examples.

(4) Ndendeule (N101, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

<i>a-ki-tola</i>	<i>ngöndi</i>	yě
1-PST-take	beans	NEG
He didn't take beans. (field notes)		

(5) Umbundu (R11, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

ha-tú-vi-mbandà-kó
NEG:1P-8-doctor-NEG
We are not doctors. (Schadeberg 1990: 54)

It is unclear at present whether this phenomenon in Bantu should be separated historically from that in the Macro-Sudan belt. What seems clear, however, is that the individual cases are commonly more recent innovations through negation reinforcement according to Jespersen's cycle (see Güldemann 1996: 256-8). This is supported by their sporadic occurrence in geographical and genealogical terms, the diversity and partial etymological transparency of the markers, and other specific facts, for example, that new strategies are no longer restricted to verbal negation, as shown in (5) for Umbundu.

Dimmendaal (2001: 382-6) gives some discussion on the distribution of serial verbs in Africa, pointing out that their absence partly correlates with extensive head-marking on the verb. The Bantu family is a case in point: valence-sensitive derivational verb morphology is a hallmark of Bantu going back to early chronolects while serial verbs are not found in this family. Further discussion of this topic will be given in §2.2.

As a summary, one can generalize that Bantu languages and accordingly the Bantu spread zone formed by them differ markedly from the Macro-Sudan belt. There are only a

couple of relevant features in Bantu as a whole which can be directly traced back to its origin in its northern areal neighbour. The less conclusive distributions aside, the predominant pattern is that a Macro-Sudan belt feature is lacking in Bantu as a whole while languages in its northern fringe close to the Macro-Sudan belt may have it. Two principal scenarios can explain this pattern: (1) early Bantu possessed the feature like other Macro-Sudan belt languages, but most descendents lost it when colonizing areas further south and east or (2) early Bantu lacked the feature, but languages in the northwest acquired it in contact with more canonical Macro-Sudan belt languages. I assume that in principle both scenarios apply, depending on the particular feature. The clarification of this question for each individual property is an issue of reconstruction by means of historical-comparative analysis and diachronic typology. The last method, which in the past tended to be neglected in favour of phonological and lexical reconstruction, must also take into account the areal-typological context of the lineage at issue.

2. Towards the early typology of the Bantu clause

2.1. Introduction

The rest of this paper attempts, among other things, to illustrate this last point by two concrete historical problems regarding the early clause structure of Bantu and its significance for the reconstruction of earlier stages of Niger-Congo and its subgroups. The general background of this problem is the currently common perception of modern Bantu and the resulting assumption how Proto-Bantu would have looked like. It is crucial in this connection that the great majority of Bantu languages, in particular in the geographically and numerically large groups of West Bantu and East Bantu, are known for their complex head-marking morphology of the predicate. Thus, it is no coincidence that in summary treatments of the Bantu family there will be some reference to the verb-centered encoding of many grammatical functions of the clause. Nurse and Philippson (1999: 9), for example, present the following, admittedly extreme, verb form with nine prefixes before and seven suffixes after the verb root *king* ‘close’.

(6) Nande (DJ42, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

tu- né-mu-ndi-syá-tá-sya-ya- ba- king- ul-ir-an-is-i- á- kyô

1P- TENSE/ASPECT- 2- close- DERIVATION-FV- 7

We will make it possible one more time for them [class 2] to open it [class 7] for each other. (Nurse and Philippson 1999: 9)

While it is clear that this example is not representative for normal verb forms in this and other Bantu languages, its choice illustrates two crucial points regarding the standard assumptions about “canonical” modern Bantu as well as the reconstruction of

Proto-Bantu and yet earlier chronolects. First, the number of verb-derivational suffixes between verb root and final vowel is large, thus forming a phonologically and morphologically complex verb stem (marked in bold). Second, this stem is preceded by prefixes encoding at least the core participants and very often also several inflectional categories. Figure 2 gives a simplified morphotactic template of Bantu so conceived.

<i>SLOT</i>	(preinitial)	initial	(postinitial)ⁿ(preradical)ⁿ	radical	(prefinal)ⁿ	final	(postfinal) ⁿ	
<i>FUNC-</i>	TAM ^{li} /	subject	TAM/	object	verb root	TAM/	TAM	participant/
<i>TIONS</i>	negation/ clause type ^{li}		negation clause type ^{li}			valence change		negation ^{li} / clause type ^{li}

Note: (...) possibly empty; ⁿ possibly multiple occurrence, ^{li} later innovations

Figure 2. A simplified morphological structure of finite verb forms in “canonical” Bantu⁴

That this synchronic generalization has indeed been extended to a historical hypothesis is evident at Meeussen’s (1967: §2 and §6-7) morphosyntactic Bantu reconstructions. Although he actually does not make it explicit which languages are exactly concerned, it can be taken for granted that he intended Narrow Bantu in the sense of Guthrie (1948). As will become clear below, the general historical problem at issue revolves partly around the very question of which languages to include in the genealogical group for which the morphological template in Figure 2 can be reconstructed.

When comparing the synthetic morphological patterns of Bantu with the more analytic structures of its relatives in the Macro-Sudan, the general impression has been that Bantu is more conservative than many Non-Bantu languages of Niger-Congo. There are indeed robust indications to this effect. For one thing it has been convincingly documented, pace Meinhof (1936, 1938), that most languages along the Gulf-of-Guinea coast of the Macro-Sudan belt (belonging to Kwa and Western Benue-Congo) have reduced their overall morphological complexity and become largely isolating (cf., e.g., Williamson 1985, Jungrathmayr 1990, Hyman 2004). Moreover, elaborate systems of gender-number markers on nouns and derivational suffixes on verbs, which can be safely assumed to go back to Proto-Niger-Congo, are still salient features in modern Bantu but recurrently appear in a number of other members of Niger-Congo only in reduced form. Extending the concept of a conservative Bantu family to other domains is thus an idea with merit and has some tradition in the discipline. However, I will argue below that the

⁴ While analysis and classification of verb affixes according to templatic slots can be far more fine-grained (cf., e.g., Meeussen 1967 and Maho 2007 for prefixes), this is unnecessary for the present purpose.

situation should be evaluated differently when it comes to the structure of the predicate.

2.2. *The early verb stem structure of Bantu*

As mentioned, one component of this general question is the degree of complexity of the verb stem in early Bantu. Reviewing the relevant studies (see, e.g., Meeussen 1967: §2.3-9, Hyman 1993, Schadeberg 2003: 72) there can be no doubt that its inventory of verb extensions was quite large. As mentioned, it can also be assumed that a system of derivational verb suffixes is an old feature of the higher genealogical level of Niger-Congo (see Voeltz 1977 and Hyman 2007a). This is uncontroversial despite the facts that the available reconstructions are far from conclusive, that the exact constituency of the stock is not fully established (consider especially such uncertain member families as Mande, Dogon, Ijoid, etc.), and that some of its clear member families have reduced this proto-system drastically, some in fact to virtually nothing. Hyman (2004, 2007a) recently tackled this long-standing historical problem and hypothesized, in line with the common sense current in the discipline, that the situation in early Niger-Congo was like that in canonical Bantu languages. In the following, I will critically assess this idea, largely using the pertinent data provided by Hyman himself.

Consider in this respect first the contrast between mono-/disyllabic verb stems in Kwa languages on the one hand and polysyllabic verb stems in Bantu and Atlantic languages on the other hand, as well as Hyman's unequivocal historical interpretation of this difference.

(7) Ewe (Kwa)

<i>gbl</i>	<i>dzu-dzɔ</i>	<i>fa-nyã</i>
say	DUPL-wait	knead-knead
say	cease	knead (Hyman 2004: 70)

(8) Yao (P21, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

-taam-uk-ul-igw-aasy-an-il-a
-sit-IMPOSITIVE-REVERSIVE-PASS-CAUS-RCPR-APPL-FV
cause each other to be unseated for/at (Hyman 2004: 70)

(9) Ful (Senegambian, Atlantic)

-mab6-it-id-an-ii
-shut-REVERSIVE-COMPREHENSIVE-DAT-PST.ACT
opened all for (Hyman 2004: 70)

Comparing Ewe with either Yao or Fula, the natural question to ask is: Why are these related languages so different? To answer this question, we assume, following Givón (1975) and Voeltz (1977), first, that the above Bantu/Atlantic verb-stem structure represents the Proto-Niger-Congo situation; and second, that Niger-Congo languages such as Ewe, Nupe, Yoruba, etc. which conform

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

to the Westermann and Bryan characterization of Kwa [...] have modified the proto system – most likely in an areal fashion. (Hyman 2004: 71)

The major processes which would be involved in the assumed “drift from a Bantu-like to a Kwa-like verb stem” are summarized succinctly by the author as shown in Figure 3:

- a. Syntax: synthetic > analytic
(head-marking > dependent or no marking)
- b. Morphology: agglutinative > isolating
(suffixation > marking by syntactic elements)
- c. Phonology: free > restricted
(unbounded > bounded)

Figure 3. Realignment processes from Proto-Niger-Congo to some modern families (Hyman 2004: 72)

It is important to recognize that Hyman’s argument contains two different components which must be evaluated independently. As mentioned above, there is general agreement about his second claim regarding the very simple verb stem in Kwa and Western Benue-Congo; this implies that Figure 3 is adequate at least regarding the directionality of change in these languages.

The problematic issue rests with Hyman’s first assumption “that the above Bantu/Atlantic verb-stem structure represents the Proto-Niger-Congo situation.” Here, I think, the partly appropriate idea of Bantu conservatism within Niger-Congo has been extended too far. As mentioned, there is no controversy about the in-principle reconstruction of a system of suffixal verb extensions for Proto-Niger-Congo, even though their exact number and forms remain largely unclear, *pace* Voeltz (1977). However, what needs to be answered conclusively for earlier chronolects is whether extensions could be stacked on each other as in modern Yao-type Bantu and Ful. That is, the existence and inventory of a verb-derivation system on the one hand and the option to use more than one marker on a particular verb form on the other hand are in principle two independent parameters.

Indeed, there are a number of language families in and outside Africa where such a morphological paradigm is elaborate but the individual elements can be employed simultaneously in a single word only to a limited extent or even not at all. Just to mention one admittedly extreme example, Voßen (1997: 349-60) reconstructs at least ten derivational suffixes, and in addition a couple of tense-aspect suffixes, for the Khoe family but modern languages hardly ever show more than one derivational suffix at a time. Impressionistically, the extremely productive morpheme stacking in Bantu and Ful appears to be the exception rather than the rule from a cross-linguistic perspective.

It therefore remains still unclear what the Proto-Niger-Congo verb stem exactly looked like. Hyman (2004) provides data showing that this question has to be asked even on the level of Pre- and Proto-Bantu. That is, he carefully documents a continuum of verb-stem complexity within Benue-Congo languages, including Northwest and West Bantu, according to which the closer relevant languages are to the Macro-Sudan belt the more they tend to contrast with canonical Bantu further south and east in imposing a restriction on the maximal number of stem syllables, as shown in Figure 4.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. four (~five)-syllable maximum | Yaka H31 |
| b. four-syllable maximum | Punu B31 |
| c. three (~four)-syllable maximum | Koyo C24 |
| d. three-syllable maximum | Basaa A43, Kukuya B77a, Tiene B81 |
| e. two (~three)-syllable maximum | most Grassfields Bantu, e.g. Mankon |
| f. one (~two)-syllable maximum | Ewe (Kwa) |

Figure 4. Maximum number of stem syllables in (North)west Bantu and beyond⁵ (Hyman 2004: 79)

This prosodic phenomenon obviously affects verbal derivation in that the number of possible suffixes is increasingly limited. Consider typical verb stems from three Bantoid languages (two of them Narrow Bantu), which are presented, like in Figure 4, in order of ever closer geographical association with the Macro-Sudan belt, and compare them with the Yao verb form in (8) with eight syllables involving six derivational extensions.

(10) Koyo (C24, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

tá-s-an-a (= 3 syllables, 2 extensions)

see-CAUS-RCPR-FV

show each other (Hyman 2004: 80)

(11) Basaa (A43, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

tij-l-an-a (= 3 syllables, 2 extensions)

attach-REVERSIVE-RCPR-FV

detach each other (Hyman 2004: 82)

(12) Mankon (Grassfields, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

ží-nə (= 2 syllables, 1 extension)

know-RCPR

know each other (Hyman 2004: 85)

While Hyman argues with detailed and convincing data that the different degrees of verb-stem complexity across Bantoid should be interpreted in terms of a historical

⁵ The numbers in parentheses indicate marginal extra lengths typically restricted to one inflectional suffix.

cline, he fails to make a conclusive case for his assumed exclusive directionality from extreme complexity - as in canonical Bantu - to ever greater simplicity in northwestern Bantu (and almost everywhere else in Niger-Congo). Thus, the possibility must also be considered that the highly productive MULTIPLE stacking of suffixes in most but not all of Bantu is the result of LOSING different degrees of prosodic stem restrictions observed in its northwestern sphere and the adjacent zone in the Macro-Sudan belt, thereby building up extreme verb-stem complexity from an earlier moderate one.⁶ Hyman's (2004: 86) own data on Igbo attest for the possible relevance of this opposite process even within the Macro-Sudan belt. More importantly, given that Voeltz (1977: 70) observed:

A brief mention should be made regarding the cooccurrence [sic] possibilities of the verb extensions here reconstructed. Outside of Bantu, little to no evidence exists [in Niger-Congo].

the modern comparative data speak against a straightforward reconstruction of multiple verb suffixes for an earlier stage of Niger-Congo. Given the above Bantu-internal diversity and its particular geographical pattern, this observation even has to be transferred to this lower genealogical level.

2.3. The early predicate structure of Bantu

A problem which is related and parallel to the previous one confronts the historical linguist concerning the verbal PREFIX morphology. In §2.1. I have given a simplified morphotactic template found in (most of) Bantu which displays complex inflection for marking participants and predication operators before the verb stem. This contrasts again with Northwest Bantu and most of the close relatives in Benue-Congo: like many other languages in the Macro-Sudan belt, their clause organization is characterized by a so-called "split predicate", as opposed to a "compact predicate" of the Bantu type with high morphological complexity.⁷ In the split-predicate type the phonological word comprising the lexical main verb is simpler - one important reason being that the verb displays stem-initial prominence and cannot host prefixes. Hence, the verb word can normally not instantiate a full predicative sentence, as in Bantu, but depends on the presence of phonologically independent grammatical elements referring to core participants and predication operators for clause type, tense, aspect, modality, polarity etc. The phonological and syntactic separation between the lexical verb and these other

⁶ Compare in this connection Good (2005) which argues in a somewhat parallel fashion for the innovative loss of earlier morphotactic restrictions in the verbal derivation system, namely the occasional violation of the originally fixed causative-applicative suffix ordering.

⁷ The terms are taken from Bearth (1995) who discusses the split-predicate type as a salient feature of Mande languages.

elements motivates the term “split predicate”.

Basaa (A43), cited already in connection with a restricted stem size, is again a good representative of a number of other Bantu languages in the Northwest which display this type and thus deviate from the usual pattern in the family. Hyman (1999: 277-8) gives the following succinct description, also implying here that this is the innovative structure:

Although Basaa has maintained much of the original Bantu morphology, its clause structure shows a drift towards analytic marking of grammatical relations and inflection. ...

The basic word order in Basaa is Subject - Aux - Verb - Object - Adjunct:

li = wándá *jêm* ***lí*** ***m*** = 'béná ***jé*** *bí* = jék *í* 'ndáp
5 = friend 5:1S.POSS 5 PRS = do.often eat 8 = food in house
my friend often eats food in the house [split predicate marked in bold]

As also seen in this example, the subject pronouns ... are required for subject agreement, as in Bantu generally, although there is no evidence that such markers are prefixed to the auxiliary or verb that follows. In fact, although the nasal marking present tense in this example is typically written as a prefix, it too could be analyzed as a proclitic and written as a separate syntactic element. In short, Basaa lacks the Bantu prefixal system on verbs.

Although Hyman (2007b: 209) cautiously admits that “it is still not clear whether the pre-stem was affixal in P[roto-]B[antu]”, all his arguments want to suggest that the compact agglutinative structure does represent the conservative stage. In Güldemann (2003a: 183-7) I have argued for the opposite historical directionality, namely that structures of the above Basaa type are original and that the morphological verb template given in §2.1. would only have to be reconstructed for a later Bantu stage.

This hypothesis directly relates to an assessment of the presence/absence in Bantu of a Macro-Sudan belt feature treated in §1.2. above, namely the marked word order SBJ-(AUX)-OBJ-V-X. I have already stated in §1.3. that canonical Bantu does not possess the feature at all; SYNTACTICALLY it is quite consistently head-initial including the clause order SBJ-V-**OBJ**-X. At the same time, the MORPHOLOGICAL verb template in §2.1., SBJ-INFLECTION-**OBJ-VERB.STEM**, notionally matches the constituent order in some related languages further northwest: the pronominal object marker precedes the verb stem but follows the subject and inflection prefixes (hence the traditional but inappropriate term “infix”). In line with his principle of “today’s morphology is yesterday’s syntax” Givón (1971, 1975) indeed interpreted the present morphological feature in terms of a syntactic phenomenon of the past, namely as a reflex of an earlier generalized SBJ-**OBJ-V** clause pattern across Niger-Congo. This turned out to be a too simplistic explanation, as illustrated already by Comrie (1981: 210-1) by means of the slightly different but in principle parallel case of some Mongolian languages which have SBJ-V order but developed SUFFIXES for marking the subject on verbs.

In Güldemann (2003a, 2007) I have proposed a different take on the problem in (parts of) Niger-Congo in proposing to reconstruct for earlier chronolects TWO clause word orders, **SBJ-V-*OBJ*-X** and **SBJ-(AUX)-*OBJ*-V-X**; the second one could be restricted to pronominal objects and later become petrified as a morphotactic pattern in fused complex verb words. To reconstruct two clause orders may at first glance appear unusual but, as mentioned, such a situation is actually recurrent in the area at issue. Moreover, in Benue-Congo and particularly Bantoid (e.g., Mambiloid, Tikar, Beboïd, Grassfields, Mbam) the order alternation is particularly frequent and often tied to a difference in information structure in that the preverbal object is extra-focal or at least less focal than in its normal postverbal position. This pragmatic feature is especially relevant for PRONOMINAL objects, due to the inherent activation status of their referents, and thus ties in nicely with the situation in Bantu.⁸ The match between the morphological template and the particular variants of syntactic *OBJ-V* order in narrow Bantu's closest relatives is yet closer: preverbal objects on the clause level are repeatedly triggered precisely by the two grammatical contexts which the morpheme template in Bantu combines. That is, the object is placed before the verb if there is a preverbal clause operator like a tense-aspect marker or an auxiliary, as in (13)b./c. from Tikar, and/or if the object is indeed an extrafocal pronoun, as in (14)a. from Kana (compare (14)b. in which a focal pronoun occurs like a normal object in the unmarked postverbal position).

(13) Tikar (Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

a. *wù sh-ê mún*

2S say-IRR 1S

Si tu me l'avais dit, ... (Stanley 1991: 71)

b. *à tǎ ñshe shε*

1 IPFV luggage carry

Il porte le bagage. (Stanley 1991: 103)

c. *à ðunmi nun jì fε*

1 begin:PFV 1.OBJ food give

Il a commencé à lui donner de la nourriture. (Stanley 1991: 133)

(14) Kana (Cross-River, Benue-Congo)

a. *wēè mē-tēērā pū*

3S:PST 1S-run meet

He ran to me. (Ikoro 1996: 212)

⁸ Given its functional motivation this situation is attested elsewhere, for example, in Europe in Romance languages and in Africa in many Atlantic languages (Childs 2005).

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- b. *wḕ* *tḕrā* *pí* *ndā*
3S:PST run meet 1S.EMPH
He ran to ME. (Ikoro 1996: 212)

Before this background, it should come as no surprise that precisely the combination of these two triggering factors is found in some Northwest Bantu languages which don't have a compact predicate of the morpheme template in §2.1. Rather, the predicate is split into subcomponents like in the above example from Basaa but now involves, as opposed to this language, also the possible encoding of objects BEFORE the verb stem. Thus, the object in Ewondo (A72a) normally follows the verb, as in (15)a., but precedes it if it is a pronoun AND there is an auxiliary element between subject and verb, as in (15)b./c.

(15) Ewondo (A72a, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

- a. *a-v́* *mə dzɔ*
1-give 1S 9.OBJ
He gave it to me. (Redden 1979: 55)
- b. *a-kad* *mə dzɔ* *v́*
1-HAB 1S 9.OBJ give
He usually gives it to me. (Redden 1979: 167)
- c. *a-kad* *mə soób* *bíyé*
1-HAB 1S wash clothes
He washes clothes for me. (Redden 1979: 56)

These facts support the basic hypothesis proposed by Güldemann (2003a, 2007), Good and Güldemann (2006) and Nurse (mutedly 2007, firmly 2008: 62-72) that Pre- or even Proto-Bantu possessed a split predicate distributed over more than one phonological word. Its basic constituents would have been the preverbal complex of predicate markers for subject and predication operators and secondly the verb stem involving (possibly multiple) extension suffixes but with some degree of size restriction. Non-subject pronouns occurred alternatively before or after the verb stem. If preceding it, object pronouns could enter with the verb into a tighter prosodic constituent known in Bantu linguistics as the "macrostem". It should also be considered that subject pronouns or other class-indexing markers that immediately preceded a verb stem (like in some simple verb forms or verbal nouns) also entered the macrostem domain and thus fused here earlier than in more complex predicate types.

This clause organization would have been retained in parts of Northwest Bantu. However, languages giving rise to today's Bantu majority increasingly fused the complex lexical verb stem and the grammatical elements before it into one morphological and

phonological word. One major factor would be the same as that relevant for the assumed innovation of multiple verb suffixes, namely the loss of the size restriction for the phonological word containing a verb. This process of grammaticalization might have had intermediate steps but eventually yielded the complex morphological make-up of a canonical Bantu verb. Importantly, identifying fusion as the major historical process does not preclude the possibility that the development could not be stopped or, in individual languages, even be reverted, for example, by (re)contacting more conservative relatives; the main point is its explanatory power for the modern Bantu default, which - provided its substantiation - could in fact be tested as a diagnostic for family-internal subgrouping.

Compare again a concrete example each for a split and a compact predicate from within the Bantu family, namely from Ewondo and Swahili, respectively ([...] indicates recognizable prosodic word domains).

(16)	Subject	Auxiliary	Object	Lexical verb	
a. Ewondo	[a- 1	<i>kad</i> TAM	[<i>mə</i>] 1S	[<i>vá</i>] give	= He usually gives me
b. Swahili	[a- Initial-	<i>na-</i> Postinitial-	<i>ni-</i> Preradical-	<i>p-a</i> Radical-Final = Stem	= He gives me

The match between the clausal pattern in (16)a. and the morphotactic pattern in (16)b. regarding the object position before the verbal element, which is quirky in both cases, is an important piece in the overall argument: it is conceivable and natural that a word order pattern involving a pronoun object, as in Ewondo, grammaticalizes and eventually becomes petrified into a morphological template, as in Swahili; it is far less likely that the latter is neatly broken up into clause constituents “to-be” and that such a string comes to be opposed to the default clause order to yield the observed pragmatically triggered word order alternation.

As mentioned above, the phonological fusion seems to have proceeded in stages, at least in some cases, because it can be observed in variable form in modern Northwest Bantu. Consider as one example the phonological merger of subject markers and the following verb/auxiliary which is apparent in (15)/(16) of Ewondo. Another case would be the early integration of preverbal object markers into a macrostem. One version of this phenomenon is described by T. Heath (2003: 343-5) for class-1 referents in some Makaa (A83) dialects, as shown in (17) ([...] indicates the macrostem domain).

(17) Makaa (A83, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

<i>mà</i>	<i>à</i>	[<i>shí</i> gè	<i>è</i>	<i>díg</i>]
1S	PST	NEG	1.OBJ	see

I didn't see him. (T. Heath 2003: 345)

away from analyticity towards agglutination due to phonological fusion is the default. Moreover, the emergence of polysynthetic word forms can at times be a rapid process (cf., e.g., Mithun 1992). The opposite historical directionality towards analyticity proceeds mostly by way of EROSION and LOSS of phonological and morphological substance, as conceded by Hyman (2007b: 201) himself. The particular type and amount of DISSOLUTION of bound morphology which he nevertheless assumes is to my knowledge unprecedented and thus needs more conclusive supportive evidence than he has provided so far (cf. Nurse (2007: 245-7) for the same argument).

Finally, Hyman's assumed great age of complex inflection before the verb stem in Bantu is also incompatible with its synchronic morphological transparency. The very fact of a uniform template of segmentable slots across the family suggests a more recent emergence and not the inheritance of an original stage in Proto-Niger-Congo, including such an idiosyncrasy as pre-stem object marking despite syntactic V-OBJ order. Given the age of this higher-order genealogical unit modern reflexes of such an old feature should display a far greater degree of assimilation and fusion between morphemes, if not even advanced erosion. The possible counterargument that individual morphemes may have been renovated while keeping the segmentable template intact is also implausible given first the time depth and number of languages involved and secondly the fact that some of the bound morphemes in Bantu are cognate with free forms far outside Bantoid.

3. Towards the role of Bantu for the reconstruction of Niger-Congo

To sum up, the discussion in §2 leads to two conclusions which although intimately related should be kept separate. The first narrow one relates to reconstructing Bantu. That is, there is an alternative hypothesis to the proposal according to which early Bantu possessed a highly agglutinative structure as found today in the majority of this family. The second conclusion concerns a far higher genealogical level, namely that the historical uncertainty about Bantu questions the repeated suggestion to model the huge number of less agglutinative Niger-Congo languages outside Narrow Bantu to be the result of dissolving an earlier morphosyntax of the canonical Bantu type.

Regarding the last point it should be clear that the Bantu data, whatever the actual facts within this group, can not nearly be sufficient for attempting a reconstruction of Niger-Congo. This can only be approached by comparing the reconstructions of all its member families - these are still widely lacking.

If any hypothesis should at all be proposed on the basis of the limited evidence currently available, I venture that it disfavours the generalized scenario from extreme morphological complexity in the proto-stage to less complexity in modern languages,

both on the level of Niger-Congo and of Bantu, here in addition to the family-internal arguments entertained in §2. One important point has just been discussed: for the pre-stem complex this hypothesis implies a highly unusual process from a cross-linguistic perspective, while the opposite change of phonological fusion is attested in many cases world-wide.

The fusion scenario is also favoured from a genealogical perspective. The predicate structure in other secure Niger-Congo families like Kru, Gur, Adamawa, and Ubangi is overall more similar to that of eastern Benue-Congo, including northwestern Bantu, rather than the majority of highly agglutinative Bantu on the one hand and highly isolating Kwa and western Benue-Congo on the other hand (see, e.g., Elders (2007) for a concrete case of a Gur language and Nurse (2007: 242-5, 2008: 63-5) for a wider comparative Niger-Congo overview). This not only makes a Proto-Niger-Congo reconstruction of a split predicate with moderate verb-stem complexity likely but, in starting out from an intermediate proto-form, also requires the least amount of historical change in order to arrive at the two modern extremes - phonological fusion before the verb stem and some amount of overall paradigmatic and syntagmatic elaboration would yield the canonical Bantu type while phonological erosion would yield the Kwa type.

Hyman (2004) and Nurse (2007: 242-3, 2008: 63-5) have without qualification brought to bear the profile of genealogically peripheral families like Kordofanian and Atlantic, which partially show a more synthetic predicate. I think that this is not warranted at this stage of the comparative evaluation. For one thing, the conclusive classification of such problematic families is still pending to the extent that, if turning out not to be members of Niger-Congo, they would not be relevant for the problem at issue. But even if they can be shown to belong to the group (and some are certainly good candidates), they would represent early split-offs which do not necessarily inform the reconstruction of what for now can be considered to be a safer genealogical entity. That is, irrespective of whether the core of Niger-Congo comprising Kru, Kwa, Gur, Adamawa, Ubangi, and Benue-Congo is unrelated to, say, Atlantic or whether it only forms a node in a bigger stock that includes Atlantic, it is a closer coherent group whose proto-syntax should be reconstructed primarily on the basis of group-internal data.

It should also be taken into account that Hyman's opposite scenario of presumably losing most affixes (especially multiple suffixes) in the verb domain across a compact zone of Niger-Congo groups in the Macro-Sudan belt, in some completely so, is not matched by a similar picture regarding the reduction of a morphological paradigm which is certainly inherited, namely the gender system. Surely, there is wide-spread areally mediated erosion of the commonly assumed proto-system. However, some Niger-Congo

lineages deep in the Macro-Sudan belt display clear traces of it or even kept it intact; a good example are the Ghana-Togo mountain languages which are surrounded by more isolating languages. After all, this feature was and is the best non-lexical diagnostic for genealogical classification in the Niger-Congo domain since Westermann (1935). So far I cannot think of an explanation why the drift towards morphological reduction across Niger-Congo in the relevant area would not also have left more frequent traces of the supposedly reconstructable compact predicate which match the specific Bantu structure.

Last but not least, and central within the present context of areal typology, there is the linguistic geography that favours the fusion scenario. Considering for example Pre-Bantu and/or early chronolects of Bantu, given that they originate in the south-central Macro-Sudan belt, they are actually EXPECTED to have looked like languages of this area, as is proposed here. At the same time, it can be motivated that the majority profile of modern Bantu is no longer like this, because the typological shift of this emerging lineage can be associated plausibly with its gradual expansion away from the Macro-Sudan belt. In this colonization process it would have lost areal features typical for its genealogical and geographical affiliates, as implied by the data in §1, and possibly gained new features through contact with the (largely unknown) languages it replaced outside its homeland.

In particular, a split-predicate structure and a verb stem of more moderate morphological complexity are, apart from possible cross-linguistic recurrence, not at all untypical for the Macro-Sudan belt and might even turn out to qualify as additional isoglosses of this area, which ultimately may be related to equally areal prosodic restrictions on the form and size of the phonological word comprising the lexical main verb. These traits are not only found widely in secure Niger-Congo families but also in peripheral stock members which might turn out to be independent lineages (cf., e.g., Bearth (1995) on Mande) as well as in clearly unrelated families. In the following I give a few examples for the second group of lineages (the split predicates are marked in the examples in bold).

A first case is the Songhai family. The illustrating example (19) is from Koyraboro Senni: predicate operators, the subject, and under certain circumstances also the object are encoded in independent words before the verb stem while the verb stem itself displays a limited amount of suffixing for derivation and participant cross-reference (see J. Heath 1999: 68-9, 164-9).

(19) Koyraboro Senni (Songhai)

ya mma^h i ɲaa-ndi ham
1S STR.IPFV 3P eat-CAUS meat

I fed them (= made/let them eat) meat (J. Heath 1999: 165)

Another case in point is split predicates in Chadic languages like Hausa, as shown in (20). Here, the preverbal subject pronouns and elements encoding tense, aspect, and modality fuse into person-inflected predicate markers while the verb stem is subject to host-final derivational inflection often described in terms of the so-called “grade system”.

(20) Hausa (Chadic, Afroasiatic)

kadà sù dafàa ma-sà naamàa ’à Kanòo dà dare
 NEG 3P.SUBJ cook:TR for-3M.S meat in GN at.night

sie sollen ihm nicht des Nachts in Kano Fleisch kochen [they should not cook meat for him in Kano at night] (Wolff 1993: 483)

In the eastern domain of the Macro-Sudan family verb prefixes and particularly regular participant cross-reference seem to be more frequent, especially in Central Sudanic. This might in fact turn out to be a significant fact in that a greater prominence of verbal prefixing might also have applied to the contact languages of Pre- and/or Proto-Bantu facilitating the restructuring process at issue. In any case, even in the eastern domain of the Macro-Sudan belt can one find the split-predicate organization. Consider Persson and Persson’s (1991: 10) remark about the Bongo-Bagirmi language Mödö:

Mödö has very few affixes, tense and person being mostly expressed by separate words. Verb prefixes are **k-** ‘dependent’, **t-** ‘purpose’, **m-** 1st singular, **d-** 1st plural.

(21) Mödö (Bongo-Bagirmi, Central Sudanic)

bò èdí k-áí
 3M.S be.at DEP-go

he is going (Persson and Persson 1991: 10)

The final example comes from the Moru-Madi language Ma’di. In this language both subject cross-reference and verbal derivation are often encoded by prefixes on the verb word. But even here, certain grammatical conditions trigger a split predicate. Compare (22)a. showing a compact predicate with (22)b. where the subject is not marked on the verb, because the object noun immediately precedes the verb and blocks the use of subject prefixes.

(22) Ma’di (Moru-Madi, Central Sudanic)

a. *ópí kʃ`-nā-ā rá*
 PN 3:NPST-eat-OBJ AFF

Opi will eat it.

b. *ópí ká èbī `-nā rá*
 PN 3 fish NPST-eat AFF

Opi will eat fish. (Blackings and Fabb 2003: 136)

From a general perspective, I venture that macro-areal patterns identified for Africa

not only CAN but in fact SHOULD inform the historical-comparative reconstruction of Niger-Congo (and other families for that matter).⁹ That is, large-scale areal typology ought to become an integral part of diachronic typology and thus of historical linguistics in general. As Mithun (1992: 107) puts it: "... our understanding of genetic, areal, and typological relationships have much to gain from each other, and much to lose if carried on in isolation." I therefore don't share Campbell's (2003: 55-8) and Campbell and Poser's (2008: 298-318) position, who, besides rightfully criticizing concrete empirical analyses, express a generalized critique of and scepticism against the approach by Nichols (e.g., 1992, 1997). Research programs like that of Nichols do not compete with the narrow historical-comparative method, as the above authors seem to perceive; they rather supplement traditional techniques in addressing historical linguistics differently and thus need to develop their own rigorous theoretical and methodological framework.

Coming back to the historical evaluation of Niger-Congo and the role the Bantu family played therein, one might wonder why the higher-order stock has tended and still tends to be modelled in terms of the typologically quite marked lower-order family. In my opinion there are at least two particular facts relating to the history of African linguistics that support(ed) such an approach.

First, there is the central role of morphological typology in the early discussion about the evolution of African languages. In line with the strongly evaluative approaches to morphological complexity, rampant in linguistics of the 19th and early 20th century, such influential scholars as Meinhof (1936, 1938) propagated the notion that a general developmental trend in Africa was from "primitive" isolating languages, originally spoken by indigenous socially "inferior Negro" populations, towards more "complex" agglutinating or inflectional languages mediated by contact with "superior Hamitic" populations supposedly colonizing from outside Africa. Among many other facts, the later establishment of the Niger-Congo family, which includes both morphologically simple and complex languages, as well as such insightful studies as Williamson (1985) and Hyman (2004) have belied the idea that the strongly ISOLATING Niger-Congo languages in West Africa are in any sense an original stage from which the agglutinating languages of the Bantu family emerged.

However, it seems that the ideological evaluation of morphological complexity by Meinhof and others has to a certain extent come to be identified with the purely linguistic notion of building up such complexity. For example, it transpires in the following quote

⁹ Consider in this respect similar cases where language families display considerable internal diversity partly according to different alliance to linguistic macro-areas, for example, South Cushitic against the rest of the family and northern vs. southern Songhai languages, at the periphery of vs. inside the Macro-Sudan belt, respectively.

from Jungraithmayr (1990: 30), especially in its second part, that the linguistic evaluation of the data is unconsciously steered in part by a kind of ideological response to the misconceptions of the 19th and early 20th century.

1) The so-called isolating languages of West Africa represent stages which are - at least with regard to their lexico-morphological structure - reduced from the agglutinative stage of East and South African Bantu languages. The theory of the Bantu language type having originated from the West African Sudanic language type as it was still propagated by C. Meinhof in 1936, is untenable because against all linguistic reality and experience.

2) If, however, West African languages like Ewe and Twi do not represent an original, 'primitive' stage of the development, then all speculations about the undeveloped - or underdeveloped - character of these languages, their supposed 'Ursprachencharakter', lose their justification.

The argument sounds as if one needed the extreme morphological complexity of the head-marking Bantu languages as an original stage in order to show that the numerous related and unrelated African languages with less morphology cannot represent a primitive stage. I have tried to show above that this approach is unnecessary. The very fact that the isolating Kwa and Western Benue-Congo languages are in fact not representative for the Macro-Sudan belt nor Niger-Congo as a whole is an important component for my present claim that "the theory of the Bantu language type having originated from the West African Sudanic language type ..." is NOT untenable.

A second reason towards a Bantu-biased approach to Niger-Congo lies in the character of the Bantu family itself and, resulting from it, its specific role for African linguistics. Bantu is numerically and geographically THE major language family in Africa. Accordingly the Bantuistic linguistic tradition has been and still is very important for the discipline as a whole. Westermann (1927, 1935, 1949) and Greenberg (1949, 1963) established the genealogical relationship of Bantu to the rest of Niger-Congo. With this background, the pure synchronic "weight" of Bantu can always influence the diachronic analysis of the higher-order lineage. In other words, the family tends to assume the role of a standard by which the structure of other Niger-Congo languages and their historical predecessors is evaluated - a potential problem well-known from other philological traditions if one considers, for example, the traditional role of Semitic for Afroasiatic. My historical approach to Bantu is different: similar to Greenberg (1949, 1963, 1972), who - from a historical perspective - relegated the family to a genealogical offshoot of a lower subgroup of Niger-Congo, I propose to view its typologically marked morphosyntactic profile as a late and partly unique development, presumably triggered crucially by a shift away from its earlier areal alliance with the Macro-Sudan belt.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACT active, AFF affirmative, APPL applicative, ATR advanced tongue root, AUX auxiliary, CAUS causative, DAT dative, DEP dependent, DUPL reduplication, EMPH emphatic, FV final vowel, GN geographical name, HAB habitual, INFL inflection, INF infinitive, IPFV imperfective, IRR irrealis, LOG logophoric pronoun, M masculine, NEG negative, NPST non-past, OBJ object, P plural, PASS passive, PFV perfective, PN personal name, POSS possessive, PRS present, PST past, QUOT quotative, RCPR reciprocal, S singular, SBJ subject, STR strong, SUBJ subjunctive, TAM tense-aspect-modality, TR transitive, V verb, X other

Arabic numbers normally indicate nominal agreement classes; only if immediately followed by S and P they refer to person categories.

REFERENCES

- Bastin, Yvonne and Pascale Piron. 1999. Classifications lexicostatistiques: bantou, bantou et bantoïde: de l'intérêt des "groupes flottant". In Hombert and Hyman (eds.), 149-163.
- Beার্থ, Thomas. 1995. Nominal periphrasis and the origins of the predicative marker in Mande languages - an alternative view. *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 41: 89-117.
- Blackings, Mairi and Nigel Fabb. 2003. *A grammar of Ma'di*. Mouton Grammar Library 32. Berlin/ New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Campbell, Lyle. 2003. What drives linguistic diversification and language spread? In Bellwood, Peter and Colin Renfrew (eds.), *Examining the farming/language dispersal hypothesis*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 49-63.
- Campbell, Lyle and William J. Poser. 2008. *Language classification: history and method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Childs, G. Tucker. 2005. The S-Aux-O-V-Other syntagm in Atlantic. *Studies in African Linguistics* 34,1: 1-42.
- Clements, Nick and Annie Rialland. 2008. Africa as a phonological area. In Heine and Nurse (eds.), 36-87.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1981. *Language universals and linguistic typology: syntax and morphology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Dale, Desmond. 1972. *Shona Companion*. Gwelo, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press.
- Dimmendaal, Gerrit J. 2001. Areal diffusion versus genetic inheritance: an African perspective. In Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. and Robert M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Areal diffusion and genetic inheritance: problems in comparative linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 358-392.

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- Dryer, Matthew S. 2009. Verb-object-negative order in central Africa. In Cyffer, Norbert, Erwin Ebermann and Georg Ziegelmeyer (eds.), *Negation patterns in West African languages and beyond*. Typological Studies in Language 87. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 307-362.
- Durie, Mark and Malcolm Ross (eds.). 1996. *The comparative method reviewed: regularity and irregularity in language change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elders, Stefan. 2007. Complex verb morphology in Kulango (Gur): similarities and dissimilarities with Bantu. In Kula and Marten (eds.), 187-200.
- Gensler, Orin D. 2003. Shared quirks: a methodology for “non-orthodox” historical linguistics. Paper presented at the 17th International Conference of Linguists (Prague, 29 July 2003).
- Gensler, Orin D. and Tom Güldemann. 2003. S-Aux-O-V-Other in Africa: typological and areal perspective. Paper presented at the 4th World Congress of African Linguistics, Workshop “Distributed predicative syntax (S P O V X)”, Rutgers University, June 21, 2003.
- Givón, Talmy. 1971. *Historical syntax and synchronic morphology: an archaeologist's field trip*. Chicago Linguistic Society 7: 394-415.
- Givón, Talmy. 1975. Serial verbs and syntactic change: Niger-Congo. In Li, Charles N. (ed.), *Word order and word order change*. Austin/ London: University of Texas Press, 47-112.
- Good, Jeff. 2005. Reconstructing morpheme order in Bantu: the case of causativization and applicativization. *Diachronica* 22: 3-57.
- Good, Jeff and Tom Güldemann. 2006. The Bantu verbal prefixes and S-Aux-O-V order in Benue-Congo. Paper presented at the International conference on “Bantu Grammar: Description and Theory”, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 20-22 April 2006.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1949. Studies in African linguistic classification: III. The position of Bantu. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 5,4: 309-317.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1959. Africa as a linguistic area. In William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovitz (eds.), *Continuity and change in African cultures*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 15-27.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. *The languages of Africa*. Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics Publications 25. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1972. Linguistic evidence for Bantu origins. *Journal of African History* 13: 189-216.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1983. Some areal characteristics of African languages. In Dihoff, Ivan R. (ed.), *Current approaches to African linguistics I*. Publications in African Languages and Linguistics 1. Dordrecht/ Cinnaminson: Foris, 3-22.
- Güldemann, Tom. 1996. *Verbmorphologie und Nebenprädikationen im Bantu: Eine Studie zur funktional motivierten Genese eines konjugationalen Subsystems*. Bochum-Essener Beiträge zur Sprachwandelforschung 27. Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer.

- STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE)*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)
- Güldemann, Tom. 1998. The Kalahari Basin as an object of areal typology - a first approach. In Schladt, Mathias (ed.), *Language, identity, and conceptualization among the Khoisan*. Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung 15. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 137-169.
- Güldemann, Tom. 1999a. Head-initial meets head-final: nominal suffixes in eastern and southern Bantu from a historical perspective. *Studies in African Linguistics* 28,1: 49-91.
- Güldemann, Tom. 1999b. The genesis of verbal negation in Bantu and its dependency on functional features of clause types. In Hombert and Hyman (eds.), 545-587.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2003a. Grammaticalization. In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 182-194.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2003b. Logophoricity in Africa: an attempt to explain and evaluate the significance of its modern distribution. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 56,4: 366-387.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2005. Complex predicates based on generic auxiliaries as an areal feature in Northeast Africa. In Voeltz (ed.), *Studies in African linguistic typology*. Typological Studies in Language 64. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 131-154.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2007. Preverbal objects and information structure in Benue-Congo. In Aboh, Enoch O., Katharina Hartmann and Malte Zimmermann (eds.), *Focus strategies in African languages: the interaction of focus and grammar in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic*. Trends in Linguistics - Studies and Monographs 191. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 83-111.
- Güldemann, Tom. 2008. The Macro-Sudan belt: towards identifying a linguistic area in northern sub-Saharan Africa. In Heine and Nurse (eds.), 151-185.
- Güldemann, Tom. forthcoming. "Sprachraum" and geography. In Lameli, Alfred, Roland Kehrein and Stefan Rabanus (eds.), *The handbook of language mapping*. Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Guthrie, Malcolm. 1948. *The classification of the Bantu languages*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Guthrie, Malcolm. 1962. Bantu origins: a tentative new hypothesis. *Journal of African Languages* 1,1: 9-21.
- Hajek, John. 2005. Vowel nasalization. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 46-49.
- Haspelmath, Martin, Matthew Dryer, David Gil and Bernard Comrie (eds.). 2005. *The world atlas of language structures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heath, Jeffrey. 1999. *A grammar of Koyraboro (Koroboro) Senni*. Westafrikanische Studien 19. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Heath, Teresa. 2003. Makaa (A83). In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 335-348.
- Hedinger, Robert. 1984. Reported speech in Akɔɔse. *Journal of West African Languages* 14,1: 81-102.
- Heine, Bernd. 1975. Language typology and convergence areas in Africa. *Linguistics* 144: 27-47.
- Heine, Bernd. 1976. *A typology of African languages based on the order of meaningful elements*. Kölner Beiträge zur Afrikanistik 4. Berlin: Dietrich Reiner.

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- Heine, Bernd and Derek Nurse (eds.). 2008. *A linguistic geography of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hombert, Jean-Marie and Larry M. Hyman (eds.). 1999. *Bantu historical linguistics: theoretical and empirical perspectives*. CSLI Lecture Notes 99. Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI).
- Hyman, Larry M. 1993. Conceptual issues in the comparative study of the Bantu verb stem. In Mufwene, Salikoko S. and Lioba Moshi (eds.), *Topics in African linguistics*. Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 100. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 3-34.
- Hyman, Larry M. 1999. The historical interpretation of vowel harmony. In Hombert and Hyman (eds.), 235-295.
- Hyman, Larry M. 2004. How to become a 'Kwa' verb. *Journal of West African Languages* 30,2: 69-88.
- Hyman, Larry M. 2007a. Niger-Congo verb extensions: overview and discussion. In Payne, Doris L. and Jaime Peña (eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the 37th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 149-163.
- Hyman, Larry M. 2007b. Reconstructing the Proto-Bantu verbal unit: internal evidence. In Kula and Marten (eds.), 201-211.
- Ikoru, Suanu M. 1996. *The Kana language*. CNWS Publications 40. Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University.
- Joseph, Brian D. and Richard D. Janda (eds.). 2003. *The handbook of historical linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jungrauthmayr, Herrmann. 1990. Evolution or reduction? On the history of research into the development of African languages. *Annali del Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico, Sezione linguistica* 12, 19-33.
- Kamba Muzenga, J. G. 1981. *Les formes verbales négatives dans les langues bantoues*. *Annalen Menselijke Wetenschappen* 106. Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika.
- Kisseberth, Charles and David Odden. 2003. Tone. In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 59-70.
- Kula, Nancy C. and Lutz Marten (eds.). 2007. *Bantu in Bloomsbury: special issue on Bantu linguistics*. SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics 15. London: Department of Linguistics, School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2003. The sounds of the Bantu languages. In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 15-41.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2005a. Glottalized consonants. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 34-37.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2005b. Vowel quality inventories. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 14-17.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2005c. Presence of uncommon consonants. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 82-85.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2005d. Tone. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 58-61.
- Maho, Jouni F. 2007. The linear ordering of TAM/NEG markers in the Bantu languages? In Kula and Marten (eds.), 213-225.

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- Meeussen, Achille E. 1967. Bantu grammatical reconstructions. In *Africana Linguistica* 3. *Annalen Wetenschappen van de Mens* 61. Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, 79-121.
- Meinhof, Carl. 1936. *Die Entstehung flektierender Sprachen: eine Untersuchung*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.
- Meinhof, Carl. 1938. Die Entstehung der Bantusprachen. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 70: 144-152.
- Mithun, Marianne. 1992. Typology and deep genetic relations in North America. In Polomé, Edgar C. and Werner Winter (eds.), *Reconstructing languages and cultures*. Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 58. Berlin/ New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 91-108.
- Möhlig, Wilhelm J. G. 1979. The Bantu nucleus: its conditional nature and its prehistorical significance. *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 1: 109-141.
- Nichols, Johanna. 1992. *Linguistic diversity in space and time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nichols, Johanna. 1997. Modeling ancient population structures and movement in linguistics. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 359-384.
- Nurse, Derek. 2007. Did the Proto-Bantu verb have a synthetic or an analytic structure? In Kula and Marten (eds.), 239-256.
- Nurse, Derek. 2008. *Tense and aspect in Bantu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nurse, Derek and Gérard Philippson. 2003. Introduction. In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 1-12.
- Nurse, Derek and Gérard Philippson (eds.). 2003. *The Bantu languages*. Routledge Language Family Series 4. London: Routledge.
- Olson, Kenneth S. and John Hajek. 2003. Crosslinguistic insights on the labial flap. *Linguistic Typology* 7,2: 157-186.
- Persson, Andrew M. and Janet R. Persson. 1991. *Mödo-English dictionary with grammar*. Bilingual Dictionaries of Sudan 1. Nairobi: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Polak, Louise. 1986. Les infixes ("prefixes objets") du bantou et leur reconstruction. In *Africana Linguistica* 10. *Annalen Menselijke Wetenschappen* 121. Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, 365-421.
- Redden, James E. 1979. *A descriptive grammar of Ewondo*. Occasional Papers on Linguistics 4. Carbondale: Department of Linguistics, Southern Illinois University.
- Schadeberg, Thilo C. 1990. *A sketch of Umbundu*. Grammatische Analysen afrikanischer Sprachen 1. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Schadeberg, Thilo C. 2003. Derivation. In Nurse and Philippson (eds.), 71-89.
- Stanley, Carol. 1991. *Description morpho-syntaxique de la langue tikar (parlée au Cameroun)*. Société International de Linguistique.
- Stassen, Leon. 2005. Comparative constructions. In Haspelmath et al. (eds.), 490-93.
- Vansina, Jan. 1995. New linguistic evidence and 'the Bantu expansion'. *Journal of African History* 36: 173-195.

STYLE SHEET : International Symposium of the Center of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010, Christa König and Osamu Hieda (eds.)

- Voeltz, F. K. Erhard. 1977. *Proto Niger-Congo verb extensions*. Ph.D. thesis: University of California Los Angeles.
- Voorhoeve, Jan. 1980. Le pronom logophorique et son importance pour la reconstruction du proto-bantou (PB). *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 2: 173-187.
- Voßen, Rainer. 1997. *Die Khoe-Sprachen: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Sprachgeschichte Afrikas*. Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung 12. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Westermann, Diedrich. 1927. *Die westlichen Sudansprachen und ihre Beziehungen zum Bantu*. Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen 30. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Westermann, Diedrich. 1935. Nominalklassen in westafrikanischen Klassensprachen und in Bantusprachen. *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, 3. Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien* 38: 1-53.
- Westermann, Diedrich. 1949. *Sprachbeziehungen und Sprachverwandtschaft in Afrika*. Sitzungsberichte der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1948,1.
- Westphal, Ernst O. J. 1958. An introductory comparative study of negation in Bantu. *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 6,2: 284-320.
- Williamson, Kay. 1985. How to become a Kwa language. In Makkai, Adam and Alan K. Melby (eds.), *Linguistics and philosophy: essays in honor of Rulon S. Wells*. Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 42. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 427-443.
- Wolff, H. Ekkehard. 1993. *Referenzgrammatik des Hausa*. Hamburger Beiträge zur Afrikanistik 2. Hamburg: LIT.

ABSTRACT

According to recent research on areal typology in Africa, Narrow Bantu can be viewed as forming a large macro-area in Africa that is structurally distinct from its areal neighbours like the Macro-Sudan belt, the Chad-Ethiopia area, and the Kalahari Basin (Güldemann forthcoming). At the same time, it is clear that Narrow Bantu is a genealogical off-shoot of its north-western areal neighbour, the Macro-Sudan belt, despite its marked typological deviation from it (Güldemann 2008). This situation informs among other things the historical study of this language group. I argue that early Bantu structure is more likely to have resembled patterns recurrent in the Macro-Sudan belt, which in turn implies that the majority structural profile of Narrow Bantu should not be the yardstick for the reconstruction of early Niger-Congo. Hence, macro-areal typology can and should inform the historical study of genealogical language groups.