

# Questionnaire on the counting of objects in Benue-Congo languages of Nigeria and Cameroon

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## 1 Introduction

The linguistics of counting presents surprises in a number of Nigerian and Cameroonian languages of the Benue-Congo family. In Tiv (Bantoid, Nigeria) for instance, certain objects such as kola nuts (1), letters (2) and bees (3) require an additional item when it comes to counting, as illustrated in the examples below.

Tiv

- (1) *ágbēndé*      *á*      *gô*      *átár*  
muscle.CLF    ASS    kola.nut    three  
'three (pod of) kola nuts'
- (2) *ásāngē*      *á*      *àbá:ɸá*      *áhár*  
grain.CLF    ASS    letter      two  
'two letters'
- (3) *òr*              *ù*      *ìyóú*      *mǎm*  
person.CLF    ASS    bee      one  
'one bee'

Rather than saying 'three kola nuts', 'two letters' and 'one bee', as is possible in English / French, one has to say in Tiv 'three muscles of kola nut', 'two grains of letter' and 'one person of bee' instead. So Tiv requires the addition of items meaning 'muscle', 'grain' or 'person' in counting, depending on the type of object counted. These additional items required in counting are called numeral classifiers (Gil 2005), glossed as CLF in the examples given above and below.<sup>1</sup>

A similar situation can be found in Ngəmba (Grassfields Bantu, Cameroon). In counting items such as farms (4), cabbages (5), yellow yams (6) and words (7), the classifiers *pǎp* (flat like object), *thwó* 'head', *ndóŋ* 'horn' and *njáŋ* 'twig, strand' are required. Not all items in classifier function can be used as independent words any more, as in the case of *njáŋ*.

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<sup>1</sup> Gil, David. 2005. "Numeral Classifiers". The World Atlas of Language Structures. Haspelmath, Dryer, Gil & Comrie, eds., 226-229.

## Ngəmba

- (4) *nnǎ*                      *pāp*                      *tè*  
 farm:1sg.POSS      flat.CLF              five  
 ‘my five farms’
- (5) *shú*                      *thwó*                      *sú?ú*  
 cabbage      head.CLF      how.many  
 ‘how many cabbages?’
- (6) *tā?*      *ndòŋ*                      *nālō?*  
 one      horn.CLF      yellow.yam  
 ‘one yellow yam’
- (7) *ghā*                      *m-bà*      *nàghà*      *njàŋ*                      *ppā*      *mǒ*  
 say.IMP      N-be      word      twig.CLF      two      on.it  
 ‘Say like two words about it.’

These numeral classifiers are the main target of our current investigation. So in the following, we would like to find out whether your language has such classifiers and to which extent they are used, depending on the items that are being counted.

## 2 Personal data

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Born in: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

First language(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Other language(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Father's language(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's language(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Questions

In answering the following questions, please select the first language that you have learned as a child from your parents and name it: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.1

In counting objects in your language, do you always simply combine a noun and a numeral as in 'one bee', 'one yellow yam', 'two letters', 'two words', 'three kola nuts', 'five farms' and 'how many cabbages', for example, or is it necessary to use other words, i.e. classifiers, in addition to the noun and the numeral, as demonstrated for Tiv and Ngɛmba above? Please tick one of the following:

- (a) We always just combine a noun and a numeral (number word) in counting, no other item (classifier) is needed: \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) We sometimes need to add another item (classifier) to noun and number word in counting: \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) We always need to add another item (classifier) to noun and number word in counting: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.2

If you have ticked (b) or (c), please give some examples here along with a translation in English/French.

### 3.3

In the following, we would like you to check some concepts for the way they are counted in your language, i.e. whether they require an additional item (classifier) or whether they can be counted directly, i.e. without an an additional item (classifier).

You find a list of nouns roughly arranged according to semantic domains such as INSECTS, PLANTS etc. These nouns come in phrases in combination with a number word. Please provide adequate translations of these phrases into your language.

#### Roots and tubers

yam

one yam

---

how many yams?

---

six yams

---

cassava

one cassava

---

how many cassavas?

---

three cassavas

---

yellow yam

one yellow yam

---

how many yellow yams?

---

four yellow yams

---

cocoyam

one cocoyam

---

how many cocoyams?

---

seven cocoyams

---

**Fruits**

bean

one bean

---

how many beans?

---

eight beans

---

banana

one banana

---

how many bananas?

---

nine bananas

---

plantain

one plantain

---

how many plantains?

---

two plantains

---

maize

one maize (cob/grain)

---

how many/much maize?

---

two maize (cobs/grains)

---

palmnut

one palmnut

---

how many palmnuts?

---

three palnuts

---

coconut

one coconut

---

how many coconuts?

---

four coconuts

---

kola nut

one kola nut

---

how many kola nuts?

---

three kola nuts

---

groundnut

one groundnut

---

how many groundnuts?

---

five groundnuts

---

nut

one nut

---

how many nuts?

---

two nuts

---

mango

one mango

---

how many mangos?

---

six mangos

---

pawpaw

one pawpaw

---

how many pawpaws?

---

three pawpaws

---

onion

one onion

---

how many onions?

---

seven onions

---

potato

one potato

---

how many potatoes?

---

ten potatos

---

orange

one orange

---

how many oranges?

---

eight oranges

---

pepper

one pepper

---

how many peppers?

---

three peppers

---

okra

one okra

---

how many okras?

---

two okras

---

ginger

one ginger

---

how many gingers?

---

two gingers

---

guava

one guava

---



how many guavas?

---

ten guavas

---

eggplant / aubergine

one eggplant / une aubergine

---

how many eggplants? / combien d'aubergines?

---

three eggplants / trois aubergines

---

avocado / avocat

one avocado / un avocat

---

how many avocados? / combien d'avocats?

---

two avocados / deux avocats

---

tomato

one tomato

---

how many tomatos?

---

five tomatoes

---

garden egg

one garden-egg

---

how many garden-eggs?

---

three garden-eggs

---

**Products**

fufu

one fufu (portion/loaf)

---

how many fufus (portions/loaves)?

---

two fufus (portions/loaves)

---

meat

one piece of meat

---

how many pieces of meat?

---

two pieces of meat

---

bean cake

one bean cake (portion/loaf)

---

how many bean cakes (portions/loaves)?

---

two bean cakes (portions/loaves)

---

**Animals**

fish

one fish

---

how many fish?

---

five fish

---

snake

one snake

---

how many snakes?

---

three snakes

---

chicken

one chicken

---

how many chickens?

---

two chickens

---

mussel

one mussel

---

how many mussels?

---

four mussels

---

**Insects**

mosquito

one mosquito

---

two mosquitoes

---

many mosquitoes

---

fly

one fly

---

five flies

---

bedbug

one bedbug

---

three bedbugs

---

louse

one louse

---

two lice

---

flea

one flea

---

three fleas

---

cricket

one cricket

---

four crickets

---

locust

one locust

---

ten locusts

---

**Artefacts**

house

one house

---

how many houses?

---

seven houses

---

wall

one wall

---

how many walls?

---

four walls

---

brick

one brick

---

how many bricks?

---

nine bricks

---

coin

one coin

---

how many coins?

---

eight coins

---

bank note

one bank note

---

how many bank notes?

---

ten bank notes

---

gun

one gun

---

how many guns?

---

three guns

---

letter

one letter

---

how many letters?

---

fours letters

---

(light)bulb

one bulb

---

how many bulbs?

---

two bulbs

---

**Body parts**

eye

one eye

---

two eyes

---

ear

one ear

---

two ears

---

head

one head

---

two heads

---

arm

one arm

---

two arms

---

breast

one breast

---

two breasts

---

hair

one hair

---

three hair(s)

---

muscle

one muscle

---

two muscles

---

**Humans**

person

one person

---

how many persons?

---

nine persons

---

child

one child

---

how many children?

---

eight children

---

woman

one women

---

how many women?

---

six women

---

wife

one wife

---

how many wives?

---

four wives

---

man

one man

---

how many men?

---

ten men

---



husband

one husband

---

how many husbands?

---

two husbands

---

mother

one mother

---

three mothers

---

father

one father

---

five fathers

---

**Plant**

tree

one tree

---

how many trees?

---

five trees

---

root

one root

---

how many roots?

---

six roots

---

leaf

one leaf

---

how many leaves?

---

three leaves

---

grain

one grain

---

how many grains?

---

four grains

---

pod

one pod

---

how many pods?

---

three pods

---

grass

one grass (blade)

---

how many/much grass (blades)?

---

two blades of grass

---

**Environment / landscape**

river

one river

---

how many rivers?

---

seven rivers

---

hill

one hill

---

how many hills?

---

four hills

---

forest

one forest

---

how many forests?

---

two forests

---

stone

one stone

---

how many stones?

---

three stones

---

stick

one stick

---

how many sticks?

---

ten sticks

---

mushroom

one mushroom

---

how many mushrooms?

---

five mushrooms

---

### 3.4

Any other examples that you may want to add?

Any other observations that you may want to share?