

Abstract HLK conference Lund:

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Title: Noun classification in Bainouk (Gubaher)
- rare classes, suffixes and nominalised verbs

The Bainouk languages, a cluster of so far undescribed varieties scattered throughout the Casamance region of Senegal, feature systems of noun classification that are exceptional in terms of complexity in more than one way: the surprisingly high number of agreement classes, the presence of plural suffixes in an otherwise prefixing system, the number of irregularities and classes only manifested by very few items and the assignment of verb stems to different noun classes. Though rare on a worldwide scale, these phenomena have been observed in several Atlantic languages, but due to large gaps in the description of smaller languages of this family new data is urgently needed in order to adequately discuss these topics. Previous analyses have sought to explain the unusual features of the system resorting to language contact in combination with phonological processes, whereas more extensive data suggests that the emergence of suffixed plurals in Bainouk can possibly be traced back to animacy issues. Similar observations have been made for some South Atlantic languages, which also have suffixed noun class markers. Another intriguing research question in connection with the noun class system involves the use of class prefixes in nominalisation of verbs: almost all existing prefixes can be used for that purpose, some verbs even being compatible with more than one prefix. I will provide examples for these processes and discuss several plausible hypotheses. The data presented focuses mainly on data from Bainouk Gubaher, spoken by the less than 1000 inhabitants of the village Djibonker. Further examples from the varieties of Gubelor, Gunyaamolo and Gujaaxer, equally undocumented varieties of Bainouk, all recently gathered during a fieldtrip to southern Senegal, will be provided as additional evidence.