

Pronominal paradigms in Songhay and Saharan

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This talk will present reconstructions of the pronominal paradigms of Songhay, West Saharan, and East Saharan, and consider their implications. Reconstruction in both families poses challenges. The superficial simplicity and homogeneity of Songhay pronominal paradigms conceals a number of apparently residual suppletive forms complicating family-internal reconstruction (Heath 1998). Within Saharan, it has long been recognized that the substantial internal complexity seen particularly clearly in Kanuri paradigms must reflect originally more segmentable forms (Lukas 1952; Cyffer 1981; Awagana 2011); recent data on Old Kanembu (Bondarev 2010) allows the resulting reconstruction to be improved. However, major differences between East and West Saharan make it impossible to reconstruct a full proto-Saharan pronominal paradigm based on internal data alone. Incorporating Songhay data into the analysis changes the situation: the pronominal paradigm of proto-Songhay shows striking similarities to proto-West Saharan, not all of which are apparent from their descendants. It remains unclear how to interpret this fact, but possible hypotheses will be explored.

References

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