

## “(Upper) Benue-Volta - the morphological evidence”

'(Upper) Benue-Volta' is definable by a bundle of morphological (but also lexical features) which apparently link noun class languages spoken in the (upper part) of the Volta Basin, (i.e. the Gur family) with noun class languages spoken in the Upper Benue Basin. Common heritage are apart from the common vocabulary, (i) nominal classification systems based on morphemes cognate in form and function, where (ii) class membership is predominantly marked by discrete nominal suffixes (= NF), while concord morphemes (= AGR) mapping agreement on dependent constituents may be prefixed and/or suffixed. Thus, 'Benue-Volta' may form a core of a or the still hypothetical and disputed 'North Volta-Congo' continuum. The paper summarizes and presents reconstructable elements of the nominal morphology that are apparently spread in different degrees (at times only 'residual') over the class languages spoken in the savannah areas of the two river basins. Main features are distinct canonical genders and transnumeral (TN) classes and their semantics e.g. \*ka-\*mV and \*bu-#; \*sɪ (generic/collective); a distinct 'thing' class \*da ~\*nV; an [animal/+animate] class \*wV distinct from a [human] class \*yV both having different plural oppositions. Furthermore, common semantic/derivation function of the transnumeral classes \*ni (abstracts derived from verbs of quality and state), \*tu (abstracts derived from persons); class \*ma derives language names and deverbal abstracts/verbal nouns like 'sleep' and 'death'; class \*I is the most neutral one as regards plural formation and often 'harbors' a phonic distinct plural marker which triggers the AGR pattern of class \*I (reconstructed as \*ci in Mieke et al 2012); plurals of kinship terms in class 2a very often have distinct nominal suffixes not corresponding with the AGR. Not characteristic for the alleged linguistic unit are (i) a distinct agent-noun extensions \*-d- and (ii) a possessor-possessed and S-AUX-O-V-X word order. Both are generally attested in the Volta languages, but they are less commonly found in languages of the Upper Benue. The morphological evidence supports common classifications only in that 'Upper Benue', and thus also 'Adamawa', is not a valid linguistic unit, and not a branch of Benue-Volta. On the other hand, an internal classification of 'Gur' on the basis of noun class morphology, ought to also accommodate probable cousins from the East.