Generic nouns, classifiers and the external genealogical relationship of Mande
Reference classification (Dwyer)
Williamson (1989)

- Niger-Congo
  - Mande
  - Atlantic-Congo
    - Atlantic
    - Volta-Congo
    - Ijoid
      - Kru
      - (New) Kwa
      - (New) Benue-Congo
      - Dogon
      - North-Volta-Congo
        - Gur
        - Adamawa-Ubangi
The standard view

- Mande is well defined as a group
- Mande is related to other groups like Gur, Dogon, Kru, Kwa ...
- Mande is the first offshoot
- Mande has „lost“ its noun class system
- Mande languages are isolating
Interdependence of typological and genealogical relationship

- The Niger Congo proposal is based on morphological traits
- The mostly used trait is the noun class system
- "Such reliance on the noun-classifier concord systems constitutes a serious problem for classification. The trait is not convincing as a "genetic marker"." (Campbell 2008, p. 131)
Typological disposition: interdependence of typological and genealogical relationship

- Stability & Arbitrariness
- Distantly related languages should be typologically related if the considered trait must be regarded as historically stable.
- Sub-traits of noun classes
  - Number (obligatory marking, pairing)
  - Classifiers
  - Agreement
  - Morphemes
Stability & reconstruction

- Reconstruction of „proto-frames“: sound reference
- Paradigms
- Phrases
- Segmental stability of morphemes
More stable features are less arbitrary than weak features, while more arbitrary elements are less stable.
Mande traits

- Formal morphological distinction of nominal/verbal stems
  - Isomorphism, especially in Manding and South-western Mande
  - Nouns with arguments: dependent nouns
- Lack of a clear distinction between the lexical and syntactic morphology between the lexical and the phrase level
  - “Pseudo-composition”
  - Object noun incorporation with light verbs
  - “Phrase nouns” (Noms conglomerées”)
  - “Archinominaux” Adverbo-nominaux
  - Phrase-final marking of categories like number
Noun classification & number

- Limited typology
- Number
- Compounding & classification
- Test languages
  - Soninke
  - Koranko
  - Mende
  - Toura
  - Samo
Reference classification (Dwyer)
Number features

- “General number” (Corbett 2000)
- General number is not widespread (Corbett 200:12)
- General number in Ful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>general</th>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>toti ‘toad(s)’</td>
<td>toti-ru ‘toad’</td>
<td>totii-ji ‘toads’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyaari ‘cat(s)’</td>
<td>nyaari-ru ‘cat’</td>
<td>nyaarii-ji ‘cats’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gerto ‘hen(s)’</td>
<td>gerto-gal ‘hen’</td>
<td>gerto-de ‘hens’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boofo ‘egg(s)’</td>
<td>woofoo-nde ‘egg’</td>
<td>boofoo-de ‘eggs’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biini ‘bottle(s)’</td>
<td>biini-ri ‘bottle’</td>
<td>biini-ji ‘bottles’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The forms which have no suffix express general meaning, that is they are used when number is irrelevant, for instance (Koval’ 1979: 11):

(8) ko biini tun waawi marde beere
    PARTICLE bottle only can.PERFV preserve beer
    ‘only a bottle/bottles can preserve beer’
Number and specificity in Mande

„It has been noted that, in the Mande languages, the stem form if ompersonam nouns has a generic reference, not specifically singular or plural, but that it is possible to express individuated pluralization“ (Welmers 1974:219)
## Number and specificity in Koranko

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen</th>
<th>Spec</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sg</td>
<td>Pl</td>
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</table>
| #Ø  | #é   | #é-nu
Number and specificity in Mende

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen</th>
<th>Spec</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sg</td>
<td>Pl</td>
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<tr>
<td>#Ø</td>
<td>#(ng)a</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sg</th>
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<td>#í</td>
<td>#í-sia</td>
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**Number and specificity SAMO type**

**Samo**

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Ø</td>
<td>#n</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Soninke**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Pl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>-o</td>
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</table>
Number and specificity in Toura

### Toura

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen/Sg</th>
<th>Pl</th>
<th>associative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Ø</td>
<td>#bò</td>
<td>#nù</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Number and specificity type Mano

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen</th>
<th>Human-gen</th>
<th>Human-spec</th>
<th>Non-human-gen</th>
<th>Non-human-spec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Ø</td>
<td>#נָה</td>
<td>#ני</td>
<td>#נָה</td>
<td>#ו</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>Pl</td>
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<td>Pl</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Generic & specific nouns in Mande

- Kastenholz (1986) specific/generic in Central Mande

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>generic</th>
<th>specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Manding, Koranko</td>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
<td>$-(Y)\hat{E}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vai</td>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
<td>$-(Y)\hat{E}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Southwestern</td>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
<td>$-(G)\hat{E}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Susu, Soninke</td>
<td>$\emptyset^{21}$</td>
<td>$\hat{E}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schreiber (2008) specific/generic in Proto Niger Volta

Numerussystem des PNV:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>indefinit/generisch</th>
<th>definit-Sg.</th>
<th>definit-Pl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
<td>*li</td>
<td>*no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number in Mande

- Singular/plural is stable
- Generic/specific is stable
- Phrase final number marking is stable
- Generic/singular distinction is unstable
- Generic/specific linking to number is found in some languages
Noun classification in Mande

- Mande has „lost“ its noun class system
- Proto-Mande creolisation hypothesis Historical sociolinguistic implications
  - „Heavy“ contact and shift
  - Early empires and urban centers
- Morphosyntactic implications
  - Gur languages:
  - Creolized Bantu languages
Noun classification in Mande

"Vestiges of an original noun class system have been identified in number of languages in which such a system is no longer grammatically functional, or at best functions only at the derivational level. ... Within Niger-Congo, the Mande languages show nothing at all comparable to the class and concord systems ..."

(Welmers African Language Structures 1974, p. 214)
Genericity & classification

- **Generic classifiers (Cantonese, Ben Au Yeung, p.1)**

  (generic noun phrase, non-characterizing sentence)
  Saigwaa gamziu jizing maai saai laa
  Watermelon this-morning already sell all Sfp
  'Watermelons were all sold out this morning'

  (generic noun phrase, characterizing sentence)
  Saigwaa dosu zung hai die soengmin
  Watermelon often grow on ground surface
  'Watermelons often grow on the ground surface'

  (indefinite noun phrase, characterizing sentence)
  Jat go saigwaa gau sik saam go jan.
  One Cl-sg watermelon enough eat three Cl-sg person
  'One watermelon is enough for three persons to eat'
Genericity & classification

Common nouns as general classifiers:

“Noun classifiers categorize the referent noun with which they co-occur. The semantic relationship between the classifier and the noun is generic-specific, ... Yidiny (...) bama waguja ('person man') 'a man' These can be independent lexemes, as above, or they can appear as affixes on a noun.”
In addition to personal free noun stems, there is a large number of compound personal free nouns, of which the final component in the singular is /nău/ 'person', with the regular tonal replacive of low for stem tone typical of compounds. Such compounds have plurals ending with /bêla/, which is interpreted as being derived from a stem with unknown tone which does not appear except in such compounds. Thus, from a phrase /tii ké/ 'do work' (noun plus verb):

\[
tii \ kē-\nuu \quad 'a \ workman' \quad tii \ kē-\bêla \quad 'workmen'.
\]
Conclusion

- Generic/specific is pertinent in Proto-Mande
- PM noun phrase structure *(n/a-)N-SPEC [...] #NUM
- – = suffix
- # = clitic
- Formal distinction of two plural markers had been pertinent:
  - *bo
  - *nu
Implications

- No grammaticalization of classifiers in Proto-Mande-dialects
- Grammaticalisation of articles/demonstratives?
- „Barrier“ to the development into noun classes?
- Mande is related to Atlantic, Gur, Kwa etc.
- Mande is Niger Congo or not by definition