Number and Animacy in the Teke Noun Class System

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In this paper, we trace the development of Proto-Bantu noun classes into Teke (Bantu B71, Ewo dialect), showing that formal reflexes of classes 1, 2, 5-9, and 14 are detectable. We further show that animacy, abstractness, and number allow us to determine the fate of classes 3, 4, 10, 11 and identify the following singular/plural genders: 1/2 (animate <PB 1/2, some 9/10), 1/8 (inanimate, <PB 3/4), 14/8 (abstract, <PB 14/8), 5/6 (<PB 5/6), 5/9 (<PB 11/10, with 10>9 merger), 7/8 (<PB 7/8), and 9/6 (<PB 9/6). Such reassignments provide a window into probing parallel noun class changes in other Northwest Bantu and Niger-Congo in general.

1 Introduction

In this paper we have two goals. First, we trace the development of the Proto-Bantu (PB) noun classes into a variety of Teke, a group of closely related, under-studied B70 languages spoken in Gabon and the Republic of Congo. Second, we discuss how the Teke facts provide a window into probing parallel noun class changes in other Northwest Bantu, Bantu, and Niger-Congo (NC) in general. In this sense we provide an additional contribution and comparison with past work on the restructuring and loss of NC noun classes. This includes, among others, the considerable work on mergers and loss in Bantoid (cf. the papers in Hyman (1980) and Hyman & Voorhoeve (1980)) and Cross-River (Williamson (1985), Faraclas (1986), Connell (1987), Hyman & Udoh (2006)). Of particular interest will be

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the restructuring which takes place on the basis of animacy, something discussed at great length in Northeastern Bantu (Wald (1975), Contini-Morava (2008)) and elsewhere in Bantu (Maho (1999): 122–126). We will show that both phonetic and semantic factors have played a role in the changes which have taken place between PB and Teke. All of the above —and more— is covered in very careful detail in Good (2012).

Crucial to the approach taken here is that synchronic noun classes and genders are established by concord (agreement markers), not by affixal marking on the noun itself. On the other hand, as pointed out by several of the above studies, attention must be paid to both marking on the noun as well as on agreeing elements. Our attention is on the Ewo dialect of Teke B71 (République du Congo), as spoken by the third author, reporting on a several month study together in Berkeley in Spring 2016. We begin by considering the situation in PB in §2, then turn to Teke in §3. The changes which have taken place between the two are enumerated in §4, followed by a presentation of our conclusions in §5.

2 Proto-Bantu noun classes

The natural starting point for this kind of study is the Proto-Bantu noun class system, both noun prefixes and (pronominal) concordial elements, which Meeussen (1967: 97) identifies as shown in Table 1.[1]

Table 1: Proto-Bantu noun classes and genders

Class	NPfx	Co	Class	NPfx	Co	Sg./pl. genders	
1	*mɔ̀-	*ɔ̀-	11	*lɔ̀-	*lɔ́-	1/2	(humans)
2	*bà-	*bá-	12	*kà-	*ká-	3/4	
3	*mɔ̀-	*gɔ́-	13	*tɔ̀-	*tɔ́-	5/6	
4	*mì-	*gí-	14	*bɔ̀-	*bɔ́-	7/8	
5	*ì-	*lí-	15	*kɔ̀-	*kɔ́-	9/10	(incl. animals)
6	*mà-	*gá-	16	*pà-	*pá-	11/10	
7	*kì-	*gí-	17	*kɔ̀-	*kɔ́-	12/13	(diminutives)
8	*bì-	*bí-	18	*mɔ̀-	*mɔ́-	14/6	(abstract)
9	*Ǹ-	*jì-	19	*pì-	*pí-	15/6	
10	*Ǹ-	*jí-				19/13?	(diminutives)

On the basis of the reconstructions, we can make the following observations:

[1] NPfx = noun prefix; Co = concord

(i) Noun prefixes all have L(ow) tone. (ii) Pronominal concord is H except for (shaded) classes 1 and 9 which are L. (iii) As indicated, some class pairings show some semantic consistency, e.g. 12, 13 and 19 are diminutive classes. In addition, class 6 *mà-* is also used for mass/liquids.), and 16, 17, and 18 are locative classes. In short, at least 19 distinct noun classes can be reconstructed in PB.

3 Teke (Ewo dialect)

The situation is quite different in Teke.[2] The forms found in the Ewo dialect are presented in Table 2.[3]

Table 2: Noun class reflexes in Teke (Ewo dialect)

PB	NPfx	As	'this'	'that'	'two'	SPr	SAgr/_C	SAgr/_V
1	ò-, Ǹ-, Ø-	wà	wù	wâ	—	ndé	Ø	Ø
2	à-	bá	bà	bâ	bvwóólè	bó	á	bá
5	lè-, Ø	lé	lì	lyâ	—	ló	lé	lé
6	à-	má	mà	mâ	mbvwóólè	mó	á	má
7	kè-	ké	kì	kyâ	—	kó	ké	ké
8	è-	bé	bì	byâ	dzíéélè	jó	é	bé
9	N-, Ø	yè	yì	yâ	yíéélè	yó	é	yé
14	ò-	bó	bà	bâ	—	ndé	Ø	Ø

As can be seen in the bolded column, at most eight distinct classes are recognizable, which we identify by their associative marker. The PB historical source of the Teke forms is indicated in the first column. The singular/plural pairings ("genders") are presented in Table 3. The number (#) indicated for each gender is based on a lexicon of 356 singular/plural nouns:

From these tables the following observations and additional facts can be noted:

(i) Class 3 merged with class 1. We know that the form is historical class 1 because of the L tone associative (only classes 1 and 9 had L tone concord in PB).

[2] Although Teke languages often have seven (or more) phonetic vowels, e.g. Kukuya (Paulian 1975), we did not find a contrast in the mid vowels, which we transcribe with e and o, pronounced as such in noun class markers and other grammatical morphemes, otherwise as [ɛ] and [ɔ].

[3] NPfx = Noun prefix; As = Associative; SPr = Subject pronoun; SA = Subject agreement.

Table 3: Teke genders (sg./pl. pairings)

Teke cl.	PB cl.	Sg. pfx	Pl. pfx	'this'	'these'	#	Semantics
wà/bá	1/2	ò-, Ø-	à-	wù	bà	79	animate, human
wà/bé	(1/8)	ò-	è-	wù	bì	52	inanimate
bó/bé	(14/8)	ò-	è-	bà	bì	18	abstract
lé/má	5/6	lè-	à-	lì	mà	92	
lé/bá	(5/2)	lè-	à-	lì	bà	1	'bird'
lé/yè	(5/9)	lè-	N-	lì	yì	12	
ké/bé	7/8	kè-	è-	kì	bì	54	
yè/má	(9/6)	N-, Ø-	à-	yì	mà	45	

(ii) Class 4 merged with class 8, thus producing a 1/8 gender (corresponding to PB 3/4).

(iii) Class 9 is used both as a singular (with a class 6 plural), but also as the plural of class 10. Again, we know that the plural form is class 9 because of its L tone associative. Its plural is class 6, hence a 9/6 gender.

(iv) Class 11 merged with class 5 (see below). Its plural is class 9, hence a 5/9 gender.

(v) PB diminutive classes 12, 13 and 19 and locative classes 16, 17 and 18 are not present in Teke.

(vi) Of the eight singular/plural genders, those not occurring in PB are in parentheses (Maho (1999): 255–261). As seen, most genders are innovations (five out of eight), as schematized in Figure 1. Examples of each gender follow in Table 4.

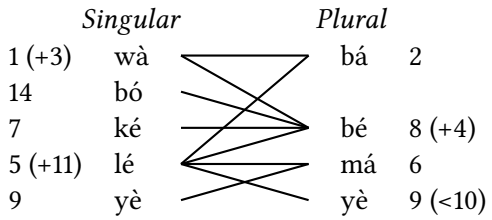

Figure 1: Teke Genders

With this established, we now turn to consider how Teke derived from PB.

Table 4: Examples of each Teke gender

Teke	PB	Singular	Plural	
wà/bá	1/2	mwàánà	à-bàánà	'child'
		ò-kúúlù	à-kúúlù	'uncle'
		ǹ-dzìá	à-ǹdzìá	'stranger'
		ǹ-dzòò	à-ǹdzòò	'elephant'
wà/bé	(1/8)	ò-bá	è-bá	'palm tree'
		ò-mbónó	è-mbónó	'leg'
		ò-nywà	è-nywà	'mouth'
		ò-kìlà	è-kìlà	'tail'
bó/bé	(14/8)	ò-yúú	è-yúú	'poverty'
		ò-dzá	è-dzá	'food'
		ò-bvwòó	è-bvòó	'fear'
		ò-ǹsámbá	è-ǹsámbá	'judgment'
lé/má	5/6	dzìínì	mìínì	'tooth'
		lè-lémì	à-lémì	'tongue'
		dzíírì	mbíírì	'eye'
		kélé	à-kélé	'stone'
lé/bá	(5/2)	lè-nyòní	à-nyòní	'bird'
lé/yè	(5/9)	lè-nkíí	ǹ(-)kíí	'neck'
		lè-sálá	ǹ(-)tsálá	'feather'
		lè-ǹtsèrè	ǹ(-)tsèrè	'straw'
		lè-ǹdèlì	ǹ(-)dèlì	'beard'
ké/bé	7/8	kè-kàì	è-kàì	'hand'
		kè-kàlá	è-kàlá	'mat'
		kè-bàá	è-bàá	'wall'
		kè-yìrí	è-yìrí	'bone'
yè/má	(9/6)	n(-)dzó	à-ndzó	'house'
		bí	à-bí	'egg'
		n(-)dzálí	à-ndzálí	'river'
		m(-)bàà	à-mbàà	'fire'

4 From Proto-Bantu to Teke

As summarized in §2, the noun classes inherited from PB have undergone a number of mergers. PB classes 3, 4 and 11 all merged their noun and agreements with classes 1, 8 and 5, respectively. Class 14, on the other hand has merged its **bɔ̀-* prefix with class 1 (and 3) *ò-*, but maintains a separate agreement. Similarly, PB class 2 **bà-* and class 6 **mà-* have merged their noun prefix as a-, but maintain distinct agreements. It is likely therefore that the fully merged first merged their noun prefix, and later their agreements. We survey these changes in this section. However, we first begin by considering the three genders that were inherited directly from PB. Table 5 presents examples of PB reconstructions and their current reflexes in Teke.[4]

Table 5: Genders inherited from Proto-Bantu (Pfx-Noun + Assoc.)

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*1/2		1/2 wà/bá		
*mɔ̀-kádí ɔ̀-	*bà-kádí bá-	ò-kálí wà	à-kálí bá	'woman'
*mɔ̀-gìà ɔ̀-	*bà-gìà bá-	ò-yìà wà	à-yìà bá	'slave'
*5/6		5/6 lé/má		
*ì-jícò lí-	*mà-jícò gá-	dzíírì lé	mbíírì má	'eye'
*ì-jɔ́ì lí-	*mà-jɔ́ì gá-	dzúì lé	a-dzúì má	'voice'
*ì-kájá lí-	*mà-kájá gá-	lè-káyà lé	à-káyà má	'tobacco'
*7/8		7/8 ké/bé		
*kì-dìbà gí-	*bì-dìbà bí-	kè-dìà ké	è-dìà bé	'pool'
*kì-gàdá gí-	*bì-gàdá bí-	kè-kàlá ké	è-kàlá bé	'mat'

As seen, the major change has been the loss of the initial consonant of PB class 2 **ba-*, class 6 *ma- and class 8 **bɪ-*. The Teke 5/6 examples show that class 5 nouns can be marked by *lè-* or Ø. Nouns in 5/6 are roughly equally divided; those in 5/9 always take *lè-*.

While the above genders have been stable, four class mergers directly explain two of the new genders: The first, gender 1/8 *wà/bé*, is the formal merger of *3 > 1 and *4 > 8. Thus, as seen in Table 6, PB 3/4 now corresponds to Teke 1/8 *wà/bé*:

Similarly, gender 5/9 *lé/yè* derives from the merger of *11 > 5 and *10 > 9.[5]

[4] Proto-Bantu reconstructions are taken from Bastin et al. (2002).

[5] The same *10 > 9 merger seems to have occurred in Latege, another B71 dialect (Ruth Raharimanantsoa and Pauline Linton, p.c.), but not in Kukuya (Paulian 1975), Ngungwel, or Eboo

Table 6: Gender *wà/bé* (*3/4 > 1/8)

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*3/4		1/8 wà/bé		
*mɔ̀-nɔ̀à gɔ̀-	*mì-nɔ̀à gí-	ò-nywà wà	è-nywà bé	'mouth'
*mɔ̀-gɔ̀ndà gɔ̀-	*mì-gɔ̀ndà gí-	ò-kùùnà wà	è-kùùnà bé	'field'
*mɔ̀-kídà gɔ̀-	*mì-kídà gí-	ò-kílà wà	è-kílà bé	'tail'
*mɔ̀-tímà gɔ̀-	*mì-tímà gí-	ò-tímà wà	è-tímà bé	'heart'

Table 7: Gender *lé/yè* (*11/10 > 5/9)

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*11/10		5/9 lé/yè		
*lɔ̀-dèdù lɔ́-	*Ñ-dèdù yí	lè-ndèlì lé	n(-)dèlì yè (*yé)	'beard'
*lɔ̀-cádá lɔ́-	*Ñ-cádá yí	lè-sálá lé	n(-)tsálá yè (*yé)	'feather'

As discussed above, these mergers appear to be the result of regular sound changes affecting noun prefixes, e.g. the loss of the initial consonant, followed by the realignment of agreement patterns, as illustrated in Table 8 for the *4 > 8 merger:

Table 8: Hypothesized steps of *4 > 8 merger

4 *mì-kídà gí-	>	4 ì-kídà gí-	> (...) >	8 è-kídà bé
8 *bì-dìbà bí-	>	8 ì-dìbà bí-	> (...) >	8 è-dìà bé

The origin of 5/9, and 9/6 can be traced back to class/gender reassignment following the consequences of the *10 > 9 merger, i.e. the loss of a number distinction of N- initial nouns. This again shows the importance of a prior prefix merger in motivating changes in noun class assignments. Former *9/10 nouns could have become a number-insensitive 9/9 gender, but did not. Instead, the *10 > 9 merger led to a class/gender reassignment based on the semantic property of animacy. Animate *9/10 nouns were reassigned to 1/2 *wà/bá*, merging with the human nouns in that class, as shown in Table 9.

(Ruth Raharimanantsoa p.c.). This merger thus seems to be a characteristic of B71 dialects only.

Table 9: Animate *9/10 > 1/2 *wà/bá* (+ 1 case of 5/2 *lé/bá*)

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*9/10		1/2 wà/bá		
*Ǹ-ɲàmà yì-	*Ǹ-ɲàmà yí-	nyàmà wà	à-nyàmà bá	'animal'
*Ǹ-jògɔ̀ yì-	*Ǹ-jògɔ̀ yí-	n(-)dzòò wà	à-ndzòò bá	'elephant'
*Ǹ-bɔ́à yì-	*Ǹ-bɔ́à yí-	m(-)bvà wà	à-mbvà bá	'dog'
*Ǹ-gòmbè yì-	*Ǹ-gòmbè yí-	n(-)gómbè wà	à-ngómbè bá	'cow'
*Ǹ-gàndɔ́ yì-	*Ǹ-gàndɔ́ yí-	n(-)gàndí wà	à-ngàndí bá	'crocodile'
*Ǹ-gòì yì-	*Ǹ-gòì yí-	n(-)gò wà	à-ngò bá	'leopard'
*Ǹ-gɔ̀mbá yì-	*Ǹ-gɔ̀mbá yí-	n(-)gùùmà wà	à-ngùùmà bá	'porcupine'
*Ǹ-kímà yì-	*Ǹ-kímà yí-	n(-)kímà wà	à-nkímà bá	'monkey'
*Ǹ-gùbɔ́ yì-	*Ǹ-gùbɔ́ yí-	n(-)gùbú	à-ngùbú bá	'hippo'
*Ǹ-pɔ́kɔ̀ yì-	*Ǹ-pɔ́kɔ̀ yí-	m(-)púù wà	à-mpúù bá	'rat'
*Ǹ-pídì yì-	*Ǹ-pídì yí-	m(-)pílì wà	à-mpílì bá	'snake sp.'
*Ǹ-cúì yì-	*Ǹ-cúì yí-	n(-)tsú wà	à-ntsú bá	'fish'
		5/2 lé/bá		
*Ǹ-jɔ̀nì yì-	*Ǹ-jɔ̀nì yí-	lè-nyòní lé	à-nyòní bá	'bird'

As also seen, one noun, *lè-nyòní* 'bird', shifted into class 5 *lè/má*. On the other hand, inanimate *9/10 nouns either became 9/6 *yè/má* (plural reassignment only) or 5/6 *lè/má* (complete gender reassignment), as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Inanimate *9/10 > 9/6 *yè/má* or 5/6 *lè/má*

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*9/10		9/6 yè/má		
*Ǹ-jàdà yì-	*Ǹ-jàdà yí-	n(-)dzàlà yè	à-ndzàlà má	'hunger'
*Ǹ-jɔ̀ngɔ̀ yì-	*Ǹ-jɔ̀ngɔ̀ yí-	n(-)dʒùngù yè	à-ndʒùngù má	'pot'
*Ǹ-jìdà yì-	*Ǹ-jìdà yí-	n(-)dzìlà yè	à-ndzìlà má	'path'
		5/6 lé/má		
*Ǹ-gì yì-	Ǹ-gì yí-	lè-ngìngì lé	à-ngìngì má	'fly'
*Ǹ-dɔ́ngɔ́ yì-	Ǹ-dɔ́ngɔ́ yí-	lè-ndúú lé	à-ndúú má	'pepper'
*Ǹ-tɔ́dɔ̀ yì-	Ǹ-tɔ́dɔ̀ yí-	lè-ntúlù lé	à-ntúlù má	'chest'

In addition, a few *9/10 inanimate nouns became either 1/8 *wà/bé* or 5/9 *lé/yè*, as can be seen in 11.

Finally, a few former *9/10 nouns alternate between 5/6 *lé/má* and 5/9 (< *10)

Table 11: Inanimate *9/10 > 1/8 *wà/bé* or 5/9 *lé/yè*

PB (sg./pl.)		Teke (sg./pl.)		
*9/10		yè/má		
*Ǹ-gòdí yì-	Ǹ-gòdí yí-	ò-ngòrí wà	è-ngòrí bé	'liana'
		lé/yè		
*Ǹ-jɔ̀gɔ́ yì-	Ǹ-jɔ̀gɔ́ yí-	lè-ndzú lé	n(-)dzú yè	'groundnut'
*Ǹ-kíngó yì-	Ǹ-kíngó yí-	lè-nkíí lé	(n)kíí yè	'neck'

lé/yè, e.g. *lè-mpàmbù lé* / *à-mpàmbù má m̃pàmbù yè* 'worm'. Note that all former *9/10 nouns reassigned to 1/2 *wà/bá*, 5/6 *lè/má*, 9/6 *yè/má*, 1/8 *wà/bé*, or 5/9 *lè/yè* have kept the historical N- prefix. The cause of all of the above *9/10 class/gender reassignments is presumably the need to maintain a singular/plural distinction, with animacy exploited as the guiding criterion for reassignment.

Animacy plays a potential role in other places in the Teke noun class system. Recall that singular nouns marked by the prefix ò- today may represent the merger of PB *1 and *3 (with the same agreements) or class *14 (which its distinct agreements). From the semantics one can almost perfectly predict whether an ò-prefixed noun will be in gender 1/2, 1/8 or 14/8. As before, animate nouns will all be in 1/2. Inanimates will either be in 14/8 *bó/bé* if they represent an abstract quality (as in PB *14), otherwise in 1/8 *wà/bé*. Representative examples are provided in Table 12.

Table 12: Animacy-based gender assignment of *ò-* nouns

Animate → 1/2 *wà/bá*					
ò-lúmì	'husband'	→	ò-lúmì wá	/	à-lúmì bá
ò-tèé	'Teke person'	→	ò-tèé wá	/	à-tèé bá
Abstract → 14/8 *bó/bé*					
ò-bvwòó	'fear'	→	ò-bvwòó bó	/	èm-bvwòó bé
ò-yúú	'poverty'	→	ò-yúú bó	/	è-yúú bé
Concrete inanimate → 1/8 *wà/bé*					
ò-bá	'palmtree'	→	ò-bá wà	/	è-bá bé
ò-sìà	'rope'	→	ò-sìà wà	/	è-sìà bé

Table 13 shows the number of animate nouns that occur in each gender: Reconcile with Table 3Table 15 shows the number of animate nouns that occur in

each gender:

Table 13: Genders and animacy: [bracketed number = nouns with human referent]

		Animate [incl. human]	Inanimate	Total
1/2	wà/bá	73 [34]	6	79
5/2	lé/bá	1	0	1
1/8	wà/bé	5 [1]	47	52
14/8	bó/bé	0	18 (abstract)	18
5/6	lé/má	9 (insects, 'frog', 'tortoise')	83	92
5/9	lé/yè	2	10	12
7/8	ké/bé	11 [5, kin]	43	54
9/6	yè/má	0	45	45
Total : 356				

As seen, the total number of animates is 101 out of 353 total nouns. Of these 101, 73 occur in 1/2 *wà/bá*. In fact, virtual all humans are in 1/2. Of the rest only 28 animate nouns occur outside 1/2. Interestingly, no animate noun has a class 9 *yè* singular (gender 9/6 *yè/má*). All PB *9/10 animate nouns were reassigned, mostly to 1/2 *wà/bá*.

To conclude this section, we note with considerable interest the variation in former *11 (and some *9) nouns that have been reassigned to class 5 *lé*: These have kept the former class 10 plural N- form, even though it has the L tone agreement *yè* of *9. However, as we have noted, an N- noun is ambiguous in terms of number, and may be interpreted either as singular or as plural. It can be the plural class 9 of a class 5 *lé* singular (from *11) or the singular of 9/6 *yè/má* and 1/2 *wà/bá*). In addition, nearly half of class 5/6 nouns alternate between a prefixed *lè-* and a Ø or N- singular form, approximately half in our lexicon occur without *lè-*. (Recall that all 5/9 nouns require *lè-* on their singular.) This is illustrated in Table 14.

As a result this has produced several cases where the same N- noun can be interpreted as either singular or plural, paired with an appropriate noun class of opposite number, as shown in Table 15.

5 Conclusion

As seen above, an identical prefix shape, here N-, can not only lead to merger of noun classes (e.g. class *1 and *3, *4 and *8, *5 and *11), but can cause a noun to

Table 14: *lè-* vs. Ø sg. prefix in 5/6 *lé/má* nouns

Optional Ø			
(lè-)m(-)péì lé	/	à-m(-)péì má	'chin'
(lè-)sàánì lé	/	à-sàánì má	'plate'
Obligatory Ø			
(*lè-)kfúrú lé	/	à-kfúrú má	'hole'
(*lè-)bìlà lé	/	à-bìlà má	'leprosy'

Table 15: N- nouns as singular or plural

Plural class 9 yè (singular = class 5 *lé*)			
lè-m(-)bàlà lé	/	m(-)bàlà yè	'civet cat'
lè-ŋ(-)kíí lé	/	ŋ(-)kíí yè	'neck'
Singular class 5 lé (plural = class 2 *bá* if animate)			
m(-)bàlà lé	/	à-m(-)bàlà bá	'civet cat'
Singular class 5 lé (plural = class 2 *má* if inanimate)			
ŋ(-)kíí lé	/	à-ŋ(-)kíí má	'leprosy'

function in two different genders, one as a singular, the other as a plural. This too can be expected to lead to further realignments as the noun classes prepare for their next move.

In the preceding sections, we have seen that the Teke noun class system has undergone important restructuring with loss of eleven of the nineteen PB classes, four class mergers, and many gender reassignments. As we have shown, only three out of eight genders are inherited from PB. Three variables have played an important role in this evolution: (i) prefix shapes; (ii) animacy; (iii) number. Number and animacy have played a major role in this restructuring, in particular in the class and gender reassignment of PB *9/10 nouns. These become 1/2 *waà/bá* if animate, 5/6 *lé/má* or 9/6 *yè/má* if inanimate (occasionally also 1/8 *wà/bé* and 5/9 *lé/yè*). Animacy also plays an important role in synchrony. As we have shown, singular *ò-* is interpreted as 1/2 *wà/bá* if animate, 14/8 *bó/bé* if abstract, and 1/8 *wà/bé* if concrete inanimate. In addition, *à-N-* is unambiguously class 2 *bá* if animate, class 6 *má* if inanimate. The relevance (and potential conflict) of animacy in the synchronic and diachronic marking of noun classes has been discussed elsewhere in Bantu (Wald (1975), Maho (1999), Contini-Morava (2008), among

others), even to the extent of entirely replacing the inherited noun class system, as in Nzadi (Crane, Hyman & Nsielanga Tukumu 2011). What is particularly interesting in the Teke case is the conspiracy between prefix shape and animacy. Noun classes are reassigned on the basis of animacy. As prefixes merge, noun class agreements merge, even those accompanying singular and plural 9/10. This shows that Teke speakers are paying attention not only to the semantics, but are impressively influenced by the forms. Such interplay in the reassignments which we have enumerated should be considered in probing parallel noun class changes in other Northwest Bantu and Niger-Congo in general.

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