

## The gender system of Laal in typological and areal perspective

Florian Lionnet (Princeton University)

flionnet@princeton.edu

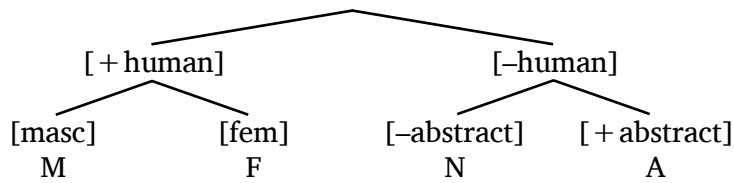
### 1 Introduction

- (1) Laal (all data are from my own field notes, which confirm and expand on Boyeldieu 1982a):
  - a. ca. 800 speakers in two villages in Southern Chad
  - b. Unclassified, several hypotheses:
    - Chadic with strong Adamawa (Boua and non-Boua) influence;
    - Niger-Congo (not Boua, perhaps Adamawa) with Boua and Chadic influence;
    - Mixed language (Chadic + Adamawa);
    - Isolate with Chadic and Adamawa (Boua or non-Boua) influence.
    - Cf. Boyeldieu (1977; 1979:11-13; 1982:3; 1985:14,29), Blench (2006), Dimmendaal (2008), Lionnet (2010).
- (2) Goals:
  - a. Describe the gender system of Laal, using Güldemann & Fiedler's (to appear) framework
  - b. Compare with other African systems (in particular today Niger-Congo, esp. Adamawa), and show that the Laal gender system is unique in Africa
  - c. Evaluate claims of traces of a Niger-Congo "noun class" system
  - d. Give weight to the isolate hypothesis
- (3) Interesting:
  - a. Areal: Gender system unrelated to any other in the region, or in Africa
  - b. Genealogical: can be used as an argument supporting the isolate hypothesis
  - c. Synchronic:
    - Complete disconnect between nominal morphology and gender system
    - Two different agreement paradigms, morphologically unrelated, structurally partly different
  - d. Diachronic: A case of complexification of the agreement classes through the innovation of a subgender within an agreement sub-paradigm

## 2 The gender system of Laal

### 2.1 Genders

- (4) Four genders:
  - a. Masculine: human male
  - b. Feminine: human female
  - c. Neuter: non-human (+ non-abstract, cf. below)
  - d. Abstract: deverbal nouns, clauses (not identified by Boyeldieu 1982a, difficult to identify as we will see)
- (5) "Strict semantic system" (Corbett 1991), with four semantic features:
  - a. One primary distinction: [ $\pm$  human]
  - b. Two secondary distinction:
    - Sex distinction: [feminine] vs. [masculine] among [+ human]
    - [ $\pm$  abstract] among [-human]



(6) Sex difference only among [+human]:

- a. nīinī **jí** gūdā 'big woman'  
 woman CON.F.SG be.big
- b. nāārā **já** gūdā 'big man'  
 man CON.M.SG be.big
- c. biāāg **má** gūdā 'big dog'  
 dog CON.N.SG be.big
- d. biāāg **má/\*jí** nīinī **má/\*jí** gūdā 'big female dog'  
 dog CON.N.SG /\*F woman CON.N.SG /\*F be.big
- e. biāāg **má/\*já** nāārā **má/\*já** gūdā 'big male dog'  
 dog CON.N.SG /\*M man CON.N.SG /\*M be.big

(7) Covert system:

- No overt marking of gender on the noun
- Gender is only marked on agreeing elements: pronouns and determiner-like items.
- Consequence: no noun form classes or declension → evidence that:
  - Noun form class ≠ agreement class
  - Gender system ≠ declension

(8) Gender and number are conflated.

- Each gender is characterized by the association of a singular and a plural agreement pattern (agreement classes, AGR),
- Each agreement class is realized differently depending on the target of agreement: two subsystems, morphologically unrelated, structurally partly different:
  - Determiner paradigm
  - Pronominal paradigm

## 2.2 Pronominal system

		Gender [±human] Secondary		Subject Indep.		Suffixes		
						Poss 1	Poss 2	Object
Sg.	1	+		já		-ər	-i	-ón ~ -ór
	2			ò	uǎy	-à	-ua	-uán ~ -uá
	3	-		à	ǎy	-àr	-ar	-án ~ -ár
	ìn			ìní	-ò(g)	-òn(ó)	-òn ~ -ò	
			(N+A)	àn	àní	-àn	-àn(á)	-àn ~ -àr
Pl.	1ex			ùrú		-rú	--	-nùrú ~ -nǔ ~ -rǔ
	1in			ǎŋ		-ráŋ	--	nǎŋ ~ -rǎŋ
	2			ùn	ùnúnŋ	-rúnŋ	--	núnŋ ~ rúnŋ
	3	+		ì	ìrí	-rí	--	-nìrí ~ -nǐ ~ -rǐ
				uàn	uàní	-uàn	-uàná	-uàn ~ -uàr

Table 1 Personal pronouns and pronominal suffixes

- (9) Three persons (1, 2, 3) + inclusive/exclusive distinction in 1<sup>st</sup> pers. pl.
- (10) Gender distinctions across the board only in 3<sup>rd</sup> person:
- 3sg: M vs. F vs. non-human (= N + A)
  - 3pl: Human (= M + F) vs. Non-human (= N + A)
- (11) F/M distinction in 1sg subject/independent = recent innovation (grammaticalization from connective markers já/jí, cf. 2.3)
- No gender distinction elsewhere in 1sg or 1pl
  - Form já/jí unrelated to other 1sg forms
  - No difference between subject and independent forms
- (12) Conflations:
- No abstractness distinction at all in the pronominal system: “neuter” = non-human
  - No sex distinction in 3pl human (neutralization of [fem] and [masc])
  - i.e. in 3pl, the only distinction is Human (M + F) vs. Non-human (N + A)
- (13) Suppletion:
- Two series of Possessive suffixes (unpredictable, Poss 2 less regular, probably older)
  - Two series of Object suffixes (mostly unpredictable)

### 2.3 Determiner system (determiners and determiner-like functional words)

- (14) Determiner-like elements are all based on five morphological bases /ja/, /ji/, /ma/, /yi/, /ya/, associated with different agreement classes.
- (15) Not only determiners:
- Indefinite jàn, = determiner
  - Partitive indefinite jánàn (“one/some of X”) = determiner and pronoun
  - Demonstrative juánā = adnominal (determiner) and pronominal
  - Demonstrative juàṅá = predicative
  - Connective já
  - Focus marker jà
  - Topic marker juāṅ

	Connective	Focus	Indef.	Partitive Indef.	Topic	Demonstrative (ad/pronominal)	Demonstrative (predicative)
	<sup>H</sup>	<sup>L</sup>	<sup>L</sup> -n	<sup>HL</sup> -nan	<sup>M</sup> [rd]-ŋ	<sup>HM</sup> [rd]-ŋV <sub>copy</sub>	<sup>LH</sup> [rd]-ŋV <sub>copy</sub>
/ja/	já	jà	jàn	jánàn	juāṅ	juánā	juàṅá
/ji/	jí	jì	jìn	jínàn	jūṅ	júṅū	jùṅú
/ma/	má	mà	màn	mánàn	muāṅ	muánā	muàṅá
/yi/	yí	yì	yìn	yínàn	(*yūṅ)	yúṅū	yùṅú
/ya/	yá	yà	yàn	yánàn	(*yuāṅ)	(yuánā?)	(yuàṅá?)

Table 2 Gender sensitive determiners and determiner-like markers in Laal

## 2.4 Agreement classes and gender

(16) There are 6 attested agreement classes in Laal (7 with so far unattested abstract plural):

AGR	Semantics	Determiners (base)	Pronouns			
			Ind.	Sbj (3 <sup>rd</sup> pers.)	Obj (3 <sup>rd</sup> pers.)	Poss
1	M.SG	ja	ǎy	à	-ár~-án	-àr
2	F.SG	ji	ìní	ìn	-ò~-òn	-ò~-òg
3	N.SG	ma~yi	àní	àn	-àr~-àn	-àn
4	A.SG	yi	àní	àn	-àr~-àn	-àn
5	MF.PL	yi	ìrí	ì	-nìrí~-nǐ	-rí
6	N.PL	ya~yi	uàní	uàn	-uàr~-uàn	-uàn
(7?)	(A.PL?)	(yi)	(uàní)	(uàn)	(-uàr~-uàn)	(-uàn)

Table 3: Laal agreement classes

(17) Singular Agreement classes illustrated (Connective + Object pronoun):

- a. AGR1: nāārā **já** dāŋ, já yìr - **ár**  
 man CON.M.SG there I know - 3M.SG  
 ‘That man, I know him.’
- b. AGR2: nīnī **jí** dāŋ, já yùr - **ù**  
 woman CON.F.SG there I know - 3F.SG  
 ‘That woman, I know her.’
- c. AGR3: bíāāg **má ~ yí** dāŋ, já yìr - **àr**  
 dog CON.N.SG there I know - 3NA.SG  
 ‘That dog, I know it.’
- d. AGR4: nyúnún **yí/\*má** Kábó, já càr - **àr**  
 departure CON.A.SG Kabo I want - 3NA.SG  
 ‘Kabo’s departure/leaving, I want it.’

(18) Plural Agreement classes illustrated (Connective + Object pronoun):

- a. AGR5: yīnān/wūrā **yí** dāŋ, já yìr - **rǐ**  
 women/men CON.MF.PL there I know - -3MF.PL  
 ‘Those women/men, I know them.’
- c. AGR6: bíīg-āny **yá ~ yí** dāŋ, já yùr - **àr**  
 dog-PL CON.N.PL there I know - -3N/AB.PL  
 ‘Those dogs, I know them.’
- d. AGR7? No abstract plural example. Predicted agreement:  
 ?? X **yí/\*yá** dāŋ, já yùr - **àr**  
 X.PL CON.A.PL there I know - -3N/AB.PL

NB: Unattested AGR7 (abstract plural) is henceforth ignored

(19) Headless relative clause → abstract agreement

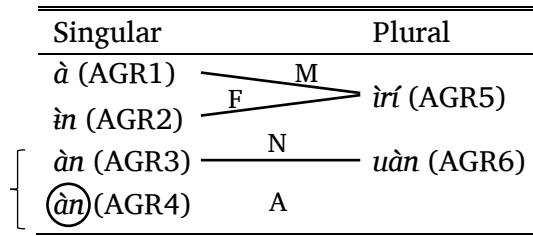
- [**yí/\*má** bə̀wə̀r káàn **yí/\*mà**] já bílā  
 CON.A.SG my.gd-father do-3N.SG.OBJ FOC.A.SG I speak  
 ‘It is (only) what my grand-father used to do that I (will) talk about.’

(20) Clause → abstract agreement

[ì nyúnì sêw yì/\*mà] bēē ì míwì  
 3.MF.PL go abroad FOC.A.SG or 3.MF.PL die  
 ‘Did they go abroad, or did they die?’

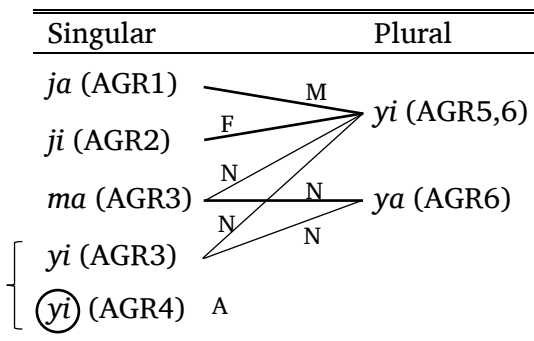
(21) Pronominal system: Agreement patterns are regular

- a. NB: lexically determined suppletive allomorphy in object suffixes and 3F.SG poss. sfx)
- b. “Convergent” type (Sg > Pl) (Heine 1982: 196-198; Corbett 1991: 154-158)



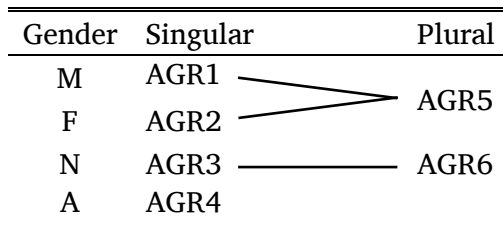
(22) Determiner paradigm:

- a. More complex
  - Syncretism of /yi/ forms
  - Free variation involving /yi/ forms in N
- b. “Crossed” type (Heine 1982: 196-198; Corbett 1991: 154-158)



(23) Neuter and Abstract are only minimally different

- a. Pronominal system: undistinguished
- b. Determiner system: minimally different
  - N.SG triggers both *ma-* and *yi-*agreement
  - A.SG triggers exclusively *yi-*agreement



### 3 Diachronic evolution

(24) Originally: M vs. F vs. Non-human

(25) Innovations: [ $\pm$  abstract] distinction within non-human & extension of *yi*-forms in Determiner system. Arguments for innovation of Abstract:

- it has no specific form in either Determiner or Pronominal systems
- there is no N/A distinction in the pronominal system
- Neuter and Abstract agreement classes are only minimally distinct

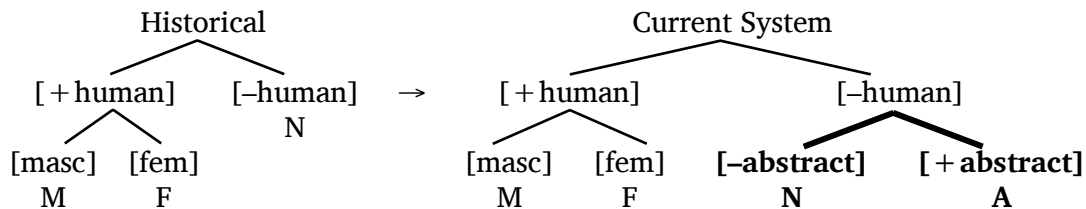


Figure 4: Diachronic evolution of Laal gender system

(26) Three historical stages (+ possible future)

- Identical to current pronominal system
- Current system:
  - Innovation of [ $\pm$  abstract]
  - Recruitment of *yi*-form for A
  - yi*-expansion to all but M/F SG, in free variation with N *ma* and *ya*
- Future system (?): Loss of N *ma* and *ya*, replaced by *yi*, causing loss of abstractness distinction

a. Original system			b. Current system			d. Future system?				
	SG	PL		SG	PL		SG	PL		
M	ja	yi	→	M	ja	yi	→	M	ja	yi
F	ji	yi		F	ji	yi		F	ji	yi
N	ma	ya		N	ma~yi	ya~yi		N	yi	
				A	yi	?				

### 4 The gender system of Laal compared to other African sex-based gender systems

(27) Other sex-based systems in Africa

- Afro-Asiatic, in particular Chadic (cf. 4.1)
- Ijoid (cf. 4.2)
- Zande (Ubangian) (cf. Appendix)
- Eastern Nilotic (cf. Appendix)
- Khoe-Kwadi (cf. Appendix)

#### 4.1 Chadic (Afro-Asiatic)

(28) General structure and semantics are different from Laal: “Gender in Chadic is (and always was) a two-term opposition: masculine vs. feminine. There are no Chadic languages with a neuter as opposed to m/f.” (Newman 1990:6)

- (29) “Morphological system” (Corbett 1991), i.e. only partially semantic: all nouns are either masc. or fem., including inanimate.

	Singular		Plural	
	ANIMATE	INANIMATE	ANIMATE	INANIMATE
Masculine:	male	various, arbitrary	all	
Feminine:	female	various, arbitrary		

Table 4: Semantics of proto-Chadic gender system (simplified)

- (30) Gender distinctions marked on
- Nouns (in a number of Chadic languages gender can also be mostly covert on nouns)
  - Adjectives
  - Pronouns
  - Some determiners

- (31) Examples from Ndam (Chadic, East-A; Bross 1988), one of the two Chadic languages spoken around and in the Laal villages (the second one is Boor)

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. <i>Masculine nouns</i> | b. <i>Feminine nouns</i> |
| gòn ‘man’                 | jām ‘woman’              |
| dān ‘water turtle’        | bād ‘arm’                |
| dáy ‘pot’                 | àdū ‘tree’               |

- c. *Adjectives:*
- |                     |                    |               |         |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------|
| <i>masc. sg. -e</i> | <i>fem. sg. -a</i> | <i>pl. -o</i> |         |
| dāmny-é             | dāmny-á            | dāmny-ō       | ‘weak’  |
| dùw-ē               | dùw-ā              | dūw-ō         | ‘white’ |
| pār-é               | pār-ā              | pēr-ō         | ‘red’   |

- (32) Gender distinctions in pronouns: 2nd and 3rd pers. sg only (proto-Chadic, proto-AA).

	Proto-Chadic		Laal	
			Object (simplified)	Subject
Sg	1	*ní	1 m -én	já
	2	m *ka f *ki	2 - (u)án	jí
	3	m *nì f *ta	3 m -án f -òn n -àn	à ìn àn
Pl	1ex	*na	1ex -nùrú	ùrú
	1in	*mun	1in -nǎŋ	ǎŋ
	2	*kun	2 -nǔŋ	ùn
	3	*sun	3 m/f -nìrí n	ì uàn

Table 5: Proto-Chadic and Laal pronouns (Newman 2006)

- (33) Pronouns in a sample of Chadic languages (Table 6 and Table 7)
- Hausa (West) (Newman 2000:486)
  - Kera (East A.3) (Ebert 1979:130)

- c. Ndam (East A.1) (Bross 1988:59)  
 → spoken in villages close to Laal speaking villages  
 d. Tumak (East A.1) (Caprile 1975)  
 e. Mafa (Biu-Mandara) (Barreteau and Le Bleis 1990)

			Laal	Hausa	Kera	Ndam	Tumak	Mafa
Sg	1	m f	já jí	na(a), ni, in	ten	nè	nā	y-
	2		ò	ka ki(n)	tam te	yè mè	yè mè	k-
	3	m f n	à ìn àn	ya(a), shi ta(a)	tó, wa tá, a	dá tá	∅ (dāàn) ∅ (tāàn)	∅
Pl	1ex		ùrú	mu(n)	áré	nà	nà	ng-
	1in		ǎŋ		áŋ		dì	nd-
	2		ùn	ku(n)	aŋ	nè	nì	kín-
	3	m/f n	ì uàn	su(n)	té ~ ye	mà	kā	t-

Table 6: Subject pronouns in Hausa, Kera, Ndam, Tumak and Mafa

			Laal	Hausa	Kera	Tumak	Mafa
Sg.	1		-ón ~ -ór	ni	-n	-n	-ye
	2		-(u)án	ka ki	-m -i	-m -i	-ka
	3	m f n	-án -òn -àn	shi ta	-u -(r)a	-l, -r, -o -d	-a'a
Pl.	1ex		-nùrú, -nǔ, -rǔ	mu	áré	nán	-ŋga
	1in		-nǎŋ, -rǎŋ		áŋ	ní	
	2		nǔŋ, -rǔŋ	ku	-ŋ	nín / nén	-kíné
	3	m/f n	-nìrì, -nǐ, -rǐ -(u)àn	su	-i	-g	-ta

Table 7: Object pronouns in Hausa, Kera, Tumak and Mafa

(34) 1ex, 1in, and 2 (perhaps 3pl?) are likely Chadic borrowings in the plural (already identified in Boyeldieu 1982b):

- a. Strong similarity with Kera
- b. Would explain a few specificities of these forms
  - Absence of subject/independent difference for 1ex and 1in
  - They do not regularly trigger the expected vowel harmony processes,
  - Complex LH tone pattern (vs. other pronouns = H or L)
  - Disyllabic suffixes (with a reduced monosyllabic variant)



(35) Gender distinctions in determiner-like elements in Hausa (Newman 2000: 147)

	Maculine sg. n(a)	Feminine sg. t(a) ~ ř ~ c	Plural (da)n
Genitive	na ~ -n	ta ~ -ř	na ~ -n
Def	`n	`ř	`n
'this (by me)'	wannàn		wadànân
'that (by you)'	wànnan ~ wânnan		wadànan ~ wadànan
'that there'	wancàn	wacnàn	wadàncân
'that (distant)'	wàncan ~ wâncan	wàccan ~ wâccan	wadàncan ~ wadàncan
'which?'	wà nè	wà cè	wadànnè
'which one'	wà nnè	wà ccè	wadànnè
REL	wà ndà ~ wandà ~ wandà	wà ddà ~ waddà ~ wà ddà ~ waccè ~ waccè	wadà ndà ~ wadà ndà
some/other	wani	wata	wa(dan)su
so-and-so	wà nè	wà cè	su wà nè / su wà cè

Table 8: Determiners and determiner-like elements in Hausa

(36) Conclusion: Laal does not have a Chadic/Afro-Asiatic gender system. Both systems seem to have two different origins, with possible signs of interference.

- Differences in semantics
- Differences in agreement targets, both in pronouns and determiner-like systems
- Differences in form (except some pronominal plural forms, possibly borrowed from East Chadic)

## 4.2 Ijoid

(37) Ijoid (possibly Niger-Congo?): no noun classes, but interesting gender system (considerable dialectal variation)

- Animacy: human vs. non-human, animate vs. inanimate
- Sex: masculine vs. feminine vs. neuter

	HUMAN	ANIMAL	INANIMATE
Masculine:	male human	all animals (incl. female)	
Feminine:	female human		
Neuter:	sex unknown or ignored		inanimate

Table 9: Summary of gender distinctions in Ijò languages (Jenewari 1989:114)

(38) Active, grammaticalized system, covert on nouns, but agreement targets:

- Pronouns
- (Definite) article
- Demonstrative

		Okrika Subject	Kalabari Subject	Laal		
				Object	Subject / Indep.	
Sg	1	à ~ arí	arì	1 M F	-ón já jí	
	2	íy ~ íyí	íyé	2	-(u)án ò / uáy	
	3	M	ò ~ òrì	orí	3 M	-án à / áy
		F Comm	á ~ árì	árí imbo	F	-òn ìn / ìní
N	àní	aní	N + A	-àn àn / àní		
Pl	1	wá	wá	1 ex in	-nùrú, -nǎŋ ùrú ǎŋ	
	2	ó	ómíní	2	-nǔŋ ùn / ùnúŋ	
	3 Anim	ìní	iní	3 M/F	-nìrí ì / ìrí	
	Inan	àrì	aní	N + A	-uàn uàn / uàní	

Table 10: Pronouns in Okrika (Orupabo and Williamson 1980) and Kalabari (Jenewari 1977:228), and Laal

(39) Expression of gender in determiners in Laal vs. Kalabari (Jenewari 1977)

		Singular			Plural
		M	F	N	
Kalabari	Definite	bé	má	mé	má
	Proximal Dem	bí	má	mí	má ~ mīnā
Laal	Determiner base	ja	ji	ma	yí (M + F) ya (N + A)

(40) Ijoid = closest to Laal

- mostly sex-based, although complications
- Gender distinctions in third person pronouns only + determiners
- Same merger masc/fem merger in third person plural:
- Form matches:
  - 3rd pers N sg: Ijoid àní - Laal àn(i)
  - 3rd pers. human or animate pl.: Ijoid iní - Laal ì(rí) (weak)
  - 3rd pers N sg: Ijoid àrì ~ àní - Laal uàn(i) (< \*àn(i))

(41) However:

- Ijoid and Laal are in general very different in almost all other aspects
- Most probably independent innovations

### 4.3 Conclusion:

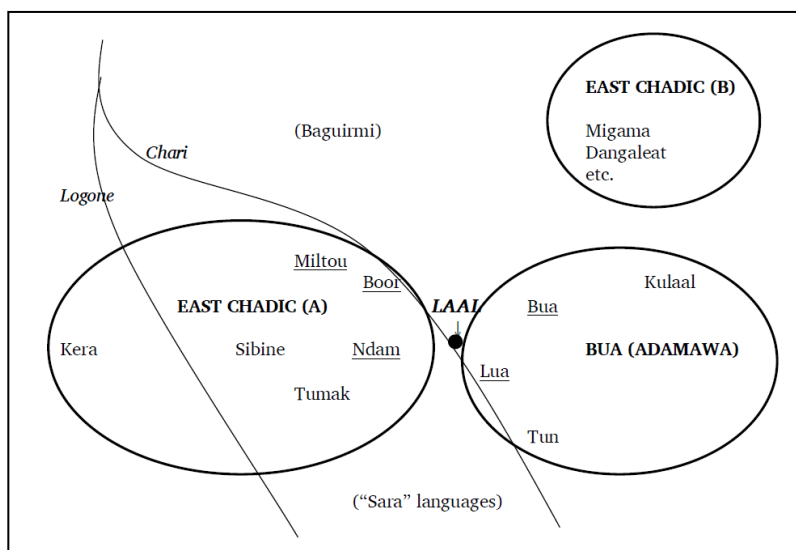
(42) The Laal gender system is unique in Africa.

- Different from the complex “noun class” system characteristic of (much of) Niger-Congo
- Different from, albeit similar to, other African sex/animacy-based gender systems

(43) Laal and other sex-based systems are (at least partly) different in:

- Type (semantic ~ morphological)
- Organization and number of genders (except perhaps Ijoid)

- c. Gender categories:
  - d. Gender distinctions in pronominal system
  - e. Gender distinctions in determiner system
  - f. Forms in both pronominal and determiner systems (except look-alikes in Ijoid, and Chadic loans in plural series)
- (44) The Laal gender system is not inherited from known phylum:
- Niger-Congo
  - Chadic/Afro-Asiatic
  - Nilo-Saharan (or any subgroup therein)
  - “Khoisan” (Khoe-type or Non-Khoe systems)
- (45) Hypothesis 1: the Laal gender system is inherited from proto-Laaloid phylum (isolate hypothesis)
- (46) Hypothesis 2: the Laal gender system is an innovation within a known phylum, e.g. Niger-Congo (see next section)
- (47) Signs of possible innovative nature of the Laal gender system:
- a. Strict semanticism (semantic transparency): hasn’t had the time to become irregular
  - b. Complex nominal morphology unrelated to gender system (covert system) might be the trace of a former, very different system
- (48) But if the gender system of Laal is an innovation, it is a relatively old one
- a. Gender markers grammaticalized into affixes
  - b. Heavy morphologization
  - c. High degree of suppletion in pronominal affixation
- (49) Local languages:
- a. Chadic: different gender system
  - b. Bua (Adamawa): “noun class” system (mostly fossilized in modern Bua languages)
  - c. SBB (Central Sudanic): no gender system



## 5 Traces of a former Niger-Congo “noun class” system?

### 5.1 Nominal number marking

(50) Number marking on nouns is

- a. very complex, partly irregular
- b. reminiscent of number marking in neighboring Bua languages Ba and Lua, where number marking morphology is what remains of a former Niger-Congo “noun class” system (Boyeldieu 1986, Boyeldieu et al. to appear)

1050	Total monomorphemic nouns		
467	Nouns that vary in number		
66	Suffix in sg. only	súm-ál / súm	‘palm tree sp.’
193	Suffix in pl. only	áár / óór-ù	‘sauce’
116	Suffix in both sg. and pl.	bìg-ál / bŭg-ū	‘tree bark’
83	Suprasegmental marking	ndáár/ndóór	‘whip’
9	Suppletion	nō / muǎŋ	‘person’

Table 11: Nominal number marking

(51) Cumulative marking:

sōōl	/	suáá-r-á	‘spear’
mī-l-āl	/	mí-n-í	‘eye’
tàg-á	/	tŭg-r-āny	‘fish sp.’
tŭgū-l	/	tùgù-r ~ tŭg-r-á	‘oxbow lake’

Overall shape	Suf.	#	Notes
L-suffixes	-al	134	semi-productive singulative
	-l	12	
V-suffixes	-a	30	ethnonyms (7/9)
	-o	9	
	-i	5	
	-e	3	
N-suffixes	-n	3	
	-un	1	
R-suffix	-ər	1	

Table 12. Singular suffixes (Laal)

Overall shape	Suffix	#	Semantics	Vowel harmony
V suffixes:	-u	85		
	-a <sub>1</sub>	69		
	-o	52		
	-i <sub>1</sub>	42	body parts (27/45)	
	-a <sub>2</sub>	4	animals (4/4)	irregular
	-i <sub>2</sub>	4		irregular
	-ə	2		
R suffixes:	-or	14		
	-r	12		
	-ri	5	animals (3/5)	irregular (3/5)
	-ər	2		
	-re	1		
M suffixes:	-mi	10	animals (6/10)	irregular
	-many	8	animals (5/8)	
	-ma	1		
N suffixes:	-n	3		
	-nu (-n-u?)	1		
Other:	-any, -nya, -iny (< *-iŋa)	30	animals (14/30)	
	-ga	3	fluids (3/3)	irregular
	-ŋu	1		irregular

Table 13: Plural suffixes in Laal

## 5.2 Comparison with neighboring Bua languages

(52) Proto-Bua had a typical Niger-Congo (Gur/Adamawa) gender system

- a. Suffixes on nouns
- b. Agreeing determiners

(53) Agreement has been lost in most modern Bua languages (except Kulaal).

SG		PL	
Sfx	Det	Sfx	Det
*-U <sub>2</sub>	*kɛ	*-I	*kɪ
*-A			
*-U <sub>1</sub>	*kʊ	*-rɪ	*tʊ
*-l	*lɛ	*-n	
*-m <sub>1</sub>	*mɛ		
?	?	*-B(V)	?
?	?	*-m <sub>2</sub>	*me
?	*kí	*-m <sub>3</sub>	*mo

Table 14: Proto-Bua gender system (adapted from Boyeldieu et al. to appear)

(54) There are a few similar suffixes between Laal and Proto-Bua:

	Proto-Bua	Laal
SG	*-U <sub>1</sub> (*kɪ)	-u (5), -o (9)
	*-U <sub>2</sub> (*kɛ)	
	*-A (*kɛ)	-a (30)
	*-l (*lɛ)	-al (134), -l (14)
	*-m <sub>1</sub> (*mɛ)	—
PL	*{ <sup>↑</sup> }-I (*kɪ)	-i <sub>1</sub> (42)
	*{ <sup>↑</sup> }-rI (*kɪ)	{ <sup>↑</sup> }-ri <sub>1</sub> (2)
		{ <sup>↑</sup> }-ri <sub>2</sub> (3)
	*-n (*tʊ)	-n (3), -or (15)
	*-B(V)	—
	-m <sub>2</sub> (*me)	—
	-m <sub>3</sub> (*mo)	—

Table 15: Similarities in Proto-Bua and Laal noun suffixes

(55) However, there are very few convincing sg/pl pairing correspondences:

- a. Laal has no systematic sg/pl pairings, contrary to what can be expected from Niger-Congo “noun class” systems
- b. There is a strong discrepancy between sg suffixes (fewer) and plural suffixes (more numerous)
- c. But there are a few regularities, detailed in Table 16

Proto-Bua			Laal			
Sg	Pl		Sg	Pl	# of Sg/Pl	Notes
*-U <sub>1</sub> (*kɪ)	*-I (*kɪ)		—	—		
*-U <sub>2</sub> (*kɛ)	*-I (*kɪ)		—	—		
*-A (*kɛ)	*-I (*kɪ)		-a (30)	-i <sub>1</sub> (43)	3	Not robust
*-l (*lɛ)	*-I (*kɪ)	residual, 6 body part terms only	-al (134)	-i <sub>1</sub> (43)	19	11 body parts
			[-∅	-i <sub>1</sub> (43)	18	13 body parts
*-l (*lɛ)	*-rI (*kɪ)		-l(-V) (13)	-r(-V) (14)	9	
*-l (*lɛ)	*-n (*tɔ)		-al (134)	-or (14)	14	(-or < *-n-tɔ?)
			-l(-V) (13)	-n(-V) (3)	3	Very few
*-m <sub>1</sub> (*mɛ)	*-rI (*kɪ)	residual, mass nouns	—	—		
?	*-B(V)	vestigial – human, kinship terms	—	—		
?	-m <sub>2</sub> (*me)	vestigial – kinship, relational terms	—	—		
?	-m <sub>3</sub> (*mo)	vestigial – ‘thing’, ‘place’	—	—		

Table 16: Proto-Bua genders and Laal singular/plural pairings

Singular	Plural	
-e	-u (possibly Chadic)	-re (-r-e?)
-i	-o (possibly Chadic)	-mi
-e	-a <sub>1</sub>	-many
-i	-a <sub>2</sub>	-ma
-n	-i <sub>2</sub>	-any, -nya, -iny (< Chadic)
-un	-ə	-ga
-ər	-ər	-ŋu

Table 17: Laal leftovers

(56) Body parts:

- a. Proto-Bua: \**-l* (\**lɛ*) / \**-i* (\**ki*) small gender, with only body part terms:
- b. Laal *-i*<sub>1</sub> is mostly used as plural of body part terms (37 out of 43). Singular is either *-al* (18 out of 100+ nouns in *-al*), or  $\emptyset$  (19)
- c. Comparison of actual forms: not conclusive:

	PBua (tentative)	Laal	sg/pl	Cognate?
'tooth'	* <i>nV-l</i> /* <i>nV-i</i>	yàm-ál/yèm-í	-al/-i	no
'breast'	* <i>mâ:l</i> /* <i>mâ:i</i>	tàw-ál/tèw-í	-al/-i	no
'belly'	* <i>pū-l</i> / <i>pū-i</i>	jìn-án/jìn-í~jǐn	-al/-i	no
'eye'	* <i>jí:l</i> /* <i>jí:i</i> (* <i>ʔí:l</i> /* <i>ʔí:i</i> ?)	mīl-ā/mín-í	-a/-i	no
'foot/leg'	* <i>na-l</i> /* <i>na-i</i>	kúr-á/kúr-í	-a/-i	no
'back'	<i>Korom: ði:lè/ði:</i>	bōrī	—	?

(57) NB: *-al* is very often a singulative suffix in Laal

jùur-ál	/	jūūr-ū	'peanut'
jìr-ál	/	jīr-ā	'bean'
miààm-ál	/	miāām	'mosquito'
miàn-án	/	mèn-ú	'fly'
tūm-āl	/	tūm	'tree sp.'

(58) *-al/-or* - \**-l* (\**lɛ*) / \**-n* (\**ʔu*) correspondence:

- a. Proto-Bua: \**-l* (\**lɛ*) / \**-n* (\**ʔu*)
  - In some modern Bua languages (Kulaale, Zan Gula): *-lɛ/ n-ɔ* (integration of former Determiner as secondary suffix, stacking)
- b. Laal:
  - *-l/-n* (4)
  - *-al/-or* (15), (*-or* < \**-n* + \**ʔu*?): all nouns with pl. *-or* have a sg in *-al*.

(59) However: the comparison between Laal and Bua is not fully conclusive

- a. Comparing individual suffixes:
  - Too few potential cognate suffixes, possibly similar due to chance
  - Corollary: Too many suffixes in Laal with no equivalent in Bua languages, including very frequent ones
- b. Even fewer sg/pl pairings in common (structural factor that would help ascertain that some of these suffixes are cognate and not just look-alikes)
  - Possible structural similarity is limited, and could be the result of old borrowing from Proto-Bua, or a Pre-Bua Adamawa language.
- c. No regular root-suffix correspondences between Bua and Laal

(60) Additionally: some plural suffixes are likely of Chadic origin:

- a. Almost certain: plural suffixes *-any*, *-nya*, *-iny* (< \**-ɪna*)
  - Boor *-aŋ* (Lionnet field notes)
  - Miltu *-eŋ* (Boyeldieu 1979: 2)
  - Ndam *-an~an* (Bross 1988)
  - Tumak *-aŋ* (Caprile 1975)
  - Possibly proto-Chadic \**-n*- (Newman 2000: 21-26)
- b. Not unlikely: plural suffixes *-o* and *-u*
  - Boor *-əw* (Lionnet field notes)



- Tumak *-aw* (Caprile 1975)
- Ndam *-o* (Bross 1988)
- Newman (2000: 36-37) says that modern Chadic plural suffixes of the form *-aw/-au/-o* are probably not cognates, but the result of various language-specific changes from different proto-Chadic forms (e.g. in Kera, *-aw* is hypothesized to be a reflex of *\*-aki*)

c. Conclusion: Both the Chadic- and the Bua-looking suffixes could be borrowings

(61) But most of what is Niger-Congo in Laal is essentially lexical, i.e. very easy to explain through borrowing (cf. Boyeldieu 1982b). There is no solid reason to favor the “innovation within NC” hypothesis rather than the isolate hypothesis

(62) There are even less Chadic features in Laal, and an “innovation within Chadic” hypothesis seems even more unlikely

## 6 Conclusion

(63) The gender system of Laal is unique in Africa, in its structure, semantics, and morphological expression

(64) Could be an old innovation:

- a. The semantic transparency and the mismatch between nominal morphology and agreement system points to innovation and restructuring
- b. The degree of morphologization and morphological irregularity suggests to a not so recent innovation (?)

(65) Genealogically, the gender system could have been:

- a. Inherited from a Laaloid phylum, if not an innovation (isolate hypothesis)
- b. Innovated within a Laaloid phylum (isolate hypothesis)
- c. Innovated within Niger-Congo (NC hypothesis)

(66) Irregular nominal number marking suffixes

- a. Look like remnants of Niger-Congo “noun class” system
- b. But the detailed comparison is not very conclusive, and the few convincing correspondences could easily be due to old borrowing from old Bua, proto-Bua or pre-Bua.

(67) Given the number of idiosyncrasies found in the Laal lexicon and grammatical system, the best hypothesis so far is still the isolate hypothesis.

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## Appendix 1: Zande

(68) Mostly sex- and animacy based, with a few exceptions, i.e. “predominantly semantic” (Corbett 1991:14)

- a. masculine: human male
- b. feminine: human female
- c. animate: non-human animate (animal)
- d. inanimate: everything else

(69) Laal and Zande are different systems

- a. Different semantic categories
  - although human m/f vs. non-human in common
  - and masc/fem merger in plural
- b. No striking morphological correspondences in the pronominal system
- c. Different stages of grammaticalization (seems younger in Zande: restricted to 3rd person pronouns, “but agreement in gender is spreading to other sentence elements” (Corbett 1991:14)

		Zande		Laal				
		Subject	Object	Object		Subject / Indep.		
Sg	1	mì	rè	1	m f	-ón	já jí	
	2	mò	rò	2		-(u)án	ò / uáy	
	3	m	kō	kō	3	m f n	-án -òn -àn	à / äy ìn / ìní àn / àní
		f	rī	rī				
an		ù	rò					
indef		nī	nī					
log	ù	rò						
Pl	1	ànì	rànì	1	ex,in	-nùrí,-nǎŋ	ùrú, ǎŋ	
	2	ènì	rènì	2		-nǔŋ	ùn / ùnúŋ	
	3	m/f	ī	(y)là	3	m/f n	-nìrí -uàn	ì / ìrí uàn / uàní
		an	àmí	rà				
inan	sí	é						
log	àmí							

Table 18: Zande subject and object pronouns (Tucker 1959:126; R. Boyd’s information in Segerer 2002-2007)

## Appendix 2: Khoe-Kwadi

(70) Khoe gender system:

- a. “Morphological system”, i.e. only some semantic basis (Corbett 1991)
- b. Three genders: masculine, feminine, “common”, but more complex than purely sex/animacy-based
- c. In particular, “Common” is not a Neuter:
  - Empty, apart from mass nouns
  - Used for M/F nouns when reference to sex (or shape etc.) is unnecessary or unwanted.

	Sg	Du	Pl	ANIMATE	INANIMATE
Masc.	-b	-kha	-gu	male	- big, high, long, thin, important - country names - abstract nouns derived with suffix -si
Fem.	-s	-ra	-di	female	- small, round, short, wide, less important - nouns derived from other categories - city names
Comm.	-i	--	-n	sex unknown or unspecified	- mass nouns (no plural), non-specific, generic, indefinite

Table 19: gender suffixes in Khoekhoe (adapted from Job 2015)

	Person	Gender	Feminine	Masculine	Number
		Common			
1	1st	*tV			Singular
2	2nd		*sV	*tsV	
3	3rd		*sV	*bV	
4	1st	*khV-m	*sV-m	*tsV-m	Dual
5	2nd	*khV-do	*sV-do	*tsV-do	
6	3rd	*khV-da	*sV-da	*tsV-da	
7	1st	*ta-e	*sa-e	*!a-e	Plural
8	2nd	*ta-o	*sa-o	*!a-o	
9	3rd	*nV	*di	*!u(a)	

Table 20: Proto-Khoe pronominal system (Güldeman’s (2004:265) revision of Vossen (1997:377))

(71) Proto-Khoe-Kwadi: only two genders (Güldemann 2004): M vs. F

(72) Clear differences with Laal in semantics, structure, realization and morphology.