

NOUN CLASSES OF THE BEBOID LANGUAGES

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1. LOCATION OF THE BEBOID LANGUAGES

The Beboid languages¹ are located in the Northwest Province of Cameroon between 6°20' and 6°50' north and between 10°10' and 10°40' east. They are surrounded by the Tiv and the Esimbi to the west, by Jukunoid languages to the north, and by Grassfields Bantu languages to the south and east. Since these languages are almost completely unknown we will mention the names and locations of the villages where they are spoken before looking at their noun class systems.

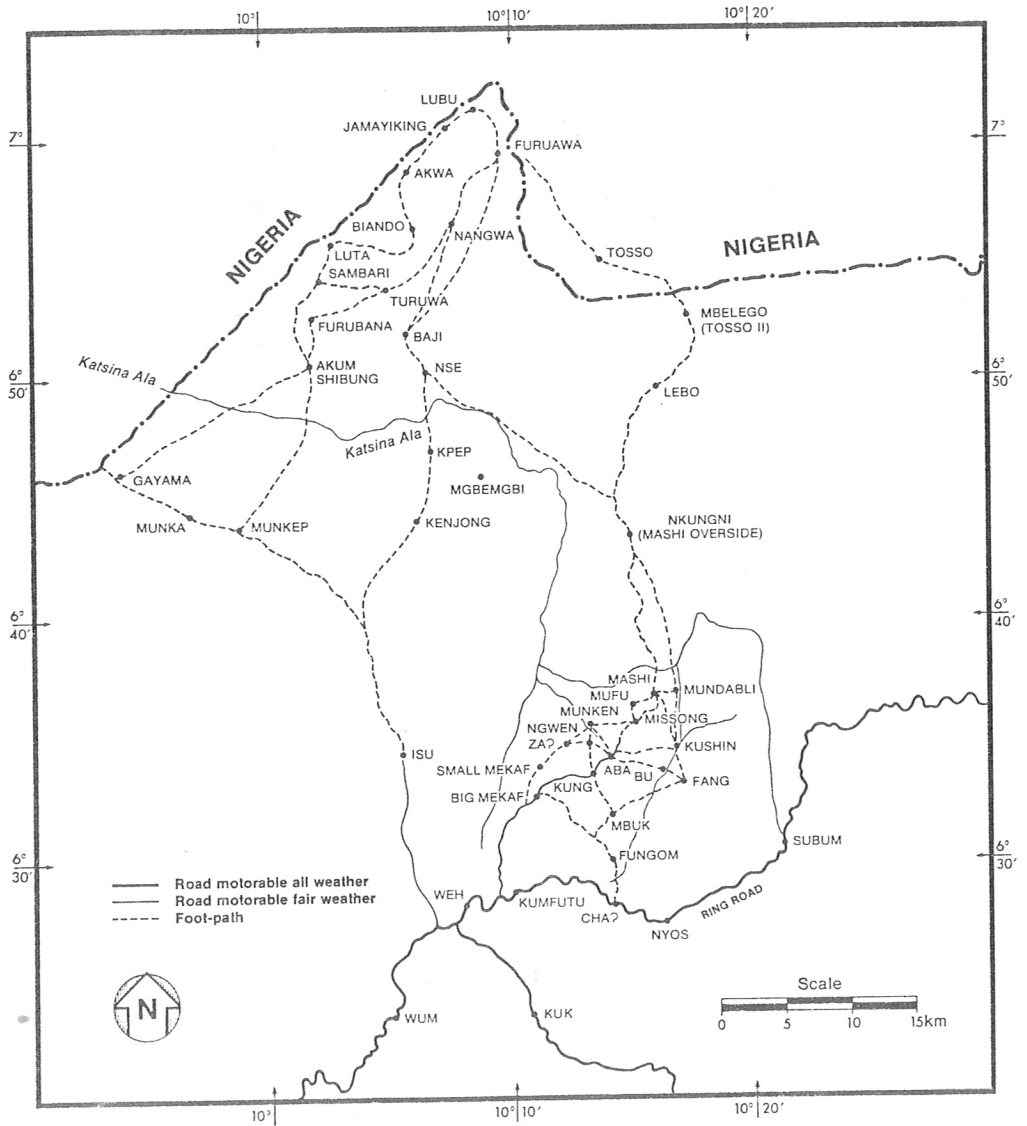
The Beboid languages are divided into two geographical zones: the western zone (Map 1) and the eastern zone (Map 2). The area located between these two zones is uninhabited. The subclassification presented in Table 1 and Table 2 is based on native speakers' impressions about mutual intelligibility.²

TABLE 1: *Subclassification of western Beboid languages*^{3,4}

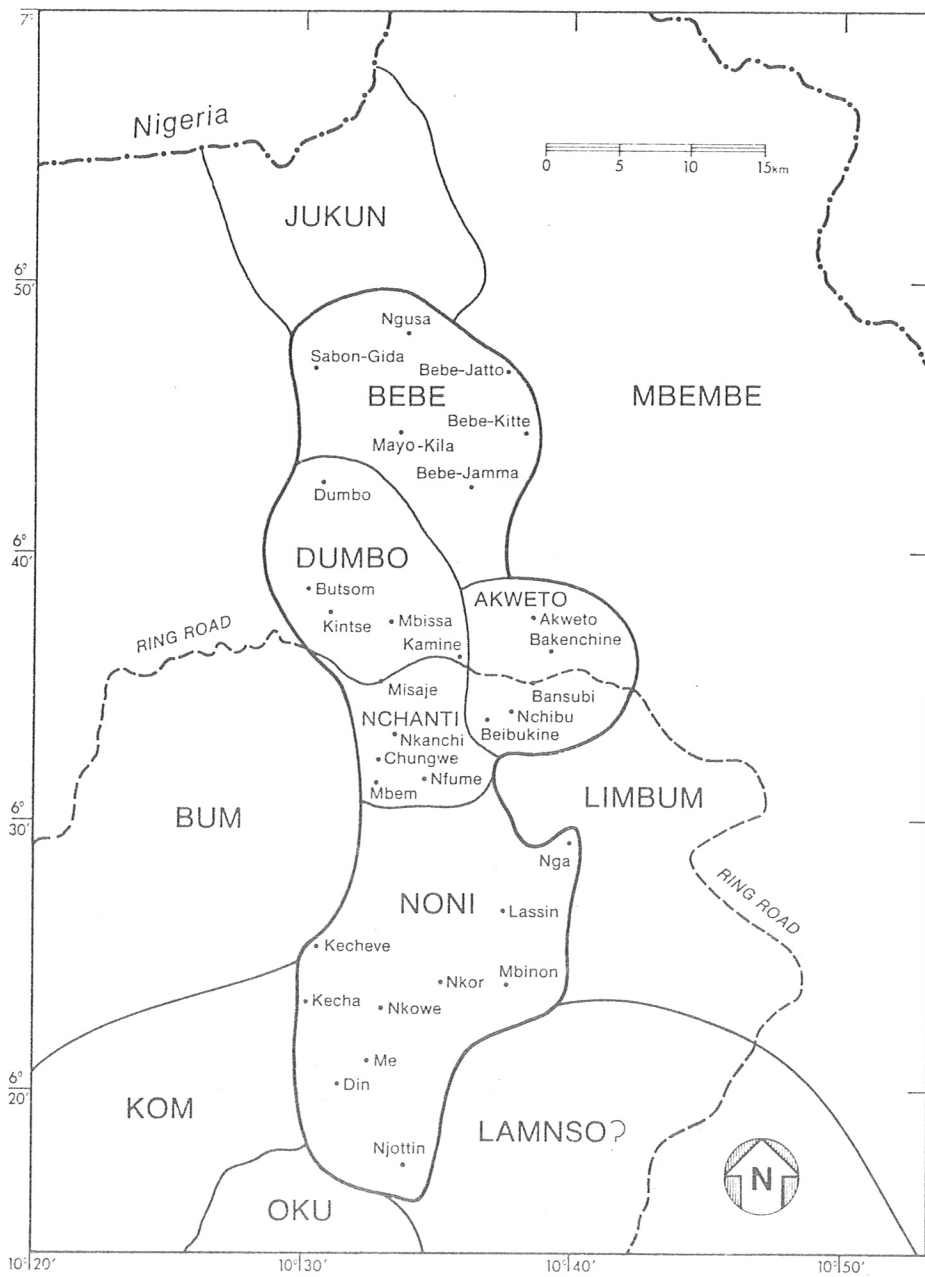
| Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 ⁵ | Group 4 |
|-------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
| Big Mekaf | Bu | Missong | Koshin |
| Small Mekaf | Za | Munken | Fang |
| Mashi | Ngwen | Aba | |
| Nkungi | | Mufu | |
| Mbelego | | Mundabli | |
| Tosso | | | |
| Nse | | | |

TABLE 2: *Subclassification of eastern Beboid languages*⁶

| Group 1 ⁷ | Group 2 | Group 3 (=Nchanti) | Group 4 (=Noni) | Group 5 |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Bebe-Jatto | Dumbo | Misaje | Nkor ⁸ | Akweto |
| Bebe-Kitte | Kwej | Nkanchi | Nga | Bakenchine |
| Ye | Butsom | Chungwe | Lassin | Bansubi |
| Fung | Kintse | Nfume | Mbinon | Nchibu |
| Sabon Gida | Mbissa | Mbem | Kecheve | Beibukine |
| Mayo Kila | Kamine | | Kecha | Bagem |
| Ngusa | Ndon | | Nkowe, Me | |
| | | | Njottin, Din | |
| | | | Mbin, Dom | |



Map 1. The western Bebid area.



Map 2. The eastern Beboid area.

What we propose to call the western Beboïd zone in this paper has been called the Fungom area in the colonial documents. This is unfortunate for language classification since the language spoken in the village of Fungom itself does not belong to the Bebe group but is a Ring language of the Western Grassfields group. The name Misaje has been used in the literature to refer to some of the languages of the eastern zone. Both because Misaje itself is a fairly recent settlement and because the languages mentioned in this paper cover a larger area than what is usually meant by the Misaje area, we prefer to refer to these languages as the Eastern Beboïd languages.

2. NOUN CLASS SYSTEM OF PROTO-BEBOÏD (PBb) AND EIGHT DESCENDANTS

We will first present the reconstructed noun class system for Proto-Beboïd and then the reflexes of this system in eight Beboïd languages. When the correspondence between PBb and Proto-Bantu (PB) noun classes is clear, we shall use the customary PB class numbers to characterize PBb classes. In three cases however, such correspondences could not be established. Consequently, the numbers 25, 26 and 27, not used in PB, are proposed.

The following classes are reconstructed for PBb.

TABLE 3.

| <i>Singular classes</i> | <i>Noun prefix</i> | <i>Concord</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | u- | w ^h |
| 3 | u- | w ^h |
| 5 | i- | ly ^h |
| 7 | ki- | k ^h |
| 9 | i- | y ^h |
| 12 | ka- | k ^h |
| 14 | bu- | bw ^h |
| 19 | fi- | fy ^h |
| <i>Plural classes</i> | | |
| 2 | ba- | b ^h |
| 4 | i- | y ^h |
| 6 | a- | aw ^h |
| 8 | bi- | by ^h |
| 10 | i- | y ^h |
| 13 | to- | t ^h |
| 25 | maN- | m ^h |
| 26 | muN- | mw ^h |
| 27 | ki- | k ^h |
| <i>Single classes</i> | | |
| 6a | m- | m ^h |
| 14 | bu- | bw ^h |

The genders are formed by the following pairings: 1/2, 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, 9/10, 12/8, 14/25, 19/26, 3/13, 5/13, 3/27 and 5/27.

The noun class prefixes and concords are now given for the following eight Beboïd languages in Table 4: 1. Mekaf. 2. Koshin. 3. Missong. 4. Bu. 5. Noni. 6. Nchanti. 7. Akweto. 8. Bebe-Jatto.

TABLE 4. Noun prefixes and concords from eight Beboïd languages

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|--|
| 1. <i>Mekaf</i> | | | noun affixes | | concords | |
| 1/2 | ∅- | bu- (-bə) | w ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 3/6 | ∅ ^w - | | w ^ˈ | | | |
| 5/6 | ∅- | -ŋ | w ^ˈ | n ^ˈ | | |
| 9/10 | ∅ ^ˈ - | ∅ ^ˈ - | y ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 12/8 | a- | bi- | k ^ˈ | b ^ˈ y ^ˈ | | |
| 14/26 | u- | m- (-m) | w ^ˈ | m ^ˈ | | |
| 19/26 | ʃfi- | | ʃf ^ˈ | | | |
| 6a | m- | | m ^ˈ | | | |
| 2. <i>Koshin</i> | | | noun affixes | | concords | |
| 1/2 | ∅- | bo- | w ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 3/4 & 3/13 | ∅ ^w - | ∅ ^y - | w ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 5/13 | ∅- | to- | w ^ˈ | t ^ˈ | | |
| 7/8 | kə- | bə- | ts ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 9/10 | ∅ ^ˈ - | ∅ ^ˈ - | y ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 19/6a | fi- | n- | f ^ˈ | m ^ˈ | | |
| 6a | n- | | m ^ˈ | | | |
| 14=8 | bə- | | b ^ˈ | | | |
| 3. <i>Missong</i> | | | noun affixes | | concords | |
| 1/2 | ∅, u- | ba- | w ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 3/4, 3/6, 3/27 | u- | i- | w ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 5/6, 5/27 | i- | a- | y ^ˈ | w ^ˈ | | |
| 7/8 | ki- | bi- | k ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 9/10, 9/6, 9/27 | i- | i- | y ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 14/6a | bu- | an- | b ^ˈ | m ^ˈ | | |
| 19/26 | fi- | mUN- | f ^ˈ | m ^w ^ˈ | | |
| 6a | an- | | m ^ˈ or am ^ˈ | m ^ˈ or am ^ˈ | | |
| | | 27. ki- -lə | | k ^ˈ | | |
| 4. <i>Bu</i> | | | noun affixes | | concords | |
| 1/2 | ∅- | bə- | w ^ˈ | b ^ˈ | | |
| 3/4, 3/27 | ∅ ^w - | ∅ ^y - | w ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| 5/6, 5/27 | ∅(y)- | ∅- | w ^ˈ | y ^ˈ | | |
| | | 27. kə- -tə | | k ^ˈ | | |

| | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|------|
| 7/8 | kə- ————— bə- | kʰ | bʰ |
| 9/10 | ∅- ————— ∅ʰ- | yʰ | yʰ |
| 19/26 | fə- ————— mə- | fʰ | mʰ |
| 6a | N- | mʰ | |
| 14 or 8 | bə- | bʰ | |
| 5. <i>Noni</i> | | | |
| | <i>noun affixes</i> | <i>concord</i> s | |
| 1/2 | ∅- ————— bə- | wʰ | bʰ |
| 3/4 & 3/27 | ∅w- ————— ∅- | wʰ | yʰ |
| 5/6 & 5/27 | -e ————— ε- | dʰ | εyʰ |
| | | | dʰyʰ |
| 7/8 | ke- ————— ji- | kʰ | bʰyʰ |
| 9/10 | ∅- ————— bi- | yʰ | yʰ |
| 12/8 | ∅ʰ- ————— ∅ʰ- | kʰ | |
| 14/25 | ε- | kʰwʰ | mʰ |
| 19/26 | bvu- ————— mɔN- -m | fʰyʰ | mʰwʰ |
| 6a | fe- ————— mun- -m | mʰ | |
| | m- -m | | |
| 6. <i>Nohanti</i> | | | |
| | <i>noun affixes</i> | <i>concord</i> s | |
| 1/2 | ∅(w)- ————— bə- | wʰ | bʰ |
| 3/4 & 3/27 | ∅w- ————— ∅- | wʰ | yʰ |
| 5/6 & 5/27 | ∅- ————— a- | çʰ | aʰwʰ |
| | | | çʰyʰ |
| 7/8 | ki- ————— bi- | kʰ | bʰyʰ |
| 9/10 | ∅- ————— ∅ʰ- | yʰ | yʰ |
| 14/25 | bu- ————— man- | bʰwʰ | mʰ |
| 19/26 | fi- ————— mun- | fʰyʰ | mʰwʰ |
| 6a | N- | mʰ | |
| 7. <i>Akweto</i> | | | |
| | <i>noun affixes</i> | <i>concord</i> s | |
| 1/2 | ∅- ————— bε- | wʰ | bʰ |
| 3/4 | ∅w- ————— ∅- | wʰ | yʰ |
| 5/4 | ∅- | çʰ | |
| 7/8 | ki- ————— bi- | kʰ | bʰyʰ |
| 9/10 | ∅- ————— ∅ʰ- | yʰ | yʰ |
| 14/25 | bu- ————— mε(N)- | bʰwʰ | mʰ |
| 19/26 | fi- ————— mu- | fʰyʰ | mʰwʰ |
| 6a | N- | mʰ | |
| 14 | bu- | bʰwʰ | |
| 8. <i>Bebe-Jatto</i> | | | |
| | <i>noun affixes</i> | <i>concord</i> s | |
| 1/2 | ∅- ————— bʌ- | ngʷʰ | bʰ |
| 3/6 | ∅w- ————— ∅- | wʰ | |
| 5/6 | ∅- ————— ∅- | lʰ | ŋʰ |
| 7/8 | kə- ————— bi- | kʰ | bʰ |
| 9/10 | ∅- ————— ∅ʰ- | njʰ | yʰ |
| 12/8 | ∅- | kʰ | |
| 19/26 | fə- ————— mun- | fʰ | mʰwʰ |
| 6a | m- | mʰ | |
| 14 | bu- | bʰ | |

3. GENERALIZATIONS BY GENDER

*Gender 1/2: *u-/*ba-*. Although Missong is the only Beboid language which has retained the vowel prefix *u- for class 1, this prefix has in some cases left traces of its existence by labializing the initial consonant of class 1 noun stems, as seen in the following Nchanti examples:

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|
| (1) Nchanti | <i>sg. cl. 1</i> | <i>pl. cl. 2</i> | |
| (∅ ^w)-ba- | čwe | bàčē | 'witch(es)' |
| | mfwà | bàmfà | 'slave(s)' |
| | kwēsē | bākēsè | 'woman/women' |

The tone of the concord is low for class 1 and high for class 2.

*Gender 3/4: *u-/*i-*. The class 3 prefix *u- has disappeared in all the Beboid languages except Missong. In all of the other languages we find traces of labialization on the initial consonant of the stem. In Mekaf and Bebe-Jatto class 4 has merged with class 6. *i- is retained in Missong, but it has been dropped in Koshin and Bu after palatalizing the initial consonant of the stem. Examples from Nchanti in (2) show the effects of labialization in class 3 without palatalization in class 4. Examples under (3) from Koshin illustrate both labialization in class 3 and palatalization in class 4.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| (2) Nchanti | <i>singular class 3</i> | <i>plural class 4</i> | |
| (∅ ^w -/∅ ^y -) | g ^w ḡḡ | gḡḡ | 'bamboo' |
| | k ^w ḡḡ | kḡḡ | 'firewood' |
| | g ^w ē | gē | 'hill' |
| | k ^w ēē | kēē | 'moon' |
| | b ^w ēḡ | bēḡ | 'mosquito' |
| | g ^w éḡ | géḡ | 'fishing net' |
| | g ^w ḡḡ | gḡḡ | 'root' |
| | s ^w ḡḡ | sḡḡ | 'tadpole' |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| (3) Koshin | <i>singular class 3</i> | <i>plural class 4</i> | |
| (∅ ^w -/∅ ^y -) | gbēà | dzāà | 'house' |
| | gbán | dzán | 'branch' |
| | gbḡḡ | dzḡḡ | 'root' |
| | gbḡ | dzḡ | 'rope' |
| | kpēn | tsēn | 'firewood' |
| | kpḡ | tsḡ | 'pot' |
| | wí | jí | 'eye' |
| | wín | jín | 'leaf, tooth' |

*Gender 5/6: *i-/*a-*. As in the previous gender, Missong has been the most conservative Beboid language preserving both the singular and the plural vowel prefixes. In some rare cases we find traces of palatalization of the initial consonant of the stem caused by the *i- prefix as in Bu b^yēḡ/bēḡ 'breast'. In Akweto class 6 has merged with class 4 and in Koshin class 5 is paired exclusively with class 13 to-. Noni has a suffix -e in class 5 as seen in (4) (Hyman 1977; in preparation).

| | | | |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| (4) Noni | <i>singular class 5</i> | <i>plural class 6</i> | |
| (-e/ε-) | tēm-é | ē-tēm | 'axe' |
| | lēm-é | ē-lēm | 'tongue' |

| | | |
|--------|---------|--------------|
| gvūn-è | ē-gvūn̄ | 'feather' |
| mbēn̄è | ē-mbēn̄ | 'breast' |
| lōw-ē | ē-lōw | 'bean' |
| kāw-è | ē-kāw | 'fingernail' |

If the stem is bisyllabic (C₁V₁C₂V₂), the second syllable C₂V₂ is deleted to form the plural in Bebe-Jatto, Nchanti and Akweto, as seen in (5), (6) and (7).

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| (5) Bebe-Jatto (∅-/∅-) | <i>singular class 5</i> | <i>plural class 5</i> | |
| | bTn̄i | bT̄ | 'breast' |
| | gšβ̄f̄ | gš̄ | 'egg' |
| (6) Nchanti (∅-/a-) | jT̄sé | ājT̄ | 'eye' |
| | tēdē | ātā | 'stone' |
| | jš̄lē | ājš̄ | 'bean' |
| | gūn̄è | āgū | 'feather' |
| (7) Akweto (5/4: ∅-/∅-) | dōkT̄ ¹⁰ | dō̄ | 'bean' |
| | gf̄kT̄ | gf̄i | 'egg' |
| | lT̄sf̄ | lT̄f̄ | 'eye' |

It could be argued that, as in Noni, there is a suffix for class 5 and that this suffix keeps C₂ from being deleted in the singular form. However, when C₂ is η it is not deleted in the plural forms as seen in the following examples:

| | | | |
|-------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| (8) Nchanti | sōn̄ō | āsōn̄η | 'palm tree' |
| | jš̄n̄ē | ājš̄n̄η | 'pumpkin' |
| (9) Akweto | gōn̄è | gōn̄η | 'spear' |

In Noni, final η is preserved in class 6 but dropped in the singular form:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----|--------|-----------|
| (10) Noni | lēè | ēlēn̄η | 'pumpkin' |
| | gōō | ēgōn̄η | 'spear' |

This process has been completely generalized in Mekaf, as seen in (11).

| | | | |
|------------|-------|--------|-----------------|
| (11) Mekaf | gf̄ | gš̄n̄ | 'egg' |
| | lT̄ | lēn̄ | 'tongue' |
| | bT̄ | bēn̄ | 'cracked egusi' |
| | dz̄f̄ | dz̄ēn̄ | 'maize' |
| | fō | fōn̄ | 'axe' |
| | jō | jōn̄ | 'sun' |
| | kū | kūn̄ | 'country' |
| | fú | fún̄ | 'head' |
| | tū | tūn̄ | 'horn' |
| | jū | jūn̄ | 'nose' |
| | gú | gún̄ | 'spear' |
| | nú | nún̄ | 'knee' |
| | dé | dēn̄ | 'pumpkin' |

In Mekaf, -n̄ could be analyzed as a class 6 suffix (but see discussion in section 5).

*Gender 7/8: *ki-/*bi-*. The fact that the concord is palatalized for class 8 (but not in class 7) in Bu, Noni, Nchanti and Akweto suggests that the vowel of the prefix was more closed than the corresponding vowel of the singular prefix (corresponding to the PB reconstruction *ki-/b|̄-). This difference in vowel quality is also confirmed by the fact that when the vowels are different between classes 7 and 8, we get kə- for the singular prefix, but bi- for the plural prefix. Since the PBb sound system has not been reconstructed as of yet, we did not include this vowel quality difference in our reconstructed prefixes. In Akweto we have an unexplained alternation in the final vowels of some items of gender 7/8:

| | | | | |
|------|--------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| (12) | Akweto | kT̄bēnè | bT̄bēnù | 'arm' |
| | | kT̄fā̀bè | bT̄fā̀bù | 'bark' |
| | | kT̄nkōfē | bT̄nkōfū | 'bone' |
| | | kT̄nkērè | bT̄nkērù | 'nail' |
| | | kT̄mfēmē | bT̄mfēmū | 'mouth' |
| | | kT̄nzēnzè | bT̄nzēnzù | 'urine' |

*Gender 9/10: *|̄-/*f̄-*. The vowel prefixes of this gender are maintained in Missong (|̄-/T̄-); elsewhere tone differences are found on the stem with relatively lower tones associated with the singular form. Tone alternations between singular and plural forms are summarized in (13) and examples are provided in (14). (Bidirectional arrows indicate tonal mergers in (13).)

(13) TABLE 5. *Tone alternations of monosyllabic stems in gender 9/10.*

| | Category I (^c *LL) | Category II (^c *LH) | Category III (^c *HL) | Category IV (^c *HH) |
|------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mekaf | L / ML | L° / H | L° / M | LM / H |
| Koshin | L / ML | L / ML | L° / H | L° / H |
| Missong | L / ML | M / ML | LM / H | LM / H |
| Bu | L / ML | M / HM | LM / H | LM / H |
| Noni | L / ML | L / H | LM / M | LH / H |
| Nchanti | L / ML | L / H | L° / 'M | M / H |
| Akweto | L / ML | L / H | L° / H | L° / H |
| Bebe-Jatto | L / ML | L / H | M / H | M / H |

| (14) | 'animal' | 'fowl' | 'snake' | 'dog' |
|------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Mekaf | ɲàm / ɲām̄ | ʒyè° / ʒyè | dzù° / dzū | bwē° / bwé |
| Koshin | ɲòm / ɲòm̄ | ʒìə / ʒT̄à | jùà° / jùá | bì° / bí |
| Missong | <i>diff.root</i> | ìʒyēā / T̄ʒyēā | <i>diff.gender</i> | ìbT̄ / T̄bí |
| Bu | ɲàm / ɲām̄ | ʒT̄ / ʒf̄- | yūā̄ / yūá | jT̄ / jí |
| Noni | ɲàm / ɲām̄ | ʒàà / ʒáá | yó° / yó | bwé° / bwé |
| Nchanti | ɲàŋ / ɲāŋ̄ | ʒìì / ʒíí | yó° / yó | bū / bú |
| Akweto | ɲàŋ / ɲāŋ̄ | ʒyè / ʒyè | yó° / yó | bwì° / bwí |
| Bebe-Jatto | ɲà / ɲā̀ | ʒìè / ʒíé | yó / yó | bwT̄ / bwí |

There is a maximum of four different categories of alternations (Mekaf, Noni, and Nchanti). In Missong, Bu, Akweto and Bebe-Jatto two of these categories have merged, while in Koshin only two types of alternations are found: L/ML and L°/H.

*Gender 12/8: *ka-/*bi-*. This gender is found in three languages: Mekaf (a-/bi-), Noni (ɛ-/bi-) and Bebe-Jatto (∅-/bi-). In these last two languages gender 7/8 also exists, but in Mekaf a- is the only singular prefix which can be paired with bi-. Since the singular consonant concord is k', we propose to reconstruct the prefix as *ka-. The initial consonant of the prefix has been lost in a relatively recent development. The reasons why we identify this prefix with PB class 12 will be made clear in section 6.

*Genders 3/13 (*u-/*to-) and 5/13 (*i-/*to-)*. These pairings are only found in Koshin. Notice that in this language class 6 has disappeared and that all the plurals of class 5 are in class 13.

*Gender 14/25: *bu-/*man-*. The initial consonant of the singular prefix has been lost in Mekaf. Classes 14 and 8 have merged in Koshin and Bu. We did not call the plural of class 14 class 6a because of the different shapes of the prefixes. A homorganic nasal is characteristic of 6a. A homorganic nasal is also found in the plural of 14, but it is preceded by a full CV prefix, as can be seen in the examples presented in (15) from Nchanti.

| | | | |
|--------------|--------|---------|----------|
| (15) Nchanti | būdēē | māndēē | 'bridge' |
| | būbT | māmbT | 'bundle' |
| | būšf | mānšf | 'face' |
| | būkō | mānkō | 'ladder' |
| | būkō | mānkō | 'name' |
| | būjūsē | mānjūsē | 'place' |

Class 25 is probably a recent development, the prefix ma- having been added to the earlier homorganic nasal. It is not surprising to find this type of innovation for this gender since class 14 contained mostly abstract nouns, plurals not being necessary. When new items were put into this class and then a plural was needed for new non-abstract nouns, the prefix and concord of class 6a were used since class 6a contained liquids and masses which could be considered as plurals in nature. As in class 6a, Noni has a -m suffix in class 25 (which Hyman 1977 does not differentiate from 6a). In Missong classes 25 and 6a have merged and in Mekaf 25 and 26 have merged.

*Gender 19/26: *fi-/*mu(N)-*. This gender has a diminutive function as seen in (16).

| | | | |
|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|
| (16) Missong | fTš'ihT | mūnš'ihT | 'small knife' |
| | fTč'umfō | mūnč'umfō | 'small village' |

Although the plural prefix is similar to PB class 18, we decided to give it a different class number since we do not think it corresponds to the locative PB class 18. It should be noted that this gender is found outside the Beboid languages, e.g. in the Menchum languages (Boum 1980) and in some Narrow Bantu languages of Guthrie A.60 (Tuki (Hyman 1980a); Yambasa (Paulian 1980). Hyman (1980b) suggests that this class could be a secondary development where an initial m- (perhaps even that of 6a ma-) would have been added to u- (possibly from an earlier class 13 *tu-).

*Genders 3/27, 5/27 and 9/27: *u-/*ki-, *i-/*ki- and *i-/*ki-. Class 27 has a -tə suffix for all stems in Bu, but in Missong it has a -lə suffix for vowel final stems, a -nə suffix when the final consonant of the stem is -ŋ and a -ə elsewhere:*

| | | | |
|--------------|--|--|--|
| (17) Bu | tsáŋ kə | kətsántə kəkətə | 'bamboo' 5/27 'country' 5/27 |
| (18) Missong | iyō ipī tšì Tám kìkì iyūn lncōm itsūŋ Ttəŋ | kīyōlè kīpīlè kīšīlè kītámé kīkíné kīyūné kīncōmé kītšūŋné kītətəŋné | 'bee' 9/27 'death' 9/27 'market' 5/27 'axe' 5/27 'headpad' 9/27 'thatching grass' 9/27 'work' 9/27 'bamboo' 9/27 'belt' 5/27 |

Notice that Koshin does not have these genders but has 3/13 and 5/13. Since class 13 has a to- prefix, it is possible that the suffixes found in Bu and Missong have the same origin as class 13 to-. As for the prefix of class 27, it should be reconstructed with a super-closed vowel, similar to PB *i. The reason for this reconstruction is that this prefix palatalized in Noni (ji-) and Nchanti (či-), while class 7 *ki- did not (see ke- in Noni and ki- in Nchanti). Let us also point out that in neighboring Menchum languages we find either a ke- or a te- prefix for this class. This te- prefix (or ti-) is also found in a number of Western Grassfields languages and in fact has been reconstructed for Proto-Benue-Congo (de Wolf 1971). How many classes do we have? Are ti- and tu- two different classes? Is ki- (or kī-) different from both then? It is not impossible that all three of them would have the same origin *tj-. If this is the case the backing of a dental to a velar place of articulation would have to be accounted for in acoustic terms (e.g. from noise burst) rather than in articulatory terms, since we would not expect a dental to become a velar before a front vowel. The fact that we have a kə- prefix but a -tə suffix in Bu does not necessarily imply that they have two different origins; it is possible that the change from *t to [k] occurred in word-initial position but not in intervocalic position. But since this issue is far from being resolved, we made a distinction between class 13 and class 27 in this paper. (Note finally in this regard that Kenyang class 13 is marked with a [k] (Voorhoeve 1977).)

*Single class genders 6a (*m-) and 14 (*bu-).* The class 6a prefix is either m- (Mekaf, Noni, Bebe-Jatto), n- (Koshin, Bu, Nchanti and Akweto) or an- (Missong). In Noni a -m suffix is found. This class contains mass nouns and liquids. Class 14 is found as a single class gender in Koshin, Bu, Akweto and Bebe-Jatto. As we mentioned earlier, its pairing with class 25 man- is certainly a secondary development.

4. TONE OF PREFIXES

Although the correlation is not perfect, the tone of prefixes seems to be a function of the tone of the first syllable of the stem. If the first tone of the stem is mid or high, the tone of the prefix is raised to mid. Examples are given from Mekaf in (19).

| | | | |
|------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| (19) Mekaf | àṅkèl | bìṅkèl | 'nail' |
| | àbè | bìbè | 'bag' |
| | àlè | bìlè | 'sweet yam' |
| | àndòṅ° | bìndòṅ° | 'cocoyam' |
| | àdùn° | bìdùn° | 'snail' |
| | àntàm° | bìntàm° | 'trap' |
| | ābān | bībān | 'arm' |
| | ābē | bībē | 'calabash' |
| | ākām | bīkām | 'crab' |
| | ātī | bītī | 'tree' |
| | ānzāmā | bīnzāmā | 'fly' |
| | ātú | bītú | 'ear' |
| | āpéhé | bīpéhé | 'bird' |

5. DEVELOPMENT OF NASAL CONCORDS

In all of these languages we have a nasal concord for class 6a and for classes 25 and 26 when these classes exist. But as we mentioned earlier these two classes are probably secondary developments. More interestingly, nasal concords are also found in class 6 in Mekaf and in classes 6, 1 and 9 in Bebe-Jatto. The development of these nasal noun class markers is extremely important since this issue has always been central to the distinction between Bantu and non-Bantu languages of the Benue-Congo group. The historical scenario for the Beboid languages seems to be as follows:

(a) Stem-final consonants were lost except when they were nasals. This can be seen from Table 6 where the percentages of types of endings in the eight Beboid languages are presented. In all languages except Mekaf the only possible final consonant is a nasal. (The final -w and -y of Noni are not considered here; see Hyman, in preparation.)

TABLE 6. Percentages of types of endings (computed from about 200 nouns)

| | Mekaf | Koshin | Missong | Bu | Noni | Nchanti | Akweto | Bebe-Jto. |
|---------|-------|--------|---------|----|------|---------|--------|-----------|
| -V | 43 | 51 | 54 | 44 | 53 | 54 | 59 | 73 |
| -Ṽ | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 21 | 12 |
| -m | 17 | 15 | 21 | 24 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| -n | 8 | 16 | 12 | 16 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| -ŋ | 13 | 11 | 13 | 16 | 17 | 23 | 19 | 12 |
| p, t, k | 9 | | | | | | | |
| l, r, q | 10 | | | | | | | |

(b) Final consonants could be used to distinguish singular vs. plural, especially for genders which had lost a distinction in the noun prefixes. This is the case for instance in gender 5/6 in Mekaf, where final ŋ indicates the plural form.

(c) For classes with vowel or glide concords, the final consonant of the stem could be copied in front of the concord in order to get the more classic C(G)V(C) syllable structure:

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|---|----------------|----|---|----------------|----|
| (V)- CVN | G... | > | (V)-CVN | NG | > | (V)-CV | NG |
| <i>pref stem concord</i> | | | | | | | |
| | <i>Stage 1</i> | | <i>Stage 2</i> | | | <i>Stage 3</i> | |

Stage 2 is illustrated by class 6 in Mekaf and stage 3 (i.e. where the final nasal of the stem has been dropped) is found in the same class 6 in Bebe-Jatto.¹⁷

6. GENDER 7/8 vs. 12/8

One of the puzzling problems encountered in the Grassfields languages located both to the south and east of the Beboid languages is that the noun prefix of the class paired with class 8 turns up either as *ki-* or *a-*. A phonetic change by which **ki>a* was considered to be an unlikely explanation when considering the whole of the Grassfields data. Data from the Beboid languages suggest a more likely explanation.

Out of the eight Beboid languages investigated, five of them (Bu, Misson, Koshin, Nchanti and Akweto) have *ki-* (or *kə-*) as the singular prefix paired with class 8 *bi-*, one language (Mekaf) has *a-*, and two languages (Noni and Bebe-Jatto) have *two* different singular prefixes paired with plural class 8, as shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7. *Singular prefixes paired with class 8*

| | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Misson | <i>ki-</i> | <i>bi-</i> |
| Bu | <i>kə-</i> | <i>bə-</i> |
| Koshin | <i>kə-</i> | <i>bə-</i> |
| Akweto | <i>ki-</i> | <i>bi-</i> |
| Nchanti | <i>ki-</i> | <i>bi-</i> |
| Mekaf | <i>a-</i> | <i>bi-</i> |
| Noni | <i>ke-</i> , ϵ -(<a) | <i>bi-</i> |
| Bebe-Jatto | <i>kə-</i> , \emptyset -(<a) | <i>bi-</i> |

The fact that Noni and Bebe-Jatto have both singular prefixes suggests that *a-* does not come from *ki-*. We propose that *a-* comes from *ka-* which has been reconstructed both for PBC and for PB (class 12). At the PB stage classes 12 and 19 (*ka-* and *pj-*, respectively) had a diminutive function. In the Grassfields area this diminutive function was taken over by class 19 exclusively. We can easily imagine that when class 12 ceased to be used as a diminutive class some items retained this prefix (*ka-*) in some languages, but since class 12 did not have a clear class content, the prefix *ka-* got frozen on different lexical items in different languages. This explains why we do not find the same lexical items in the ϵ -/*bi-* gender in Noni as we do in the \emptyset -/*bi-* gender in Bebe-Jatto. Items which retained the *ka-* prefix after class 12 lost its diminutive function formed their plural with class 8 *bi-* on the basis of identical concords between *ki-* and *ka-*. On phonetic grounds it is surprising that a later development changed **ka-* to [a], and that **ki-* did not change. It is expected that a velar consonant followed by a front vowel is more subject to change than before the low vowel *a*. Note that the loss of this initial *k* did not lead to any confusion since there is no *a-* singular class. On the other hand, a loss of *k-* before *i* would have led to a confusion with the prefixes of class 5 and class 9.

7. CONCLUSION

The Beboid languages have noun class systems similar to the Bantu languages. Nasal prefixes are not found in classes 1, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 10 (as they are found in Bantu), but rather they are restricted to classes 6a, 25 and 26. These last two classes seem to be relatively recent developments probably based on class 6a. However, it should be emphasized that nasal *concord*s are found in some of

the Beboid languages (in class 6 in Mekaf and in classes 1, 6 and 9 in Bebe-Jatto). the origin of these nasals appears to be the copying of a final stem nasal onto a following vowel- or glide-initial concord. This copying could represent an attempt to preserve consonant initial syllable structure and thus provides a more canonical CV syllabification. It was also mentioned that although plural classes to- and ki- (or kj-) could have a single origin, we did not have enough evidence here to make a decision and consequently posited separate classes 13 and 27. Finally, it was suggested that the a- singular prefix corresponds to PB class 12 ka-.

NOTES

¹The data presented here were collected during the summer and fall of 1979. I would like to thank Larry Hyman for providing me with his data and analysis of the Noni noun classes and for discussions on the data presented here. Special thanks are made to Harriet Jisa, George Bwei of Mekaf and Mark Bintum of Nkor for their help during the fieldwork period. This research was supported by a National Science Foundation Grant. No. BNS76-81261.

²A number of the villages presented in this paper are known by several names:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Kwej = Kwe = Kikwo | Mundabli = Mundabili = Ndabile = Njam |
| Bebe-Jatto = Bega | Lebo = Lebe |
| Bebe-Kitte = Bebe-Ketti = Binbua | Nkungi = Mashi overside |
| Munken = Bengan | Mbelego = Tosso II |
| Mufu = Mumfu = Memfu = Nnsa | Furuawa = Furukankang |
| Missong = Bijong | Luta = Lutu |
| Aba = Belo | Biando = Yukube |
| Mekaf = Menkaf = Menkap = Bunaki | Akum Shibung = Mufong |
| Mashi = Bukpang | Kpep = Lissang |
| Dumbo = Kimanjong = Kumaju | |

³North of the western Beboid languages a number of Jukunoid speaking villages are found:

Furu villages: Furuawa, Furubana, Furuturuwa, Furusambari, Furuangwa
 Kutep villages: Lubu, Jamayiking, Baji, Akwa
 Ehum villages: Luta, Biando
 Akum Shibung
 Munka
 Kpep

⁴West of the western Beboid languages the villages of Munkep, Munka and Gayama are Isu speaking (i.e. belong to Ring group of Western Grassfields). Ring languages are also spoken in the neighboring villages of Zoa, Weh, Aghem, Kumfutu, Cha?, Nyos, Bafmeng, Mbuk, Kung and Kuk.

⁵This group is called the Kinabe group.

⁶Chilver and Kaberry (1968) mention that the villages of Ngong, Fio, Mungom, Ketambo, Ngunokimbin belong to the same group. However, according to our informants, nowadays these villages are Bum speaking villages.

⁷North of this group but still on the Cameroonian side of the border with Nigeria, there are five Jukun speaking villages: Gidan-Jikum, Take, Sonkuru,

Mpetaba and Ndaka. In Ndaka the plural is formed by adding the suffix -ha to the singular form. The Ndaka people claim that they came from the Nupe area in Nigeria, settling first in Wukari and then moving to their present location. Ndaka people say that they can understand Mbembe. At least five chiefs are buried in Ndaka.

⁸Several village names in this group were given by their Limbum neighbors:

| <i>Limbum names</i> (usually used on maps) | <i>Noni names</i> |
|---|-------------------|
| Nkor | Nko |
| Lassin | Laan |
| Mbinon | Tfu |
| Dom | Bvugoi |
| Njottin | Djottin |

⁹The following tone marks are used in this paper:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| [à] Low tone (slightly falling) | [˘] |
| [à°] Low level tone | [ˉ] |
| [á] Lowered mid tone | [-] |
| [ā] Mid tone | [-] |
| [á] High tone | [ˊ] |

¹⁰Tone alternations between the singular and the plural forms in this gender will not be accounted for in this paper.

¹¹The fact that nasalization is associated with class 9 but not class 10 in Bebe-Jatto may have something to do with the systematically lower tone found in class 9 (as opposed to class 10). We have for example ʒ̃ʒ̃ 'sheep' (sg.), but ʒ̃ʒ̃ 'sheep' (pl.) without nasalization.

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