

CLASS PRONOUN DESUETUDE IN THE MÖÖRE-DAGBANI SUBGROUP OF GUR

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The noun classes of the Mööre-Dagbani subgroup of the Gur languages show a striking range of development, from full concord utilizing pronouns of about a dozen classes, to simple singular/plural agreement. While from the glottochronological and morphological, points of view the languages of this subgroup are very close-knit (Swadesh, 1966), there are wide differences in phonology and syntactical structure.

Most of the class exponents have comparable forms in languages elsewhere in Gur. Manessy (1969) shows that the Grusi subgroup's class exponents are extremely similar, though the lexical relationship with Mööre-Dagbani averages a generous 50 per cent on the Swadesh 'First 100' (op. cit.).

Seven samples of Mööre-Dagbani class systems are given in Tables below. Three—Naudem (ND), Buli (BL) and Gurenne (GN)—operate class concord with an almost one-to-one relationship between noun suffix and pronoun, concord also affecting several types of demonstratives, and the numerals '2' to '9'. In the four other languages cited—Dagbani (DB), Mampruli (MP), Mööre (MR) and Dagaari (DR)—many of the class pronouns have fallen out of use, so that class concord no longer operates.

What the tables show is that in every instance where pronouns have been lost, there is a different remnant. This had led to each resultant concord system being based on different criteria, as diagrams will illustrate.

In Table 1 are given the noun suffixes. Since in general these are liable to considerable morphophonemic changes, not more than one or two representative forms of each are listed for each sample. The singular and plural pairings of classes are in general as implied by the numbering—Sg 1/Pl 1, Sg 2/Pl 2, etc.—but other pairings occur, especially Sg 4/Pl 2. The pronouns are listed in Table 2.

The starred forms for the Mööre-Dagbani class exponents assume a single origin for both pronoun and noun suffix in each instance, without attempting to solve the chicken-and-egg problem of which is derived from the other. The concord exponents of Gurma (GM) and Kasem (KS) are also listed as examples of systems in other subgroups. Also shown in Table 2 are the Grusi starred forms, taken from Manessy (op. cit.).

NOTES ON THE CLASS EXPONENTS

Sg 1 and Pl 1 apply to personal nouns, though not all personal nouns are in these classes. There has been speculation about whether the *o* forms and the *a* forms are related in origin.

In Sg 3 and 4 an initial **k* is postulated, since this is the usual pronoun initial. BL alone retains *k* in noun suffixes.

Sg 5 and 6 are nowhere differentiated by their pronouns, and may have a common origin. In DB -*bu* occurs only in Name of Action verbal nouns.

Sg 7 is associated with nouns denoting liquids. Only in ND does it have a pronoun distinct from Sg 6.

The starred form of Pl 2 is problematic. The pronoun in BL, DB has initial η , but the noun suffix after vowels is usually -ya; DB has two instances of - η a, and MR has - $\tilde{y}\tilde{a}$ after vowels, so suggesting an original nasal in at least these systems. After consonants the suffix is always -a; in DB this -a is not subject to weakening or loss when utterance medial, as is the -a of Sg 1.

Pl 4 has in many systems the vowel i, no doubt by analogy with Pl 3. The initial *t is generally weakened to d or r, but in other than DR it remains phonologically distinct from Sg 2 and Pl 3. Exponents identical with Pl 4 occur in many mass nouns.

Pl 5 has a suffix with a distinct tonal behaviour, and with umlauting effect on the stem vowel a or aa in all but ND and GN. The vowel harmony of MR and DR does not affect it. Though frequent in ND, it appears elsewhere only in a very small closed set of nouns, mainly animal names.

The vowels of Sg 2, 4, 5, 6 and Pl 3, 4 are given as *i and *u (= 'open' i and u) rather than *i and *u, since there is evidence of two-set vowel harmony in several languages, and comparison with Pl 5 suggests that it is the open set of vowels which are modified for harmony, rather than the close. Manessy proposed *e and *o vowels, but this to us suggests close set vowels. (Note that in DR all suffixes with vowel *a are subject to harmony, different in each dialect in its effects.)

Naudem is geographically somewhat isolated from the other members of this subgroup, being closer to languages of the Gurma subgroup. It may be to these that it owes its class exponent -u, and its (? retention of the) Sg 7 pronoun. One may assume that its Sg 6 exponent is relatable to the others; it corresponds to Sg 5 and 6 elsewhere in Mõöre-Dagbani. The pair Sg 6/Pl 5 is quite frequent, as it is in Gurma (Prost, 1968).

CORRELATION OF MEANING WITH NOUN CLASS

In so far as it is possible to correlate the meanings of nouns with their class affiliation, Father Prost (1966), for example, has attempted to do so. Here is a summary of his remarks on ND and MR classes (op. cit. pp. 436-44). The classes have been renumbered to conform with the numeration used in the present paper.

Sg 1/Pl 1	(a/ba)	Persons
Sg 2/Pl 2	(di/ya)	General
		Many small body parts
		Some animals
Sg 3/Pl 3	(gu/tu)	Some animals
		Trees (not ND) cf. GM: small trees
Sg 4/Pl 5	(gu/i)	Some animals
		Miscellaneous
Sg 6/Pl 5	(bu/i)	Trees (ND), cf. GM: large trees
Sg 5/Pl 5	(fu/i)	Some animals (> Sg 6/Pl 5 in ND)
— Pl 7	(m)	Liquids, masses
		Verbal abstracts

The bulk of nouns are distributed between pairs 2/2, 3/3, 4/4 and 4/2, so that relatively few items are included in the above semantic classification. There is, however a very high degree of correspondence between the class membership of cognate nouns in the various languages, so that the 'animals' and 'body parts' observed by Father Prost within a given Sg/Pl class pair are nearly all in these classes throughout the subgroup; compare, for instance, the word lists in Swadesh (1966).

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SEMANTIC FEATURES DETERMINING PRONOUN AGREEMENTS

Where the class concord system has broken down owing to loss of pronouns, the following semantic features are proposed for classifying the pronouns according to the required grammatical agreements in the resultant systems; see Figs. 1-4.

SINGULAR/PLURAL [\pm Sg]. Applicable in all four samples, though in no instance distinctive for all pronouns.

ANIMATE/INANIMATE [\pm An]. Applicable in all but MR. In DB and MP this is the primary feature; the Sg/Pl distinction does not apply to [$-$ An] in DB, though there is an archaic survival of a plural pronoun in some dialects in a few contexts.

LIQUID/NON-LIQUID [\pm Lq]. In MP, nouns denoting liquids keep their own class concord pronoun, relatable to that in BL and GN. In DR they take the same pronoun as the plural inanimates, and in DB as all inanimates.

ABSTRACT/NON-ABSTRACT [\pm Ab]. In MR and MP one pronoun is specialized to refer to situations which are not designated by a particular noun; for example, 'it/that is good', referring to the result of a process.¹

It is only in MP that all four of these feature pairs are needed to distinguish all the pronouns. In DR, though there are but three pronouns, three feature pairs are needed, in view of the dual role of one of the items; two alternative classifications are given in Fig. 3 to illustrate the problem.

The pronouns cited in the present paper are all 'simple', but there are also 'strong' and 'relative' forms in each language. The numerals do not retain any class or semantic concord in the four languages cited here, having the same prefixes whatever the noun counted.

Table 1. Noun class suffixes

		BL									
*Mööre-		ND	Def	Indf	GN	DB	MP	MR	DR	KS	GM
Dagbani											
Sg 1	*a, *o	-a	-wa	-a	-a	-a, -o	-a	-a	-a, -o	Back V	-o, -a
Sg 2	*dɨ	-re	-ni	-ri	-de	-li	-ri	-de, -re	-rɨ	Frt V	-li
Sg 3	*ka	-ga	-ka	-k	-ga	-ga, -V	-ga	-ga	-V	Cent V	-ga
Sg 4	*kɨ	-gu	-ku	-kʷ	-go	-gu	-gu	-go	-ɨ	Back V	-gu
Sg 5	*fɨ	.	.	.	-fo	-fu, -hu	-fu	-fo	-hɨ	.	.
Sg 6	*bɨ	-be	-mmu	-b	-bo	-bu	-bu	-bo	-bɨ	.	-bu
Sg 7	*ma	-m	-mmu	-m	-m	-m	-m	-m	-ŋ	.	-ma
		-u	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-u
Pl 1	*ba	-ba	-ma	-ba	-ba	-ba	-ba	-ba	-ba	Cent V	-ba
Pl 2	*ya, *ŋa	-a	-ŋa	-a	-a	-a, -ya	-a, -ya	-a, -yã	-a	Cent V	-a
Pl 3	*sɨ	-hi	-s + ŋa	-sa	-se	-si	-si	-se	-rɨ	Frt V	.
Pl 4	*tɨ, *tɨ	-ti	-t + ŋa	-ta	-to	-di, -ri	-di	-to	-rɨ	-dɨ	-di
Pl 5	*i	-i, -e	.	-i	-i	-i	-i	-i	-i	.	-i
											-mu
										-ŋɨ	

¹ Professor Manessy (personal communication) suggests that Abstract is perhaps not to be taken as parallel with the other semantic features. He points out as an analogy that French 'ce' in 'ce sont...' does not operate as part of the gender system, as do 'ce, cette', like 'le, la'.

Table 2. Class pronouns

	*Mõõre-	Dagbani	ND	BL	GN	DB	MP	MR	DR	*Grusi	KS	GM
Sg 1	*a, *o	a	wa	a	o	u	a	u		*o, *e	wu	o
Sg 2	*dj	nde	di	de	*di (də, li)	di	r	.		*de	di	li
Sg 3	*ka	ka	ka	ka	.	ka	.	.		*ka	ka	ke
Sg 4	*ku	ku	ku	ko	.	.	.	.		*ke, *ko	ku	ku
Sg 5	*fu	.	(=6)	(=6)	.	.	.	.		.	.	.
Sg 6	*bu	be	bu	bo	.	(bu)	.	.		(*be, *bo)	.	bu
Sg 7	*ma	mi	(=6)	(=6)	.	↓	.	.		↓ ↓	.	ma u
Pl 1	*ba	ba	ba	ba	*ba (bə, ba)	ba	b	ba		*ba	ba	bi
Pl 2	*ya, *ŋa	a	ŋa	a	(ŋa)	a	.	a		*ya	ya	a
Pl 3	*si	hi	sa	se	.	.	.	.		*se	si	.
Pl 4	*tu, *ti	ti	ta	to	.	.	.	.		*te, *to	tj	ti
Pl 5	*i	i	.	i	.	.	.	.		*yi	.	i mu
										*de'	dj	

Note that in Sg 6 the pronoun serves for Sg 7 in MP as also in *Grusi; the downward arrow shows this.

CLASSIFICATION OF PRONOUNS BY SEMANTIC FEATURES

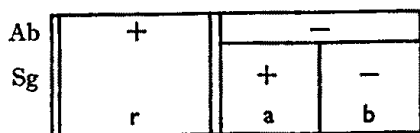


Fig. 1

Fig. 1. Mõõre.

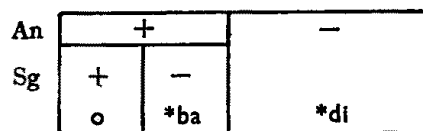
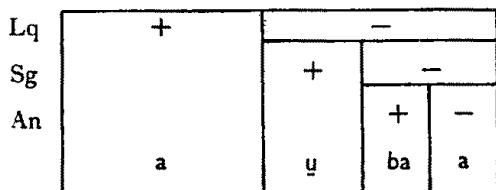
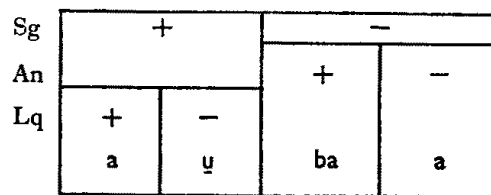


Fig. 2

Fig. 2. Dagbani. [-An, -Sg] has archaic variant ŋa, a surviving strong pronoun of the *ŋa class. [-An, +Sg] has one surviving *ku class concord occurring as relative pronoun in the idiom: o nəŋ buŋ kun ka ni 'he became a thing which is-not there' (euphemism for the death of a chief). buŋ (< *bən-gu) is in the *ku class; kun is concordant relative pronoun; normal usage requires dən, [-An].



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3. Dagbaari. (a) Implies that number is not relevant to [+Lq]. (b) States that [+Lq] is [+Sg]. (Some dialects have [±Psn] for [±An].)

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An	+		-			
Ab	+		-			
Lq	+		+		-	
Sg	+	-	di	bu	+	-
	u	ba			ka	ga

Fig. 4. Mampruli. In Figs. 1 and 4 the [+Ab] are within double lines; they are both derived from the same class exponent.

ADDENDUM

Since this paper was drafted a copy has been received of Professor Manessy's 'Les langues gurunsi' (1969), in which he sets up the starred forms for Grusi as cited, with modified numbering and notation, in Table 2. He postulates (Vol. 2, p. 22) semantic features which underlay the 'Common Gur' concord system. We here summarize these features, and diagram them in Fig. 5, on the lines of Figs. 1 to 4.

CONTINUOUS, NON-ANALYSABLE/NON-CONTINUOUS. This approximately corresponds to [\pm Lq], and is so symbolized in Fig. 5.

COLLECTIVE/DISCRETE [\pm Col]. This partly corresponds to a non-countable/countable distinction, but [+Col] includes abstract nouns derived from nominal stems, e.g. 'manhood', 'blindness'.

ONE/MANY [\pm Sg]. This corresponds to singular/plural, and is so treated in Fig. 5.

The set *ke, *ko/*de', *yi/*te, *to is postulated as an original triad meaning one/many/collective, abstract.

Lq	+		-	
Col	+		-	
Sg	+		+	-
	*be, *bo		*te, *to	*ke, *ko
			*o/*e	*de'
			*de	*ba
			*ka	*ya
				*se

Fig. 5. *Common Grusi.

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