The reconstruction of noun classification in Guang

Ines Fiedler, Tom Güldemann (Berlin)

The presentation compares the synchronic gender systems of most of the 18 Guang languages, revealing huge differences with respect to their design and complexity, in order to establish an improved reconstruction of the proto-system. This reconstruction differs from the two already existing ones (Snider 1988, Manessy 1987) in two points: (i) the data base includes more languages with new data, and (ii) it is based on a more systematic cross- linguistically oriented approach to the analysis of gender systems, as proposed by Güldemann (2000) and, with a particular focus on Niger-Congo, Güldemann and Fiedler (2018). This approach consistently distinguishes the four following gender-related concepts: (a) agreement classes as the ultimate basis of the system of genders, (b) gender (classes) as reflecting the classification of nouns in the lexicon/reference domain, (c) noun (form) classes as the partial reflex of genders hosted by the nouns themselves and (d) declension classes as reflecting the morphological variation of nouns triggered by number, gender etc.. Snider (1988) and Manessy (1987) relied mainly on noun form classes in their Proto-Guang reconstruction and included agreement forms only marginally and in a non-systematic way, which does not yield the agreement-based proto-system of genders but rather that for declension classes. Our new theoretical approach also contributes to the reconstruction of gender systems in Niger-Congo in general.