



Cross-Categorical Classification. Nouns and Verbs in Eegimaa (Sagna 2022)

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Serge Sagna. 2022. *Cross-Categorial Classification. Nouns and Verbs in Eegimaa*. Empirical Volume 60 in the series Empirical Approaches to Language Typology [EALT]. Berlin/Boston : Walter de Gruyter GmbH. xxiii+ 268 pp. 133,95€.

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Reviewed by Olivier Bonde  lle, (independent researcher).

This book deals with the noun and verb classification system of Eegimaa, an African language of the J  ola group (Niger-Congo > Atlantic > J  ola). The book consists of 8 chapters and 2 appendices.

Chapter 1 ("Overt verb classification in spoken language: an introduction and a typology") provides a critical review of verb classification systems, summarised in Table 1 on p. 24. The author uses McGregor's four criteria (2002: 18-22 cited) to identify the marking of verbal classification: combination of lexemes and classificatory elements, obligation of this combination to express quantification, constraints on the selection of classificatory elements, possible polyfunctionality of classificatory elements. The application of these criteria leads the author to recognise that the non-finite forms of verbs in Eegimaa are marked in the same way as nouns, by class prefixes. The author also points out that some of these prefixes in this language can alternate in combination with stems, leading to three situations: noun and verb have a common stem but different prefixes, noun and verb have a stem and a prefix in common, and finally different non-finite verb forms can result from alternating prefixes combined with a common stem.

Chapter 2 (Nouns, verbs and polycategorial stems in Eegimaa) provides a morphological analysis of nouns and verbs in Eegimaa. This leads the author to consider that there are 3 distinct categories: the noun, the verb and the verbo-nominal. He characterises the noun by its strict position as an argument and by its compatibility with a restricted list of affixes (class prefixes and possessive and quantifier suffixes); the verb by its compatibility with other affixes (TAM) and by its position as a predicate, with non-finite forms generally requiring the class prefix e-; and the verbo-nominal, which functions as both a noun and a verb, with the particularity that non-finite forms are compatible with several class prefixes.

Chapter 3 ("The Eegimaa noun class/gender system") analyses the morphosyntactic properties of Eegimaa noun class and agreement systems, distinguishing between morphological classes and agreement classes. The author adopts this approach, which is uncommon in the description of Niger-Congo languages, because he assumes that it is the best way of accounting for the agreement discordances triggered by lexical hybrids in Eegimaa (b  -jur 'young woman': 99). According to the author, the agreement discordances manifest a multiple morphosyntactic classification with interactions between number and gender, making it meaningful to categorise these entities at several levels.

Chapter 4 ("Non-finite verbs and their classification") begins by discussing the distinctions between finite and non-finite verb forms in Eegimaa, which involve

morphological, syntactic and semantic/pragmatic features, summarised in Table 14 p. 107. The author examines their distributional properties and shows that non-finite verbs have both the nominal property of combining with nominal class markers, and the verbal properties of governing an object and conveying assertions. On this basis, he considers that non-finite verbs constitute a mixed category. He then counts 15 morphological classes of non-finite verbs, according to their compatibility with class prefixes, which he summarises in Table 17 on p.129. He points out that the only class markers not involved in the classification of non-finite verbs are those used to classify nouns denoting humans (cl1 a- and cl2 bug-) and locative class markers (cl 13 ti-, 14 d- and 15 n-). The author then introduces what will be examined in the following chapters (6 to 8): the semantic motivations of verb classification, and the possibility of combining certain non-finite verbs with several class prefixes.

Chapter 5 ("Noun class semantics") is devoted to highlighting the semantic motivations of morphological classes and agreement classes. After presenting the various semantic parameters used in the different nominal classification systems, the author uses the frequency of noun distribution in morphological classes and the association of specific genders with referent properties to show the semantic bases of the classification system in Eegimaa. Frequency allows the author to establish that morphological classes 1 (a-) and 6 (ju- ~ ji-) respectively classify nouns denoting humans and small entities. To show a semantic association with a gender, the author relies on borrowings from French and Wolof, or on the combination of class markers with the fictive radical -nde "thingamajig", agreement discrepancies and prefix alternations. At the end of this analysis, it emerges that humanity is associated with gender I (morphological classes a-/gu-), smallness with gender VI (morphological classes ju-/mu-), and roundness with gender IV (morphological classes fu-/gu- or ga-/gu-), large size and pejorative meaning in gender V (morphological classes gu-/u- or ga-/gu-), and collective and diminutive meanings in one of the morphological classes of gender III (a-/gu- or bu-/u-).

Chapter 6 ("Semantics of overt verb classes") argues that Eegimaa verb forms with class prefixes are classified in a similar way to nominal forms. The generalisations proposed are based on an examination of the common properties of the events that verbs of a given class of overt verbs denote, and how they differ from those of other classes. The author stresses that knowledge of speakers' experience of the world is essential for understanding the underlying semantic motivations for the classification of verbs and the corresponding categorisation of events. As with nouns, the marker e- is the most frequent and often alternates with other markers. The author then details the marking of verbal pluractionality: su-/si- marks iteration; bu-/bi- marks reciprocal actions between participants or collections of objects; ba- marks multiple or repetitive actions. The author acknowledges that it is difficult to separate these last two classes, but points out that this is also the case for nominal classification where these two morphological classes belong to the same gender of the collective. He assumes that these two classes of non-finite verbs are related and belong to the same conceptual domain. The parallels between nominal and

verbal domains are detailed: thus, *mu-/mi-* and *ma-* mark, among other things, the massive in the nominal domain and the stative or unbounded in the verbal domain. The author also acknowledges that some parallels are more difficult to establish, such as that between the depreciative in the verbal domain and the collective in the nominal domain with the marker *fa-*, or that between plurality in the nominal domain and dynamicity in the verbal domain with the marker *gu-*, and to a lesser extent that between the durativity of events and the extent of entities with the marker *ga-*. From a socio-cultural point of view, the author establishes a link between the nominal and verbal morphological classes *ñu-* and *ña-* which mark social organisations, and between the morphological class *u-* of the plural of the collective nominal or pejorative with the mini class of verbal forms (4 elements) which have this marker *u-* as a prefix and which could convey the idea of grievance (pejorative event). Finally, the author stresses that although the categorisation of events denoted by verbs uses aspectual properties such as telicity or dynamicity, it is more specific and is also based on cultural motivations.

Chapter 7 ("Event delimitation: NCP alternations on non-finite verbs") focuses on prefix alternations on verb stems. The author points out that the marker *e-* is systematically attested when there is an alternation. Using examples, he proposes that the degree of transitivity of the verb is a factor that determines the class prefix. According to him, the prefix *e-* marks the highest degree since it is frequently associated with the individuation of the object, while *ba-* and *ga-* mark less transitivity insofar as they are attested with objects in the definite plural, and sometimes indefinite. The author nevertheless points out that more systematic and context-specific studies would be needed to confirm the generality of his own observations.

Chapter 8 ("Conclusion") summarises and synthesises the contents of the book.

Appendix A presents the phylogenetic classification of Eegimaa and the location of its use.

Appendix B gives an overview of its phonology, which attests to a double vowel harmony, one [\pm ATR] and the other which targets only high vowels, and explains the allomorphic variation between the prefixes [i] and [u] on class prefixes. The author also points out that the frequent gemination/de gemination or prenasalization processes can be explained by mora preservation strategies and the non-violation of the coda condition, which stipulates that a coda internal to the stem is only allowed in certain contexts.

One of the main claims of this book is that Eegimaa uses the same morphosyntactic mechanism to classify non-finite verbs and nouns, namely the prefixation of morphemes onto stems. After a detailed study of this system, the author argues firstly that it is motivated in part by semantic factors, and secondly that one of its axes is an analogy between the nominal and verbal domains. It is this main thesis that I evaluate in this review.

This book presents an innovative analysis of the classification systems for noun classes and verbs in Eegimaa, describing morphological classes and agreement classes in

turn. The author is right to emphasise that this is a departure from traditional presentations that usually disqualify one or other descriptive approach. The author's approach has undoubted advantages. The first of these is to be able to explain class prefix alternations on nominal stems such as --*muse* (table 20: 155).

The second advantage is that this fascinating fact of the classification of Vs is dealt with and explained by the same system of class prefixation, and an analogy between N and V is highlighted, particularly in the areas of quantification (Tables 25 and 26 : 208) and individuation (Tables 27 and 28 : 225).

The third advantage, which is a consequence of the first two, is that the categorisation of entities and events is multi-level, and that the study of class alternations makes it possible to extract semantic associations of genders and characteristics of entities and events (gender III and collectivity or repetitiveness, gender IV and form, genders V-VI and massiveness or stativity). It should be emphasised that the author makes a clear distinction between the classification of linguistic elements (nouns and verbs) and the categorisation of extra-linguistic things (entities and events), and that he therefore recognises that these semantic associations remain limited in scope at the level of the lexicon.

This book marks an important stage in our understanding of the classification systems for nouns and verbs in the languages of this Senegambian area. Not only does it highlight the categorisation of entities and events at several levels and the structural analogy of nouns and verbs, but it also provides a better understanding of the classification and categorisation systems of other languages at different levels of similarity: see references in the text for closely related languages such as Balant and Jóola which also use class prefixes and also (Creissels & Pozdniakov 2015), or others for more distant languages of the same Atlantic family such as Wolof which categorise entities and events using different but probably related strategies (Bondéelle 2009), according to semantic and logical principles (Jackendoff 1991, Filip 2001).

A few editorial errors should be noted: the abbreviation REFL for reflexive in the table on p. xxiii occurs twice; the genus *tu-* noted XII should logically be noted VIII in table 12 on p. xxiii. 82.

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