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On Reconstructing the Syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other to Proto-Niger-Congo

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[This paper is dedicated, with much respect and much affection, to Charles Fillmore, part-time Africanist — in whose field methods class on Bakweri I had my first linguistic exposure to a Niger-Congo language.]

1. Background and Overview

‘Niger-Congo: SVO or SOV?’ This question, the title of a 1986 article by Kay Williamson, epitomizes a twenty-year debate over the clause-level word order of Proto-Niger-Congo (PNC). Niger-Congo languages by the hundreds are overwhelmingly Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) in dominant word order; only Ijo shows clearcut OV clause-level syntax, while the Mande languages are technically ‘SOV’ but in fact place everything except the object after the verb. Hence it might seem that Proto-Niger-Congo should be reconstructed, unproblematically, as SVO. Contrary to this position, Talmy Givón and others (Givón 1975, 1979, Hyman 1975, and the Williamson article just cited) have argued vigorously for an original SOV order as in Ijo, drawing on ‘minor’ word order patterns throughout the family and making heavy use of the ‘morphology as frozen syntax’ (MAFS) principle. On the other hand, Bernd Heine and others associated with him (Heine 1976, 1980; Heine and Reh 1984; Claudi 1988, 1993), appealing to standard comparativist methodology and invoking the overall word order profile of Niger-Congo (including NP-level syntagms), have argued for SVO as the original word order in the family. The debate becomes an explicit head-to-head confrontation in Givón 1979 and Heine’s 1980 rejoinder in successive numbers of the same journal.

The question/title quoted above sums up not only the debate but the presuppositions shared by both sides in the debate — presuppositions highly characteristic of the era when the question was first formulated. Word order studies in the ’70s were dominated by the VO/OV ‘seesaw theory’ associated with Lehmann and Vennemann, whereby long-term change in word order was seen as a slow pendulum swing toward or away from ideal VO (Head-Modifier) or OV (Modifier-Head) macro-types. In this tradition clause-level elements other than S, V, and O — that is, adverbials of any sort — are given at best cursory attention. Specifying the position of the object (more specifically, the direct object) vis-a-vis the verb is implicitly taken as a shorthand way of indicating the position of any verbal argument or adjunct vis-a-vis the verb. And indeed, in the great majority of the world’s languages this is the case.

Three assumptions appear to be taken for granted in both Givón’s and Heine’s approach to Proto-Niger-Congo word order:

a) The ‘interesting’ question to ask is whether Proto-Niger-Congo was SVO or SOV;

- b) This question ought properly to have a clear-cut, yes/no answer;
c) Given (a) and (b), the right approach to the answer must necessarily focus on articulating paths and mechanisms of *change*, whereby modern-day SVO features can be shown to derive from earlier proto-SOV, or vice versa.

This paper comes at the problem of Proto-Niger-Congo word order in a very different way, one which ignores or takes issue with all of these assumptions. The question it asks — the question I consider to be the really interesting one — bypasses the usual SVO/SOV dichotomy, and indeed ignores the matter of *overall* clause-level word order type almost entirely; rather, it focuses on one particular and very distinctive word order subconfiguration of Niger-Congo: S-Aux-O-V-Other. Far from seeing the abstract choice between SVO and SOV as a clearcut yes/no dichotomy, it observes that S-Aux-O-V-Other (and more generally S-O-V-Other) represents an intermediate type that is neither SVO nor SOV in any straightforward sense (though it can be and has been ‘argued into’ the status of SVO or of SOV). And its focus is not on change (regrammaticalization) but on continuity. It will be argued that the given configuration *as a configuration* — a template — should be reconstructed all the way back to Proto-Niger-Congo as a pattern that was always there, constantly emerging and re-emerging with new morphemic material as far back as we can envision in the linguistic prehistory of the family. This in turn has significant implications for how we see the overall clause-level word order type of PNC.

2. Terminology

In this paper I will be consistently using the terms Aux (= Auxiliary) and MainVerb in a particular way. I take the MainVerb in a clause to be that element which belongs to an open paradigmatic class and which conveys the lexical-semantic content of the verbal action or state or process in the given clause. An Aux, by contrast, is taken as an element which is syntagmatically separate from the MainVerb (thus not an affix), which belongs to a small, closed paradigmatic class, and which conveys grammatical notions such as tense, aspect, mood, and/or negation. In the English clause ‘I have been thinking’, the MainVerb is ‘think’ and the Auxes are ‘have’, ‘be’. These definitions are deliberately neutral as to the categorial assignment of Aux and MainVerb, in order to foster comparability across the whole family. Thus the Aux may be a particle, a special subclass of verb (including a serial verb), or its own distinct part of speech; the MainVerb can perfectly well pattern morphosyntactically as a (verbal) noun or a participle, and often does. Normally the MainVerb is obligatory; in some languages the Aux is as well.

The term ‘SOV’ will be understood in this paper as representing ‘canonical SOV’, that is, a word order where the verb (MainVerb) basically appears in *final* position in the clause. This terminological stipulation reflects the fact that, crosslinguistically, languages which position O before V overwhelmingly position the verb clause-finally; even in languages described as ‘flexible SOV’, the unmarked position of the verb is still clause-final. The corollary is that, understood in these terms, the structure S-Aux-O-V-Other (taken strictly as a surface string and ignoring internal constituency) is neither SOV nor SVO. Unlike canonical SOV but like SVO, the MainVerb is not clause-final but clause-medial; unlike SVO but like SOV, the Object precedes the Verb.

'Other' covers everything except Subj and (Direct) Obj, i.e. Adverbials of all sorts. In languages where indirect objects are expressed as adpositional phrases ('to John'), it may cover IndObj as well. On the other hand, 'O' (= Object) may include IndObj and other secondary objects in addition to DObj, depending on the language.

3. The Phenomenon

In many branches of Niger-Congo, some languages — and, in at least one branch (Kru), apparently all languages (Marchese 1986:218) — show a characteristic constructional pattern whereby sentences having an Aux appear in a special word order: Subject - Aux - Object(s) - MainVerb - Other. (In many of the languages this contrasts sharply with Aux-less clauses, where the order is straightforwardly SVO.) In some languages, only one Obj may precede the MainVerb; other languages allow multiple preverbal Objects. All previous works on Niger-Congo word order diachrony have of course acknowledged this pervasive construction, but only Lyn Marchese's excellent treatment of the syntagm in Kru has made it the focus of attention. In other studies the construction appears in the penumbra of something else — not as a phenomenon of interest in its own right, but in a supporting role, as part of the arsenal mustered for or against original SVO or SOV order.

Below I present, in condensed form, representative data displaying the construction as it appears in six branches of Niger-Congo. The construction is a dominant feature of Kru, Senufo, and Mande. It appears elsewhere in other branches, but is conspicuously rare in Bantu — a point we will return to in sec. 8.

A. Mande

The basic order is Subj (Aux) DObj V Other; this order appears to hold rigidly throughout the family, regardless of whether or not an Aux is present (cf. Heine and Reh 1984:198–202).

The situation is clearest in Mandinka (Creissels 1983). Here the Aux element (Creissels' 'prédicatif') is an obligatory component of verbal clauses (1983:20), and the standard verbal syntagm (26–27) is:

Subj Aux DObj V Other

The postverbal 'Other' includes IObj, which is realized as an adpositional phrase and thus counts as an oblique (Creissels' 'circonstant'); only the direct object is preverbal. Examples:

- 1) [mòolu ye kinoo dii] n na
 people PAST food give me to
 'The people gave me food' (134)
- 2) [i kana wò fo] à ye
 you PROHIB that say him to
 'You mustn't say that to him' (125)

In Mende, the basic word order is S (Aux) O V-Tns/Asp Other (Aginsky 1935:99, Innes 1962:127ff.); the sequence [O-V] forms a tight constituent that is identical structurally to one subtype of [Gen-N] construction (Innes 1963:54ff.). The indirect object counts as 'Other' and is postverbal. Tense/aspect distinctions (Aginsky 1935:31ff., Innes 1962:122ff.) are basically coded by suffixes on the verb, and most tense/aspect forms do not involve an Aux; only a handful of elements may occur between S and O, including Neg and a few aspectual/adverbial particles (Innes 1963:116, 122, 134-35), so that 'Aux' appears to be a relatively impoverished category.

Significantly, however, subject pronouns occur in a number of distinct series, depending on the choice of verbal tense/aspect (Migeod 1908:69-70, Aginsky 1935:20-22, Innes 1962:31ff.). Some of these series are analyzable as the phonological fusion of the 'basic' pronominal series (the *ngi*-series) with a following vocalic element (Innes 1963:126-27, 132ff.); and this vocalic element, which conveys tense/aspect information, plausibly represents the residue of earlier Aux elements. Moreover, subject pronouns are of extremely frequent occurrence because full-NP subjects (especially plural NPs) are commonly doubled by a following subject pronoun (Migeod 1908:70, Aginsky 1935:23-24, Innes 1963:135-36 and passim). Hence the Aux residue, as an integral part of the Subj pronoun, is likewise very common. Examples (Innes 1963):

- | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 3) Kpana ii nika-i waa-ma ha | Neg cow-Def kill-Sfx today | 'Kpana is not killing the cow today'
(explicit Aux <i>ii</i>) (118) |
| 4) ngi mbɛ-i lo mɛ-ni | I rice-Def Emph eat-Sfx | 'I ate the rice' (121)
(no Aux) |
| 5) nga mba mɛ lo | I rice eat Emph | 'I eat rice (habitually)' (131)
(frozen Aux: <i>nga</i> = <i>ngi</i> + <i>a</i>) |

Essentially the same overall pattern appears to hold for Kpelle (Welmers 1973:395ff.).

B. Kru

Marchese devotes a major portion of her excellent study of tense/aspect in Kru to the construction S Aux O V (1986, especially chapter 5). Throughout the Kru family, there is a sharp distinction between verb constructions with and without Aux (1986:21, 24, 225):

Subj	Aux	IObj	DObj	V	Other
Subj	V	IObj	DObj		Other

(Not all Aux elements show this patterning; Marchese separates out a subclass she terms 'sentence-second particles', with word order 'S Aux V O' (24).) Examples from Wobé (Western Kru):

- 6) [ɔ se kei ko kpa] dé dɔɔ
 he NEG Kei rice bring LOC market
 'He didn't bring rice to Kei at the market' (243)
- 7) [ɔ se (e) dɔɔ mu]
 he NEG to market go
 'He didn't go to the market' (91)

Kru languages show variability regarding the positioning of adverbials when an Aux is present: in some languages the adverbial is preverbal, in some postverbal (219, 225), and different classes of adverbials can pattern in different ways. However, one adverbial subtype shows consistent behavior throughout the family. Locative complements of verbs of motion (see ex. [7]), which are subcategorized by their governing verb, always come between Aux and V — just like objects. This is no accident, Marchese argues, for such a verb is properly to be taken as *transitive*; the locative complement is its Object (89–92). With other types of adverbials — non-complement locative, temporal, manner, etc. (219ff.) — there is a rough dividing line between Eastern and Western Kru: often Eastern Kru allows preverbal position, while Western Kru does not (219).

C. Kisi (Atlantic)

The same structural opposition evident in Kru exists in the Atlantic language Kisi (Childs 1988:29, 32):

Subj	Aux	IObj	DObj	V	Other
Subj	V	IObj	DObj		Other

No explicit statement is made in the grammar about the ordering of IObj and DObj, but the above formulas fit the examples. Thus:

- 8) í bɛ́í ndú
 I hurt him
 'I hurt him' (29)
- 9) í có ndú bèì
 I FUT him hurt
 'I will hurt him' (29)
- 10) ò có ndú kóná dónǝng (preverbal IObj, DObj)
 he FUT him message pour.forth
 'He will relate the message to him' (139)
- 11) ò cǐ yǝmndé lòmǝǝ múééng (postverbal non-Arg)
 he finish wood burn IDPH
 'He finished burning the wood completely' (143)

D. Tunen, Ewondo (Bantu)

As indicated above, S-Aux-O-V-Other is highly unusual in the syntax of Bantu languages. Interestingly, the one or two (narrow) Bantu languages where it does occur are spoken in Cameroon, the area of the Proto-Bantu homeland. These basically isolating languages lack the characteristic agglutinative structure typical of

most Bantu languages. Clearest of all — though apparently unique in Bantu (Dugast 1971:6) — is Tunen, where all objects (noun or pronoun, direct or indirect) occur between Aux and Verb while adverbials are postverbal (6, 171, 309):

- 12) á ndò miaró menyàma húlən ‘he brought me the meat’ (171)
 he AUX me meat bring

In Ewondo, pronoun objects (but not noun objects) come between Aux and main verb (Redden 1980:126, 166–67):

- 13) a- kad mə dzə vó ‘he usually gives it to me’ (167)
 he-do.usually me it give

In both languages, indirect objects precede direct (1971:309, 1980:166).

E. Ewe (Kwa)

Heine (1980:104) provides the following examples from Ewe. The language has basic SVO order, but in progressive and ingressive aspects the object is preverbal (cf. also Heine and Reh 1984:188–90):

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 14) éle nú-ɖu mí | 15) mele é-dí mí |
| he-is thing-eat PROG | I-am him-want PROG |
| ‘He is eating’ | ‘I am looking for him’ |

Note the fusion of Aux onto the Subj (as in Mende).

F. Senufo (Gur)

The syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is standard in the Senufo subgroup of the Gur family; the indirect object is post-verbal (Carlson 1991:201, Claudi 1993:112; also Givón 1975:60). Thus:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 16) u a kù kàn mì-á | ‘s/he gave it to me’ (Supyire) |
| s/he PERF it give me-to | (Carlson 1991:217) |

4. S-Aux-O-V-Other as a Rare Type Globally

As the preceding section demonstrates amply, the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other as a clearly profiled, salient word-order type is a fixture of many (though not all) branches of Niger-Congo. In striking contrast to this is the rarity of the type worldwide. In a reasonably well-balanced global sample of over 75 languages (created for other purposes), I found no cases of the syntagm outside Africa; elsewhere in Africa, it exists only (?) in some dialects of the non-Niger-Congo language Songhai (Carlson 1991:201), a neighbor of Mande. At first glance the Mandarin Chinese *bǎ* construction, Subj *bǎ* DObj Verb (Li & Thompson 1974; 1981:463ff.), might appear to be an example of the configuration; but whatever the precise function of *bǎ* (apparently a combination of case-marker and indica-

tor of certain kinds of discourse salience, 1981:482ff.) it is certainly not a tense/aspect/mood 'Aux', nor is the element 'Other' constrained to postverbal position (1981:19ff.).

The ordering S-O-V-Other (without Aux) would appear to be almost as rare. Manner adverbs and especially adpositional phrases — two of the major constituent types subsumed under the rubric 'Other' — tend very strongly to appear on the same side of the verb as the Object (Dryer 1992:92–93), in line with the remarks made above (sec. 1) to the effect that the vast majority of OV languages are actually verb-final. Two instances where S-O-V-Other is presented as the favored word order are the Muskogean language Koasati (Kimball 1991:513–14) and (in the genre of legal texts) the atypical, peripheral dialect of Akkadian spoken at Ugarit (Huehnergard 1989:220ff.). However, as the authors make clear, these are flexible-word-order languages, and S-O-V-Other is merely a preferred option — quite unlike its canonical status in families like Mande. (The New Guinea language Kobon (basically SOV) may represent another example; but the grammar is self-contradictory in this regard (Davies 1989: 49, 51).)

This global rarity establishes the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other as a widespread (though not universal) family-wide *quirk* of Niger-Congo — a fact which will have considerable importance in arguing for the existence of the syntagm in the protolanguage.

5. The Methodology of Syntactic Reconstruction

The concerns and the approach of the present paper are very different from those of earlier diachronic work on Niger-Congo word order, and the differences bear some discussion. A great deal of attention has been devoted in previous literature to the mechanisms and scenarios whereby the verbal structures of present-day Niger-Congo languages could have emerged by grammatical reanalysis from earlier stages of the language — grammaticization processes variously involving serial verbs, verb-noun periphrastic tenses, or adverbs (see Heine and Reh 1984:114ff., and most recently and comprehensively Claudi 1993). As applied to the genesis of S-Aux-O-V-Other, such processes show how the construction can be seen as emerging from an earlier Aux-less construction (SVO or SOV). But it is one thing to explore the genesis of a particular individual instance of the construction (involving some particular concrete Aux) from an earlier Aux-less construction, and something very different to ask how and when the construction as a whole first emerged in the given language or branch of Niger-Congo. In particular, the just-mentioned scenarios, in reconstructing Aux-less SVO or SOV syntagms at an earlier stage, say nothing about whether at that earlier stage the language might not *already* have had the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other alongside Aux-less SVO or SOV — with different morphs in the Aux slot, of course. The present paper focuses exclusively on this latter question, and its concerns are thus largely complementary to those of earlier studies.

This paper also differs from previous studies of Niger-Congo word order in its methodology: the orthodox comparative method, as applied to syntactic material. As in traditional phonological and morphological reconstruction, a word order reconstruction for a protolanguage should above all be comparative: it should be responsive first and foremost to the observed syntactic distribution throughout the family, and should yield the most plausible path of evolution from the protophenomenon to the observed facts. Such considerations as synchronic 'naturalness'

or typological consistency, though important, are distinctly secondary. A protolanguage, on this view, is not an idealized schematic construct but a language like any language; particular languages routinely embody 'inconsistent' and quirky phenomena, and so may the reconstructed protolanguage — if the daughter languages warrant it. Earlier work has been based heavily on internal reconstruction and on plausible assumptions about how change 'ought' to proceed, notably the 'morphology as frozen syntax' principle (associated with Talmy Givón) and the notion that word order change is dominated by vast tidal shifts between ideal VO and OV macrotypes (associated with Lehmann and Vennemann). Both of these are valuable principles, and reflect phenomena which are indeed common and natural. But they are not laws, and should never be appealed to blindly. Crucially, pure internal reconstruction by its very nature produces neat origins for un-neat data. But origins may sometimes be just as messy as the descendant reflexes.

Earlier work has tended to view syntagms that do not conform to straightforward VO or OV patterns as deviations from an ideal, both synchronically and diachronically, and thus to view the 'quirky' syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other as a problem in need of explanation; the explanation would involve an appeal to some more canonical word order (SVO or SOV), either recasting S-Aux-O-V-Other as actually being an instance of one or the other 'basic' configuration, or else deriving it historically from such a source. This procedure, however, is exactly backwards from the comparative method as regularly applied in standard phonological and morphological reconstruction. When a distinctive and quirky phenomenon recurs all over a family F, the comparative method may indeed seek to explain where the phenomenon comes from, especially if suitable data is available from the superfamily encompassing F; but within the family F itself, the method's primary stance is simply to accept the phenomenon as such — and, most typically, to reconstruct it in some form to the protolanguage. A quirky phenomenon thus represents not so much a problem to be solved as rather a key to solving other problems. In particular, family-wide quirks are prized as one of the very best proofs of genetic relatedness (see e.g. Meillet 1967:41). An example is the quite peculiar cooccurrence of *t*-as marker of both 2-sg and 3-f-sg (but not 3-m-sg) in Cushitic (e.g. Afar), Berber, and all of Semitic. This quirk is not normally seen as a datum in need of explanation, but rather is accepted as one of the structural cornerstones of the Afroasiatic superfamily.

In the domain of syntax, the only secure way to ground the notion 'quirk' is by an observational appeal to typology: a quirk is a pattern that is observed to be common in the language grouping in question but rare worldwide. It is in this light that I will be approaching the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other, rare globally yet commonplace in Niger-Congo: as a family-wide and family-specific quirk which, precisely because of its quiriness, merits reconstruction to the protolanguage.

Of course, there is a difference between a morphological and a purely syntactic reconstruction. Morphological reconstruction posits a particular concrete morph or set of morphs which, subject to possible phonetic and semantic change, can be traced from the protolanguage down to the attested daughter languages. 'Mixed' morphosyntactic reconstruction involves the reconstruction of both concrete morphs and a syntactic pattern. Purely syntactic reconstruction, however, posits only a pattern (or diachronic succession of patterns), which may be filled with different concrete material in different languages at different periods. It is extremely important to elucidate the mechanisms (metanalysis, grammaticization) whereby this kind of serial replacement of morphemic material occurs. Equally important, however, is the proto-pattern itself — the focus of the present study.

6. The Reconstruction

On analyses of the sort presented in Claudi 1988 and 1993, the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is present and constantly reemerging (by various mechanisms) over much of Niger-Congo. (For Bantu see sec. 8 below.) This is observationally true synchronically, and the process can be observed today at all stages (Claudi 1988:53); to posit it as also occurring in the past is totally natural. In light of these considerations and those presented in the previous section, it is the thesis of this paper that the construction S-Aux-O-V-Other, in some form or other, has been part of Niger-Congo as far back in time as one can envision, and hence should be reconstructed in some form or other to the protolanguage. And it reconstructs as a pattern, a template conducting speakers (and the language itself) to regenerate and re-regenerate new elements in the Aux slot as old Aux elements underwent phonetic erosion and absorption by the Subject (as e.g. in Mende).

A central feature of this reconstruction is that the regeneration process, both of Aux morphemes and thus of the syntagm as a whole, is assumed to have gone through (unknowably) many cycles between Proto-Niger-Congo and the present. This dynamic cyclicality seems well-nigh unavoidable if we are aiming at a realistic reconstruction reaching all the way back to the actual protolanguage of the Niger-Congo family. Thousands of years have gone by since the time of Proto-Niger-Congo, and it seems improbable that any grammaticization scenario for Aux-formation would have taken that entire time span to slowly complete just one cycle. One need only think of Romance, where the evolution from full verb 'have' via Aux to a future suffix (as in French *parler-ai*) ran its course in less than a millennium. The time depth of Niger-Congo is much greater than that. There is of course another conceivable single-cycle option, which is to posit that the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is recent in Niger-Congo; on this view we would envision a single cycle which ran its course relatively quickly, taking us back to some fairly recent intermediate boundary point before which the syntagm did not exist at all in Niger-Congo. But this would not yield a reconstruction to Proto-Niger-Congo — unless perhaps we imagined, with no evidence at all, that the word order profile of the posited intermediate stage had been preserved over millennia since the time of PNC. Any such intermediate boundary point, moreover, would obviously be an arbitrary guess. And there are in fact several positive arguments that the syntagm is actually quite old in the family; see sec. 9.

None of these difficulties arise on a multicyclical view. Natural cyclical processes, observable at many stages all over contemporary Niger-Congo, are simply assumed to have been at work indefinitely far back in time, producing variations on the same pattern again and again.

It should be stressed that the proposed reconstruction of the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other to Proto-Niger-Congo is not intended as a competitor to (or mutually exclusive with) the various proposed 'mechanism'-oriented accounts deriving the syntagm from other syntagms, but rather as something compatible with and complementary to them. For, whatever the mechanism which is posited for deriving any particular case of S-Aux-O-V-Other from an Aux-less syntagm, the process could not help but be facilitated by the prior existence of S-Aux-O-V-Other as a preexisting template. Any diachronic process will surely be favored if its output pattern is something already well-installed in the grammar and in speakers' competence, rather than something completely alien to the language. Speakers will

not then have to augment their grammar with a completely novel syntagm, but merely add a new paradigmatic option to a preexisting syntagmatic pattern.

A concrete demonstration of just such a template-sensitive process in action can be seen — at the morphological level — in Bantu, the one Niger-Congo family containing a language for which direct historical data is available. In Swahili, the basic verbal slot-sequence is the ordinary Bantu one,

Subj-Tns/Asp-Obj-Stem .

The Tns/Asp slot, however, represents ‘an open set’ of morphemes (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993:361). In particular, future-tense markers are secondary throughout Northeast Coast Bantu: all are ‘transparently innovations’ (384), and none is reconstructible. The Swahili future tense/aspect-marker *-ta-* is derived from the verb stem *-taka-* ‘want, like’ (412), a connection still synchronically transparent in relative clauses, where the allomorph of the future marker is *-taka-*. The formative stage of this future marker can be seen explicitly in older Swahili texts (written in Arabic characters) reflecting the language of approx. 1700 A.D. (335). At this stage the transition from Aux+Infinitive (‘want to Verb’) to TnsMarker+VerbStem (‘will-Verb’) is still in progress, and future forms with *-taka-* still occur — e.g. (with 1-sg Subject indicated by aspiration of the initial *t*):

17) Ø-*thaka*-ku-omba ‘I will pray to you’ (Miehe 1979:209).

The point to be emphasized here is that the reanalyzed helping verb *-taka-* is absorbed into the verb-word precisely in the Tns/Asp slot, that is, in such a way as to conform to the preexisting template. And the existence of the template was undoubtedly one of the factors shaping the reanalysis. Nurse and Hinnebusch make the point explicitly in their general discussion of the genesis of new Tns/Asp [TM] markers: ‘Once the productivity of TM was thus established, it proved a magnet for other material’ (458). A telling example of such attraction is provided by the category of aspect: while in morphologically more conservative Bantu languages only tense is coded in the Tns/Asp slot, with aspect expressed suffixally, in the Sabaki subgroup of Northeast Coast Bantu aspect (like tense) did come to be coded in the Tns/Asp slot (458).

Morphology is a much less flexible domain than syntax, and intraword bonds are much tighter and less permeable than interword bonds. In general, therefore, the process of paradigmatic expansion — whereby new morphemic material penetrates into a syntagm and generates a new paradigmatic substitution-element in a closed-class slot — should be much easier at the level of syntax than at the level of morphology. The kind of template-sensitive process just noted in Swahili at the word level should thus be expected to occur all the more readily at the clause level, in particular as regards the creation of new Aux elements in the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other.

I stated that the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is to be reconstructed ‘in some form or other’. But different branches of Niger-Congo, as seen in sec. 3, allow different material to count as ‘Object’ (only direct object; both direct and indirect object; also locative complement of verbs of motion). This presents a problem to which I have no very convincing solution: precisely what actually counted as ‘Obj’ in the protolanguage? Provisionally and tentatively, I reconstruct the variability as such. As remarked, a reconstructed protolanguage is a language like any language,

and as such it may perfectly well be not an ideal 'point source' with a unitary monolithic grammar, but a somewhat blurred constellation of dialects. In keeping with this view, Proto-Niger-Congo will be cast roughly in the image of Kru, as a group of dialects all of which had the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other but which showed various options regarding what could count as 'Object' and whether multiple objects could cooccur. The daughter languages have perpetuated sometimes this option, sometimes that. In protodialects where multiple objects occurred, I reconstruct the order seen today in Kru and in most of the other languages having multiple preverbal objects: indirect object before direct. Again as in Kru, I will allow locative complements of verbs of motion to be one possible realization of the notion 'Object', on a dialect-specific basis — certainly in Proto-Kru, quite likely in other protodialects as well. For those Kru languages where other adverbs may come between Aux and V, I assume (contra Marchese, 1986:251–54) a diachronic process of 'inbraciation', whereby the Adv moved from original postverbal to preverbal position. Here the already-preverbal position of one very prominent kind of adverb — the locative complement — would provide a model for a preverbal shift of other adverbs as well. Such inbraciation would be much more modest than that entertained (and rejected) by Marchese: only Adverbs would have to move leftward, since objects would be preverbal already.

More tentatively, I propose to assign to the proto-syntagm an additional feature found commonly in the modern languages. The reconstructed syntagm will not be 'flat' but will have internal structure, such that [O (O) V] forms a constituent over against S and Aux: S - Aux - [O - (O) - V]. The reason is simply that, in a great many Niger-Congo languages, the element symbolized 'V' in the syntagm is transparently a nominalized verb-noun (VN) form. Moreover, it is clear — as discussed at great length by Marchese and Claudi — that this stage, where V = VN, is a fundamental and recurrent phase in the cyclical life history of the construction. I interpret the nominalized verb straightforwardly as the head of a nominalized VP (i.e., V + its arguments), the latter thus constituting a subconstituent within the syntagm as a whole; the appropriate bracketing of the postverbal 'Other' is not clear to me, but at least the preverbal object(s) will be bound more tightly to the V than to S or Aux.

Further justification for these details of the reconstruction must be postponed until the end of sec. 8, when Bantu has been integrated into the argument.

7. Previous Analyses

The present paper does not focus on questions of mechanism, and I have little to add to earlier discussion of precisely how new Aux elements arise in the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other (or in other syntagms), and/or how Niger-Congo languages might have changed their word order over time. The dynamic of word order change in Kru is examined in minute detail in Marchese 1986. Various approaches to deriving SVO from an SOV proto-word order can be seen in (e.g.) Givón 1975, 1979 (serial verbs), Hyman 1975 (afterthought), and Williamson 1986 (verb copying), with critique in Claudi 1993. Mechanisms deriving S-Aux-O-V-Other (and OV in general) from original SVO are laid out in (e.g.) Heine 1980, Heine and Reh 1984, Claudi 1988, and especially Claudi 1993.

One point, however, bears brief discussion here. Heine (1980:104–6, cf. Heine and Reh 1984:187ff.) proposes a reanalysis of the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other as SVO. In languages like Ewe or Mande, the 'V' element shows clear

indications of being a verb-noun (VN), or at least of having originated in one. The 'O', in turn, is structurally the genitival dependent of this VN (like 'the shooting of the lions'). Crucially, in these languages Gen-HeadN order is the rule. If we now take Aux as the 'real' verb, with the lexical verb (V) as its complement, then transparently

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{S-Aux- O- V - Other} \\ = & \text{S- V - [O- VN] - Other} \\ = & \text{S- V - [Gen-N] - Other ,} \end{aligned}$$

with [O-V] now recast as a nominalized constituent functioning as object of the Aux (recall sec. 6). The syntagm has thus metamorphosed into an instance of SVO.

This analysis embodies a presupposition: that the right way to conceive of the 'real' verb (and thus to select between the two candidates for the real verb, MainVerb and Aux) is in syntactic, not semantic, terms. It is not self-evident, however, that this is intrinsically any better (or worse) than specifying the 'real' verb on semantic grounds, an approach which would favor MainVerb over Aux. The two approaches simply clash; and the very fact that the clash exists, I would argue, is a manifestation of the inherent structural intermediacy of S-Aux-O-V-Other, as neither SVO nor SOV. Heine's analysis also has the effect of reducing the difference between S-Aux-[O-V]-Other and S-Aux-[V-O]-Other to something minor and secondary; the two become incidental variants on a single theme. Yet the former, unlike the latter, is typologically quite remarkable. Fortunately, these criticisms are largely terminological. The analysis per se is not affected by whether we choose to pigeonhole the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other as 'SVO' or not.

There are also more substantive criticisms which can be made on a language-specific basis. For one thing, the re-presentation of the syntagm as an instance of SVO requires the Aux to be morphosyntactically verb-like, something which holds only for some of the languages. Further, Williamson (1986:6-7) notes that the sequence [O-VN] also appears in languages which do not have Gen-HeadN order. And in languages like Kru, where *two* objects can precede the verb, the genitival reanalysis becomes very strained; nouns do not commonly take two genitive dependents (note that 'John's shooting of the lions', which does have a double genitive, does not involve two genitival *objects*). Mention should be made here of Claudi's 'Complement Serialization' proposal (1988:64ff.), which she offers as a solution to this problem in Kru.

If loosened slightly, however, Heine's analysis can apply even in a language like Kru, where genitive rection is ill-motivated. One need not, after all, insist on genitive rection in order to preserve the essential insight about the nominalized status of the V. It is not unusual crosslinguistically to find VPs nominalized while preserving the verb's case rection (including non-genitive rection of objects) more or less as in finite clauses; cf. infinitival constructions in the familiar languages of Western Europe. To be sure, the preverbal position of the object(s) now becomes largely an ad-hoc stipulation rather than a transparent consequence of the Gen-HeadN order; but this is in keeping with the general slant of this paper, which does not demand that S-Aux-O-V-Other should necessarily 'make sense' but simply accepts it as such, as a continually regenerating template.

8. Bantu

Little has been said about Bantu word order thus far except to remark that the construction S-Aux-O-V-Other occurs in only a very few of the languages. This is not surprising: in most of Bantu, the isolating, independent elements seen elsewhere in Niger-Congo have fused together to form an agglutinative verb-word, and there is no reason to expect that the new, post-agglutination sentence-level syntax (SVO) should mirror old, pre-agglutination patterns. However, *within* the Bantu verb-word, on the level of morphology, we find replicated exactly the same syntagmatic pattern seen elsewhere in Niger-Congo on the level of syntax:

	Niger-Congo	Subj	Aux	Obj	Verb	
=	Bantu	Subj-Tns/Asp-Obj - Stem				
e.g.	Swahili	ni	- li	- mw	- ona	'I saw him'

It is thoroughly plausible to see the slot-sequence of the Bantu verb as a continuation of pre-Bantu syntactic patterns existing prior to agglutination.

This is internal reconstruction based on the 'Morphology as Frozen Syntax' (MAFS) principle, a hallmark of much of Givón's work. One should be cautious about appealing to this principle when doing syntactic reconstruction: not every sequence of morphemes automatically reflects earlier syntax, and applying the principle aprioristically and without independent corroborating evidence (as Givón often does) can be purely speculative, running the risk of reconstructing an artificially idealized, over-schematic protosyntax. In the present case, however, the Bantu internal reconstruction is bolstered by comparative data: precisely the right syntagm is attested, and vigorously attested, all over Niger-Congo, and even sporadically in Bantu itself.

The likelihood of the reconstruction is increased by the fact that the slot sequence of the Bantu verb, like the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other, is extremely rare globally, as shown by the same typological survey mentioned in sec. 4. In the typological sample the only good (though still not perfect) match to the Bantu verb was Tiwi, an isolate spoken off the north coast of Australia (Osborne 1974:37ff.). If we allow a string of clitics to count as a realization of 'inflection', then the French periphrastic future ('je-*vais-le-voir*') may count as a match, and perhaps the '*për të*' future in Albanian (Newmark et al. 1982: 26, 50); but in neither French nor Albanian is this the standard sequence of clitics with Auxes ('je-*l'ai-vu*' = Subj-Obj-Aux-V). The relevance of this to the reconstruction is straightforward. When two related languages agree in some configuration which is common globally, the agreement can easily reflect not a shared linguistic history but simply independent parallel development (e.g., in Semitic, the rise of SOV word order independently in Akkadian and Ethiopic). With a globally rare configuration, conversely, this is maximally unlikely.

Of course, this congruence between Bantu morphology and Niger-Congo syntax involves only the ordering of *bound pronominal* morphemes: in Bantu full-NPs, which are generally optional, adhere to SVO order, not to the ancestral S-(Aux)-O-V pattern. But this is hardly a counterargument against the kind of morphologization posited here, which in fact is quite common globally: old pronouns cliticize onto the verb and become agreement markers, doubling any full-NP arguments that may be present. Such morphologization is happening today in spoken French; within Niger-Congo it can be observed in-process in various

languages, e.g. Wolof, whose verbal complex involves an elaborate system of Subj and Obj clitics which generally double full-NP arguments, and also Mende (see sec. 3). In such cases, the ordering of full-NPs in the new, post-morphologization syntax may follow new principles having little to do with those governing the pre-morphologization syntax. Especially in the case of Bantu, where centuries or millennia have elapsed since the time when the agglutinated verb-word took form, there is no reason to expect the synchronic ordering of full-NPs to replicate old Niger-Congo patterns.

Not all scholars see the Bantu verb as representing a preservation (via MAFS) of earlier word order patterns. Heine (1980:103) notes that 'pre-verbal object pronouns are largely confined to the Congo branch of Bantu,' one of eight parallel branches in his subclassification of Bantu; this limited distribution, he argues, favors an analysis treating the preverbal Obj pronoun as 'a recent phenomenon confined to one Bantu branch,' and not as a survival. It is significant, then, that Tunen and Ewondo are spoken in Cameroon, a zone which not only is geographically distant from the territory of the Congo branch but is also the region of the proto-Bantu homeland (see Heine, Hoff, and Vossen 1977:60, 61, 71), precisely where maximal conservatism might be expected. These languages demonstrate that preverbal Obj markers are more widespread in Bantu than Heine indicates, strengthening the argument that the standard Bantu verbal slot sequence represents a retention and not an innovation.

The resemblance between the Bantu verb and the Niger-Congo syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other goes beyond the general syntagmatic congruence just described, to encompass three points of detail. First, some Bantu languages allow multiple Object slots within the verb; thus in Haya (Duranti 1979:40):

18) a -ka -mu -ku -leetela 'he brought him to you' OR
 he-PAST-him-you-brought.to 'he brought you to him'

Similarly, in Niger-Congo some families (e.g. Kru) have two Objects sandwiched between Aux and Verb, while others (e.g. Mande) have only one. The variability in number of Object-slots across Bantu languages can plausibly be seen as a synchronic reflex of inherited variability across Niger-Congo languages. The resemblance, to be sure, is not perfect. For one thing, languages like Kinyarwanda and Haya have more than two Obj slots in the verb (1979:34), while families like Kru are limited to two Objects. Moreover, the ordering constraints are different: non-Bantu Niger-Congo languages generally have indirect object preceding direct (see sec. 3), whereas in Bantu languages like Haya the indirect object often occurs next to the verb stem, with the ordering governed by a complex of interacting topicality constraints (per Duranti). Nonetheless, the pre-agglutinating Bantu languages Tunen and Ewondo do show the same IndObj-DirObj ordering seen in most of non-Bantu Niger-Congo; this argues that the more flexible ordering principles just mentioned are likely to represent a later innovation.

Secondly, the positioning of Locative complements between Aux and V in Kru, and their analysis as objects, also finds parallels in Bantu. Locatives are commonly marked on the Bantu verb; as such, they are recast as objects, with the locative coded as a locative (i.e., via a locative class-marker) in the Obj slot. Thus in Chichewa (Sam Mchombo, p.c.):

- 19) msika ndi-na -ú - óna 'I saw the market'
 market I-PAST-it -see (Obj = class-marker *u*)
 [mu msika] ndi-na -mú -lówa 'I entered the market'
 -enter (Obj = Loc class-marker *mu*)
 * [mu msika] ndi-na -ú -lówa

Finally, an argument has been advanced by Myers (1992) for recognizing subconstituents within the Bantu verb; on his analysis, the major constituent break in the word is as follows: [Subj - Tns/Asp] # [Obj - Stem], with the Obj bound more closely to the Stem than to the rest of the verb-word. This parallels arguments made above for several Niger-Congo families, whereby the sequence [O-V] in the syntagm Subj-Aux-O-V-Other is similarly treated as forming a constituent — in fact, a nominalized verb with 'O' as its dependent noun argument (see sec. 6).

The above similarities are not identities, and I do not mean to argue that the behaviors in Bantu and the rest of Niger-Congo are precisely parallel. My point is just that many of the issues which are characteristic and problematic for Niger-Congo clause-level syntax are likewise characteristic and problematic for the Bantu verb. This strengthens the thesis that the syntagmatics of the Bantu verb should be seen at bottom as a retention from Niger-Congo and not as an innovation. It also provides further support for the variable reconstruction tentatively put forward at the end of sec. 6: reconstructing Proto-Niger-Congo as a variable dialect cluster mirrors not only Kru but Bantu as well.

9. The Status of the Reconstruction

With the inclusion of Bantu, the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other is attested over the entire geographical and much of the genetic range of Niger-Congo, from Mande, Kru, and Atlantic in the north and west to Bantu in the south and east. Such breadth in itself would already argue that the phenomenon is old in Niger-Congo. The fact that the syntagm is found specifically in Bantu and in Mande has special methodological significance, and provides two additional arguments for its presence at an early stage in the history of Niger-Congo. Most concretely, its fossilized presence all across present-day Bantu on the morphological level — assuming the basic slot-sequence of the Bantu verb to have been more or less frozen at its inception and unchanged since — bears direct witness to its presence on the syntactic level (as S-Aux-O-V-Other) at the time of Proto-Bantu, or at least at that early stage in the history of Bantu when the characteristic agglutinative verb-structure took form. And the vigorous presence of the syntagm in Mande, the earliest branch-point on the Niger-Congo family tree (Williamson 1989:13), plausibly pushes it back to that stage in Niger-Congo when Mande split off from the rest of the family.

Are there alternatives to reconstructing the syntagm back to Proto-Niger-Congo? Yes; but they seem less tenable. One could, first of all, posit that that all (or many) of the occurrences in the various Niger-Congo subfamilies represent cases of totally independent parallel development — not merely independent genesis of concrete instantiations of S-Aux-O-V-Other, but multiple creation of the syntagm *ex nihilo* in languages which previously did not have it at all. This explanation is weakened by the great crosslinguistic rarity (see above) of both the syntagm S-(Aux)-O-V-Other and the verbal slot-sequence of Bantu. The more rare and

marked a phenomenon is globally, the harder it is to ascribe multiple occurrences in the same family simply to independent parallel development.

More plausibly, one might see the multiple occurrences of S-Aux-O-V-Other as an areal phenomenon (thus Carlson 1991:201–2; for Kisi see Childs 1988:34–35). In favor of this is the fact that the syntagm also occurs in dialects of Songhai, a non-Niger-Congo language spoken adjacent to Mande territory (1991:201). And indeed, within Niger-Congo several of the families where the syntagm occurs are situated more or less in the same general region, viz. western-most West Africa. However, the syntagm surely also existed in Proto-Bantu — which was spoken in Cameroon, many hundreds of miles to the east. Here an areal explanation is unmotivated: the relevant geographical territories are far apart and not contiguous. Any such area, clearly, would represent a reconstructed hypothetical entity rather than an empirical fact ‘on the ground’. Moreover, it would have to have been extremely old, and essentially all the languages partaking in it would be Niger-Congo (assuming the Songhai phenomenon, which does not occur in all dialects, to be secondary). We would thus be dealing with an ancient Sprachbund of related languages. But the very concept of ‘area’ or ‘Sprachbund’ in such instances becomes conceptually more and more tenuous the further back in time we go: genetic inheritance and Sprachbund inter-influence become increasingly difficult to distinguish. In the limiting case, the separate ‘languages’ merge into dialects of the protolanguage, and the ‘areal’ commonality (in this instance S-Aux-O-V-Other) reverts to a feature of the protolanguage — the basic thesis of this paper.

Common genetic inheritance, then, would seem to provide a better explanation than either independent parallel development or areality.

One immediate advantage of reconstructing S-Aux-O-V-Other to Proto-Niger-Congo is that it goes far toward defusing the problem of the coexistence in Niger-Congo of SVO and SOV languages. Positing PNC as SOV will require an elaborate scenario to derive SVO languages (such as that found in Williamson 1986; see critique in Claudi 1993:35ff.); and conversely, for original SVO, with regard to modern-day SOV languages (Ijo). Positing S-Aux-O-V-Other, however, renders this problem much less acute, for two reasons: because the syntagm is structurally intermediate between SVO and SOV, and because it is a marked construction. Because it is structurally intermediate, it is naturally easier to chart a path from it to either SVO or SOV than it would be to go from one extreme to the other. Because it is distributionally and typologically marked, it embodies an inherent potential to change into something less marked, if not reinforced by strong template pressure from a whole paradigm of S-Aux-O-V-Other constructions. One can easily imagine circumstances where this reinforcement could dwindle and the construction thereby become vulnerable — where, e.g., phonetic erosion and fusion wiped out most of the Aux morphs at some period in a language’s history, leaving the syntagm only weakly installed in speakers’ competence and hence freer to develop in various ways into a less marked construction. The Aux might be totally lost so as to yield S-O-V-Other, itself a highly marked construction which would readily lend itself to abductive reanalysis either as ‘orthodox’ verb-final SOV (because O comes before V) or as SVO (because the verb is non-final). Which option was taken would depend largely upon other factors, both internal (e.g. the language’s NP-level word order profile) and external (e.g. the linguistic area in which the language was located, the possible bilingualism of its speakers, and the word order of whatever other language(s) they may have spoken). And other paths of change are also imaginable.

As remarked, the logic behind the reconstruction is one which is standard in orthodox phonological/morphological reconstruction: a phenomenon that is widely attested in a family stands an excellent chance of reconstructing to the proto-language, and above all a marked or quirky phenomenon. But it would seem that this methodology, applied to Aux constructions in Indo-European, explicitly yields the wrong answer. Periphrastic tenses — formations involving an Aux word — are a commonplace in many branches of modern Indo-European (Romance, Indic, etc.), and occur in one ancient language (Hittite) as well. This data distribution would appear closely analogous to that found in Niger-Congo: here too the construction is widespread in the modern languages and can be assumed with reasonable confidence to have existed in one ancient language (Proto-Bantu). In Niger-Congo, I have argued that such a distribution warrants reconstruction of the Aux syntagm all the way back to the protolanguage. But for Indo-European, this argument fails: despite their great frequency in the modern languages, and despite their occurrence in ancient Hittite, Aux constructions are not a prominent feature of Latin, Sanskrit, etc., and do not reconstruct to Proto-Indo-European. Wherever they appear they are manifestly secondary. Is it not risky, then, to apply the analogous argument to Niger-Congo?

But the two cases are only superficially similar. The crucial difference is that in Indo-European, unlike Niger-Congo, there is no one Aux syntagm which is common and characteristic over much of the family. Rather, Indo-European periphrastics fit a variety of patterns, each fairly well constrained genetically and areally:

S Aux V X	French: (Romance)	l'homme a acheté le livre the man has bought the book 'The man (has) bought the book'
S Aux X V	German: (Germanic)	der Mann hat das Buch gekauft the man has the book bought 'The man (has) bought the book'
Aux S V X	Welsh: (Celtic)	mae 'r dyn yn prynu 'r llyfr is the man in buy(ing) the book 'The man buys/is buying the book'
S X V Aux	Urdu: (Indic)	ādmī kitāb xarīd-tā hai man book buy-PTCP is 'The man buys the book'
S X V Aux	Hittite: (Anatolian)	GIŠGIGIR turiyan ḫarweni (Friedrich chariot harnessed we.have 1974 I:137) 'We have harnessed the chariot'

(The Hittite and the Indic constructions represent independent historical developments.) The recurrence seen in Niger-Congo is thus much more precise than its Indo-European counterpart: it involves not just the general fact of a periphrastic construction, but the precise syntagmatic details of the construction itself. Moreover, none of the various Indo-European Aux syntagms appears particularly exotic crosslinguistically. By contrast, Niger-Congo S-Aux-O-V-Other is definitely

an exotic, and as such — as with any family-wide quirk — is a good candidate for reconstruction.

10. Conclusion

This paper has deliberately ignored the general question of the overall word order of Proto-Niger-Congo, focusing instead on one quite specific and highly characteristic syntagm. But reconstructing this syntagm to the protolanguage has consequences for our assessment of the 'basic' word order, too. Proto-Niger-Congo may or may not have had an Aux-less syntagm alongside S-Aux-O-V-Other (recall that Mandinka has no Aux-less syntagm); if such a syntagm did exist, it may have been SOV or SVO (though I find Claudi's (1993) case for SVO much stronger than the argument for SOV), or even S-O-V-Other as in Mande. Regardless of what such an Aux-less syntagm may have looked like, however, I have argued that Proto-Niger-Congo *also* had a syntagm, very sharply profiled and not at all marginal, which was fundamentally neither SVO nor SOV — a syntagm cast in an essentially intermediate mold all its own. If so, the dichotomy posed at the beginning of this paper, 'Niger-Congo: SVO or SOV?', is revealed as the wrong way to frame the problem. For it would appear that the single most reliable conclusion that can be drawn regarding word order in PNC, the reconstruction which is at once simplest, least speculative, and most in keeping with the comparative data and with standard comparative methodology, is that the protolanguage featured very prominently a syntagm which was neither straightforwardly SVO nor SOV.

The approach outlined here has at least one corollary which does bear directly on the dichotomous choice of SVO vs. SOV. The syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other, which plays a central role in the body of evidence adduced by proponents of 'SOV Proto-Niger-Congo', can no longer be appealed to in this way: it has been recast as evidence for something else. The argument that PNC was SOV (verbal-final) thus becomes correspondingly more difficult to make.

It is tempting in historical linguistics to always seek to trace things back to ultimate causes. Reconstructing the syntagm S-Aux-O-V-Other to Proto-Niger-Congo feels like begging the question: the syntagm must surely have come from *something*. Indeed; and many scholars have laid out plausible (and competing) scenarios for the recurrent development of the syntagm in particular Niger-Congo languages, and hence, in all likelihood, in Proto-Niger-Congo itself and even earlier. The purpose of this paper has not been to take a position for or against any of these scenarios, but simply to argue that S-Aux-O-V-Other itself shows every likelihood of having been a part of Niger-Congo as far back as we can reasonably project. Its history prior to PNC is unknown. Tautologically, some state of affairs preceded that of Proto-Niger-Congo; but (absent any clear picture of comparative Kordofanian syntax) we have no access to it via comparatively based reconstruction.

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