Rebecca Paterson - University of Oregon
rpaters3@uoregon.edu
1   Introduction

Verbal categories in Ʉt-Ma'in, a Kainji language of Nigeria

A recent study of Niger-Congo languages (Nurse, Rose, & Hewson, 2010) attempts a survey of

verbal categories of the major divisions of the language phylum. This endeavor sought to reach beyond

the knowledge of the well studied Bantu languages to a better understanding of languages across Niger-

Congo. This paper adds to the knowledge of verbal categories in Niger-Congo languages by offering

data from Ʉt-Ma'in, a Kainji language, to the discussion.

There are approximately 60 Kainji languages that make up the sub-branch within Benue-Congo

first recognized in Williamson (1989). No data from Kainji languages was included in the Nurse et al.

(2010) study quite likely because very little on Kainji languages has been researched or published.

Blench & McGill (2012) describe the Kainji languages as showing 'remarkable morphological

diversity…[and having] complex verbal forms with multiple affixes'; they also claim that:

> 'the academic neglect of Kainji languages is both unwarranted and unjustified in view of their
> importance. Given the endless recycling of material on already well-known Bantu languages in
> the descriptive and theoretical linguistics literature, a greater focus on the Kainji languages and
> their analytic challenges is surely to be encouraged.'

Data is presented from Ʉt-Ma'in [gel], spoken in Kebbi State and Niger State, Nigeria.

Comparative verbal morphology data is presented from closely related C'Lela [dri].

Ʉt-Ma'in employs verbal suffixes, a series of pre-verb auxiliaries and nominalizations to

express the various tense and aspect categories of the language. Within the auxiliary paradigm, there is a

three way tense distinction: past imperfective, present imperfective and future. The suffixed verb

morphology paradigm shows only a two way tense distinction: past versus non-past.

(1)   ɔ̄m   rɛ́-g-ɔ̄n   sāp   ɔ́   zwɔ̄gɔ̄r
        1SG   eat-PST-DIST   rice   LOC   Zuru.town
        'I ate rice in Zuru (before coming here)'

The suffixing paradigm expresses additional aspectual meanings for past forms, which include perfective interpretations along with distance (1), affectedness of the object, and exclusiveness of the subject (2). Exclusiveness of subject is marked by a verb suffix -έ that emphasizes that only the referent of the subject pronoun/noun is capable of or subject to the predicate. To my knowledge, this type of exclusivity of the subject has not been described as a verbal category within an aspect system.

(2)   ú   jɔ̄n-έ   hɔ̀g-d-ɘ̀-mέ
       C1.3SG   leave-EXCL   hear-C5-ASSOC-6M-shame
       '(Only) he leaves ashamed./He is the only one leaving in shame.'

2   References:

Blench, Roger, & McGill, Stuart. 2012. Documentation, Development, and Ideology in the Northwest Kainji Languages. *Language Documentation and Description*, *11*, 90–135. Retrieved from http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/General/McGill%20and%20Blench%202012%20offprint.pdf

Nurse, Derek, John Hewson & Sarah Rose. 2010. *Verbal categories in Niger-Congo languages*. http://www.mun.ca/linguistics/nico/index.php

Williamson, Kay. 1989. Benue-Congo overview. In The Niger-Congo languages : a classification and description of Africa's largest language family. Lanham: University Press of America.

3   Classification and sociolinguistic background

- Ụt-Ma'in [ɔ̄tʰ.māʔ.īn], (Fakanci; ISO 639-3 gel); 36,000+ speakers (Regnier 1992:7)
- Niger-Congo, Benue-Congo, East Benue-Congo, Central Nigerian, Kainji (Williamson & Blench 2000)
- 60+ Kainji languages (McGill & Blench 2012:97); a new language, Damakawa, was first reported in 2008 (McGill 2008)
- Northwest West Kainji Cluster- Gwamhi-Wuri-Mba [bga], C'Lela (Dakakanci/Dakakari) [dri] and Ụt-Hun (Dukanci/Dukawa) [dud].

4   Basic clause structure

- Consistent SVO word order (SV/AVP/AVRP); obligatory overt S/A argument (noun or pronoun); optional only in the imperative.
- TAM marking suffixed to verb stem; no person/number/noun class agreement marking on verbs.

- Some indication of case marked arguments in 1SG pronoun subject **ɔ̄m** (3) vs. object form **mɛ́** (2), tone on other pronouns, and unmodified nouns as subject position (4a) vs. object (4b).

(1) *hɔ̄:bɔ̄t dâudā hā:g ɔ́ménè.*

S		V-TAM	OBL_{LOC}	
hɔ̄:b-ɔ̄t	*dâudā*	*hā-:g*	*ɔ́*	*mɛ́=nè*
friend-C6	Dauda	go-PST	LOC	1SG.ACC=with

‘Dauda's friends went with me.’ (06.10.20..9)

(2) *nā gʲín mɛ́ ə̀zán*

A	VTAM	P	OBL_{LOC}	
nā	*gʲín-Ø*	*mɛ́*	*ɔ́*	*zán*
3PL.NPERS.NOM	hate-NPST	1SG.ACC	LOC	outside

‘I am hated outside (Lit: They hate me outside.)’ (05.11.FSC..24)

(3) *ɔ̄m jā:g wɔ́n ɔ̄màp gjɔ̄p*

A	V-TAM	R	P	OBL_{TEMP}
ɔ̄m	*jā-:g*	*wɔ́n*	*ɔ̄m-àp*	*gʲɔ̄p*
1SG.NOM	give-PST	3SG.ACC	C6M-meat	yesterday

‘I gave him/her meat yesterday.’ (13.08.Bk1..29)

(4a) **fàrsɛ̀** *hɛ̄:g*   (4b) *ɔ̄m hɛ̄:g* **ɔ̄sfàr** *sɛ̀m wɔ́r*

S-CM	V-TAM
fàr-sɛ̀	*hɛ̄-:g*
tree[1]-C4.NOM	fall-PST

‘Shea trees fell’ (Smith 2007:22)

A	V-TAM	CM-P
ɔ̄m	*hɛ̄-:g*	*ɔ̄s-fàr-s-ɛ̀-m-wɔ́r*
1SG.NOM	fall-PST	C4-tree-C4-ASSOC-C6M-length

‘I cut down the tall shea trees.’ (Smith 2007:76)

(5a) *ɔ̄m ɔ́g mādùkúr*   (5a) *wā mā:g ūkúr*

A	V_{AUX.TAM}	V-*d* -ASSOC-C-P
ɔ̄m	*ɔ́-g*	*mā-d- `u-kúr*
1SG	PROG-PST	build-C5-ASSOC-C3u-room

‘I was building a room.’ (2006.12..18)

A	V-TAM	P
wā	*mā:-g*	*ū-kúr*
C1.NOM	build-PST	C3-room

‘He built a room.’ (06.12.04..27)

5 Suffixing verb morphology

Verb Root	Suffix 1	Suffix 2	Suffix 3
1.	-Ø 'NPST'	-(ɔ̄s)tè 'COMPL'	-ɔ̄n 'DIST'
2.	-g / -k 'PST'	-ɛ́ 'EXCL.S'	3.
4.	5.	-ɔ̄ʔsè 'PERFECT'	6.

- Obligatory suffix 1:

---

[1] The root *fàr* refers to the shea tree and is glossed in the interlinear simply as 'tree'.

- o Hypothesis 1: **Tense**: past vs. non-past
- o Hypothesis 2: **Aspect**: factitive vs. perfective

(6) *nḗtə̄tín rē̄ ə̄rgá ɔ́ ttʃʷā̄ nὲ.*

A	V	P		
nḗt-ə̄t＝ín	*rē̄-∅*	*r-gá*	*ɔ́*	*t-tʃʷā̄＝nὲ*
people-C6＝2PL.INCL.POSS	eat-NON.PST	C5-cooked.grain	and	C6-soup＝with

'Our (incl.) people eat cooked grain and soup.' (06.10.20..22)

(7) *wə̄n **nák** ə̀rtɔ́m sók.*

A	V_TAM	P	OBL_MANNER
wə̄n	***nák***	*ə̀r-tɔ́m*	*sók.*
3SG.NOM	know.PST	C5-hoeing	well

'He knew hoeing very well.' (2006.12.20..4)

- • Optional suffixes 2 and 3: **Aspect**: completive, exclusive subject (contrastive focus?), distal
- • **Completive**

(8a)

wə̄n	***rē̄-∅ -:stὲ***	*r-gá*
3SG.NOM	eat-∅-COMPL	C5-yam

'He ate all the yams (there are none left).'
(13.08.Bk1..23&24)

(8b)

ɔ̄m	***rē̄ -∅ -:stὲ***
1SG.NOM	eat-∅-COMPL

'I ate (everything).'

(9a) *ɔ̄m **zɔ̀ŋgtὲ** gjɔ̄p*

S	V-TAM	OBL_TEMP
ɔ̄m	*zɔ̀ŋ-∅-tὲ*	*gⁱɔ̄p*
1SG.NOM	prepare-NPST-COMPL	yesterday

'I prepared yesterday.'(13.08.Bk1..33)

(9b) *ɔ̄m **zɔ̀ŋgtὲ** ɔ́ gjɔ̄p*

A	V-TAM	P	OBL_TEMP
ɔ̄m	*zɔ̀ŋ-∅-tὲ*	*ɔ́*	*gⁱɔ̄p*
1SG.NOM	prepare-NPST-COMPL	C3.ACC	yest.

'I prepared it yesterday.'(13.08.Bk1..33)

- • Past plus completive

(10a) *ɔ̄m tʃʷa:g*

ɔ̄m	*tʃʷa-:g*
1SG.NOM	enter-PST

'I entered'(13.08.Bk1..41)

(10b) *ɔ̄m tʃʷagtὲ*

ɔ̄m	*tʃʷa-g-tὲ*
1SG.NOM	enter-PST-COMPL

'I entered (every place)' (13.08.Bk1..41)

- • Past plus distal

(11)

wā̄	*ré-g-ɔ̄n*	*ɔ̄t-rʷā̄.*
C1.NOM	eat-PST-DIST	C6-yam

'He ate yams (from some far away place).' (06.12..12.7)

- • Non-past plus completive plus distal

(12a) *ɔ̄m nā̄:stὲ*   (12b) *ɔ̄m nā̄:stə̄n*

S	V-Sx1-Sx2		S	V-Sx1-Sx2-Sx3
ɔ̄m	nāːs-∅-tɛ̀		ɔ̄m	nāːs-∅-tɔ̄n
1SG.NOM	ruin-NPST-COMPL		1SG.NOM	ruin-NPST-COMPL-DIST
'I ruin (something)'			'I ruin (something) far away.'	
(and it is completely destroyed)			(and it is completely destroyed)	
(13.08.Bk1..45)			(13.08.Bk1..45)	

- **Exclusive subject (contrastive focus?)**
  - use of *mɛ́* 1SG.ACC form for 1SG pronoun "subject"

(13a)	**mɛ́**	náp-∅-ɛ́	wá	(13b)	**mɛ́**	náp-ɛ́
	1SG.ACC	know-NPST-EXCL	C1.ACC		1SG.ACC	know-NPST-EXCL
	'(Only) I know him.'(13.08.Bk1.39)				'(Only) I know.' (13.08.Bk1.39)	

(14a)	*ɔ̄m nápɛ́ wá (13.08.Bk1.39)	(14b)	*ɔ̄m nápɛ́ (13.08.Bk1.39)

(15)

ú	jɔ̄n-∅-ɛ́	hɔ̀g-d-ə̀-m-ɛ́
C1.3SG.ACC	leave- NPST-EXCL	hear-C5-ASSOC-6M-shame

'(Only) he leaves ashamed./He is the only one leaving in shame.' (13.08.GK..2:42)

(16) *wā shít wá zɔ̄ wá hʲánɛ́ à, kò wárə̀ tɔ̀, ná wárə̀ wá?*

(a)

wā	shít	wá	zɔ̄	wá	hʲán-∅-ɛ́	à,
3SG.NOM	ask	3SG.ACC	COMP	3SG.ACC	see-NPST-EXCL	Q

'He (the big king) asked him (the man) saying, "Did he see?...'

(b)

kò	wár-ə̀	tɔ̀,	ná	wár-ə̀	wá?
or	explain-ASSOC	C6	3PL.NPERS	explain-ASSOC	3SG.ACC

'Or (did) someone tell him about it?' (13.08.GK..1:44,45)

6   Imperfective auxiliary constructions - Aux + Nominalization

One argument semantics			Tense/Aspect	Possible sources for Auxiliaries and nominal marking
S	AUX	Semantic Verb	8.	9.
S	ɔ́-∅	C-V	PRES.PROG	current equative verb: ɔ́ 'be'
S	ɔ́-g	C-V	PST.PROG	current equative verb + PST: ɔ́-g 'be-PST'
S	dɛ́-∅	C-V	FUT	ɔ̄t-dɛ́ʔɛ́ 'travel, go'
S	dɛ́-∅	t-V	FUT.INCEPT	NOUN CLASS 6 marking
S	∅	t-V	FUT	NOUN CLASS 6 marking

Two argument semantics			Tense/Aspect	Possible source of nominal marking
A	AUX	Semantic Verb		
A	ɔ́-∅	Vᵢ- Cᵢ-ASSOC- Cⱼ-Oⱼ	PRES.PROG	inherent class of root

A	ɔ́-∅	V - *d* -ASSOC- C_j -O_j	PRES.PROG	NOUN CLASS 5
A	ɔ́-*g*	V_i- C_i-ASSOC- C_j-O_j	PST.PROG	inherent class of root
A	ɔ́-*g*	V - *d* -ASSOC- C_j -O_j	PST.PROG	NOUN CLASS 5
A	dɛ́-∅	V_i- C_i-ASSOC- C_j- O_j	FUT	inherent class of root
A	dɛ́-∅	V - *d* -ASSOC- C_j -O_j	FUT	NOUN CLASS 5
A	∅	V - t - ASSOC- C_j -O_j	FUT	NOUN CLASS 6

- **Present progressive:**

(17) ɔ̄m ɔ́-∅ ɔ̄m-dʒāːs [Ṵt-Ma'in]

1SG.NOM PROG-NPST C6m-washing

'I am washing up (the dishes).' (2006.12..4)

(18) əm el ən tʃ-sapto [C'Lela]

1SG COP.PROG LOC C6-washing

'I am washing up (the dishes).' (Adapted from Dettweiler 2012:13)

- **Equative (for comparison with Aux use above)**

(19) ɔ́dàʔɔ́ ràndímə̀ ɔ́ fə̀nùrī

OBL_{LOC} NP V NP

ɔ́dàʔɔ́ ràndí-mə̀ ɔ́-∅ fə̀n-ù-rī

now spider.web-C6M.NOM be-NON.PST road-C7U-1SG.POSS

'Now, the spider web is my road.' (FSC 2006.20)

- **Past progressive:**

(20) S V_{AUX.} C_i-V_i

ɔ̄m ɔ́-*g* ū-mā

1SG.NOM PROG-PST C3U-build

'I was building.' (2006.12..18)

(21) A V_{AUX} V-*d* -ASSOC-C_i -O_i

ɔ̄m ɔ́-*g* mā -d- `-u-kúr

1SG.NOM PROG-PST build-C5-ASSOC-C3U-room

'I was building a room.' (2006.12..18)

- **Future:**

(22) S V_{AUX} C-V

ɔ̄m dɛ́-∅ ū-mā

1SG FUT C3U-build

'I will build .' (2006.12..18)

(interpretation: I am going to join someone who is already building)

(23)   S   V$_{AUX}$ C-V

              ɔ̄m   dɛ́-∅   t-mā

              1SG   FUT   INCEP-build

'I will (start the process of) building.' (2006.12..18)

(inceptive interpretation)

(24)   S   V$_{AUX}$ C$_1$-V$_1$

              ɔ̄m   dɛ́-∅   s-vɔ̄k.

              1SG   FUT   C4-greet

'I will greet.' (2006.12..19)

(25)   A   V$_{AUX}$ V$_1$-s -ASSOC-C$_2$-O$_2$

              wɔ̄n   dɛ́-∅   vɔ̀k-s-ɔ̀-r-maŋ

              3SG   FUT   greet-C4-ASSOC-C5-old.woman

'He will greet the old woman.' (2006.12..18)

(26)   A   V$_{AUX.TAM}$ V$_1$-d -ASSOC-C$_2$-O$_2$

              ɔ̄m   dɛ́   mā-d- `-u-kúr

              1SG   FUT   build-C5-ASSOC-C3U -room

'I will build a room.' (2006.12..18)

References

Blench, Roger & Stuart McGill. 2012. The Kainji languages of Northwestern and Central Nigeria (Circulation Draft). Electronic ms. Online: http://rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Kainji/Kainji%20language%20overview.pdf

Dettweiler, Stephen. 2012. *C'Lela grammar sketch*. Unpublished ms.

Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ụt-Ma'in: A language of Nigeria. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=gel

McGill, Stuart. 2008. The Damakawa language. Electronic ms. Online: http://cicipu.org/papers/damakawa.pdf

McGill, Stuart & Roger Blench. 2012. Documentation, development, and ideology in the northwestern Kainji languages In Peter K. Austin & Stuart McGill (eds.) *Language Documentation and Description,Vol 11,* 90-135. London: SOAS.

Regnier, Clark. 2003. *A sociolinguistic survey of the people of Fakai District*. Elec. ms. SIL International. Online: http://www.sil.org/silesr/2003/silesr2003-021.pdf

Smith (Paterson), Rebecca Dow. 2007. *The noun class system of Ut-ma'in*. MA thesis, University of North Dakota. Online at http://arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/theses/_files/docs/2007-smith-rebecca-d.pdf

Williamson, Kay & Roger Blench. 2000. Niger-Congo. In *African languages: an introduction*. Bernd Heine & Derek Nurse (eds.), 11-42. Cambridge: University Press.

Abbreviations

A	AGENT-LIKE ARGUMENT OF A TRANSITIVE OR DITRIVALENT CLAUSE		O	OTHER ARGUMENT OF A TRANSITIVE CLAUSE
ACC	ACCUSATIVE		OBL	OBLIQUE
ASSOC	ASSOCIATIVE MARKER		P	PATIENT-LIKE ARGUMENT OF A TRASITIVE OR DITRANSITIVE CLAUSE
AUX	AUXILIARY VERB			
C	NOUN CLASS MARKER		PL	PLURAL
COMP	COMPLEMENTIZER		PROG	PROGRESSIVE ASPECT
COMPL	COMPLETEIVE ASPECT		PST	PAST TENSE
FUT	FUTURE		R	RECIPIENT ARGUMENT OF A TRI-VALENT CLAUSE
INCEP	INCEPTIVE			
LOC	LOCATIVE		S	SINGLE ARGUMENT OF A INTRANSITIVE CLAUSE
NLZ	NOMINALIZER			
NP	NOUN PHRASE		SG	SINGULAR
NPST	NON-PAST		TAM	TENSE/ASPECT/MODALITY
NPERS	NON-PERSONAL		TEMP	TEMPORAL
NOM	NOMINATIVE		V	VERB