

Nominal classes/declensions and limited agreement in Tiefo languages (Burkina Faso)  
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## 1. Tiefo languages

Tiefo-N of the villages Nyafogo and (until recently) Numudara

Tiefo-D of the village cluster of Daramandougou (several well separated *quartiers*)

3 tone levels

## 2. history of Tiefo linguistics

Tiefo was once a geographically wide and militarily powerful confederacy (till end of 19th C.).

Numudara still has the mausoleum of the last king, Tiefo Amoro, and a military museum.

Tiefo lgs. survive in a few villages in plains east of the cliffs parallel to the Bobo-Banfora highway.

Access there is hampered by the cliffs and by poor roads, somewhat improved in recent years.

Manessy (1982) feared that Tiefo language was already extinct.

He identified Gur elements in the very limited data available to him (word list from Prost)

Winkelmann dissertation (auf Deutsch) on Tiefo-D (1998)

Primarily phonology/morphology with a lexicon.

She did salvage work on Tiefo-N, especially Numudara.

She found only “semi-speakers” in Nyafogo; they couldn’t produce plurals.

Most Tiefo-N plurals are by final-vowel lengthening and/or denasalization.

yǎ ‘woman’, Pl yàá→                      bǒ<sup>n</sup> ‘monitor lizard’, Pl bòó→

So it’s easy to miss these plurals in a brief field trip under difficult conditions.

ELDP grant 2008 to Ibrahima Ouattara, no archived data or publication.

Heath, Ouattara & Hantgan, *Short grammar of Tiefo-N* (2017).

Salvage work with 2 old people: OK for basic grammar and lexicon, no texts.

Heath & Ouattara now in advanced stages of work on Tiefo-D

## 3. Tiefo-D has very limited declensions or agreement

It does have a prenominal proclitic (“vocalic prefix”) ē (→ è before H-tone).

ē is regularly audible clause-initially and in citation forms, i.e. after a pause.

Medially it may be elided, or it may have a lengthening or tonal effect on preceding syllable,

## 4. Winkelmann distinguishes Tiefo-D productive ē from ā in flora-part terms (e.g. ‘leaf’);

The flora-part terms begin with compound initial (w)àà- and may follow the proclitic:

ē àà-biè<sup>n</sup>?é<sup>n</sup> ‘leaf’, dialectally ē wàà-biè<sup>n</sup>?é

## 5. Tiefo-D nominal suffixes

Sg/Pl pairings

a) Pl adds -rV with copied vowel

if Sg ends in -?V, result is dialectally either replacive -rV or infixed -rV-?V

b) Pl adds -o or shifts final a to ɔ (a few human & animal terms)

if Sg ends in nasalized ɔ<sup>n</sup>, Pl denasalizes and ATR-shifts final ɔ<sup>n</sup> to o

one case (‘foot’) of Sg final ε<sup>n</sup>, Pl denasalizes and ATR-shifts to e

c) Pl adds -ni

d) suppletion (‘person’)

vestiges of Gur suffixes identified by Manessy and Winkelmann:

-gV ~ -ŋV, -de, -nu ~ -ru, -ne ~ -ni, -e, -a, -ɲo, -ri, -n

Except for Sg/Pl, these are not involved in agreement.

**6. Tiefs-N has 3 synchronic nominal classes {A E O} expressed by vocalic proclitics/articles** also relevant for agreement (see below)

A:	à	some humans ('person', 'mother', 'white person', 'aunt') most body parts many inanimates
E:	è	'tooth' and 'hair' many inanimates
O:	ò	adult humans most animals some inanimates

Tiefs-N proclitics are omitted when the noun is preceded by a possessor.

The proclitic could therefore be labeled "absolute" (i.e. unpossessed)

Nominal classes of some kin terms are indeterminate.

Unlike Tiefs-D, the Tiefs-N proclitic is normally absent postpausally.

I.e., it is usually absent in subject NP and in citation forms.

The proclitic usually encliticizes to and contracts with the **preceding** word.

Tiefs languages are SVO, so a proclitic to the object NP is heard on the **verb**.

**7. Tiefs-N proclitic declensions (Sg/Pl alternations)**

A few Tiefs-N nouns switch class proclitics between Sg and Pl, others don't.

'thing' (à to è)	Sg	à yáyá
	Pl	è yé→
'person' (à to ò)	Sg	à nɔ <sup>n</sup>
	Pl	ò nɔ→ (only before numeral, note denasalization)
		ò ná-wò (only in ò ná-wò byé 'everyone')
	ò dyó→ (elsewhere)	
'white person' (à to ò)	Sg	à kásè <sup>n</sup>
	Pl	ò kásò→ (note vocalic shift and denasalization)

**8. Tiefs-N noun-forms (frozen class suffixes)**

A-declension (prosodically light and heavy, i.e. three or more syllables)

(Light) mono- & bisyllabics have no recurrent ending.

Most heavy stems end in afa<sup>(n)</sup> or ɔfo<sup>(n)</sup>, cf. à yáyá 'thing'.

- à pìyàfá<sup>n</sup> 'knife'
- à yèyàfá 'ax'
- à dīyðfó 'cockroach'
- à f̃ɪnðfó<sup>n</sup> 'ashes'

E-declension (mostly light stemw)

mostly ending in {ɛ e i y}

- è ɲmé 'egg'
- è sáy<sup>n</sup> 'thorn'
- è júwì<sup>n</sup> 'fun, amusement'
- è bíklé 'money'

O-declension (mostly light stems)

humans: no discernible pattern

animals and inanimates: most end in {ɔ o u w}

ò didú	‘louse’
ò sàwów <sup>n</sup>	‘cat’
ò biŋɔ	‘baboon’
ò nũ	‘water’
ò yó	‘tree’
ò pów <sup>n</sup>	‘grass’

### 9. Tiefó-N postnominal adjectives

some are invariant, some show A/E/O agreement, but much inconsistency

	‘red’	‘long’	‘big’
A	sìyàfá <sup>n</sup> ~sìyāfā <sup>n</sup> ~ sìyàfà <sup>n</sup>	sòròw <sup>n</sup> ~sóròw <sup>n</sup>	sàŋbéráfá <sup>n</sup> ~sàŋbèràfà <sup>n</sup>
E	sìyéy <sup>n</sup> ~sìyēy <sup>n</sup> ~sìyèy <sup>n</sup>	sórēy <sup>n</sup> ~sórōy <sup>n</sup> ~sòròy <sup>n</sup> ~sòèy <sup>n</sup>	sàŋgbéráy <sup>n</sup>
O	sè <sup>n</sup> ~syò <sup>n</sup> ~sìyòó <sup>n</sup>	sòy <sup>n</sup>	sàŋgbwēy <sup>n</sup> ~sàŋbéráw <sup>n</sup>

Predicative forms of these adjectives (‘be red/long/big’) are suppletive.

### 10. Tiefó-N pronominals

Independent pronouns: no class distinctions in third person

“Strong” pronouns: 3Sg bõ, 3Pl bòó

The old E-class form bèé is now specialized as discourse-definite ‘it, that’.

3Sg and 3Pl subject and object clitics:

subject proclitics (preceding verb)	
ā	A (nonhuman)
ē	E (nonhuman)
ī	O and all human 3Sg
ō	general 3Pl ( <u>not</u> O-class!)
object enclitics (following verb, subject to contraction)	
(y)àfà	A
ỳ after {ɔ ɛ a}	E
è after {e o}	
̀ (lengthening and L-tone) after {u i}	
ò~ò	O and all human 3Sg
oo~òò	general 3Pl

### 11. Tiefó-N demonstratives

No distance distinctions.

Usual form is ŋóò<sup>n</sup>, (always so for A and O)

Archaic E form ŋòéè<sup>n</sup> attested in è sòéè<sup>n</sup> ŋòéè<sup>n</sup> ‘this work’

### 12. Tiefó-N specific indefinite (‘a certain X’)

Sg	Pl	
dî	díè→	A & E (nonhuman)
dî	díò→	O, all humans

Contrast dyó→ ‘people’

### 13. Tiefo-N relative pronouns

jìnáǵá	A (nonhuman)
jèrèý <sup>n</sup>	E (nonhuman)
jèrǒ <sup>n</sup> ~ jùrǒ <sup>n</sup>	O, all humans
jèrǒó <sup>n</sup> ~ jùrǒó <sup>n</sup>	plural

contrast jèrǒ<sup>n</sup> ‘who?’

### 14. question

Tiefo vocalic proclitics immediately precede the noun (unless elided).

	class-specific	citation or after pause	medially
Tiefo-D	no (E)	overt	contracted/elided
Tiefo-N	yes (A E O)	omitted	contracted/elided

Are the proclitics part of noun forms? Or agreement on an “article” (determiner)?

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