

## **Reconstructing the Niger-Congo personal pronouns**

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*Though the genetic relationship between the Niger-Congo (NC) languages was first proposed by Diedrich Westermann in 1927 and later verified by Joseph Greenberg in 1963, the NC linguistics still lacks reliable comparative morphology works. While some areas of Proto-NC morphology have been successfully researched and reconstructed (noun class system, some verbal affixes, basic numerals), personal marking is yet to be analysed in the comparative aspect.*

*It is often claimed that the Proto-NC system of personal pronouns cannot be correctly restored because of the lack of reliable data and ongoing discussions about the internal classification of the family. However, we argue that NC personal marking can be reconstructed, and must be reconstructed in order to make a significant step forward in African historical linguistics. There is a number of prerequisites ready for this.*

*In the past few decades, the number of descriptions of various NC languages has increased enormously, allowing the necessary data to be in hands of a comparative researcher. We have plenty of synchronic description works on the languages of all the families composing NC, so it has become possible to analyse personal pronominal systems in the great variety of tongues. Moreover, a number of reliable works have been published on reconstructing the person marking on group level (Bantu, Ijoid, Mande, Atlantic, etc.) and subgroup level. Such level of knowledge makes the reconstruction possible: just like in the Indo-European linguistics of the 19th century, the lack of Armenian or Tocharian data did not prevent from reconstructing the Proto-language pronominal system.*

*A relative consensus was reached as to the internal classification of the NC family. The remaining (albeit numerous) disputable issues of sub-branches cannot spoil the whole picture.*

*Lexical data and reconstructed Proto-NC corpus, though not yet generated a solid phonetic system for the proto-language, allows to trace and doublecheck some regular phonetic correspondences within the pronominal data. All that makes the perspective of personal marking reconstruction viable.*

*Since personal pronouns have always been one of the most stable elements of morphology, relatively resistant to borrowing, they are a natural means of historical analysis.*

*Therefore, we now aim at creating a thorough research on origins and development of personal marking in NC languages, and reconstructing, albeit tentatively, the original proto-NC system of personal marking, which is to appear in 2009.*

*For that, strict comparative method will be used, combining both internal and external data comparison. We will start our research from the bottom of the family tree first trying to get results for chronologically newer branches such as Benue-Congo and Gur-Adamaua, then unifying our results on the Volta-Congo level, going further up to Atlantic-Congo and then including Kordofanian which seems to be the first stock to drop off from the NC proto-language.*

*Both the independent personal pronouns and the bound personal affixes will be used for the analysis. We will widely use typological data for reconfirming the developments within the person marking systems, including analogical changes, which are extremely widespread in pronominal paradigms. Borrowed data will be identified, which is also a common place in the pronoun systems of the languages of Africa.*

*Initially, it seems obvious that the NC proto-language used two series of personal pronouns well attested in the descendant languages as subject and non-subject sets. This distinction is still preserved in most branches, complicated by further generations of series such as possessive and emphatic (or 'stressed').*