Afrikanistisches Kolloquium

**Freitag, 19.04.2024 12-14 Uhr,
Campus Westend, Seminarhaus SH 2.103**

Roland Kießling (Hamburg)

"Ein Muskel Muschel", "drei Stock Nadel", "zehn Kern Leute": In wenigen Schritten zum Numeralklassifikator im Benue-Kongo

Numeral classifier systems do not figure prominently in the overall typological record of African languages, as reflected in their drastic underrepresentation in prominent surveys of the topic such as Aikhenvald 2000 and Gil 2013. This picture has been changing recently, due to the availability of relevant data from a wider range of Benue-Congo languages of various branches (Cross River, Tivoid, Ekoid, Grassfields Bantu), converging in the Nigerian/Cameroonian borderland. These data attest to the presence of classifiers that categorize counted items for their shape and texture (e.g. long and rigid vs. flat vs. small and globular) as well as for their aggregation type (bundle vs. heap) and partition (half, piece). Beside mensural classifiers (Gil 2013) which provide nouns of low countability such as meat, blood, oil and wine with a unit of measure, it is striking to also find sortal classifiers that apply to nouns of high countability such as tooth, person, stone and plantain.

The present talk explores/examines the semantic and morphosyntactic properties of Benue-Congo numeral classifier systems in a typological and a diachronic perspective, based on three case studies, i.e. Kana (Ogoni, Cross River), Ugare (Tivoid) and Ngəmba (Eastern Grassfields). While these three represent different stages of historical emancipation and consolidation of numeral classifiers, they retain a fairly high degree of etymological transparency. With respect to lexical source concepts, the classifier items originate in nouns for concrete objects such as body parts (eye, hand, head, horn), in basic level terms (person, child), many of which relate to the botanical domain (grain, fruit, stick, leaf), and in terms of aggregation (bunch, bundle, heap, lump). Syntactically, the emergent classifier constructions reflect constituency relations directly inherited from associative predecessor constructions.

While most Benue-Congo numeral classifier systems co-exist with fully fledged noun class systems or have come to supersede residual ones (Kießling 2018), their forms and functions raise questions about their genetic status and their areal diffusion in a wider perspective.

Der Vortrag wird auf Deutsch gehalten.

Roland Kießling ist Professor am Afrika-Asien-Institut der Universität Hamburg. Sein Arbeitsschwerpunkt liegt auf der Dokumentation und Analyse afrikanischer Sprachen; phonetische Transkription, Morphosemantik, Sprachwandel; Kuschitische Sprachen (bes. Süd), Niger-Kongo (bes. Süd-Bantoid), !Xoon (Südkhoisan).