

# Pronominal and Possessive Referencing in Limbum

Wepngong Ndi Francis  
Leiden University (LUCL)

## ***Abstract***

This paper presents Limbum personal and possessive pronoun systems, demonstrating their precise specific reference when compared with the pronoun systems of other Grasslands Bantu languages. As far as we have been able to discover, although most Grassfields Bantu languages have dual and plural forms for inclusive pronouns, they are all complex pronouns. Limbum appears to be the only Grassfields Bantu language with simple pronoun forms for the dual and plural inclusive, or speech act, pronouns. There are seventeen personal pronouns and forty possessive pronoun forms. This number indicates that speakers of Limbum can be very explicit in their pronominal references. The Limbum personal pronouns are more explicit than the possessive pronouns, as is demonstrated in the way the forms are distributed in the various combinations of persons. With the possessive pronouns, many distinctions collapse and the combination of the persons are more general even though they have more forms. As such, the possessive pronouns are combined in eight groups made up of five forms each, according to noun class, while the personal pronouns are distributed in individual slots with a few slots bearing the same pronoun form.

## **I Introduction**

Limbum is the language of the Wimbun people, who live in Donga Mantung Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The tribe is made up of thirty-two major villages with a population of more than one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants following the 1986 census. The *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun*, (Dieu et Renaud, 1983) gives the reference number 903 for Limbum and classifies it as an Eastern Grassfields Bantu language, Northern group, together with other languages like Mfumte and Yamba. According to the *Ethnologue* (Grimes and Grimes, 2000), Limbum is classified as Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam Nkam, Nkambe. Limbum has three significant dialects. The differences between the dialects are mostly phonological. These differences do not affect intelligibility. These three dialects have been labelled North, Central, and South Limbum. The dialect selected for written development by the Wimbun Literacy Association is the Central variety. For this study, we have used this Central dialect whereas the dialect used for the only grammar book at this point in time; Fransen (1995) is the Southern dialect.

### **I.i. Limbum Pronominal system from a cross-linguistic perspective**

In Cysouw's (2003) classification of person/number marking, a paradigm like that of Limbum with 8 simple pronouns represents one of eight common types out of (a continuum of) fifty-six different paradigmatic structures. Following his criteria, that means: (a) it is widely dispersed throughout the world's languages and (b) it is a typical pattern in at least two genetic units. Thus the pattern is relatively frequent among the world's languages.

Nevertheless, within Africa this type is mainly found in Cameroon and Nigeria and occurs in various branches of the Niger-Congo stock and in the Chadic family of the Afro-Asiatic stock (more specific see Cysouw p.140, footnote 28); other closely related languages have 7 simple pronouns – 1+2 and 1+2+3 form a single category together (no “dual”). Many other Grassfields languages have a 5 way simple pronouns system. It seems that the existence of such a pronouns system is a contact phenomenon rather than a genetic feature.

While the simple pronouns of Limbum are not too unusual cross-linguistically, real compound pronouns (i.e. such with incorporative reading of the first part of the compound), as in Limbum, are only known to exist in central-western Cameroon. (Cysouw, 2003:167). They occur in languages which are genetically and geographically closely related – most of the languages being Grassfields languages; a specialty that distinguishes Limbum from most of these other languages, is that Limbum makes a distinction between incl. and excl. simple pronouns which most other languages don't.

While the system of simple pronouns of Limbum is rather common, real compound pronouns (i.e. such with incorporative reading of the first part of the compound), as in Limbum, are extremely uncommon. In fact, they are only known to exist in central-western Cameroon (Cysouw, 2003:167). Pronoun compounds are found in languages all over the world, but complex pronouns, i.e. grammaticalized compounds of two pronouns, the first of which gets an incorporative reading as in Limbum, are not attested anywhere else in the world. Nevertheless, this may be due to descriptive practice, i.e. such compounds might exist in other language phyla and other parts of the world, too, but may just have not been recognized as such. One fact that hints towards such a situation is that numerous languages belonging to different genealogical groups and spoken in various areas of the world do have compounds which consist of two compounds, where the first has an incorporative reading as in the complex pronouns. Thus it is likely that a grammaticalization of such compounds could have taken place elsewhere, too. Nevertheless, for no language spoken outside of Cameroon and Nigeria, these compounds are reported to be grammaticalized.

### **II. Simple Pronouns**

Unlike English, Limbum personal pronouns are numerous. Sometimes there may be more than one Limbum simple pronoun for the same English pronoun or two Limbum simple forms can be combined to form complex pronouns, whose reference is more exact than that of English plural pronouns. Limbum personal pronouns are independent of the noun class of the noun to which they refer, though all of them refer primarily to human beings or anthropomorphized beings.

### II.i. Personal Pronouns: 1+2 as a value for person

1+2 is a value for person for personal pronouns. Like other values such as 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person, 1+2 has a singular and a plural form. Pronouns have 4 values for person and 2 values for number yielding 8 different pronouns for each set. Personal pronouns and possessive pronouns distinguish person and number but not gender. Person and number are independent categories.

Table 1: Simple personal pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1	<b>mɛ̀, m̀</b>	<b>wɛ̀r</b>
2	<b>wɛ̀, à</b>	<b>wɛ̀e</b>
1+2	<b>sò</b>	<b>sɛ̀e</b>
3	<b>ye, e</b>	<b>woowɛ̀e, a</b>

**m̀, à** and **e** (I, you, s/he) can be used as subjects before **ce** and **be** which are aspect and tense markers respectively whereas **mɛ̀, wɛ̀** and **ye** are used in object positions when referring to humans. They are different from non-human object pronouns. But it should be noted that these personal pronouns are not used in subject positions if there is a full subject noun. They replace the subject like in a situation where one can say **Jôn, e ce vɛ̀** – John, he is coming. **Jôn** is the addressee and not the subject of the sentence. **E** cannot act as an agreement marker.

Examples:

#### (1) **mɛ̀, m̀**

1SG SBJ

- (a) **Mɛ̀ zhe baa.**  
 1SG eat fufu.  
 I have eaten fufu.

1SG OBJ

- (b) **E ba fa nè mɛ̀.**  
 3SG PST1 give BEN 1SG  
 He gave it to me.

1SG SBJ.

- (c) **M be fu dù foŋ.**  
 1sg FUT2 go also  
 I will also go.

(2) *wè, à*

2SG SBJ.

- (a) **Wè yε ye a?**  
2SG see 3SG Q  
Have you seen him?

2SG OBJ.

- (b) **E be fa nè wè.**  
3SG FUT1 give BEN. 2SG  
He will give it to you.

2SG SBJ.

- (a) **À be vù a?**  
2SG FUT1 come Q  
Will you come?

(3) *sò*

1SG + 2SG SBJ.

- (a) **Sò à mu du wεε à se'kε?**  
INCL.DU. 1SG.SBJ.AGR PST2 go hunt when?  
When did we go for a hunt?

1SG + 2SG OBJ.

- (b) **E be fa sò baa.**  
3SG FUT1 give INCL.DU fufu  
He will give us fufu.

(4) *ye, e*

3SG SBJ.

- (a) **E yε wè a?**  
3SG see 2SG Q  
Has he seen you?

3SG OBJ

- (b) **Fa ye Mbu**  
Give 3SG goat  
Give him the goat.

(5) *wèr*

1PL SBJ.

- (a) **Wèr be dù.**  
1PL FUT1 go.  
We will go.

1PL OBJ.

- (b) **A mu suŋ wèr.**  
3PL PST2 tell 1PL  
They told us.

(6) *wèe*

2PL SBJ.

- (a) **Wèe be zhe kε?**  
2PL FUT1 eat what?  
What will you eat?

2PL OBJ.

- (b) **Wèr**            **be**    **fa**    **wèè**    **mrù’**.  
1PL                FUT1   give 2PL    wine  
We will give you wine.

(7) *Sèè*

1SG + 2SG + 3SG

1SG + 2PL

1PL + 2SG

1PL + 2PL

INCL.PL SBJ.

- (a) **Sèè**            **du**    **wɛɛ**.  
INCL.PL          go    hunt.  
Let’s go for a hunt.

INCL.PL OBJ.

- (b) **Làa**    **a**        **fa**        **sèè**            **mnta’**.  
Tell                3PL    give    INCL.PL        chairs.  
Ask them to give us chairs.

(8) *woowèè*, *a*

3PL SBJ.

- (a) **Woowèè**        **a**                    **vù**    **a?**  
3PL                3PL.SBJ.AGR    come    Q.  
Have they come?

3PI OBJ.

- (b) **Wèr**    **à**                            **mu**    **yɛ**        **woowèè**.  
1PL    1PL.SBJ.AGR            PST2    see        3PL  
We saw them.

3PL SBJ.

- (c) **A**        **ce**                    **vù**.  
3PL    ASP.PROG.    come  
They are coming.

### III. The Inclusive Pronouns

Limbum inclusive pronouns refer both to the speaker and addressee (first person plus second person). They are used almost entirely in hortative and interrogative mood. For these reasons they can also be referred to as “speech act” pronouns. They have no phonological or morphological relationship to any of the first and second person pronominal forms. Unlike inclusive pronouns in other Grassfields Bantu languages, which are complex forms,<sup>1</sup> the Limbum inclusive pronouns are simple forms. These inclusive pronouns include a singular “dual” (1+2) form and a plural form. They can both be used in any syntactic function in which a noun or any other pronoun can be used. The singular “dual” form is **sò** ‘you(sg) and I, you(sg)’. This is the only simple

---

<sup>1</sup> Voorhoeve, 1967; Parker, 1986.

dual pronoun form in all of the Limbum pronominal system. This dual form refers only to both the first person singular and second person singular. As such, it is inclusive in meaning.

The plural inclusive pronoun reference requires that either one or both of the first and second person referents be plural. There is only one exception, where a third person singular referent is included with the speech act reference to the participants, as can be seen below. [Either 1 or 2 or both being plural means that a third person referent is involved; either making 1 or 2 plural.] In this case, the plural inclusive pronoun refers to two participants and a singular third person referent in an imperative mood. There is only one inclusive plural form which is *sèe* 'we, us', which can be used in any syntactic environment.

#### IV. Complex Pronouns

Complex personal pronouns are a combination of two simple personal pronouns, and they denote two units of referents. The first component of the complex is formally plural and may take the value of 1st (exclusive or inclusive) *wèr* and *sèe*, respectively, or 2nd person *wèe*. It signals the participant values of 'speaker', 'addressee', and 'speaker and addressee'. The second component of the complex can only take the form of 3rd person (singular or plural) and denotes the value 'non-participant'. This second component always uses the object form of the simple personal pronoun, i.e. *ye* for singular, *woowèe* for plural, even if syntactically the complex pronoun functions as subject. It also has to be noted that such complex structures do not appear within the domain of possessives. The forms of the complex personal pronoun are displayed in table 3 as follows:

	complex pronoun	referents of speech act scenario	
		participant value	non-participant value
<b>dual</b> reference value (only two persons referred to)	<i>wèr ye</i>	Speaker (SPK) (1SG)	non-participant (N) (3rd person)
	<i>wèe ye</i>	Addressee (A) (2SG)	
	-----	Addressee+ non participant (A) (2SG)	
<b>plural</b> reference value (more than two persons referred to)	<i>wèr woowèe</i>	speaker (SPK) (1SG)	
	<i>wèe woowèe</i>	Addressee (A) (2SG)	
	<i>sèe woowèe</i>	speaker + addressee (SPK, A) (1SG + 2SG)	

Table 3. Complex personal pronouns

For dual reference, the two units of referents comprise only one person each, one unit consisting of either speaker or addressee, the other unit consists of a person not



(d) Oblique position

**M ce fa baa ca ba nè wèe ye.**  
 1SG ASP.PROG give fufu PROX FOC BEN CMP.PRO.A+EXCL.DU  
 I am giving this fufu to the two of you ('addressee-dual').

(e)

**Wèr woowèe be kep kwâa.**  
 COM.PRO.S+EXCL.PL FUT1 harvest corn  
 We ('speaker-plural') will harvest corn.

(f)

**Wèe woowèe be fâ' nsuu ca.**  
 CMP.PRO.A+EXCL.PL FUT1 work farm DEM.PROX.  
 You ('addressee-plural') will work on this farm.

(g)

**Sèe woowèe be tarte.**  
 CMP.PRO.S+A+INCL.PL FUT1 meet  
 We ('speaker+addressee-plural') will meet.

## V. Syntactic Properties of Pronouns and Agreement

There is a major difference between pronouns and agreement markers. The forms discussed so far refer to humans only and not to non-human referents. In addition to these personal pronouns (inclusive personal possessives), there are also agreement markers that refer to the person or the class of the subject and object referents.

### V.i. Subject agreement

Some subject pronouns or subject markers are simple pronouns agreement markers, which follow the subject of the sentence. They follow nouns, possessive pronouns, possessive adjectives or possessive focused adjectives with which they agree in numbers and the class gender. We can find them after first, second and third person plural pronouns but never after the singular pronoun forms. They occur in these positions only when the verb is in the past tense or the sentence is in the interrogative. These subject markers are important in that they show the number person distinction in sentences. **à** refers the first and also to the second person singular, and **zhi** refers to third person plural agreeing with class one, seven or ten non-human nouns, **rli** refers to third person singular agreeing with class five non-human nouns, **mi** refers to third person plural agreeing with class six nouns, **a** refers to third person plural human subject, and **bvi** refers to third person plural agreeing with class two non-human subjects.

Table 5: Subject Agreement Markers

1/2/3 human/animate	<b>a</b>
CL.1	<b>à</b>
CL.2	<b>bvi</b>
CL.5	<b>rli</b>
CL.6	<b>mmi</b>
CL.7	<b>zhi</b>
CL.10	<b>zhi</b>



Examples:

(a) After Nouns

i) **Dgwe** **à** **bu.**  
 Dog CL1-3SG.SBJ.AGR lost  
 The dog is missing.

ii) **Dgwe** **zhi** **bu.**  
 Dogs CL1-3PL.SBJ.AGR lost  
 The dogs are missing.

iii) **La** **rtaa** **rli** **sii.**  
 CL5-3SG.POSS.ADJ cap CL5.3SG.SBJ.AGR dirty  
 My cap is dirty.

iv) **Bcè'** **bvi** **sà'nger** **mè.**  
 Clothes CL2-3PL.SBJ.AGR torn 1SG.  
 My clothes are torn.

(b) After Pronouns

i) **Sèe** **à** **misi** **mfà'** **wɛɛ.**  
 1PL.INCL 1PL.SBJ.AGR finish jobs all.  
 We have completed all the jobs.

ii) **Woowèe** **a** **ce** **dù** **ntaa.**  
 3PL 3PL.SBJ.AGR ASP.PROG go market.  
 They are going to the market.

iii) **Wèe** **à** **zhe** **fufu** **baa** **a?**  
 2PL 2PL.SBJ.AGR eat Q.  
 Have you eaten fufu?

(c) After Possessive Pronouns

i) **Yàa** **à** **she** **wɛɛ.**  
 1SG.POSS.PRO 1SG.SBJ.AGR burn all  
 Mine has burnt completely.

ii) **Yaa** **zhi** **she** **wɛɛ.**  
 1PL.POSS.PRO 3PL.SBJ.AGR burn all.  
 Mine have burnt completely.

(d) After Possessive Adjectives and Possessive Focused Adjectives

i) **Yàa** **nà'** **à** **bi** **muu.**  
 CL1a-1SG.POSS.ADJ cow 1SG.SBJ.AGR deliver child.  
 My cow is delivered of a child.

ii) **Mo** **mkuu mi** **fuu** **a?**  
 CL6-2SG.POSS.ADJ beans CL6-SBJ.AGR germinate Q.  
 Have your beans germinated?

iii) **Dgwa** **wàa** **à** **vù.**  
 Wife CL1a-1SG.POSS.FOC.ADJ 3SG.SBJ.AGR come.  
 My wife has come.

iv) **Mkuu** **mmaa** **mmi** **bi.**  
Beans CL6-1SG.POSS.FOC.ADJ CL6-3PL.SBJ.AGR ready.  
My beans are ready.

The second person singular pronoun subject **à** is used in interrogatives involving the present and in future affirmative constructions whereas **wé** is used with the other tenses. The **à** as used below should not be confused with the way it agrees with the subject as seen above. The third person plural subject pronoun **woowèe** followed by **a** in the subject position can be replaced by **a** in the same environments but **à** cannot be used in the same way.

Examples:

a) **À ce gèe ba kɛ?**  
2SG ASP.PROG do FOC what  
What are you doing?

b) **À be no kɛ?**  
2SG. FUT1 drink what  
What will you drink?

c) **Wè mu du mbo a?**  
2SG. PST2 go there Q  
Did you go there?

d) **Woowèe a be vù àyànṣè.**  
3PL. 3PL.SBJ.AGR FUT1 come tomorrow  
They will come tomorrow.

e) **A be vù àyànṣè.**  
3PL. FUT1 come tomorrow  
They will come tomorrow.

## V.ii Object Pronouns

Those that can be used only in the subject position are **mò'**, the alternate form of the pronoun for **rmo'**, **e**, 'he/she' **à** 'you(sg)' and **a** 'they'. **Ye** 'him/her' can be used only in the object position. The first person singular pronoun subject changes from **mè** to **m̄** in the present or future tense.

Beside simple pronoun forms that we have seen above as occurring in the object positions, there are other pronoun forms, which take the object forms. They have the same forms as some possessive adjectives, same subject pronouns and simple object pronouns. They also agree with the number and class of the nouns they are referring to.

It should be noted that they replace only non-human objects in sentences. These object pronouns include: *zhi*, *bvi*, *rli*, *rmo'*, *mo*, *mò'*, *mmo'*, and *mmi*

#### Examples

- a) **Dgwe**                    **à**                    **lòr**                    **zhi.**  
 Dog                    1SG.SBJ.AGR                    take                    CL7/1-3SG.OBJ.  
 The dog have taken it.
- b) **Lè bvi**                    **njep baa.**  
 Put CL2-3PL.OBJ.                    Prep. bag  
 Put them in the bag.
- c) **E**                    **lòr**                    **rli.**  
 1SG                    take                    CL5-3SG.OBJ.  
 He has taken it.
- d) **Wè**                    **lè**                    **bvi**                    **fɛ?**  
 2SG.                    keep                    CL2-3PL.OBJ.                    where  
 Where have you kept them?
- e) **E**                    **lòr**                    **mmo'**                    **a**                    **ma'.**  
 3SG.                    take                    CL6-3PL.OBJ.                    CONJ. throw.  
 He has taken some and thrown.
- f) **Dgwe**                    **à**                    **zhe**                    **rmo'**  
 Dog                    3SG.SBJ.AGR                    eat                    C5-3SG.OBJ.  
 The dog has eaten one of them.
- g) **Ntannguu**                    **à**                    **nòŋ**                    **mbendùu**                    **mò'**  
 Wood                    3SG.SBJ.AGR                    sleep                    Prep.                    CL1-3SG.OBJ.  
 The wood is lying on top top another one.
- h) **M be dù**                    **àmbùu**                    **mo.**  
 1SG. FUT1 go                    behind                    CL1-3SG.OBJ.  
 I will follow it.

## VI. Possessives

In Limbum, the possession of a noun may be indicated in two different ways at the level of the noun phrase: (1) using a possessive pronoun to modify a noun phrase with the head noun and by (2) using a possessive pronoun to replace the noun, e.g., *mine*. We therefore have possessive pronouns and possessive adjectives in Limbum, which dependent on noun classes in that they acquire concord prefixes of the noun they modify (possessive adjectives) or refer to (possessive pronouns). Thus the possessive adjectives are divided into Possessive adjectives and Possessive focused adjectives. Possessive pronouns are built on the out-of-focus form<sup>2</sup> of possessive adjectives, which are themselves already marked for noun class agreement.

---

<sup>2</sup> The normal order in a Limbum noun phrase whose possessive adjective is out-of-focus is: possessive adjective + head noun, e.g., *la rtaa* 'my cap'. When the possessive adjective is in focus, the order becomes: head noun + SBJ.AGR + in-focus possessive adjective, e.g., *rtaa r-laa* 'my cap (not your cap) '.

### V.i Possessive Pronouns

Limbum possessive pronouns could be construed as having a double prefix. Possessive focused adjectives and possessive pronouns double the initial consonant, which show concord with class six nouns whereas possessive adjectives do not. Thus, an *r-* prefix marks agreement with a singular noun from class 5, *y-* followed by a low tone marks agreement with a singular noun from classes 1 and 1a, the plural of nouns from class 1 is the *b-* prefix of noun class 2, *m-* prefix for nouns from class 6, and *y-* followed by a high tone marks plural in class 10, which is the plural of class 1a.<sup>3</sup> The in-focus form of possessive adjectives and the possessive pronouns have the same form but their identification depends on their function. Possessive pronouns can occur in either the subject or object positions whereas possessive focused adjectives follow the nouns they modify.

Possessive pronouns differ from possessive adjectives in that the possessive pronouns stand apart to represent nouns whereas possessive adjectives precede nouns and possessive focused adjectives follow nouns.

Table 3: Simple possessive adjectives (class 5)

	Singular possessors	Plural possessors
<b>1</b>	<b>La</b>	<b>ler</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Loo</b>	<b>lee</b>
<b>1+2</b>	<b>Lisò</b>	<b>lisèè</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Li</b>	<b>lap</b>

### V.ii. Adjectival possession

Possessive adjectives have more forms than the possessive pronouns. They can be divided into possessive focused adjectives and possessive adjectives. Possessive adjectives precede nouns whereas possessive focused adjectives follow the nouns. Most of the forms that we will see in table 2 below as possessive focused adjectives are possessive pronouns which replace nouns. Possessive adjectives have the same forms except when *r*, *b* and *m* prefixes are added to form some possessive focused adjectives.

#### V.ii.a Default possession

Possessive (default) adjectives precede the noun, thus *la rtaa* ‘my cap’. This word order is remarkable in Limbum. Below a few examples:

- a) *yàa ndap* = ‘my house’
- b) *wa mndap* = ‘my houses’
- c) *yàa mbu* = ‘my goat’
- d) *yaa mbu* = ‘my goats’

---

<sup>3</sup> See Table 3 below for exact forms

Note that the word *mndap* ‘houses’ is a class 6 noun that behaves as a class 2 noun. This is because a nasal cannot be preceded by a plosive. In such a case, the bilabial plosive is replaced by a bilabial nasal.

The table of possessive default adjectives is given in the paper on page 18. Below, for the sake of consistency, a slightly adapted version:

Table 1: possessive (default) adjectives

Class	Singular				Plural			
	1SG	2SG	1+2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	1+2PL	3PL
1	yàa	yòo	zhisò	zhii	yèr	yèe	zhisèe	yàp
2	wa	wo	visò	vi	wer	wee	visèe	wap
5	la	lo	lisò	li	ler	lee	lisèe	lap
6	ma	mo	misò	mi	mer	mee	misèe	map
7	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	zhisèe	yap
10	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	zhisèe	yap

### V.ii.b Focused possession

In focused possession, possessive adjectives follow the noun, thus *rtaa rlaa* ‘my cap’. This is the unmarked order in Limbum. The examples a) to d) of chapter V.i.a, then, can also be expressed in the focal mode:

e) *ndap yàa* = ‘my house’

f) *mndap bwaa* = ‘my houses’

The possessive focused adjectives of noun classes 1, 7, and 10 are similar to their default counterparts. Those of class 2, 5, and 6 have a double concord structure, in which a weaker agreement marker is attached to the stronger default form. The agreement marker onset seems to correspond phonologically with the initial consonant of the original morpheme, as /w-/ or /v-/ is preceded by /b-/ or /l-/ by /r-/ and /m-/ by /m-/.

Table 2: possessive focused adjectives

Class	Singular				Plural			
	1SG	2SG	1+2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	1+2PL	3PL
1	yàa	yòo	zhisò	zhii	yèr	yèe	zhisèe	yàp
1b	wàa/àa	wòo/òo			wèr/èr	yèe/èe	zhisèe	wàp/àp
2	b-waa	b-woo	b-visò	b-vii	b-wer	b-wee	b-visèe	b-wap
5	r-laa	r-loo	r-lisò	r-lii	r-ler	r-lee	r-lisèe	r-lap
6	m-maa	m-moo	m-misò	m-mii	m-mer	m-mee	m-misèe	m-map
7	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	zhisèe	yap
10	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	zhisèe	yap
10b	waa	woo			wer	wee	zhisèe	wap

The possessive focused adjectives belonging to noun classes 1 and 10 have two forms, one with and one without the initial /y-/. The latter is only used upon a specific set of words referring to siblings, relatives and close friends. Examples of this type are *muu wàa* ‘my child’ and *ɲkar àa* ‘my friend’.

In the focal form, the tone of the possessed noun in some cases also changes. This especially holds true for low-tone words. This change, however, is optional and entangled with dialectical variation. The following pairs, derived from the fieldwork sessions, illustrate this:

g) *yàa njèe* = ‘my sheep (default)’ – *njěe yàa* = ‘my sheep (focus)’

h) *yaa kùu* = ‘my leg (default)’ – *kũu yaa* = ‘my leg (focus)’

### V.iii. The difference between focused and default possession

Focused adjectival possession is used in cases of comparison, conflict or confusion, and therefore in situations in which the relation between the possessor and the possessed noun needs to be underlined and all other possible possessor-candidates need to be excluded. The form does not inherently express anger or impoliteness. *Rtaa rlaa*, then, could be translated in different ways during the sessions, each time in agreement with the context of the discourse; ‘my cap, not yours’, ‘my own cap’, ‘my cap’, or simply ‘my cap’.

Apparently, the usage of possessive constructions within the specific word group referring to siblings, relatives and close friends that we saw in 3.2 is restricted to the focal mode. Hence, the correct forms are *muu wàa* ‘my child’ and *boo waa* ‘my children’, not *\*yaa muu* and *\*yaa boo*.

### V.iv. Substantial possession

The substantially used possessive pronouns are similar in form to the possessive focused adjectives (table 2).

i) *mbu anà a yaa* = ‘those goats are mine’

### V.v. Focus distinction in the possessive adjectives

Limbum has two different types of possession at the level of a noun phrase:

- 1) Adjectival possession; the combination of a possessive adjective and a noun
- 2) Substantial possession; the replacement of a noun by a possessive pronoun

The former can be subdivided into focused and default adjectival possession. All forms are used in consensus with the corresponding noun classes.

### V.vi. Other forms of possession

In case of double possession, the two items are juxtaposed:

- j) *boo yòo makɯ* = ‘the children of your grandmother’
- k) *boo makɯ yòo* = ‘the children of your grandmother (focused)’

However, in constructions of the type ‘your X of his Y’, in which both items has a possessive pronoun, a relative clause needs to be made.

- l) *mbăa yoo ce e fa wɛ̃* = ‘your share of his money’ (literally: ‘your money that he has given’)

Limbum has yet another dimension in possession, used when possessed items do not have a *de facto* possessor. The particle *ler* can be used in both the default and focused constructions and indicates that the possessed item belongs to a lot of people.

- m) *a ler rtaa* = ‘it is our cap’
- n) *a rtaa rler* = ‘it is our cap (focus)’

Finally, there is an exceptional case where possession is inferred. In that situation, the simple personal pronoun, which stands for the possessor, occurs after the verb whereas the object occurs before the verb. The possessor is seen in such a syntactic construction as a victim. Example:

<b>Mbɯ</b>	<b>à</b>		<b>bɯ</b>	<b>mɛ̃.</b>
Goat	CL1-3SG.SBJ.AGR	lost	1SG.	

My goat is lost.

### VI. Conclusions

In Cameroon, complex pronouns are relatively common. They are found in languages of different branches of Niger-Congo (Cysouw 2003), and among these most frequently in Grassfields languages. Though the structure of the compounds is very similar in the various languages, there are strong indications that complex pronouns are an individually acquired phenomenon, and not a genetic feature. “The idea of making compound pronouns is borrowed (or developed in parallel), but not the compound pronouns themselves.” Thus, apart from being interesting in themselves, complex pronouns as they are found in Limbum may also provide further evidence for a linguistic area straddling the Cameroon Nigerian border (see Good, Bakassi Buffer Zone).

## REFERENCES

- Cysouw, A. 2003. *The Paradigmatic Structure of Person Marking*. Oxford University Press. Dieu, Michel and Patrick Renaud. 1983. *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun*. Yaounde: CERDOTOLA, DGRST.
- Fiore, Lynne E. 1987. *A Phonology of Limbum*. Non-thesis project for MA in Linguistics, University of Texas at Arlington.
- . 1977. *A phonology of Limbum*. ms..
- Grimes, Barbara F. and Joseph E. Grimes. 2000. *Ethnologue*. Dallas, Texas: SIL.
- Gufler, Hermann. 1983. *Limbum Dictionary*. Catholic Mission Nkambe.
- Fransen, Margo Astride Eleonora. 1995. *A grammar of Limbum: a grassfields bantu language spoken in the North West Province of Cameroon*. Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Higgins, Kathleen and Virginia Bradley. 1985. *Limbum language learning course*. Yaounde: SIL.
- Hollenbach, Barbara. 1970. Inclusive plural: a further look. *Linguistics* 60: 27-33.
- Ndi, Augustine and Ndi Robert. 1983. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò I* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor I, 2nd Revision) Yaounde: SIL.
- . 1985. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò II* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor II). Yaounde: SIL.
- & Ngah Samson. 1983. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò I* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor I). Yaounde: SIL.
- . 1988. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò, Fàake ba Nfo. 2.* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor II) Yaounde: SIL.
- . 1996. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò, Fàake ba Nfo.* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor) Yaounde: SIL.
- . 2003. *Bkinfêr Tàta ba Nyakò I* (Stories from Tata, Nyako, Faake and Nfor I) Yaounde: Collection PROPELCA.
- & Wabe N. Cyprian, Shey Sylvester A. 1986. *Ŋwà' Jems*. The Book of James. Catholic Mission Mankon.
- Ndi, Francis Wepngong, 2013, *Limbum-English Dictionary*. In Print.
- Ndi, Robert, Wabe Cyprian N and Shey Sylvester A. 1979. *Ŋwà' Jems* (The Book of James). Mankon, Bamenda Catholic Mission.
- Ngange, Emmanuel T. 1996. *Yeni à Rbè' ker Saŋ Limbùm*. (Learn how to Read and Write Limbum, 1st edition). Nkambe, Wimbun Literacy Association.
- . 1999. *Yeni à Rbè' ker Saŋ Limbùm*. (Learn how to Read and Write Limbum, 2nd edition). Nkambe: Wimbun Literacy Association.
- . 1999. *Bkinfêr 3*. (Stories 3). Yaounde: PROPELCA, University of Yaounde I.
- Parker, Elizabeth. 1986. Mundani pronouns. *Pronominal systems*. Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr. 131-66.
- Reenen, Pieter Van, and Jan Voorhoeve. 1977. *Gender in Limbum*. Yaounde: ONAREST.
- Wiesemann, Ursula ed. 1986. *Pronominal systems*. Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr.
- Voorhoeve, Jan. 1967. Personal Pronouns in Bamileke. *Lingua* 17:421-30.



## List of Abbreviations

1SG,2SG,3SG	1 <sup>st</sup> ,2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Singular	FOC.	Focus
1PL,2PL,3PL	1 <sup>st</sup> ,2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Plural	INCL.	Inclusive
A	Addressee	Q	Interrogative
ADJ.	Adjective	LOC.	Locative
AGR.	Agreement	OBJ.	Object
ASP.	Aspectual Marker	PST1	Today Past
BEN.	Benefactive	PST2	Yesterday Past
CL1-,CL2-,CL5-, CL6-,CL7- & CL10-	Noun Class Labels	POSS.	Possessive
CONJ.	Conjunction	Prep.	Preposition
CMP.	Complex	PRO.	Pronoun
DU	Dual	PROG.	Progressive
EXCL.	Exclusive	PROX.	Proximal
FUT1	Today Future	SPK	Speaker
FUT2	Tomorrow Future	SBJ.	Subject
DEM.	Demonstrative		

**Appendix 1:** Table for Possessive Adjectives and Noun Classes

Person	1SG.	2SG	1+2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL	1+2.PL
Class1/1a	yàa	yòo	zhìsò	zhii	yèr	yèe	yàp	zhìsèe
Class 2	waa	woo	visò	vi	wer	wee	wap	visèe
Class 5	la	lo	lisò	li	ler	lee	lap	lisèe
Class 6	ma	mo	misò	mi	mer	mee	map	misèe
Class7/7a	yàa	yòo	zhìsò	zhii	yèr	yèe	yàp	zhìsèe
Class 10	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	yap	zhisèe

Table for Possessive Focused Adjectives and Noun Classes

Person	1SG.	2SG	1+2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL	1+2.PL
Class 1/a	yàa	yòo	zhìsò	zhii	yèr	yèe	yàp	zhìsèe
Class 1b	wàa	wòo	wèe	zhii	wèr	wèe	wàp	zhìsèe
Class 2	bwaa	bwoo	bvisò	bvii	bwer	bwee	bwap	bvisèe
Class 5	rtaa	rloo	rlisò	rlii	rler	ree	rlap	rlisèe
Class 6	mmaa	mmoo	mmisò	mmii	mmer	mmee	mmap	mmisèe
Class 7/a	yàa	yòo	zhìsò	zhii	yèr	yèe	yàp	zhìsèe
Class10	yaa	yoo	zhisò	zhii	yer	yee	yap	zhisèe
	waa	woo	zhisò	zhii	wer	yee	wap	zhizii

1SG. Singular forms: **yàa, wàa, rlaa, yaa** – mine

Plural forms: **bwaa, mmaa, yaa, waa** - mine

2SG. Singular forms: **loo, rloo, yòo, wòo** - your

Plural forms: **yoo, bwoo, moo, mmoo** - your

2PL. Singular forms: **yèe, , rlee, wèe** – your

Plural forms: **yee, yee, mee, mmee, wee, bwee** – your

3SG. Singular forms: **li, rli, zhii** – his/her/it

Plural forms: **vi, bvi, mii, mmii, zhii** – his/her/it

3PL. Singular forms: **yàp, lap, rlap, wàp** - their

Plural forms: **yap, bwap, map, mmap, wap** - their

Dual Singular forms: **lisò, rlisò, zhìsò** – our

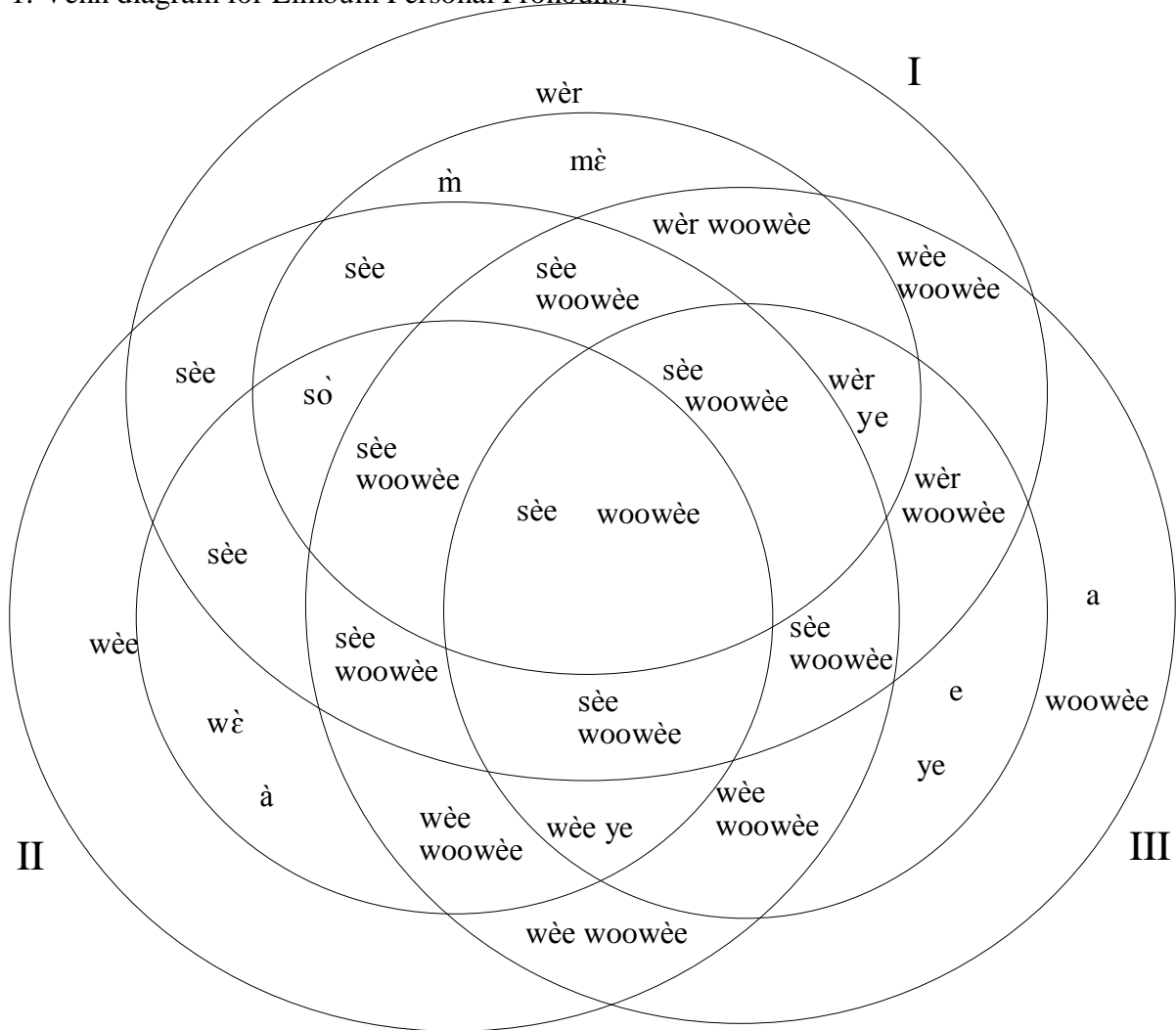
Plural forms: **visò, bvisò, misò, zhisò, mmisò** – our

Singular Inclusive forms: **lisèe, rlisèe, zhìsèe** - our

Plural Inclusive forms: **visèe, bvisèe, misèe, zhisèe, mmisèe** – our

**Appendix 2:**

**1. Venn diagram for Limbum Personal Pronouns.**



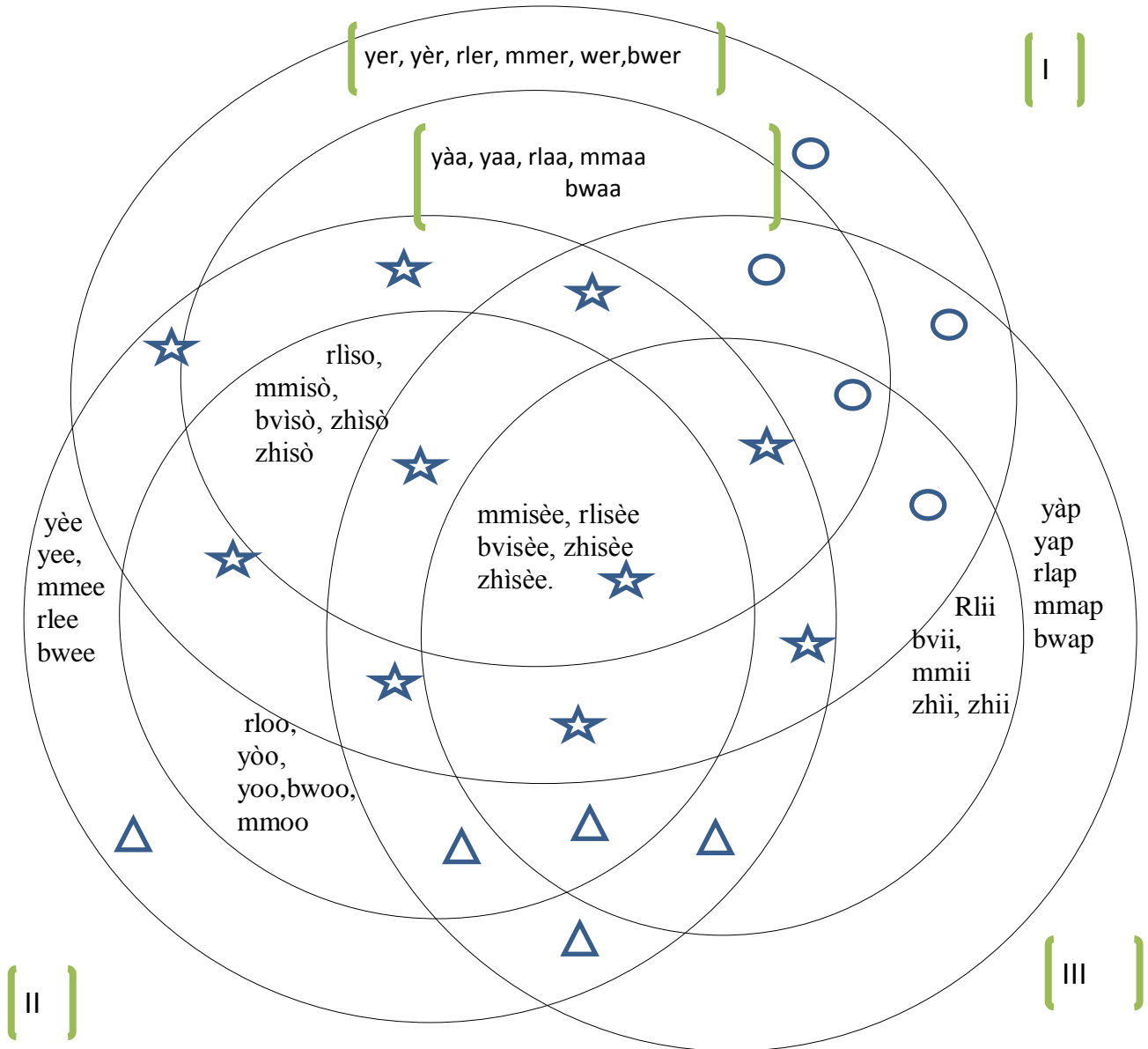
I = 1st Persons

II = 2nd Persons

III = 3rd Persons

The singular forms are within the inner circles and the plural forms are within the outer circles.

## 2. Venn Diagram for Possessive Pronouns



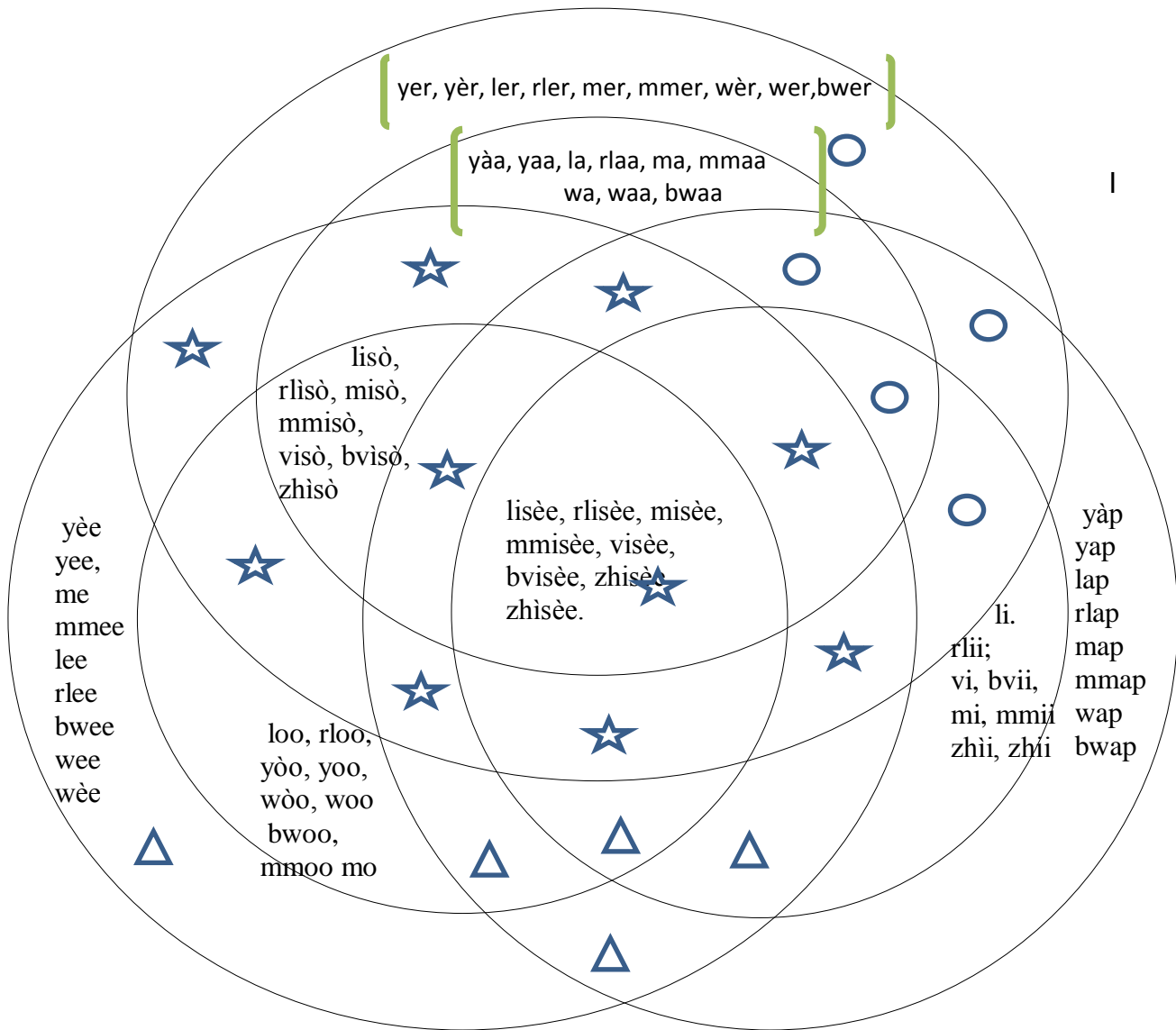
I = 1st Persons

II = 2nd Persons

III = 3rd Persons

The singular forms are within the inner circles and the plural forms are within the outer circles. The various shapes show that the same forms are used where various persons intersect.

### 3. Venn Diagram for Possessive Adjectives



II

III

I = 1st Persons

II = 2nd Persons

III = 3rd Persons The singular forms are within the inner circles and the plural forms are within the outer circles. The various shapes show that the same forms are used where various persons intersect.