Strange kinds of nominal classification in some West African languages
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There are two types of nominal classification widely known in African languages: gender and noun classes. The first is typical for Afroasian and Nilo-Saharan macrofamilies (as well as Khoisan languages), the second for Niger-Congo and Kordofanian. But among the languages of the both waste areas, some have deviant types of nominal grammar, such as (also well known) cases of genderless or classless language systems. The present paper is devoted to yet another kind of deviation from typical gender or noun-class grammar. There are a few languages which demonstrate two rare for Africa kinds of nominal classification: one is the so-called "classificative verbs" and the other – classifiers. The first of these structural types is exemplified in the paper by data from Dogon languages where a covert class of the nominal object (such as [-flat, +hard] like, for example, 'stick' vs. [+flat, -hard] like 'paper') is expressed in transitive verba actionis (e.g. "to break off" vs. "to tear off") by the stem modification. The other structural type may be illustrated by Ngyemboon examples (a Grassfield language, Cameroon) where two systems of noun classification co-exist side by side – usual noun classes (though undergoing structural destruction and simplification) and classifiers which are used in numeral constructions. Strange for Africa, these kinds of nominal classification are not so rare outside the African continent: classificative verbs are quite common in some groups of North-American Indian languages, whereas classifiers are widely represented in the South-East Asian languages.