

CLASS PRONOUN DESUETUDE REVISITED

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The Western sub-group of Oti-Volta languages (formerly called Mõõré-Dagbani and Mõõré-Gurma) exhibit class pronominal systems with varying degrees of elaboration, as has been described by André Wilson (1971). This paper shows how two of these languages, Frafra and Mampruli, have more-and-less-elaborate pronominal systems co-existing in a principled way. Data is also provided for pronominal systems of languages not included by Wilson, and observations are made on the geographical distribution of the systems concerned.

Le sous-groupe d'ouest des langues dites Oti-Volta (autrefois appelées Mõõré-Dagbani ou Mõõré-Gurma) comprend des systèmes de classes pronominales dont le degré d'élaboration varie, comme M. André Wilson l'a décrit en 1971. Cette étude démontre comment deux de ces langues, le 'fafra' et le 'mampruli', ont chacune deux systèmes pronominaux, l'un plus élaboré que l'autre, dont la coexistence est fondée sur des principes établis. Des données concernant les systèmes pronominaux de langues non démontrées par M. Wilson y sont incluses, ainsi que des observations sur la distribution géographique de ceux-ci.

André Wilson (1971) has presented the various degrees of elaboration and simplification found in some class pronoun systems in a set of related languages: his elegant article, though perhaps somewhat too compressed for easy assimilation by those not already familiar with the material, is of the greatest value for the comparative study of Central Gur languages. The group of languages covered by Wilson was at that time known as 'Mõõré-Dagbani' from two of its prominent member-languages: more-recent studies have modified this, first to 'Mõõré-Gurma' (Bendor-Samuel, 1971) and then, with a broader grasp of the groupings involved, to 'the Western subgroup of Oti-Volta languages' (Manessy, 1975: hereafter W.O/V) - in each case included in the Central group of Gur languages. We here offer notes on some further material relevant to the matters raised in Wilson's study. In the first two sections we consider further information from fieldwork on two languages mentioned by Wilson: Frafra¹ (Gurenne, Nankanni - see Naden/R.L. Schaefer, 1976) and Mampruli.² In these sections we show how more- and less-elaborate pronominal systems can co-exist in a principled way in a single language. The third section offers data on the pronominal systems of a number of further languages of the area which were not

included in Wilson, 1971. Finally we make some observations on the geographical distribution of the pronominal systems concerned.

The W.O/V languages are divided on the grounds of lexical - and to some extent grammatical - similarities into two major segments, a Northwestern comprising M̄ōōré, Frafra, and the Dagaari group, and a Southern comprising Mampruli, Talni, Dagbani and Hanga; the precise position of the Nabit-Kusaal and the Safalaba-Waali clusters is not yet clear, while Buli is nearer to W.O/V than to other groupings but occupies an isolated position within that group (Manessy, 1975, p.233 ff.). In all these languages the noun stems have in general a suffix for the singular form and a different suffix for the plural, such that there is usually a₃ correlation between the suffixes, forming 'declensions' of nouns:

- e.g. MP -ga/-si: bulga/bulsi 'well/-s', gobga/gobsi 'lefthander/-s'
kukparga/-kparsi 'fairy/-ies',
- FR -ga/-he: bulega/bulehe, gɔbiga/gɔbihe, kinkirega/-kirehe
- MP -ri/-(y)a: nyuuri/nyuya 'yam/-s', gbari/gbaya 'leg/-s'
tubri/tuba 'ear/-s'
- FR -re/-(y)a: nyuure/nyuya, gbere/gbɛya, tobere/toba⁴

Some of the languages also have elements elsewhere in the nominal phrase which concord with the 'declension' of the head noun, in which case we can speak strictly of a system of noun classes. There may also be a set of pronouns which show class-concord with the noun for which they substitute.

Frafra is frequently cited as the language where the class-concord system shows the most elaborate development - "with almost one-to-one relationship between the suffix and pronoun, concord also affecting several types of demonstratives and the numerals '2' to '9'," (Wilson, 1971, p.79). Researches over a number of years (some findings published by Schaefer, 1974, 1975, 1980 - see also fn. 1 and 4) did not find this to be the situation in the text materials studied and everyday conversation observed. The demonstratives and particularly the anaphoric pronouns usually took forms which were neutral with regard to the nominal classes, but were rather determined by patterns of topicalisation and participant-structure in the discourse. The class-specific pronouns were rare and seemed to occur sporadically: they appeared to be "individual ways of speaking or devices of style" (N. Schaefer, personal communication).

A further study of those examples of 'class' pronouns which were found in text material, following the suggestion of Linda Lloyd, revealed that the determining factor in the selection of these pronouns was that they were used only in cases where the class-concord which they manifest would disambiguate the reference of the pronoun. As the number of the contexts in which two non-animate referents are equally available for anaphora yet differ in nominal class is small, by far the majority of the nouns fall into three of the classes - those which Wilson numbers 2/2, 3/3 and 4/4-2.⁵

Further researches in Mampruli have revealed here, also, facts which did not emerge clearly in Wilson's treatment. First, it is clear that bu as a pronoun for liquids is only found in the extreme Western and Eastern dialects of Mampruli: the normal system used by most Mampruli-speakers includes these referents under the di pronoun. As a result, the central MP system looks rather different from that presented in Wilson's fig. 4 (loc.cit. p. 83): the primary dichotomy is between NON-COUNTABLE (abstract, liquid - di) and the remaining COUNT pronouns to which the two-way contrast of SINGULAR/PLURAL and ANIMATE/INANIMATE applies (fig.1):-

count	-			+	
an.		+		-	
sing.		+	-	+	-
	<u>di</u>	<u>u</u>	<u>ba</u>	<u>ka</u>	<u>a</u>

fig.1 - Central Mampruli

The only occurrence of bu in central MP is in conjunction with numerals, with the meaning 'n times':

yimmu (yin- + -bu) 'once'; buyi 'twice'; buta 'thrice'.....

The numerals do not concord with the Head Noun when used as modifiers:

daba ayi 'two days'; doppa ayi 'two men'; suma ayi 'two ground-nuts'

but contrast $\frac{+}{-}$ An. when used absolutely, as in a reply:

(How many men?) - Babayi. 'Two of them (An.).'

(How many days, nuts...?) - Abayi. 'Two of them (Inan.).'

Mampruli has a suffixal plural (-ma, say Pl.6) for nouns of Wilson's Class sg.7⁶ 'liquids':

bugum 'fire'/buguma 'fires'; koom 'water'/kooma 'types, portions of water'

- and these are naturally inanimate count plurals:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
sing.	<u>o</u>	<u>di</u>	<u>ka</u>	<u>ku</u>	<u>bu</u>	# ⁸	<u>bu</u>
pl.	<u>ba</u>	<u>a</u>	<u>si</u>	<u>ti</u>	?	# ⁸	

fig. 2 - Talni

Konni, a language whose genetic affiliations are not yet clear,⁹ but which is spoken in an area adjacent to the western borders of Mampruli and Buli, has a different system again. The normal citation forms of all non-personal nouns in the singular consist of the stem followed by an indistinct nasal syllable with falling pitch and force - [-^hŋ], [-^hŋ̄], [-^hŋ̄̄]. This syllable appears to represent an 'indefinite article' which is so far from the unmarked form that it is very difficult to elicit a singular without it. What by comparative standards one would consider the normal singular suffix appears as a corresponding 'definite' form, while in the plural the suffix appears once in the indefinite and twice in the definite (fig.3).

	singular	plural
indefinite	<u>biisiŋ</u> 'a breast'	<u>biisa</u> 'breasts'
	<u>gbaaŋ</u> 'a dog'	<u>gbaasi</u> 'dogs'
	<u>daaŋ</u> 'a stick'	<u>daati</u> 'sticks'
definite	<u>biisri</u>	<u>biisa-a</u>
	<u>gbaaka</u>	<u>gbaasi-si</u>
	<u>daaku</u>	<u>daati-ti</u>

fig. 3 - Konni 'Articles'

Anaphoric pronouns occur with a more extensive correspondence to the noun suffixes than in MP, but forming less of a complete system than in FR or BL (see fig. 4 opposite).

In addition, a group of animal names of varied and irregular suffix morphology are recorded with a plural anaphoric ŋi ('horse' duum/duuni ?7/5; 'sheep' yiisuŋ/yiisi ?4,7/?3,5; 'goat' biiku/bii 4/?5; 'guineafowl' kpaan/kpiini ?4,7/5): the same speaker gave ŋa with 'eggs', 'stones' and 'neck' (sic - sg.).

The pronouns show a mixed system with a primarily semantic personal/impersonal contrast in the plural but a partially grammatical system in the singular.

Wilson's singular class nos.	sx.	singular def. art.	pn.	sx.	plural def. art.	pn.
1	<u>-o</u> ~ <u>-a</u>	#10	<u>o</u>	<u>-ba</u>	#10	<u>ba</u>
2	#10	<u>-i</u> ~ <u>-ri</u> ¹¹	<u>?~ka</u> ¹²	<u>-a</u>	<u>a</u>	<u>a</u>
3	#10	<u>-ka</u>	<u>ka</u>	<u>-si</u>	<u>si</u>	<u>a</u>
4	#10	<u>-ku</u>	<u>ku~ka</u> ¹²	<u>-ti</u>	<u>ti</u>	<u>a</u>
5	<u>-m</u> ~ <u>-b</u> ¹²	<u>bu,ka</u> ¹² <u>-be</u>	<u>ku~be</u> ¹²	<u>-i</u> (& umlaut)	<u>ku ~ wa</u> ¹²	<u>a</u>
7	<u>-o</u> (<u>-m</u> in 'fire')	<u>-bu</u>	<u>bu</u>	<u>-ti</u>	<u>ti</u>	<u>a</u>

fig. 4 - Konni

Finally Kusaal has a highly-simple system identical to that of Dagbani, while Hanga (closely-related to DB-MP) and Safalaba (close to DR) have a different 3-pronoun system which first distinguishes PLURAL from NON-PLURAL (count-sing., abstract, liquid), and then contrasts ±An. only within plural (fig.5).

pl.	-	+	
	<u>u</u>	- <u>a</u>	+ <u>ba</u>
an.			

fig. 5 - Hanga/Safalaba

The final point of interest concerns the geographical distribution of the languages discussed. The most fully-developed concord system in the northwestern group of W.O/V - Frafra - is contiguous with the most fully-developed of the southern W.O/V systems - Talni, while the isolated language Buli, also contiguous, is another with a full system of concords. Moreover the Grusi language with the completest set of concords is Kasem (Callow, 1965; Manessy, 1969) which adjoins both Buli and Frafra.

The next most-complex pronoun inventories are those of MP and MR, respectively southern and northern immediate neighbours of the above languages, and Konni which borders on MP and BL. It would therefore appear that there is a geographical centre of either diffusion or retention of class pronouns, located in the Upper Region of Ghana. Further research may be able to offer evidence to show whether these systems are being developed (from material provided by the common Gur noun suffixes) and spread from this point, or whether - as is more usually assumed - they are in this area resisting the trend to 'desuetude' which is overtaking them elsewhere.

FOOTNOTES

¹Information from Bob and Nancy Schaefer, who have been engaged on research in Frafra since 1970.

²The author, with the assistance of Margaret Langdon (1974-'75) and Tony Pope (1979-'80) has been engaged on studies in Mampruli since 1974.

³For published treatments of the nominal suffix systems, besides Wilson and Manessy, opp.cit., see: Canu, 1967; Manessy, 1965; Prost, 1963; Tait, 1954.

⁴Transcriptions are orthographic. Orthographies of these languages differ as to whether the transitional vowel between stem and suffix is written or not. Details may be found in R.L. Schaeffer, 1975; Hunt, Gray/Gray, Naden/et al., forthcoming.

⁵It seems to have escaped previous remark that the use of pl.2 with sing.4 is phonologically conditioned, occurring with stems ending in certain consonants.

⁶FR 'liquids' have a 'singulative' for 'one portion, type, sample of ...' - suff -ho, pronoun a:

A de la kahɔ. 'It is a single portion of oil.'

Bo de la kaam. 'It is oil.'

⁷Cognates, including the most extreme westerly dialects of MP which retain -ti for 4 pl., have to be called upon in making a decision here.

⁸Only sa'abu 't.z.' (millet-porridge staple) and verbal nouns end in -bu. Liquids have no 'plural'.

⁹Konni data are based on a brief visit by the author with colleague Andrew Ring to the remote location of the Koma people, plus a 100-word list collected by John Binnington. These materials are not fully verified.

¹⁰Neither the persons (1/1) nor the inanimate classes show a contrast which would allow sg. sx. and def. art. to be distinguished.

¹¹The Konni cognates do not line up so neatly with the items in the 2/2 class of other languages: stems in -l and -N seem to show -i (or assimilating -li, -ni as in MP) - duni 'the knee', pl. duna; gi(1)li 'the egg', pl. gila; the di pronoun is only found in our data in the abstract sense (as in MP): Di kpatiya. 'It is finished.'

¹²The alternatives are from the two villages of Yikpebongo and Nangurma respectively. All one can really say about class 5 is that there seems to be a contrast with the clear-cut bu of 7; most of the regular items in this class are animals and so may take 1/1 pronouns for semantic reasons; wa may be a variant of ba.

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COMMENTS ON NADEN (JWAL 12) BY W.A.A. WILSON

Tony Naden's amplification of my 1971 paper is most welcome.

Particularly striking is his observation that the most conservative class concord systems operate in the centrally situated members of the group, while the peripheral ones have the most reduced systems. Mõõrè, notably, whose 2.5 million speakers make it some ten times larger than the next in extent, has effectively kept only one sg. and one pl. pronoun, usable with nouns of any class. (It incidentally uses a 'polite plural', whereby a singular person is addressed or referred to by a 2nd or 3rd pl. pronoun when courtesy requires.) The details on Frafra, which is now seen to have relegated one-to-one class concord to a disambiguating rôle, are noteworthy.

The situation of Mõõrè-Dagbani (or W.O/V) would seem to contrast with that of Benue-Congo. Nowhere in W.O/V is the collapse of class concord ascribable to the phonetic reduction of noun affixes to obscurity, as has happened to the 'Semi-Bantu' languages of the Nigeria/Cameroon border areas (the western end of the 'Bantu borderline') which Guthrie rejected from Bantu on typological grounds. A comment from a Benue-Congo specialist would be most instructive here.

The presence, in the geographical centre of Mõõrè-Dagbani, of the Grusi language Kasem, with its very conservative class concord, is itself curious, and one does indeed wonder whether it has influenced the retention of the concord by its immediate neighbours to the south.

Kasem is notable, incidentally, for another phenomenon with a wide areal spread. Its classic ten-vowel two-set cross height vowel harmony makes it a very conservative member of a belt of VH languages of various groups and sub-groups extending west, then south to the coast, on either side of the western border of Ghana, and including Dagaari, Birifor, and Lobiri, to say nothing of Volta-Comoé (cf. Stewart, 1971).

Ref. Stewart, J.M: *Niger-Congo: Kwa* in Current Trends in Linguistics vol. 7, 1971, pp. 179-212.