

NOUN CLASSES IN SÈLÈÈ¹

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This paper describes the noun class system of Sèlèè, a Na-Togo, Kwa (Niger-Congo) language spoken in the Volta Region of Ghana. As shown in this paper, Sèlèè has a noun class system with an equal number of singular and plural classes that are paired in irregular ways. The singular-plural pairs are referred to as genders. Nouns normally agree with certain modifiers within the noun phrase. The agreement targets are determiners, numerals, interrogative pronouns and some adjectives. Outside the noun phrase, noun classes may be indexed on the verb to signal long distance anaphora, a strategy that speakers rarely use. The paper provides a detailed account of possible semantic and cultural motivations for the assignment of nouns to a particular gender and/or class.

Cet article décrit le système de classe de Sèlèè, une langue Na-Togo, Kwa (Niger-Congo) parlée dans la Région de Volta du Ghana. L'on montre que le Sèlèè a un système de classe nominal avec un nombre égal de classes au singulier et au pluriel qui sont appariées de manière irrégulière. Les paires singulier-pluriel sont appelées genre. Les noms s'accordent normalement avec certains modificateurs au sein des syntagmes nominaux. Les cibles d'accord sont des déterminants, des numéraux, des pronoms interrogatifs et certains adjectifs. Hors du syntagme nominal, les classes nominales peuvent être indexées sur le verbe pour signaler des anaphores de longue distance, une stratégie que les locuteurs utilisent cependant rarement. L'article rend compte, de manière détaillée, de motivations sémantiques possibles pour assigner les noms à un genre et/ou une classe particulière.

0. INTRODUCTION: THE LANGUAGE AND THE PEOPLE

Sèlèè is a Niger-Congo language of the Kwa subgroup spoken in Santrokofi, a small community located in the Volta Region of Ghana. It is one of the 14 sparsely described Ghana-Togo Mountain (henceforth GTM) languages, the genealogical classification of which is quite problematic, and is closely related to Siwu, Sekpele and Lelemi (Stewart 1989). Westermann and Bryan (1952) consider GTM languages to be an isolated group that cannot be subsumed under either Kwa or Bantu languages. Greenberg (1963) classifies them among the Kwa sub-group B of the Niger-Congo family. Stewart (1989) submits that the two sub-groups Ka and Na postulated by Heine (1968) belong to two different branches of Kwa: the Ka belongs to the left bank branch together with Gbe, which includes Ewe. The group to which Sèlèè belongs is what Heine calls the Nyo branch. Rather than subsuming the GTM languages under Kwa, Blench (2009) sees these languages as a mixture of single-branch languages and small clusters. Dakubu (2009) in turn argues for a proto-GTM node for this group of languages.

The goal of this paper is to describe the noun class system of Sèlèè in an areal and typological context. The paper is structured as follows: selected features of the grammar of Sèlèè and background issues are introduced in section 1; previous analyses of the Sèlèè noun class system are discussed in section 2, whereas the current analysis of the system is presented in sections 3 to 6. Some concluding remarks are given in section 7.

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The data for this study were collected in the field by the author. The corpus includes spontaneous spoken texts, narratives and Bible passages. It also includes responses to various questionnaires: the examples taken from the TMA Questionnaire by Dahl (1985) are referred to as (DQ_X), where DQ refers to the TMA Questionnaire and the X denotes the particular number of the question or sentence in the questionnaire. Data taken from the temperature questionnaire compiled by Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2007) are referred to as (TEMP_X_Y), where X refers to a block of conversations about temperature expressions and Y refers to a particular sentence within the block. The examples taken from the spatial relation questionnaire compiled by Wälchli (unpublished) are coded (SSPQ_X), where X represents the number of a particular picture. Other data sources include the Pear Story narrative designed by Chafe (1980) and are referred to as (PS_X_Y), where X refers to the number of the pear story narrative and Y indicates the sentence number in X. A narrative of the puberty rite ceremony for girls in Santrokofi known as **bakafɔ̃ɔ̃** is referred to as (BKF_X_Y). The X refers to the sentence number and Y the name of the narrator. Some examples are taken from legendary tales and stories narrated by speakers. Examples taken from stories are coded (S0_X), with S indicating 'story,' 0 to the initial of the narrator, and X to the sentence number in the story. Finally, Bible texts are taken from the book of Acts, chapter 1. These sentences are referred to as (ACTS_X_Y), where X refers to the chapter and Y the verse. The present paper is based on 552 nouns.

1. MAJOR TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES

In the ensuing subsections, I will introduce a few features of the language that are necessary for the reader. These are phonology, tonology, and the marking of the subject and the verb.

There are 15 consonant phonemes in Sɛlɛɛ²: six plosives /**p, b, t, tʃ, k, kp**/, two fricative /**f, s**/, four nasals /**m, n, ɲ, ŋ**^w/, one lateral /**l**/ and two approximants /**j, w**/ . An interesting revelation of the consonant inventory is the presence of the voiced bilabial plosive /**b**/, despite the voiced counterparts of other voiceless phonemes being absent. In comparing Sɛlɛɛ consonant phonemes with those of other GTM languages such as Logba (Dovlo 2008:14), as well as Siya and Siwu (Dakubu and Ford, 1988), it appears that Sɛlɛɛ has an unusual feature in having only one voiced counterpart of a voiceless phoneme.

Sɛlɛɛ has a seven-vowel system typical of Kwa languages. There are three front vowels /**i, e, ɛ**/, one central vowel /**a**/ and three back vowels /**u, o, ɔ**/ . The mid vowels are distinguished by the feature Advanced Tongue Root (ATR). Sɛlɛɛ has a restricted harmony system. The high vowels /**i**/ and /**u**/ as well as the low vowel /**a**/ can co-occur with [±ATR] vowels. When more than one mid vowel occurs in the root, they will either be [+ATR] or [-ATR]. Apart from the two advanced tongue root mid vowels /**e**/ and /**o**/, all others have a nasalized counterpart.

Vowel length is phonemic in Sɛlɛɛ. Long vowels are typically found word finally, even though word-internal long vowels also occur. Unlike most Kwa languages where vowel length is only observed in loan words and ideophones, vowel length is attested in all word classes in Sɛlɛɛ. Like all GTM languages, Sɛlɛɛ has tone,

² All the examples in this paper are transcribed following the orthography established for Sɛlɛɛ by GILLBT (Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation). Within the conventions of the GILLBT orthography /**tʃ**/ is transcribed as **ky-**, /**ɲ**/ as **ny-** and the labialized velar nasal /**ŋ**^w/ as **nw**/.

which is used lexically and grammatically (see Agbetsoamedo forthcoming). Allen (1974) reports four discrete phonetic tones: High (H), Mid (M), Low (L²) and Extra Low (L¹).³ Lexical words can have up to three tones. Noun class prefixes are generally marked with EL, L or M. There is no occurrence of H on any prefix in our corpus. Nonetheless, noun prefixes assimilate high tones in context (see Allen 1974; Chumbow and Neba 2011, for an extensive discussion).

In this paper, only H and EL tones are always marked. M and L are only marked in cases of ambiguity.

Sɛlɛ has three different pronominal subject markings: subject clitics, independent pronouns and anaphoric agreement markers in the form of noun class prefixes. The noun class prefixes are used to signal long distance anaphora, which native speakers implement phonetically with a repetition of the noun. The few occasions where the class prefix is marked on the verb is shown in section 4.5. The subject clitics and the independent pronouns shown in Table (1) designate all persons in a pronominal paradigm, whereas the noun class prefixes only designate third person singular and plural. In Sɛlɛ, verbs take one of the pronominal subject markers, and interestingly, independent pronouns always co-occur with subject clitics. A lexical subject is always cross-referenced with the verb, which is different from the 3rd person subject clitics. I refer to this special type of person marking in the text as Lexical Subject Marker, and thus gloss it in the examples as LSM.⁴ The lexical subject marker does not inflect for number and is also identical in form with the 1st person singular subject marker in affirmative sentences. The subject marker fuses with the tense and aspect (TA) marker that follows it, creating a portmanteau.

	Subject clitics		Independent Pronouns	
Person	SG	PL	SG	PL
1 st	le-/la-/ma-/n-	bu-	ami	awo
2 nd	fV-	bi-	afɔ	aye
3 rd	V-	ba-	nwɔ	ma
LSM	le-/la-/ma-/n-			

Table 1: Pronominal markers

As implied in Table (1), the value of the vowels of the 2nd and 3rd person singular subject clitics are determined by the Advanced Tongue Root (ATR) value of the first syllable of the verb root as well as the tense and aspect marking on the verb.

Sɛlɛ nouns trigger agreement on their syntactically dependent elements within the noun phrase and outside the noun phrase. This is further discussed in section 4.

Tense and Aspect markers are generally fused with subject markers in Sɛlɛ. There are four absolute tense distinctions: Simple Present (SP), Recent Past (RP), hodiernal past tense, Distant Past (DP), pre-hodiernal past tense and Future (FUT).

³ In my earlier investigations, after merely listening to the speakers, I claimed that there was no difference between low and extra low tone. Recently, a PRAAT analysis (many thanks to Raphael Domange for his help!) revealed a significant difference between them. Consequently, I agree with Allen that Sɛlɛ has four discrete phonetic tones: High (´), Mid (˘), Low (unmarked) and (Extra-low (˘˘), which are abbreviated as H, M, L and EL, respectively).

⁴ This person-marking has been referred to in Agbetsoamedo and Di Garbo (forthcoming) as 3PK (3rd person known), following Harflett and Tate (1999).

Forms without any tense-aspect marking occur infrequently but when they do occur, they have stative meaning. Otherwise, verbs are either marked for tense, aspect or both.

2. PREVIOUS WORK ON SɛLɛɛ NOUN CLASSES

The term *noun class* is traditionally used to describe the nominal classification system that is typical, among others, of many Niger-Congo languages. Similarly, the term *gender* is used to describe the nominal classification system that is typical of Indo-European and Dravidian languages, among others. Corbett (1991) uses the term *gender* typologically as a cover term to describe systems of nominal classification that are based on agreement.

The main difference between languages with noun classes and languages with gender lies in the number of distinctions found in the systems of noun classification. Noun class systems have four or more members, whereas gender systems have a maximum of three. Gender systems can be sex-based or non-sex-based. Even though the principles of gender assignment can be quite arbitrary, gender systems have a semantic core (Corbett 1991:43).

Schuh (1995:128) shows two ways of using the term *noun class* in reference to African languages. In the first usage, the term refers to ‘a single set of morphological concords which may show up as affixes on noun stems, affixes on modifiers, and pronominal referents to nouns’; in the second usage, it refers to ‘a paired set of concords where one member has a singular referent and the other member, its plural counterpart.’

In previous attempts to describe the noun class system of SɛLɛɛ (Allen 1974; Harflett and Tate 1999; Agbetsoamedo 2009), the term *noun class* is used in accordance with Schuh’s (1995) second definition, that is, as singular and plural pairings. In this paper, however, I will use both *noun class* and *gender*. The term *noun class* will be used in accordance with Schuh’s first usage, and *gender* will be used to refer to singular/plural pairs, that is, synonymously with the second definition. When quoting earlier works, the original terminology will be used, however.

The three earlier works on SɛLɛɛ differ from each other on three counts: (1) the number of classes; (2) the order of numbering; and (3) the members of each class, as shown in detail in Table 2).

Allen (1974)			Agbetsoamedo (2009)			Harflett and Tate (1999)		
CL	SG	PL	CL	SG	PL	CL	SG	PL
I	o-/ɔ- ∅	ba-	I	o-/ɔ- ∅	ba-	1	a) ∅ b) V- c) kɔ-	ba-
II	di-/le- le-	a-	II	di-/le- le-	a-	2	li-/ni-/le- /le-/ku-/ko- /kɔ-	a-
III	o-/ɔ-	si- /se- sɛ-	III	o-/ɔ-	si- se- sɛ-	3	a) o- ɔ- b) o-	se- sɛ- si-

IV	ka-	n-	IV	ka-	n-	4	ka-	n-
V	ku- /ko- kɔ-	a-	V	ku- /ko- kɔ-	a-	5	le- } le- } + -bi	∅
			VI	n-		6	ka-	kɔ-

Table 2: Noun classes as presented by the three authors

Allen (1974) grouped Sɛlɛ nouns into five classes based on singular and plural pairings, using Roman numerals to number them. Her work was mainly on the phonology of the language, with focus on the tonal behavior of lexical items in isolation and various collocations. Her classification of the five noun types based on tonal shapes and the five noun classes are orthogonal to each other.

Harflett and Tate (1999) postulate six noun classes based on singular and plural prefixes and, for one class, also a suffix, as shown in table 2. Their explanation for surface variation within the classes is vowel harmony. For some of their six classes, they suggest semantic features.

Agbetsoamedo (2009) proposes six noun classes for the language and defines noun classes based on concord markers organized in paired sets. She also provides some semantic features that are meant to be dominant but not exclusive for each class, as shown in table 5. Allen (1974) and Harflett and Tate (1999) were both based on samples of about 300 nouns, while Agbetsoamedo’s work was based on a sample of about 200 nouns. All three works point to the fact that the language has a noun class marked by singular and plural prefixes. What seems to differ, however, is the numbering of the classes, the order of the classes, and the membership allocation within a class, as iterated above.

On the numbering of the classes, Allen (1974) differs from Agbetsoamedo (2009) and Harflett and Tate (1999) in presenting five classes as opposed to six. Considering the two other differences, Harflett and Tate differ greatly with Allen and Agbetsoamedo on their numbering order and membership allocation to a class.

Harflett and Tate have subgroups within the class 1 singular prefixes: class 1a has no prefix, class 1b has a V- slot, and class 1c has the prefix **kɔ-**. They posit V as an archiphoneme. Another addition to Harflett and Tate class 1, absent in Agbetsoamedo and Allen, is the singular prefix **kɔ-**. In their class 2, Harflett and Tate lump together what Allen and Agbetsoamedo call classes II and V. The explanation provided for this is that the front vowels /i/, /e/ or /ɛ/ take the initial consonants /l/ or /n/ (but /n/ before /i/ only). Also, the back vowels /u/, /o/ or /ɔ/ take the initial consonant /k/. Their motivation has, however, no correlation with the noun stems in class 2. Class 3 in Harflett and Tate’s work is similar to what Allen and Agbetsoamedo have for class IV except for the additional singular prefix **kɔ-**, which they have in their class 3.

Harflett and Tate’s class 4 is also similar to Allen and Agbetsoamedo’s class III, but they subdivide the group into two: *a* and *b*. Class 4a has for the singular prefixes **o-/ɔ-**, and **se-/sɛ-** for plural and in the subgroup 4b, **o-** and **si-**. Harflett and Tate have two additional genders that do not feature in either Allen’s or Agbetsoamedo’s categorization, which are classes 5 and 6. In class 5, there is a combination of the prefixes **le-/lɛ-**, plus the suffix **-bi** in the singular, and, according to Harflett and Tate (1999), the plurals of these nouns are formed by removing these affixes. In class 6, they have **ka-** for the singular nouns, and **kɔ-** for the plural.

In light of the disparities in the categorization of Sɛlɛ noun class markers, there is a need for a more detailed analysis of the noun classification system in the language. The current analysis of the noun class system is different from the earlier works in many respects. In the following, I will provide details of the agreement targets and show how the noun agrees with the targets. I will also discuss in detail the semantic clues for the assignment of the majority of nouns to classes and/or gender.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY: NOUN CLASS PREFIXES

In the following sections and subsections, I will first introduce the noun class prefixes. Then, I will talk about agreement targets, followed by gender and, finally, semantics of the genders.

In the present analysis, there are eight morphological noun classes that are numbered 1 to 8 based on their agreement properties. Noun class prefixes are most often overtly coded on nouns. Determiners, numerals and interrogative pronouns normally agree with the noun in a nominal phrase. Noun class agreement on the verb is used to signal long distance anaphora, and the noun class agreement is only indexed on the verb when there is no overt subject. There is no noun class agreement with adjectives. Each noun class is either singular or plural with the exception of class 7, which functions as both singular and plural. Table 3 illustrates the noun classes and their respective markers, anaphoric agreement markers and agreement targets in Sɛlɛ. The singular classes are odd numbered, whereas the plural classes are even numbered.

Generally, the noun class prefixes and the agreement markers have alliterative patterns, but there are a few exceptions in which the noun class prefixes are different from the agreement markers. For example, the definiteness markers and the agreement markers of the proximal demonstratives are different from their noun class prefixes, and the agreement markers do not spread to the noun except for numerals, in which case the class 4 agreement marker spreads to the noun.

Noun Class	Prefix	AAM	Obj. Pro	Def.	Dem	Num	Int. Pro
1	o-/ɔ- /∅	ku-/a-	nwu/nwɔ	wɔ	wɔ-	o-	ɔ-
2	ba-	ba-	ma	ba	ba-	ba-	ba-
3	ka-	ka-	kã	ka	ka-	ka-	ka-
4	si-/se- /sɛ-	si-	sĩ	se	se-	e-	sɛ-
5	di-/li- /ni-/le- /lɛ-	di-	ni	le	le-	ni-	lɛ-
6	n-	n-	mi	be	be-	n-	m-
7	ku-ko- /kɔ-	ku-ko- /kɔ-	kũ	ko	ko-	ku-	ku- ko- /kɔ-
8	a-	a-	nya	ya	ya-	a-	a-

Table 3: Noun class markers and agreement targets in Sɛlɛ

As can be observed from the examples above, some noun class markers have allomorphs. There is ATR vowel harmony between the vowel of the prefix and the vowel of the first syllable of the noun stem, and this vowel harmony is illustrated in table 4. Only prefixes with allomorphs are represented in the table.

noun class	class 1	class 4	class 5	class 7	vowel of the 1st syllable of the noun stem
prefixes	o-	si-	di-/li- /ni-	ku-	i, u
	o-	se-	le-	ko-	e, o
	ɔ-	sɛ-	lɛ-	kɔ-	ɛ, ɔ, a

Table 4: Morphophonemic alternations of the class prefixes

Vowels in the first syllable of the noun stem trigger harmony, whereas the vowels in the noun class prefixes are the targets of vowel harmony. Sɛlɛɛ noun class prefixes take two forms; CV or V. The prefix-vowel harmonizes with the first vowel of the noun stem in [±ATR] and [±High]. Thus from table 4, the prefixes **si-**, **di-**, **li-**, **ni-** and **ku-** can co-occur with nouns with /i/ and /u/ in the first syllable of the stem, as in **si-sini** ‘okra/lady’s finger’; **di-kutu** ‘orange’; **ni-nii-bi** ‘bead’; and **ku-kũ** ‘book,’ while the same prefixes will surface as **se-**, **le-** and **ko-** with either /e/ or /o/ in the first syllable of the stem, as in **se-kle** ‘rivers’; **le-kotowa** ‘peanut’; and **ko-fe** ‘farm.’ Finally, the prefixes **sɛ-**, **lɛ-** and **kɔ-** may co-occur with nouns having /ɛ/, /ɔ/ or /a/ as the vowel in the first syllable of the stem as found in **sɛ-ka** ‘tails’; **lɛ-kɔɔ** ‘liver’; and **kɔ-fɛɛfɔ** ‘air.’

V prefixes on their part harmonize only in ATR. Thus class 1 prefixes **o-** / **ɔ-**, while class 8 **a-**, e.g., **o-bi** ‘child’; **o-wu** ‘silo’; **o-kle** ‘river’; and **o-kpoo** ‘town,’ but: **ɔ-blɔ** ‘anger’; **ɔ-kle** ‘pepper’; and **ɔ-sankó** ‘woman.’

The low vowel /a/ can occur with vowels of either harmonic category in the stem but governs the harmonic category of adjacent prefixes (Clements 2000). In other words, [a] is neutral for ATR harmony when it functions as a class marker, as can be observed in the following examples: **a-wosobi** ‘fruits’; **a-nii-bi** ‘beads’; **a-kũ** ‘books’; **a-fe** ‘farms’; **a-mɛ** ‘boundaries’; and **a-saanwu** ‘snakes.’

Each of the following subsections discusses each class.

3.1 CLASS 1

Class 1 comprises the singulars with classes 2 and 4, its plurals, which makes it one of the largest singular classes. Nouns in this class (borrowed and native words) are prefixless, or they take **o-/ɔ-** as prefix and have two anaphoric agreement markers **ku-** and **a-**, as well as two object pronouns **nwu** and **nwɔ**. The pronouns **ku-** and **nwu** designate inanimate nouns and animals, whereas **a-** and **nwɔ** are human referents.

Although class 1 is the default class for human referents, it also comprises non-human nouns (animate and inanimate). (1a) contains a sample of nouns in this class, while (1b) illustrates the pronominal subject and the object pronoun for human referents.

- (1) a. **o-tii** 'person' **ba-tii** 'people'
o-bi 'child' **ba-bi** 'children'
ɔ-sankóbi 'girl' **ba-sankobi** 'girls'
ɔ-ka 'chief' **ba-ka** 'chiefs'
o-kũ 'rope' **si-kũ** 'ropes'
ɔ-klɛ 'pepper' **sɛ-klɛ** 'peppers'
o-kpoo 'town' **se-kpoo** 'towns'
- b. **a-tóò-yɔ** **o-si** **ɛ-ɛ-kyenko** **nwɔ**
3SG-PRF-take CL1-yam 3SG-RP-send 3SG
'He has taken the yam and sent it to him.'

Notice that the anaphoric agreement **a-** in (1b) is the same as the third person singular subject clitic as indicated in Table (1). There was no occurrence of the subject clitic and the object pronoun for inanimate nouns for class 1 in the corpus. However, speakers say it is possible to produce (2), for instance, to refer to a class 1 object lying on the floor.

- (2) **ku-te** **kaa-sɔ**
CL1-lie CL3.PP-ground
'It is lying on the ground.'

Interestingly, cl7 nouns can replace the cl1 nouns in (2), as subsection 3.3.7 illustrates.

There are some indigenous words, both derived and non-derived, that do not take any prefix but are also classified as class 1 nouns because they also take **ba-** as plural prefix. While the derived nouns have human characteristics, the non-derived nouns refer to non-human, animals and things. Examples of these nouns are listed in (3).

- (3) **foso** 'sheep' **ba-foso**
saate 'boss' **ba-saate**
kpi 'corpse' **ba-kpi**
yu 'thief' **ba-yu**
bɛɛsi 'bowl' **ba-bɛɛsi**

Additionally, all borrowed words that cannot be analyzed as having a prefix are assigned to class 1.

- (4) **sukuu** 'school' <English **ba-sukuu**
gate 'mill' <Ewe **ba-gate**
nankywe 'cattle' <Akan **ba-nankywe**

There are only two nouns in my corpus, **o-tita** 'corn' and **o-kuɔle** 'running stone' in this group that have neither class 2 nor class 4 as their plural. Instead, they take class 8 as their plural, resulting in **a-tita** 'corns' and **a-kuɔle** 'running stones.'

There are few abstract and uncountable nouns in this class that do not take any plural prefixes. Their plurality is encoded by quantifiers such as 'all,' 'some' and 'every.' These nouns include **o-bè** 'time' and **o-tukɔnsɔ** 'thirst.'

Class 3 nouns take their plurals in class 7 in diminutive derivations. As noted earlier, this is the only occasion in which class 7 (a singular class by default) functions as a plural class.

3.4 CLASS 4

Class 4 is a plural class, and its singular counterpart is class 1. Nouns belonging to this class take **si-**, **se-** or **se-** as a prefix depending on the ATR status of the stem vowel, as discussed in (3.1). The anaphoric agreement marker is **si-**, as in (8), and the object pronoun **sĩ**. Nouns in this class mostly denote edible plants and infrastructure.

(8) TEMP_0010_35

o-bè	o-wo	sé	kayi	le-fila	
CL1-time	CL1-some	if	weather	LSM.RP-be.hot	
bu-o-fila	di	suoto	lóo	kame	miè
1PL-PROG-heat	PP	CL4.body	1POSS	inside	today
nwu mu-naa-nyi	a-saa	nyènènè-ε	bu-le	suoto	
DET 1PL-?-drink	CL8-thing	cold-INT	1PL-that	CL4.body	
lóo	si-yòò				
1POSS	CL4-be.cool				

‘Sometimes if the weather is hot, our bodies also get hot, then we say we will drink cold things to cool our bodies.’

Language names also fall within this class, e.g. **Se-blòfò** ‘English’; **Se-kleni** ‘Ga’; **Se-kɔpo** ‘Akan’; **Si-yigbé** ‘Ewe.’ Cf. (9):

(9) TEMP_006_01

nkpo oso	sé	fa-le	ɔ-leε	
Then so	if	2SG-COP	CL1-native of Santrokofi	
o-mu	fa-naa-ye	sé	boo-bue	Se-leε
CL1-full	2SG-NEG-know	if	3PL.PROG-say	CL4-Santrokofi_language
fa-ba-nyu	fa-le	se-le	bàmba	bo-o-bue
2SG-FUT-look	2SG-that	CL4-language	another	3PL-PROG-say

‘Then if you are a native of Santrokofi and you don't know, if they are speaking Selee, you will think they are speaking another language.’

Selee was mentioned in (9) when some speakers complained about how some youths, and even some adults, are code mixing. They claim that these speakers often use borrowed words instead of the existing **Selee** words for the referent.

Class 4 works as the plural of a number of abstract and uncountable nouns. These nouns include **se-blɔ** ‘angers’; **si-hia** ‘poverties’; **si-yududu** ‘shades’; and **se-tɔ** ‘fires.’ My informants said that when **se-blɔ** is used in reference to a person as in (10), it means the person is quick tempered.

- (10) **a-nya** **sɛ-blɔ** **kplàkplà**
 3SG-see CL4-anger quickly
 ‘S/he is quick tempered (lit: he sees angers quickly)’

These nouns are therefore to be understood as a collection of the entity denoted by the noun or an intensity of one and the same entity. So for example **sɛ-tɔ** can be used to refer to fire burning at one location but at a very high intensity.

3.5 CLASS 5

Class 5 is a singular class, and it is one of the two classes that take class 8 as its plural. Nouns in class 5 are prefixed with either **di-**, **li-**, **ni-**, **le-** or **lɛ-**, as shown in (11). The choice of prefix vowel depends on the ATR/High harmony discussed in 3.1. When the stem initial syllable contains a nasal onset, **ni-** is used. The choice between **di-** and **li-** also depends on the village. Mostly speakers who used **li-** were from Bume and Gbodome, whereas no one from Benua where I stayed during my fieldwork ever used it. There are a wide range of nouns from varied semantic categories in this class.

(11) di-si	‘head’	a-si	‘heads’
di-bulaa	‘onion’	a-bulaa	‘onions’
ni-nu	‘eye’	a-nu	‘eyes’
ni-niibi	‘bead’	a-niibi	‘beads’
le-yo	‘house’	a-yo	‘houses’
le-lesaa	‘food’	a-lesaa	‘foods’
lɛ-fata	‘leaf’	a-fata	‘leaves’
lɛ-nyɛɛ	‘tooth’	a-nyɛɛ	‘teeth’

Some derived nouns belong in this class. In my corpus, most of these are temperature terms derived from the verb **fila** ‘be hot’ and the adjectives **sansa** ‘warm’ and **nyɛnɛnɛ** ‘cold.’ The examples below show the context of the derived nouns.

- (12) TEMP_005_17

a-pípi	ni-kpe	ale	di-fila	ee	le-sansa	n-naa
CL8-sweat	3SG.NEG-work	that	CL5-be.hot or		CL5-warm	3-not.exist
‘There is no sweat without heat or warmth.’						

- (13) TEMP_009_11

sé	lɛ-nyɛnɛnɛ-ɛ	le	ni-ɛ-wa	ni	
If	CL5-cold-INT	CL5	REL-PR-come	PART	
sé	fe-e-kutu	si-sí	ni	si-lóóba-bùù	ni
if	2SG-RP-uproot	CL4-yam	then	CL4-NEG.FUT-rot	PART
o-kóso	si-ba-kóso	si-lóóba-bùù			
PROG-dry	CL4-FUT-dry	CL4-NEG.FUT-rot			
‘Yams don’t get rotten when uprooted in cold, they only get dry.’					

Example (12) shows the occurrence of **fila** and **sansa** as nouns, and the occurrence of **nyɛnɛnɛ** as a noun is shown in (13). Interestingly, a variant of class 5 prefix **le-** is homophonous with the recent past marker for the first person singular and the lexical subject marker. Example (14) illustrates the occurrence of **fila** as a verb and also as a

noun in the same context.

(14) TEMP_0010_21

ku-tu le-fila ɔ-kle le-buo le nin-te
 CL7-soup LSM.RP-be.hot CL1-pepper LSM.RP-enter how LSM-lie

sé fe-e-le o-nyinyinle ku a-lesaa ya
 if 2SG-RP-eat CL1-pepper with CL8-food CL8

ni-e-fila nii sé fe-e-lòò o-le lewo
 REL-RP-be.hot ? if 2SG-RP-finish PROG-eat sometime

a-toko lefo n-ye fo ɔ-to suu
 CL8-ear 2SG.POSS LSM-stand 2SG.OBJ CL1-fire IDEO

fan-tofo fa-le di-fila n-si fo di suoto
 2SG-know 2SG-that CL5-heat LSM-sit 2SG.OBJ PP body

‘When soup is spicy and hot, how is it like? After eating spicy food, you will feel a burning sensation in your ears and then you will feel heat in your body.’

In the example above, **di-fila** ‘heat’ functions as a noun with a CL5 marker, whereas **le-fila**, on the other hand, functions as a verb with the subject marker + tense marker (portmanteau morpheme) prefixed to it.

Nouns shift to class 5 for diminutive derivation and the derivation of animal offspring nouns that belong in other classes, especially animal terms in class 1, as shown in example (15) below.

- (15) a. **siló** > **di-siló-bi**
 CL1.lizard CL5-lizard-DIM
 ‘lizard’ ‘baby lizard’
- b. **lenke** > **le-lenke-bi**
 CL1.crocodile CL5-crocodile-DIM
 ‘crocodile’ ‘baby crocodile’
- c. **weewee** > **le-weewee-bi**
 CL1.dog CL5-dog-DIM
 ‘dog’ ‘puppy’

Class shift is accompanied by suffixation of the diminutive suffixes with or without stem modification (see section 6).

3.6. CLASS 6

Class 6 is a plural class with class 3 as its singular counterpart. Nouns in this class are prefixed with **N-** (a homorganic nasal), and they share features and characteristics with class 3 with the exception of not being involved in diminutive formation. Examples of nouns in this class are provided in (6) above.

Class 6 as found in our corpus has two members that do not have the default class 3 as their singular class but rather have class 7 as their singular form. The nouns refer to the two limbs, **n-kpa** ‘legs’ and **n-nɛɛ** ‘hands.’

Some non-count nouns, especially liquids and masses, belong to class 6. Liquids and masses found in the corpus are **n-tù** ‘water’; **n-ta** ‘drink (alcoholic)’; **n-tɔ** ‘blood’; **n-nɔnyi** ‘oil’; **n-tɔ** ‘ashes’; and **m-bi** ‘feces.’

3.7. CLASS 7

Class 7 is predominantly a singular class displaying three variants of the class prefix: **ko-/kɔ-/ku-**. However, this class also functions as a plural class for diminutives. This is also the case for classes 1, 4 and 5.

Singular nouns assigned to this class often refer to entities that seem to have such features as wide surface and density. Most of the nouns appear to be farm-related concepts.

(16)	ku-kuɔle	‘bedstone’	a-kuɔle	‘bedstones’
	ku-kũ	‘book’	a-kũ	‘books’
	ko-woso	‘tree’	a-woso	‘trees’
	kokloo	‘door’	a-kloo	‘doors’
	kɔ-te	‘sand’	a-te	‘sands’
	kɔ-pa	‘cutlass/machete’	a-pa	‘cutlasses/machetes’

Interestingly, one human term, **kɔ-sa** ‘husband,’ is found in this class. This noun is also found in class 1 **ɔ-sa**, the default class for human terms. It is not clear at this point what the difference is in usage. Speakers say that **kɔ-sa** and **ɔ-sa** are the same and that one could use either of the two in the same context. There are only two body part terms in this class, with the majority of them being in class 5. It is plausible to speculate that the two body part nouns **kɔ-kpa** ‘leg’ and **kɔ-neɛ** ‘hand’ belong in this class because their referents can both be described as having a wide surface and are also dense in volume.

Class 7 also functions as a plural class for diminutive derivation; however, one noun was found in the corpus that does not seem to be derived. Examples of nouns in this group are given in (17).

(17)	kɔkpaku	‘fishes’
	kowoese	‘sticks’
	kɔbɔkɔbii	‘insects’

The only noun that does not seem to be derived in (17) above is **kɔ-kpaku** ‘fishes.’ Since class 7 functions as a plural class for diminutivized nouns, we can see some process of diminutivization in the noun for ‘stick,’ **ko-woese**, but we can only speculate on the noun for ‘insects,’ **kɔ-bɔkɔbii**. The stem **bɔkɔ** in Sɛlɛɛ does not have a meaning, but we might suggest that this stem is derived from the word for ‘animal,’ **bɔkɛ**. It is not uncommon to see a stem being modified when a diminutive suffix **-bii** is added to the noun (see Agbetsoamedo and Di Garbo forthcoming). In fact, it is a productive process of diminutive derivation. In the same way, the noun **ko-woese** ‘sticks’ underwent stem modification. The stem for ‘stick,’ **woese**, is derived from the stem for ‘tree,’ **woso**. When the diminutive suffix **-e/-ɛ** is added to the stem, it changes from **woso** to **woese**.

3.8. CLASS 8

This class is the largest plural class having two singular classes, classes 5 and 7, as its singular counterparts, as shown in (11) and (16). Class 8 has a mixed semantic

group with the exception of human nouns. Other nouns in this class are **a-yɔ** ‘smokes’⁵; **a-te** ‘sands’; **a-feɛfo** ‘air’; **a-wente** ‘months’; and **a-bokote** ‘mountains.’

Most mass nouns and collective nouns belong in this class. Examples of such nouns include **a-pipi** ‘sweat’; **a-lombi** ‘sperm’; **a-ku** ‘rubbish’; and **a-fii** ‘madness.’

4. AGREEMENT

As in most West African languages, NP modifiers usually follow the head noun, as shown in (18).

(18) NP → N (ADJ) (DET) (QUANT)

In Sɛlɛɛ, determiners, numerals and interrogative pronouns agree with their head nouns. Adjectives do not generally show agreement, but occasionally one of two or three adjectives in an NP may take an agreement marker.

4.1 HEAD NOUN AND DETERMINERS

4.1.1 Demonstratives

There are two demonstratives: the proximal **mle** ‘this/these’ and the distal **nwu** ‘that/those,’ which have an extended range of uses compared to prototypical demonstratives and can normally be translated by speakers in different ways. The second meaning assigned to these demonstratives is definiteness. It might be stated here that the definiteness meaning given to the demonstrative is a process of grammaticalization according to a cross-linguistically well-attested pattern.

Only the proximal demonstrative agrees with a preceding noun. Consider the non-agreeing use of the distal demonstrative in (19) and (20) below.

- | | | | | | |
|---------|----------------|------------|----|----------------|------------|
| (19) a. | di-fuwɔ | nwu | b. | a-fuwɔ | nwu |
| | CL5-stone | that | | CL8-stone | those |
| | ‘That stone’ | | | ‘those stones’ | |
| (20) a. | foso | nwu | b. | ba-foso | nwu |
| | CL1.Sheep | that | | CL2-sheep | those |
| | ‘That sheep’ | | | ‘those sheep’ | |

The proximal demonstrative shows agreement with the noun and is most often used with an accompanying pointing gesture if the referent is visible. The examples in (21) and (22) show occurrences of the proximal demonstratives.

⁵ Some of the nouns in this class seem unnatural in a language such as English. For example, the noun **a-yɔ** ‘smokes’ is to be understood as ‘smoke from different sources’; **a-te** ‘different heaps of sand’ is also the plural for ‘air’; **a-feɛfo** is used to describe strong air blowing, probably from a fan.

(21) ACTS_1_17

Yuda la-sie dii-kudi lóo le-mle
 Judas LSM.DP-sit CL5.PP-group 1POSS CL5-this

kame di Yesu la-diki nwo a-le
 inside PP Jesus 3PK.DP-remove 3SG 3SG-that

sée a-a-bla ni ba-tɔkyente ɔ-kpɛ
 IDEO 3SG-DP-do it CL2-messenger CL1-work

‘Judas sat in this group of ours, and then Jesus appointed him to do the messengers’ work.’

(22) TEMP_007_19

ko-leele ko-mle o-bè kanto ma-fuo ɔ-nɔɔ
 CL7-harmattan CL7-this CL1-time rain LSM.FUT-can 3SG-fall

‘This harmattan season, the rain can fall.’

In addition to the use of the distal demonstrative as a definite article, there is another form of the definiteness marker that is identical with the agreement markers on the proximal demonstratives and thus agrees with the noun:

(23) ACTS_1_12

nɔi kamaa ba-tɔkyente nwo nkpo la-kple
 then after CL2-messenger DEM so LSM.DP-return

di ko-bokote ko bɔ-ɔ-lɛɛ ni n-nɔnyi
 PP CL7-mountain DET 3PL-PROG-call it CL6-oil

a-woso ko-bokote osi
 CL8-tree CL7-mountain top

‘After that, the disciples returned from the top of the mountain they are calling Oil Trees Mountain [...]’

(24) ACTS_1_13

ba-tii ba ni-a-we ni ninfa ni-a-le
 CL2-person DET LSM-DP-have it there REL-DP-COP

Petro ku Yohane ku Yakobo
 Peter and John and James

‘[...] the people who were there were Peter, John, James [...]’

It appears that speakers are more prone to using the definiteness determiner **nwo** than the agreement form of the determiner. In the same way, the proximal demonstrative is more frequently used than the distal demonstrative. However, having used the proximal demonstrative, speakers tend to gloss it as ‘the’ when asked to produce the same sentence in English, for example. When I probed further in an effort to determine the difference between the proximal demonstrative and the agreement marker, they gave ‘this/these’ and ‘the,’ respectively, as equivalents. We can speculate that the agreement form of the definiteness marker might have grammaticalized from the proximal demonstrative.

4.1.2 Indefinite marking

Indefinite reference, both in the singular and the plural, is marked by the stem **wo** preceded by an agreement marker and translates as ‘a,’ ‘a certain’ or ‘some.’ Where the noun class prefix has allomorphs, it harmonizes in ATR with the stem. Examples (25) and (26) illustrate the occurrence of indefinite marking in the corpus.

(25) TA_Q058 (DQ 103)

o-suɔtɔ-bi **nwu ko-nyu** **ko-to** **ko-wo**
CL1-man-DIM DET LSM.PROG-look CL7-money CL7-some

o-suku sé **ku-ɔ-kpànkó** **nwɔ n-nɛɛ**
CL1-road if CL7-PROG-receive 3SG CL6-hand

a-ba-ya **lɛ-saa** **a-n-ta** **ɔ-sankó-bi** **nwu**
3SG-FUT-buy CL5-thing 3SG-HAB-give CL1-woman-DIM DET

‘The boy is expecting some money; when he gets it, he will buy things for the girl.’

(26) ACTS_1_14

ba-tii **ba-mle** **la-tóò-si** **o-bè** **lele**
CL2-person CL2-DEM LSM.DP-PRF-gather CL1-time more

ku ba-sankó **ba-wo** **ku Yesu** **ɔ-ya** **Maria**
and CL2-woman CL2-some and Jesus CL1-mother Mary

ku Yesu **ba-suɔtɔ-bi** **lema**
and Jesus CL2-man-DIM 3PL.POSS

‘These people were gathering every time with some women and Jesus’ mother Mary and Jesus’ brothers [...].’

In the singular, the stem for ‘one’ **nwii** is also used to mark indefiniteness and also takes an agreement marker, as shown in (27).

(27) PS00513

ni **ɛ-ɛ-kyaka-kó** **ɔ-sankó-bi** **o-nwii**
it 3SG-RP-meet-with CL1-woman-DIM CL1-one

n-si **gasɔ** **ɔ-ɔ-wa**
LSM-sit bicycle 3SG-PROG-ride

‘... then he meets a girl on a bicycle coming.’

4.2. HEAD NOUN AND QUANTIFIERS

Quantifiers fall into two groups, general quantifiers (**petee** ‘all,’ **mu** ‘all’ and **kpinwu** ‘many’) and numerals, but only the latter can take agreement, under conditions described below.

4.2.1 Cardinals

When counting, the cardinal numbers from one to nine take the prefix **o-** or **ɔ-** (see, for example, **o-nwi** ‘one,’ **ɔ-nɔɔ** ‘five’ and **ɔ-naasi** ‘nine’). Counting numbers from 10 to 19 starts with **le-fosi** ‘ten’ followed by the ones. Thus, ‘twelve’ is

le-fosi ɔ-nyɔ. However, for 11 and other multiples of 10 plus 1, there is a linker **ku** between the tens and the one. Thus, 11 is **le-fosi ku o-nwii**. The numbers from 20 to 99 take the class 8 prefix **a-**. The prefix for one remains **o-**. Some examples of multiples of ten are given in (28).

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|--|---------------|
| (28) | a-fosi a-nyɔ | | ‘twenty’ |
| | a-fosi a-nyɔ ku o-nwii | | ‘twenty-one’ |
| | a-fosi a-tie | | ‘thirty’ |
| | a-fosi a-tie a-nyɔ | | ‘thirty-two’ |
| | a-fosi a-na a-tie | | ‘forty-three’ |
| | a-fosi a-nɔɔ a-na | | ‘fifty-four’ |

The numbers 'hundred' **kɔ-lafa** and 'thousand' **ka-kpe** appear to be borrowed from Ewe **alafa** and **akpe**, respectively, but unlike Ewe, which has no gender, the two numbers in Selɛ belong to different classes.

4.2.2 Numerals as modifiers

Cardinal numbers from one to nine functioning as modifiers agree with the noun they modify. Agreement is typically restricted to the lower numerals for both cardinal numerals and the ordinal numeral, which is in accordance with Corbett's (2006:42) generalization that higher numerical values correlate with having more noun-like qualities and so they are more frequently agreement controllers than agreement targets. When enumerating items from one to ten, the nouns precede the modifier, as illustrated in the examples below.

- | | | | | | | |
|------|----|----------------|----------------|----|---------------|---------------|
| (29) | a. | ka-fusu | ka-nwii | b. | n-fusu | n-nyɔ |
| | | CL3-rat | CL3-one | | CL6-rat | CL6-two |
| | | ‘one rat’ | | | ‘two rats’ | |
| (30) | a. | ko-fe | ku-nwii | b. | a-fe | a-kuwɔ |
| | | CL7-farm | CL7-one | | CL8-farm | CL8-six |
| | | ‘one farm’ | | | ‘six farms’ | |
| (31) | a. | o-si | o-nwii | b. | e-si | e-na |
| | | CL1-yam | CL1-one | | CL4-yam | CL4-four |
| | | ‘one yam’ | | | ‘four yams’ | |

Class 4 in example (31b) is a plural class with **se-/sɛ-/si-** as class marker and takes **e-** as an agreement marker on numerals two to nine. Observe, however, that the example in (31b) shows a difference with regards to what can be seen in examples (29) and (30). Incidentally, for numerals, the agreement marker for class 4 is **e-** and not **si-** or any of the class 4 variants of the prefix. From the example in (32b), it can be observed that the agreement marker spreads to the noun itself.

I want to argue here that the prefix **e-** is not an addition to the noun class markers. Instead, the agreement system appears alliterative in the sense that the form of the agreement marker is often identical to that of the noun class marker. Consequently, the agreement marker spreads to the noun to make the system as fully alliterative as possible.

In most Bantu languages, alliterative patterns start from the noun class markers to the agreement marker. Interestingly in Selɛ, however, the opposite seems to be the case here.

The order of the cardinal number and the noun changes when we have between 11 and 19 items being enumerated as the noun comes after the tens and before the ones. These are shown in (32).

- (32) **le-fosi o-tii o-nwii** ‘eleven people’
le-fosi n-kyikye n-nyɔ ‘twelve baskets’
le-fosi a-kutu a-tiɛ ‘thirteen oranges’
le-fosi ba-foso ba-na ‘fourteen sheep’
le-fosi m-pamii n-nɔɔ ‘fifteen knives’

Enumeration becomes a bit complicated with 20 to 99 items. The noun precedes the numerals and show agreement only with the ones as shown in (33).

- (33) **e-si a-fosi a-nyɔ** ‘twenty yams’
esi a-fosi a-nyɔ e-tiɛ ‘twenty-three yams’
a-kũ a-fosi a-tiɛ a-nyɔ ‘thirty-two books’
ba-sanko a-fosi a-na ba-nɔɔ ‘forty-five women’
m-pamii a-fosi a-nɔɔ n-kuɛnsi ‘fifty-seven knives’

Speakers say one can also repeat the noun before the last number, as in **ba-sanko a-fosi a-na ba-sanko ba-nɔɔ** ‘forty-five women,’ but they also added that it will sound too long and that it suffices to omit the repeated noun.

4.2.3 Ordinals

Ordinals are formed by suffixing either **-le**, **-nle** or **-fa** to the base of the cardinal numbers from two to ten. The stem of the ordinal ‘first,’ however, involves suppletion of the stem. The ordinals one to ten are shown in (34).

- (34) **ɔ-kasa-le** ‘first’; **ɔ-nyɔɔ-fa** ‘second’; **o-tiɛ-fa** ‘third’; **ɔ-naa-fa** ‘fourth’;
ɔ-nɔɔ-nle ‘fifth’; **o-kuɔ-nle** ‘sixth’; **o-kuɛnsi-nle** ‘seventh’; **ɔ-ne-nle**
‘eighth’; **ɔ-naasi-nle** ‘ninth’; **le-fosi-le** ‘tenth’ ; and **ɔ-yente-le** ‘last.’

The ordinals can function as nominal by themselves. In modification, however, the ordinal loses the prefix when it follows a noun, as shown in (35) and (36) below.

- (35) **Kofi ni-le o-bi kasale**
Kofi LSM-COP CL1-child first
‘Kofi is the first child/born.’

- (36) **le-yo nyɔɔfa ni-e-muɔ dilénkée**
CL5-house second LSM-RP-be.big exceed
‘The second house is bigger.’

4.3 HEAD NOUN AND INTERROGATIVES

Only two interrogative pronouns, ‘who’ and ‘which,’ show agreement in Sɛlɛɛ. The interrogative pronoun ‘who’ takes Gender I prefixes (see table 5.1): the singular form **o-wé** and the plural correspondent **ba-we**, as shown in (37) and (38).

(37) SF_17

afɔ **o-wé** **nin-ye** **ninfa**
 2SG.INDP CL1-who LSM-stand there
 ‘Who are you standing there?’

(38) BKF_00219_SK

ni **ba-we** **ku** **ba-wé** **nin-le** **a-lɛsaa** **nwu**
 then CL2-who and CL2-who LSM-eat CL8-thing DET
 ‘Then who and who (which people) go to eat the food?’

The form of the interrogative pronoun ‘who,’ **we-**, is different from the relative pronoun ‘who,’ **ni-**.

The interrogative pronoun ‘which’ has a stem **mɛn** that takes a prefix to agree with the class of noun it co-occurs with. This form of the interrogative pronoun is special in many respects. First of all, it is the only modifier that precedes the noun and, in this case, the noun loses its class prefix leaving only the stem. There is also homorganic nasal assimilation when the interrogative pronoun co-occurs with nouns in class 6 with the prefix **n-**. Examples are provided from the five regular genders, Gender I-V from (39a) to (39e).

- (39) a. **ɔ-mɛn** **ka?** **ba-mɛn** **ka?**
 CL1-which chief? CL2-which chiefs?
 ‘which chief?’ ‘which chiefs?’
- b. **lɛ-mɛn** **bukii?** **a-mɛn** **bukii?**
 CL5-which clay pot? CL8-which clay pots?
 ‘which clay pot?’ ‘which clay pots?’
- c. **kɔ-mɛn** **kũ?** **a-mɛn** **kũ?**
 CL7-which book? CL8-which books?
 ‘which book?’ ‘which books?’
- d. **ɔ-mɛn** **suku?** **sɛ-mɛn** **suku?**
 CL1-which road? CL4-which roads?
 ‘which road?’ ‘which roads?’
- e. **ka-mɛn** **pamii?** **m-mɛn** **pamii?**
 CL3-which knife? CL6-which knives?
 ‘which knife?’ ‘which knives?’

Looking at the prefixes on the interrogative pronoun, it is easy to conclude that the prefixes are transferred from the noun and as a result, the noun drops its prefix. This argument is not plausible considering examples (39b) and (39c) above. The noun **di-bukii** ‘clay pot’ takes the prefix **di-** but not **lɛ-**, and also in the same way, the noun **ku-kũ** ‘book’ takes the prefix **ku-** but not **kɔ-**. These examples show that the noun class marker is not simply transferred to the interrogative pronoun, but rather, the interrogative pronoun takes an agreement marker that has a vowel with the same ATR status as the vowel of the interrogative pronoun.

4.4 HEAD NOUN AND ADJECTIVES

There are three classes of adjectives in the language: (1) underived adjectives, which form a very small class, for instance, **kplè** ‘big’; (2) adjectives derived from verbs by adding the enclitic **-le** to the verb root; for example, the verb **sɛɛ** ‘to be ripe/red’ becomes **sɛɛle** ‘red’; and (3) an ideophonic adjective class, which is quite a large group characterized by reduplicative stems or long vowels, such as **munumunu** ‘circular/spherical’ and **bùù** ‘wet.’

Adjectives in **Sɛɛ** do not generally show agreement with the noun they modify, as in (40a) and (40b).

- (40) a. **o-suɔɔ** **kaana-le** b. **ba-suɔɔ** **kaana-le**
 CL1-man be.tall-ADJR CL2-man be.tall-ADJR
 ‘tall man’ ‘tall men’

However, I have found one adjective that tends to show agreement when there are more than one adjective modifying a noun. The only adjective in the corpus that shows agreement is the underived adjective **kplè** ‘big.’ Compare examples (41a) and (41b), where **kplè** appears as the only modifier, with (42), where it follows another adjective:

- (41) a. **o-si** **kplè** b. **si-si** **kplè**
 +CL1-yam big CL4-yam big
 ‘big yam’ ‘big yams’
- (42) a. **ba-sankó** **kunkuru** **ba-kplè** **ba-nɔɔ**
 CL2-woman short CL2-big CL2-five
 ‘Five short big women’
- b. **a-kpayo** **munumunu** **wèèfèè** **a-kplè** **a-kuɔ**
 CL8-hut round black CL8-big CL8-six
 ‘Six big round black pots’

The adjective in (41a) and (41b) remains uninflected, while in (42a) and (42b), the adjective **kplè** ‘big’ is inflected to show agreement with the noun **ba-sankó** ‘women’ and **a-kpayo** ‘hut.’ In other cases where there are two or more adjectives modifying the head noun, there is no agreement between the noun and the adjectives. Observe the examples below.

- (43) **ko-woeséé** **sɛɛ-le** **kaana-le** **ku-tiɛ**
 CL7-stick be.red-ADJR be.tall-ADJR CL7-three
 ‘Three long red sticks’.
- (44) **dibukíí** **fútútú** **bííbíí** **kofole**
 CL5-pot white small old
 ‘Small old white pot’
- (45) **a-yo** **kplè sɛɛ-le**
 CL8-house big be.red-ADJR
 ‘Big red houses’

4.5 HEAD NOUN AND VERB

Noun class agreement on the verb is used to signal long distance anaphora. The noun class agreement is only marked on the verb when there is no overt subject immediately preceding the verb. The agreement marker syntactically and semantically represents the subject, which has already been introduced in the discourse. As stated earlier, speakers are aware of the existence of these anaphoric agreement markers for every class, but they do not often use them. A case worth mentioning is a story that was narrated with the noun **si-si** ‘yams’ as one of the central terms in the story. The noun occurred 24 times in a narrative of about five minutes, but nowhere in the story did the narrator use the anaphoric agreement marker in place of the noun. There were few cases, such as the sentence in (8), in which the anaphoric agreement marker was used. It turned out that the utterance in (8) and all the other occurrences of the anaphoric agreement markers found in the corpus was made by an elderly person. On the other hand, the narrator of the ‘yam-story’ belongs to the younger generation. If the non-usage of the anaphoric agreement marker (mostly by the younger generation) is anything to go by, we can allude to the fact that the noun class system is losing some of its defining features.

(46) TEMP_006_32

ka-sɔ	lɛ	ka-n-te	kabienle	o-bè?
CL3-ground	how	CL3-HAB-lie	harmattan	CL1-time
ka-sɔ,	ka-n-koso,	ka-n-kóso	kplàkplàkplà,	
CL3-ground	CL3-HAB-dry	CL3-HAB-dry	IDEO	
sɛ-fa	se-wo	bia	nin-yɛ	ni
CL4-grass	CL4-some	all	LSM-stand	PART
			kaa-sɔ	
			CL3.PP-ground	
nín-sin-wɛ	n-tù	si-a-nyi	ni	oso,
LSM.NEG-NEG-have	CL6-water	CL4-DP-drink	then	so
sɛ-fa	n-kpi			
CL4-grass	LSM-die			

‘How is the ground in the harmattan time? The ground becomes extremely dry, even the grass that is on the ground does not get water, so they die.’

Notice that in (46), the first utterance has the agreement marker **ka-**, which agrees with its antecedent **kasɔ** ‘ground.’ Observe also that the agreement marker does not immediately follow the noun **kasɔ**. In the following sentence, the verb immediately follows the noun with the agreement marker prefixed to it. However, there is a pause after the noun **kasɔ** before the verb. The anaphoric agreement marker **si-** is used to index the noun phrase **sefa sewo bia**.

There is a division of labor between the LSM and the anaphoric agreement markers. The LSM occurs immediately after the noun or the noun phrase, whereas the anaphoric agreement marker occurs later in the utterance when the noun in question is not mentioned any more. It is used to co-index the noun or the noun phrase.

Observing the agreement patterns in the language, certain configurations seem to emerge especially in cases where a class marker exhibits allomorphy. Thus the agreement marker for each class is either:

- (i) a vowel closest in harmony with the vowel in the stem of the target, or
- (ii) alliterative.

5. GENDER

As noted above, the term *gender* is used in this paper to refer to pairs of singular and plural noun classes. Figure 1 illustrates the pairings.

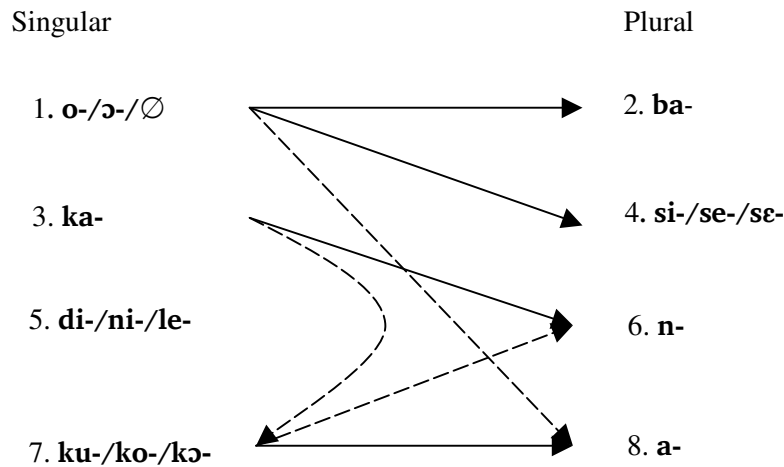


Figure 1: Noun class pairs (Genders)

As observed in figure 1, the singular classes are odd numbered, and the plural classes even numbered, with one exception: class 7. Class 7 functions as the singular class for Gender 7/8, and the plural class of Gender 3/7. Sɛlɛ has a system of the kind Heine (1982:27) calls “a crossed nominal classification system,” which is common among Bantu languages.

The solid lines in the figure represent the most frequent genders and the dashed lines the less frequent ones. Following Corbett’s (1991) terminology, we refer to the least frequent genders as *inquate genders*. Inquate genders are the controller counterpart to over-differentiated targets. [...], inquate genders are those postulated on the basis of an insufficient number of nouns, which should instead be lexically marked as exceptions (Corbett 1991:170).

5.1 MOTIVATIONS FOR THE ALLOCATION OF NOUNS TO GENDERS

In order to fully comprehend the motivation of noun assignment to a particular gender in a given noun class language, it is important to understand the way of life of the people: their history, language, culture and belief systems. Knowledge of these key factors may contribute to greatly reducing the number of exceptions in a system, although some exceptions will always remain.

Gender I is made up of singular nouns from class 1 and plural nouns from class 2. Finely grained semantic features can be assigned to this gender if we further divide members of the gender into two groups, say groups A and B. Group A nouns on the one hand have singular prefixes o-/ɔ-, but group B nouns take no prefix in the singular. Both groups do take ha- prefix for plural nouns. Gender I is the only gender to which human nouns are assigned with the exception of the noun le-kɛɛ ‘virgin,’ which is assigned to Gender II, and the noun ɔ-sa/kɔ-sa ‘husband,’ which is assigned to both Genders I and III. Group A contains, without exception, only nouns with human referents, e.g., o-tii ‘person’; ɔ-sankó ‘woman’; and o-suɔtɔbi ‘boy.’ Membership to group B is also highly motivated in the sense that all nouns that cannot

be analyzed as having a prefix and a stem belong to this group. These nouns can be divided into three groups: the first consists of derived nouns denoting human attributes and professions or vocations such as **saaketekete** ‘disciples,’ **tuote** ‘teacher,’ **saate** ‘boss’ and **wu** ‘thief.’ The second group includes animal nouns such as **foso** ‘sheep,’ **tie** ‘goat’ and **kansie** ‘bird.’ Finally, all borrowed nouns automatically belong to group B, in so far as they do not have a vowel prefix. Thus, **gate** ‘corn mill’ goes into group B, but the Ewe borrowing **a-wu** ‘dress’ is analyzed as having the prefix **a-** and is consequently placed in class 8. There are only three inanimate nouns in group B: **hæsi** ‘howl’ and **kanto** ‘rain.’; the noun **kni** ‘corn’ also belongs to Gender I. The Balɛ believe that the soul of the dead is present among the people, even though the body is not.

Gender II is made up of pairs of nouns from classes 5 and 8. It is first and foremost the default gender for animal offspring. Nouns for some animals such as **foso** ‘sheep’ and **tie** ‘goat’ belong to Gender I, but the nouns for their offspring -- **le-foso-bi** ‘lamb’ and **di-tie-bi** ‘kid’ -- are in Gender II. Gender II also includes nouns denoting items that share the property of being round/circular, oblong or concave. This includes some body part nouns such as **di-si** ‘head,’ **le-koo** ‘navel,’ **à-nvèè** ‘teeth’ and also some paired body parts that are roundish in nature: **a-kveke** ‘buttocks,’ **a-nu** ‘eve’ and **ā-nvèè** ‘breasts.’ Nouns for food items in this gender with the assigned semantic features include **afase**⁶ ‘water yam’; **a-kakofuo** ‘eggs from the hen’; **di-kutu** ‘orange’; **di-bulaa** ‘onion’; **a-kotowa** ‘peanuts’ and **a-kaafɔbi** ‘beans’ (including all other kinds of bean).

Other nouns found in this gender with the above properties include **di-bukii** ‘clay pot’; **a-too** ‘big calabash’; **le-wæke** ‘mortar’; **le-koto** ‘hat’; **a-niibi** ‘head’; **lè-tsà** ‘horn’ and **lè-tsá** ‘roof.’ The noun for ‘roof’ belongs to this gender probably because of the way roofs were built in olden days. Houses were built in a circular shape, and consequently, roofs are also made in the same shape with the middle part of the roof forming a cone. As a matter of fact, the noun for ‘house,’ **le-yo**, also belongs to this gender.

In other cases, it is not equally obvious that the nouns share these properties. For example, the noun for ‘leaf,’ **le-fata**, and many other words for herbs belong to Gender II. It might be the case that most leaves have somewhat circular or oval shapes. Certain time-related concepts such as **le-bombo** ‘hour’; **dii** ‘day’ and **le-lɛ** ‘year’ fall into Gender II. We might speculate that the Balɛ have a cyclic understanding of time. Relatedly, the noun for ‘name,’ **le-yooto**, falls under this gender. When a child is born among the Balɛ, it is named after eight days of being born, and this event is considered as the first complete cycle of the newborn baby. Thus, naming a child on the eighth day signifies a cyclic event.

For certain nouns, the motivation for their allocation to Gender II might be explained on cultural grounds and also stereotypes. For example nouns such as **a-kyuu** ‘groups’ and **a-kye** ‘generation’ can be accounted for by the stereotype that a group, for instance, is a gathering of people or things, more often than not, in a circular form. The noun **a-kye** ‘generation,’ on the other hand, can also be said to be a cyclic occurrence of cultural experiences of a people.

Gender III consists of pairs of nouns from classes 7 and 8. Membership in Gender III is also semantically motivated to some extent. Most nouns in this gender can be said to denote farm and forest-related concepts. Whereas some of these nouns

⁶ Note that the shape of water yam is usually different from an ordinary yam. Water yam is often more roundish than an ordinary yam.

can be described as having long referents, a few nouns do not have a defining feature. Nouns that can be assigned the feature LONG include **kɔ-la** ‘python’; **kɔ-saanwu** ‘snake’; **kɔ-pa** ‘cutlass/machete’ and **ko-woso** ‘tree.’ Other nouns in Gender III whose referents are not necessarily long but which are farm and forest-related are: **kɔ-tɛ** ‘soil/sand’; **ko-bokotee** ‘mountain’; **ko-fe** ‘farm’; **kɔ-ba** ‘garden’ and **ku-kuɔle** ‘bedstone for grinding,’ among others. The Balɛ grow most of their crops on farm lands situated on the mountains with the exception of rice, which is grown in marshy areas.

There are a few abstract and mass nouns in Gender III whose referents are long in a metaphorical sense, for instance, the noun **kɔ-laafɔ** ‘dream.’ To have a dream will require some time of sleep, and as such, a dream can be perceived as a long event. The nouns **kɔ-fɛfɔ** ‘air’ and **kɔ-yɔ** ‘smoke’ also belong to Gender III and may as well be accounted for by a metaphorical extension. Air, on the one hand, blows far and wide, and there is no limit as to where air can reach. In a way, it can be described as long. Smoke, on the other hand, starts from a source and moves high up forming an irregular path, which makes it look longish.

There are a handful of nouns that are exceptions to the assigned feature and categorization of Gender III. These nouns are neither long nor farm and forest-related. They include two paired body parts, **ko-toko** ‘ear’ and **ko-ti** ‘thigh,’ and the others are **ku-tu** ‘soup’; **kɔ-ka** ‘hunger’; **ko-foko** ‘wing’ and **kɔ-sanka** ‘rust,’ among others. One human noun ‘husband’ also belongs to Gender III as well as Gender I, its expected gender. Perhaps the difference between **kɔ-sa** and **ɔ-sa** ‘husband’ is /k/-deletion. Speakers acknowledge both uses and claim they are identical.

Gender IV comprises pairs of nouns from class 1 and 4. Most nouns in Gender IV belong to three semantic domains: things, infrastructure and domain of negative experience. Within the things group, there are nouns denoting body parts, plants and concrete objects, which have the distinctive feature of being POINTED. Parts of the body with a pointed end or part of it being pointed include **o-nu** ‘nose’; **o-tu** ‘heart’; **ɔ-neefɔ** ‘fingernail’; **ɔ-nɛ̀kɔnkɔ** ‘elbow’; **ɔ-kplalomii** ‘tongue’; **o-nwini** ‘hair’ and **ɔ-tɔ** ‘hip.’ The pointed nature of the hip of a woman is expressed in (47).

- (47) **ɔ-sankó nwu n-kpe ɔ-tɔ**
 CL1-woman DET LSM-have CL1-hip
 ‘The woman has a nice (big) hip.’

Although (47) literally means ‘the woman has a hip,’ it is understood with the implicature that the hip is large, or in other words, has a nice shape (the prototypical shape of a woman). The only exceptions to the pointed body part in this gender are **o-mu** ‘neck’ and **ɔkɔnsɔ** ‘throat.’ The plants found in Gender IV are both edible and non-edible and can all be described as having a pointed end. Some of the plants are: **ɔ-kle** ‘pepper’; **o-sini** ‘okra/ladies finger’; **o-du** ‘root’; **ɔ-wɔsɔ** ‘oil palm’; **o-si** ‘yam’ and **ɔ-fa** ‘grass.’

The nouns that belong to the concrete object group cannot all be described as having a pointed part, even though some of the nouns do have a pointed end. The concrete objects with pointed ends include **ɔ-sa** ‘enema’; **o-lonkoo** ‘feather’; **o-wuu** ‘thorn’; **ɔ-mankyĩ** ‘hammer’; **o-bue** ‘claw’; **o-kumã** ‘gun’ and **ɔ-ka** ‘tail.’ Other nouns that may be described as having a somewhat pointed end include; **ɔ-wefe** ‘laddle,’ **o-lomu** ‘bell’ and **ɔ-wɛkɛɛ** ‘pestle.’ Pestles used to be curved in such a way that the part used to crush something else was flat and the other end was pointed. In recent times, however, both sides are made flat. A bell also has its handle pointed as compared to the part that rings. The other nouns are **o-ku** ‘trap,’ **o-kũ** ‘rope’ and **o-**

punu ‘table.’ The allocation of these nouns to Gender IV can only make sense to us if we know how these things used to look. Our speculation on this matter is that, at an earlier stage, these things used to have a part that was made pointed, as we have observed for the pestle, for example. However, their membership to this gender does not make sense, given our current worldview of these items.

The nouns taken from the domain of infrastructure are: **o-kpoo** ‘town’; **o-kpo** ‘toilet’; **o-suku** ‘road’ and **o-wu** ‘silo.’ These are the only nouns in this group in the corpus. They primarily denote structures built for community use. Toilets, for instance, used to be public places of convenience in Sankotrofi, unlike in many other villages in Ghana. The third semantic group within Gender IV is the domain of human experience, mostly but not exclusively negative: **o-numbebeɛ** ‘greed’; **ɔ-fiɛ** ‘sickness’; **o-hia** ‘poverty’; **ɔ-blɔ** ‘anger’; **o-tukɔnsɔ** ‘thirst’; **o-nūnū** ‘ache’; **ɔ-laa** ‘lie’; **o-fufa** ‘smell’ and **ɔ-kpe** ‘job.’

There are a few nouns that do not belong to any of the three domains described above. They are all non-count nouns, even though they have plural forms. They are **ɔ-tɔ** ‘fire,’ **o-yududu** ‘shade’ and **o-ku** ‘taboo.’

Gender V is made up of class pair 3/6. There are three main groups of nouns in Gender V. The first and clearest group comprises nouns that denote body parts, some of which have been grammaticalized as locatives, as well as place names and locations. The body parts in this group include **ka-tū** ‘forehead’; **ka-maa** ‘back’; **ka-nya** ‘mouth,’ **ka-yeɛ** ‘jaw’ and **ka-neetū** ‘wrist.’ Nouns denoting location and places, namely **ka-tū** ‘front’ and **ka-maa** ‘behind/back,’ are derived from body part nouns ‘forehead’ and ‘back,’ respectively. Others are **ka-sɔ** ‘ground/floor’; **ka-ko** ‘place’; **ka-fa** ‘home’ and **ka-fiofa** ‘shrine.’

The second group in Gender V is characterized by being related to the pre-Christian belief system of the Balɛɛ, which was deeply entrenched in their rituals and festivals. Data found in this cluster comes from a narrative on puberty rite ceremonies. For example, **ka-mensu** ‘test’ is a kind of test given at **ka-fiofa** ‘shrine’ to prove the innocence or a similar characteristic of a person. In the narrative, the test is used to determine whether or not a girl going through the puberty rite is a virgin. Also, **ka-mɔɔ eyo** (anatii) ‘rice porridge’ is the only food eaten in **ka-sefe** ‘earthenware bowl’ during the puberty rite celebrations. Another Gender V noun of great importance to the Balɛɛ is **ka-kɔkɔɛ** ‘calabash.’ The calabash is used in pouring libation to offer prayers to the gods on behalf of the celebrants. It is important to note that some of these items mentioned are not exclusively related to the Balɛɛ ritual practices and festivals but are also used as household items.

There are other nouns in this group that are found to be culturally salient. For example, there are taboos associated with the noun **ka-kye** ‘night.’ It is a taboo among the Balɛɛ to do certain things at night, such as whistle, cut firewood, pound palm nut, pound rice and sweep the compound, among others.

There are 11 animal terms found in the second group of Gender V, 5 out of which denote things that are either taboo related, offered as sacrifices to the gods or believed to have spiritual potency. The he-goat **ka-tiekpaa** is offered as a sacrifice to the gods during certain rituals. The rat **ka-fusu** and the chameleon **ka-nanwɔnwɔ** are regarded as taboo animals for certain people in the community. It is said to be bad luck to see a rat in the afternoon, and also, twins and their parents do not eat rats because it is a taboo for them. Likewise, it is believed that a child will grow lean if the mother sees a chameleon before birth. The only remedy to this curse is to tie the tail of a chameleon around the wrist of the child. Other animal nouns in this gender of cultural significance are **ka-kpini** ‘deer’ and **ka-kunfeke** ‘tortoise.’ The remaining

six animal nouns could not be accounted for on cultural grounds. This is probably because some of them are now foreign to the current **Balɛ**, although they might have been culturally salient to the community in the past. The nouns include **ka-pupɔnkɔ** ‘camel’; **ka-kyabetɛ** ‘lynx’; **ka-kpakanaa** ‘scorpion’; **ka-kye** ‘hawk’ and **ka-fiɔmbɔlɔ** ‘gecko.’

The third group comprises nouns that do not fall within the first two groups, and no particular feature can be assigned to them. Examples are **ka-tokota** ‘shoe,’ **ka-kpe** ‘fight’ and **ka-lenke** ‘strainer,’ among others.

5.2. INQUORATE GENDERS

The remaining genders are inquorate genders. Gender VI, containing pairs from classes 3 and 7, is a borderline case. On the one hand, there are only two nouns that belong to this gender without being derived, viz. **ko-kpaku** ‘fish’ and **ka-sakalɛ** ‘ant.’ On the other hand, it is a very productive gender for diminutive derivation.

Gender VII, 7/6, is made up of two nouns denoting the two limbs, **ka-nɛ/kɔ-nɛ** ‘arm or hand/arms or hands’ and **ka-kpa/kɔ-kpa** ‘leg/legs.’ Finally, Gender VIII, 1/8, is also made up of two nouns, **o-tita/a-tita** ‘corn/corns’ and **o-kuɔlɛ/o-kuɔlɛ** ‘running stone/running stone.’

5.3. SUMMARY

Table 5 shows some of the semantic domains associated with gender in **Sɛlɛ**.

Gender	Pairs	Frequency	Prefixes	Semantics
I	1/2	26.6%	o-/ɔ-; ba-	Human terms (identity, kinship).
			∅- ; ba-	Mostly derived human referents, some animals, and borrowed nouns.
II	5/8	28.7%	di-/li-/ni-/le-/le- ; a-	Animal offspring; body parts, food and other things with round/circular, oval or concave shape.
III	7/8	10.1%	ko-/kɔ-/ku-; a-	Long things with flat surfaces, farm and farm-related concepts
IV	1/4	15.7%	o-/ɔ-; se-/sɛ-/si-	Domain of some human experience, some plants (edible and non-edible)
V	3/6	16.4%	ka- ; n-	Most external body parts, mass nouns, location/places
VI	3/7	1.1%	ka-; ko-/kɔ-/ku-	Diminutives. The noun for ‘fish’ and ‘ant’
VII	7/6	0.7%	ko-/kɔ-/ku- ; n-	Limbs: hand and leg
VIII	1/8	0.7%	o-/ɔ- ; a-	Running stone and corn

Table 5. The semantics of the genders

There are three productive genders in the noun class system: Gender I, whose productivity is characterized by borrowing, and Genders II and VI, which are characterized by derivation. Gender II is productive in the derivation of animal offspring nouns, and Gender VI is the diminutive gender.

6. GENDER SHIFT AND NOUN CLASS PREFIX MODIFICATION

6.1 GENDER SHIFT

Sɛlɛɛ nouns change their gender to encode diminutive meaning and also to encode a part-whole relationship of the referents when the diminutive suffixes **-bi/bii**, **-mii**, **-ɛ/-e** and **-nyi** are attached to the nouns. Gender II and VI are very productive in derivation of diminutives. Gender II can only co-occur with the diminutive suffix **-bi/-bii**. Consider examples (48b); (49b), singular forms and (48c); (49c), plural forms; and (50), which are all Gender II.

(48) a.	foso CL1.sheep 'sheep'	b.	le-foso-bi CL5-sheep-DIM 'lamb'	c.	a-foso-bi CL8-sheep-DIM 'lambs'
(49) a.	kɔ̃du CL1.banana 'banana'	b.	le-kɔ̃du-bi CL5-banana-DIM 'finger of banana'	c.	a-kɔ̃du-bi CL8-banana-DIM 'fingers of banana'
(50) a.	n-fusu CL6-rat 'rats'	b.	a-fusu-bi CL8-rat-DIM 'small rats'		

A shift to Gender II mostly expresses small size and part-whole relationships, as shown in (49). When the base noun is an animal referent, it encodes offspring, as in (49), as well as small size, as in (50). Notice also that the original prefix of the noun disappears when there is a shift.

Gender VI can combine with all the suffixes. Apart from expressing small size, a shift to Gender VI also assigns the referent a derogatory undertone. Observe the examples below.

(51) a.	tie CL1.goat 'goat'	b.	ka-tie-bi CL3-goat-DIM 'tiny goat'
(52) a.	se CL1.monkey 'monkey'	b.	ka-se-mii CL3-monkey-DIM 'tiny monkey'
(53) a.	a-yo CL8-house 'houses'	b.	ko-yo-e CL7-house-DIM 'tiny houses'
(54) a.	kɔ̃-nɛɛ CL7-hand 'hand'	b.	ka-nɛɛ-nyi CL3-hand-DIM 'tiny hand'

Gender shift with suffixation may also determine stem modification as in (55) and (56) below.

- | | | | |
|---------|----------------|----|-------------------|
| (55) a. | kəkəkə | b. | ka-kəkəkə |
| | CL1.fowl | | CL3-fowl.DIM |
| | ‘fowl’ | | ‘chick/tiny fowl’ |
| (56) a. | ko-woso | b. | ka-woesee |
| | CL7-tree | | CL3-tree.DIM |
| | ‘tree’ | | ‘stick’ |

Notice that the diminutive form is different from the stem. It is arguable that the diminutive suffix **-e/-ε** triggered a change in the stem of the nouns.

The diminutive suffix **-bi** is the most productive among the suffixes and may be used to encode diminution or to express small size without gender shift.

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------|----|--------------------|
| (57) a. | o-suətə | b. | o-suətə-bi |
| | CL1-man | | CL1-man-DIM |
| | ‘man’ | | ‘boy’ |
| (58) a. | di-bulaa | b. | di-bulaa-bi |
| | CL5-onion | | CL5-onion-DIM |
| | ‘onion’ | | ‘small onion’ |

6.2 CLASS PREFIX MODIFICATION

The noun class prefix can be modified by lengthening the vowel of the prefix. This often occurs in stative locative constructions. The example sentences are taken from the responses to an SSPQ questionnaire.

- (59) SSPQ_07
- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| kandie | n-te | kaa-sə |
| CL1.lanten | LSM-lie | CL3.PP-ground |
| ‘A lantern is lying on the ground.’ | | |

- (60) SSPQ_10
- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| o-kũ | n-si | lɛɛ-bɛɛsi-bii |
| CL1-rope | LSM-sit | CL5.PP-pan-DIM |
| ‘A rope is in a bowl.’ | | |

Note that although an alternative construction with the preposition **di** ‘in/on/at’ exists, there is a strong preference for speakers to lengthen the vowel of the prefix instead of using the preposition **di** with CV- prefixes.

- (61) SSPQ_09
- | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| a. | o-kũ | n-tũ | di | o-yoyie |
| | CL1-thread | LSM-thread | PP | CL1-wall |
| ‘A rope is in a wall.’ | | | | |

b.	o-kũ	n-tũ	loo-yoyie
	CL1-thread	LSM-thread	CL1.PP-wall
	'A rope is in a wall.'		

In the case of V- prefixes, speakers have two choices: (61a) and (61b). In the SSPQ data, only (61a) was found. (61b) might suggest to us that the class 1 prefix **o-/ɔ-**, which was shown earlier, also had an initial consonant /l/.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have shown that Sɛlɛ has eight individual noun classes distinguished by their morphosyntactic and semantic clues. Each class has a set of agreement markers whose targets include: determiners, numeral quantifiers, interrogative pronouns, certain adjectives and the verb. Pairs of singular and plural classes form genders. There are eight genders, five of which are regular, and three that are inoperative. Although the genders have certain semantic features and cultural undertones that correlate with them, the motivation for the assignment of a majority of nouns to their respective genders is quite arbitrary. Class 1A happens to be the only one with a definite semantic category, viz. animacy. Gender shifts can also be semantically constrained: nouns change their gender when more marked interpretations of their referents are entailed. Sɛlɛ noun classes seem at the moment quite vibrant. Nonetheless, the infrequent use of the anaphoric agreement marker might suggest otherwise. On the other hand, the noun class systems of closely related languages such as Tafi and Tutrugbu are on the verge of decay.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	IDEO	ideophone
2	second person	INT	intensifier
3	third person	LOC	locative
ADJ	adjective	N	noun
ADJR	adjectivizer	NEG	negation
ATR	advanced tongue root	NP	noun phrase
C	consonant	OBJ	object
CL	class marker	PART	particle
CONJ	conjunction	PL	plural
COP	copular	POSS	possessive
DEM	demonstrative	PP	preposition
DET	determiner	PRF	perfect
DIM	diminutive	PROG	progressive
DO	direct object	QUANT	quantifier
DP	distant past	REL	relative pronoun
FUT	future	RP	recent past
HAB	habitual	SG	singular

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