

# **Nominal affixes and number marking in the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria**

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## 1 Introduction: Plateau languages

The Plateau branch consists of between sixty and eighty languages spoken in central Nigeria, spreading from Lake Shiroro to the banks of the Benue River (Figure 1). Although most Plateau populations are small (2-10,000 speakers), there are probably more than a million speakers of Plateau languages, with the bulk of the numbers made up from large groups such as Berom and Eggon. Some Plateau languages, such as Sambe and Yangkam, are moribund and others are severely threatened, such as Ayu.

Plateau languages represent one of the four major branches of East Benue-Congo outside Bantoid, together with Kainji, Jukunoid and Cross River. Internally, they are divided into a large number of subgroups, whose inter-relations are not well understood. Plateau languages remain extremely poorly studied, with no complete grammar or dictionary for any language except Berom (which is in French and thus inaccessible to Nigerians). Basic overviews of their ethnography and ethnic distribution can be found in **Temple1922** **Meek1925**; **Meek1931** **Gunn1953**; **Gunn1956** and **CrozierBlench1992**

The most striking feature of Plateau is its morphological and typological diversity. It is usually assumed that proto-Plateau would have had a system of paired nominal prefixes with semantic associations and alliterative concord, similar to but probably less elaborate than Bantu. However, these systems have collapsed and been rebuilt or in some cases disappeared completely. Compensatory morphology has evolved, including highly complex consonantal inventories and rich tone-systems. Synchronically, Plateau languages display systems of consonant mutation, contrastive length, as well as palatalisation, labialisation, lateralisation of initial consonants and combinations of all these.

Figure 1: The Plateau languages by subgroup

The origin of these diverse outcomes may lie in the characteristic marriage systems within the Plateau region. These often involved linguistic exogamy, which, combined with marital instability, resulted in the pervasive multilingualism which almost certainly played a role in the evolution of complex 'mixed' systems of number marking. Plateau marriage systems are discussed in considerable detail in **Muller1982** Many different systems co-existed, and there is evidence that when absolute numbers of speakers were much lower (often as little as 500 per language in the pre-colonial era) this principle of outmarriage was strongly enforced.

Plateau languages are assumed to form part of the broader unit represented by

East Benue-Congo (**Williamson1971; Williamson1989; WilliamsonBlench2000**). The earliest source for Plateau, **Koelle1854** gives wordlists of Ham (Hyam), Koro of Lafia (Migili) and Yasgua (Yeskwa). **Westermann1927** assigned the few languages for which he had data to a “Benue-Cross” family, corresponding to present-day East Benue-Congo, although later in **WestermannBryan1952** these were classified as “isolated units”. However, the modern subclassification of Plateau derives principally from the work of Joseph **Greenberg1963** who proposed dividing Westermann’s “Benue-Cross” languages into seven co-ordinate groups (including modern-day Kainji and Jukunoid). With numerous emendations and additions these have been reprised in almost all subsequent works (notably **WilliamsonShimizu1963; Williamson1971; Williamson1972; Williamson1989; Maddieson1982; Gerhardt1989; CrozierBlench1992; Blench1998; Blench2000a**). **Blench** reflects the most recent understanding of Plateau subgrouping.

Comparative studies of number marking in Plateau are scarce; **Bouquiaux1967** represents an initial attempt to discern commonalities across a small number of languages. Some Plateau languages retain complex systems of nominal affixes and alliterative concord, notably Kulu and other members of the northwest cluster and Tarok. However, many languages, such as Cara and the Ninzic cluster, include some affix alternation as part of a repertoire of number marking strategies, while subgroups such as Ndunic and Ake, have completely lost these systems. Other languages, such as Izere, have systems which look elaborate at first sight, but when segmental and tonal allomorphs are taken into account, the underlying number of pairings is considerably reduced. The existence of these systems certainly suggests that alternating affixes and concord were a feature of proto-Plateau, but actual segmental correspondences between affixes are few, pointing to a continuing process of renewal. Plateau also has frequent nasal prefixes, as well as numerous examples of unproductive nasals preceding C<sub>1</sub> of the stem (**Miehe1991**). Some of these are reflected more widely in other branches of Benue-Congo or even further afield in Kwa. However, the correspondences between noun classes and semantic subsets (humans, trees, animals, paired things) characteristic of Bantu are more tenuous.

The analytic challenge of Plateau is to account for synchronic number marking systems through the lens of the erosion of affix alternation. In the light of this, the confident assertions of authors such as **deWolf1971** in reconstructing the prefixes of proto-Benue-Congo seem very optimistic. Such reconstructed forms reflect a prior knowledge of Bantu and a large pool of miscellaneous data from which exemplars can be selectively chosen. This paper<sup>1</sup> is an overview of nom-

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<sup>1</sup> It would be impossible to list all those who have acted as informants, but Barau Kato, Daniel

inal affixing in the Plateau languages, based principally on my own fieldwork materials.<sup>2</sup> It describes the systems in individual subgroups and then asks what evidence these provide for the situation in proto-Plateau.

None of the authors who have classified Plateau languages have presented evidence for their classifications. This is not a criticism; faced with large arrays of data it is easier to set out what appears to be the case impressionistically than to write a monograph demonstrating it. The series of publications on Plateau subgroups, especially Plateau II and IV, by Gerhardt1969a (Gerhardt1969a; Gerhardt1969b; Gerhardt1971; Gerhardt19723a; Gerhardt19723bnot; Gerhardt19734; Gerhardt1974; Gerhardt1983a; Gerhardt1983b; Gerhardt1988a; Gerhardt1988b; Gerhardt1989; Gerhardt1994) assume the boundaries of these groups. A particular issue in the internal classification of Plateau and Jukunoid is the notion of a ‘Benue’ grouping. Shimizu1975a proposed that some branches of Plateau should be classified with Jukunoid. In particular, he argued that Eggon (and by implication the other Plateau V languages, including Nungu and Yeskwa) and Tarokoid (at that time consisting only of Yergam (=Tarok) and Basherawa (=Yanjkam)) formed a group together with Jukunoid. This emerged from his lexicostatistical tables and was further supported by five isoglosses, the words for ‘drink’, ‘tail’, ‘meat’, ‘fire’, and ‘four’. This expanded group he christened “Benue”. Gerhardt1983b questioned Shimizu’s hypothesis noting both that his own lexicostatistical work (GerhardtJockers1981) did not support this, and casting doubt on the five isoglosses proposed by Shimizu. The ‘Benue’ group continued in a sort of half-life, appearing in Gerhardt1989 as a subgrouping of Jukunoid and Tarokoid against the rest of Plateau. Blench2005 has presented evidence that there is a genuine boundary between Plateau and Jukunoid, drawing on lexical and morphological evidence.

This uncertainty is a reflection of a more general problem, the evidence for a bounded group “Plateau” in opposition to Kainji, Jukunoid, Dakoid or Mambiloid, other members of the Benue-Congo complex. The relationships between Plateau languages, their coherence as a grouping and their links with Jukunoid and Kainji remain undetermined. Rowlands1962 was the first to suggest that there was a dichotomy between certain languages of the Jos area, which he linked to West

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Gya and Selbut Longtau have been my principal co-workers on field data collection. Bitrus Kaze, Deme Dang, Ruth Adiwu, Barnabas Dusu (†), Gideon Asuku, Alex Maikarfi and Wayo Bai have been crucial to the development of extended materials in their languages. Staff members at NBT and SIL Jos have been always helpful in giving me access to unpublished materials and to discuss issues relating to particular languages. I would particularly like to thank Mark Gaddis for arranging workshops on the Koro cluster languages.

<sup>2</sup> Lexical and grammatical materials are available on the author’s website <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/PIOP.htm>

Kainji, and the remainder, but his short wordlists were far from constituting linguistic proof. Comparative analysis has produced some tentative evidence for isoglosses defining Plateau, but so far no phonological or morphological innovations that would define the group have been proposed. Some of this diversity is undoubtedly due to long-term interactions with the mosaic of Chadic languages also occurring on the Jos Plateau (Blench2003).

With these caveats, Figure 2 presents a new subclassification of Plateau, within the context of East Benue-Congo. Evidence for this subgrouping is presented in Blench (in press). The majority of evidence is lexical, but some subgroups, such as Northwest, clearly also share considerable common elements in the noun-class system. This “tree” is clearly not final, as there are too many co-ordinate branches and too little internal structure. But until further analysis is undertaken, provisional versions of Plateau which do not promote too many unwarranted assumptions are the best that can be produced.

for tree=grow'=east,delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges  
 [Benue-Congo [[[Kainji]]] [Plateau [ [Tarokoid] [Southern [Eggonic] [Jilic] ]  
   [Bo-Rukul     , name=br, anchor=west] [East] [Horom-Fyem, name=hf,  
     anchor=west] [Alumic] [Ninzic] [Ndunic] [West-Central] [Beromic]  
                   [North-West] ] [[Eloyi]] ] [[[Jukunoid]]]  
   [Cross River, Mambiloid, Dakoid, Bantoid                     ,edge=dashed] ]  
     [<->,dotted, thick] (hf) to [out=north,in=south] (br);  
 [inline]tree rotated. Check prose text for references to above/below/next

Figure 2: Benue-Congo languages: proposed classification

This paper is organised using these Plateau subgroups and listed approximately left to right. The summary Table 1 also gives a list of all known Plateau languages.

The great majority of material presented here is either from my own fieldwork since 1980, from manuscript sources, with a relatively small amount from published work, cited in the reference list. Where no source is cited it can be taken this is my own data. All original wordlists can be found on my website<sup>3</sup>. Some of the earliest data is not tone-marked, and the segmental transcription may be less reliable. Most Plateau languages have a three-level tone system and by convention the mid-tone is not marked. Therefore, if the data is tone-marked, a vowel without a tone is deemed to be mid. Where a standardised orthography exists, for example in the case of Mada, only the high tone is unmarked. I have noted

<sup>3</sup> Lexical and grammatical materials are available on the author's website <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/PIOP.htm>

deviations from the standard tone marking in relation to relevant examples.

The sample wordlist is usually five hundred items and of these some 350 are nouns with singular and plural recorded. Allowing for entries that cannot be elicited, the nouns available for analysis amount to around 300. Where the data has not been collected by the author, the sample may be smaller, whereas in the case of dictionaries prepared by the author, for example Berom, Izere, Mada and Tarok the sample is usually well over a thousand. For most languages only singular/plural pairs are available, but where a grammar sketch has been prepared, we also have an overview of the concord system. The reader should refer to the original wordlist for examples of the noun-class pairings, where these are summarised in the tables below.

Plateau languages exhibit extensive allomorphy in their nominal affix systems. Allomorphs are here defined as ‘one of two or more complementary morphs which manifest a morpheme in its different phonological or morphological environments’. In Plateau, tonal allomorphs are common, because the tone of the prefix may be driven by the tone of the stem, thus the V of a CV prefix may have one of three tone levels, as for example in Kulu. Sometimes claims of allomorphy in less-well-studied languages are only educated guesses, based on parallels with better known languages. The term alternation is used to apply to the change in prefix on a stem marking number, i.e. singular and either one or two plurals. Throughout the text, the tables present a summary of the prefix alternations occurring in the data, mostly wordlists. This is not ideal, as we have no evidence for the patterns of concord in many languages, but it provides a preliminary guide to the synchronic system.

## **2 Plateau languages by subgroup**

Table 1 shows a comprehensive list of Plateau languages, by subgroup, and a summary of the system of number-marking, as far as it is known. Where there is a published reference on a specific language, it is given, although I do not always agree with the analysis and the text presents my own hypothesis. No entry in the reference column means the summary is based on my own fieldwork. The names of the branches are proposed by the author, since the classification is at variance with previous proposals in many areas. Further justification can be found in **Blench2000a**

Table 1: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Northwest

IQQ		
Language	Comments	Reference
Eda	Reduced alternating prefixes, concord	
Edra	Reduced alternating prefixes, concord	
Acro	Reduced alternating prefixes	
Obiro	Reduced alternating prefixes	
Kulu	Extensive alternating prefixes, elaborate allomorphy, concord	<b>Seitz1993</b>
Ējēgha [Idon]	Extensive alternating prefixes, elaborate allomorphy, concord	
Doka	Data very poor	
Ēhwa [Iku-Gora-Ankwe]	Reduced alternating prefixes	

Table 2: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Beromic

IQQ		
Language	Comments	Reference
Berom	Reduced alternating prefixes, consonant mutation, concord	<b>Wolff1963;</b> <b>Bouquiaux1970</b>
Cara	Restricted alternating prefixes, stem-tone change, consonant mutation, concord	
Iten	Reduced alternating prefixes, consonant mutation, concord	<b>Bouquiaux1964</b>
Shall-Zwall	Data very poor but affix system apparently heavily eroded	

Table 3: Synthesis of nominal affixing: West-Central

L3cmQL2.4cm	
<b>Izeric</b>	
Izere of Fobur	Restricted alternating prefixes, and extensive stem-tone changes. <b>Blench2000b</b>
Icèn, Ganàng, Fəràn	Similar to others in group
<b>Rigwe</b>	
Rigwe	Innovative system, with residual concord <b>Anon2006 BlenchGya2012</b>
<b>Tyapic</b>	
Jju	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements <b>McKinney1979 Hyuwa1986</b>
Tyap	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements <b>Follingstad1991</b>
Gworok	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements <b>AdwiraahHagen1983</b>
Atakar, Kacicere, Sholyo, Kafancan	Similar to others in group
<b>Koro</b>	
Ashe	Very reduced affix alternation
Tinɔr (Waci-Myamya)	Very reduced affix alternation
Idū, Gwara	Very reduced affix alternation
Nyankpa-Bade	Very reduced affix alternation
<b>Hyamic</b>	
Shamang	As Hyam cluster
Cori	As Hyam cluster <b>Dihoff1976</b>
Hyam cluster	Nominal prefixes almost lost and replaced by consonant mutation and stem-tone change <b>Jockers1982</b>
Zhire	As Hyam cluster
Shang	Small number of alternating prefixes but probably borrowed from Koro languages
<b>Gyongic</b>	
Gyong (=Kagoma)	Very restricted alternating prefixes, palatalisation, concord <b>Hagen1988</b>
Kamanton	Similar to Gyong



Table 4: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Ninzic

p2.5cmQl		
Language	Comments	Reference
Ninzo	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
Ce	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	<b>Hoffman1976</b>
Bu-Nin̄kada	No morphological plurals	
Mada	Very restricted alternating prefixes, some concord, multiple other number-marking strategies	<b>Price1989</b>
Numana-Nunku-Gwantu-Numbu	Information inadequate	
Ningye-Ninka	Alternating prefixes lost, tone plurals	
Anib	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
Ninkyob	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
Nindem	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
Nungu	Information inadequate	
Ayu?	a. prefix alternation or addition b. consonant mutation c. tone-change d. nasal insertion	

Table 5: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Ndunic

lQl		
Language	Comments	Reference
Ndun-Nyeng-Shakara [=Tari]	Extremely reduced system, retaining Niger-Congo a/ba person class	<b>RueckEtAl2008</b>

Table 6: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Alumatic

lQl		
Language	Comments	Reference
Toro, Alumu-Təsu	No functioning noun-prefixes and a single plural suffix.	
Hasha	Innovative system, reduplicating first syllable of stem	
Sambe (†)	No functioning noun-prefixes and a single plural suffix.	

Table 7: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Southern

IQQ		
Language	Comments	Reference
<b>Eggonic</b>		
Eggon	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord, evolution of single pluralising prefix.	<b>Maddieson1982; Maddiesonnda), Sibomana1985</b>
Ake	No functioning noun-prefixes	
<b>Jilic</b>		
Jili	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	<b>Stofberg1978</b>
Jijili	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	

Table 8: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Southeastern

IQI		
Language	Comments	Reference
Fyem	Very reduced nominal affix pairings, suffixing, stem initial syllable reduplication	<b>Nettle1998a</b>
Horom	Very reduced nominal affix pairings, circumfixing	<b>Nettle1998b</b>
Bo-Rukul	Alternating prefixes with extensive allomorphy and concord	<b>Nettle1998b</b>

Table 9: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Tarokoid

IQQ		
Language	Comments	Reference
Tarok	Alternating prefixes and concord	<b>Sibomana1981 Longtau2008</b>
Pe [=Pai]	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord	
Kwang-Ya-Bijim-Legeri	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord	
Yanjkam [=Bashar]	Fragmentary nominal affix pairings, may be a problem of informant recall	
Sur [=Tapshin]	No functioning noun-prefixes	

Table 10: Synthesis of nominal affixing: Eloyi

IQI		
Language	Comments	Reference
Eloyi	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	<b>Armstrong1964 Mackay1964</b>

## 2.1 Northwest Plateau

Northwest Plateau consists of Eda/Edra, Acro-Obiro [=Kuturmi], (i) Kulu, Idon, Doka and Iku-Gora-Ankwe. No new data has been published since this group was set up, although a wordlist of Kulu has been circulated (**Moser1982** analysed in **Seitz1993**) and **Shimizu1996** has posted a grammar sketch on the Internet. Recent interest in Ẹda [=Kadara] language has resulted in an unpublished dialect survey, a preliminary alphabet book and the launching of an alphabet chart in 2009. Kadara is known to its speakers as ‘Ẹda’ and there is a closely related lect, Ẹdra (which is presumably the source of the common Hausa name). Two other lects for which information is recorded, Ejẹgha and Ẹhwa<sup>4</sup>, correspond to Idon and the Iku-Gora-Ankwe clusters (as named in the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist in **WilliamsonShimizu1968**; **Williamson1972**). The wordlists are so different from each other and from Ẹda that they clearly deserve separate language status. Northwest Plateau remains a high priority for further research.

Table 11 shows the singular/plural prefix pairings recorded in Kulu including tonal variants, based on **Moser1982** and **Seitz1993**. A postulated ‘underlying’ prefix is given together with its allomorphs. The mid-front vowel shows harmony with the stem-vowel. The bracketed nasals in the plural prefixes show their sporadic appearance. They are homorganic with the following consonant and only follow /i/.

Table 11: Kulu prefix pairings. Source: Re-analysis by author of **Moser1982** and **Shimizu1996**

cccc			
Singular		Plural	
Underlying	Surface	Underlying	Surface
E-	è, e, é, è, ε	bE-, a-	bè, bε, a
dì-	dì, di	a, be- e-	a, be, è, e
gE-	gè,ge,gé,gè,gε	bE-	be,bε
gì-	gì,gí,gí	E-, Ni-	be,i(m), i(ŋ), nì, ni, nĩ, ní(n), í(n)
gù-	gù,gu	E-, Ni-	ε,è,e,ì,i(n)
ì-	ì	Ni-	m,mi(n)
ù-	ù,u	bE-, i-	be, i

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Zac Yoder for sound files of wordlists of 384 items of these languages. Retranscribed by the author.

Tonal variation in prefixes is driven by the stem-tone (as in many Plateau languages, cf. **Blench2000b**) and the different surface tones do not in themselves mark distinct pairs marked for number. The numerous forms of a gV- prefix presumably point to these all originally having a single underspecified vowel which has gradually diverged<sup>5</sup>. The presence of an underspecified vowel in the V of a prefix is very common in the East Kainji languages with which Kulu is in contact and it is possible this is a borrowing.

Kulu has frequent doubled /l/ in stem-initial position, assumed to derive from nasal prefixes which have been first fossilised and then assimilated to an initial lateral. For example (1):

Doubled /l/ in stem-initial position *gé-llam* ‘water’ *gu-llúru* ‘storm’ *gɛ-llán* ‘chin’ *gè-llibi* ‘hyena’

Semantic associations in Kulu are weak, but the majority of nouns for persons show *E-/bE-* prefix alternation. Most domestic animals have a gV- singular prefix but no consistent plural marking. Wild animals, on the other hand, almost all have their singular and plural forms distinguished only by tonal differences in the stem. Trees, body parts, abstracts and even mass nouns do not form consistent sets marked by paired affixes. The *ni-* prefix for noun plurals is uncommon and surprisingly, it is strongly correlated with household items as in Table 12.

Table 12: The *ni-* plural prefix in Kulu

QQQ		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘knife’	<i>gí-ɲmán ní-ɲmán</i>
	‘bag’	<i>gi-mpak ni-mpak</i>
	‘mortar (wood)’	<i>gí-ɲklu ní-ɲklu</i>
	‘pot (generic)’	<i>gí-nugu nìi-nugu</i>
	‘head-board’	<i>gí-ɲgwel ní-ɲgwel</i>
	‘basket (generic)’	<i>gi-nɕžili<sup>+</sup> ni-nɕžili<sup>+</sup></i>
	‘spoon’	<i>gi-ntfàk ni-ntfàk</i>
	‘fish-trap’	<i>gí-sak nín-sak</i>

However, Kulu does operate a principle of using prefixes to assign semantics, such as the parts of a tree, by means of prefixes, as for example in (2):

<sup>5</sup> One reviewer queries the directionality of this process. However, if instead this were a case of convergence, this would require ten different surface forms to come together, which is hardly an economical explanation.

*Nominal affixes and number marking in the Plateau languages of Central  
Nigeria*

Kulu prefixes used to assign semantics e.g. parts of tree  
*gi-n-yoŋ* 'locust tree'  
*gé-n-yoŋ* 'locust fruit'  
*u-yoŋ* 'locust pod powder'

2.2 Beromic

The term ‘Beromic’ has been adopted here to cover former Plateau 2 languages. Beromic now consists of Berom, Iten, Cara and two closely related lects, Shall and Zwall, geographically distant in Bauchi State. The principal publications on Berom are **Bouquiaux1970**; **Bouquiaux2001** and **KuhnDusu1985** and on Iten, **Bouquiaux1964** Recent unpublished materials are dictionaries of Berom and Iten. Cara (Teriya) was reported in a mimeo paper by **Shimizu1975b** who first proposed a link with Berom. Shall and Zwall were previously classified with the Ninzic languages (Plateau 4), but are better placed with Beromic.<sup>6</sup> Beromic languages show a broad range of number-marking systems, although none have a full noun-class system and Shall-Zwall has lost all nominal affixing, perhaps under the influence of Chadic. A summary of Beromic number marking is shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Number-marking in Beromic. Source: All analyses of Beromic by author based on personal fieldwork.

IQ	
Language Summary of number marking	
Berom	Very restricted prefix alternations, incipient consonant mutation
Cara	Restricted prefix alternations, complex consonant mutation, tone and length contrasts
Iten	Prefix alternations, complex consonant mutation
Shall-Zwall	Nominal prefixes entirely lost

Berom itself has a complex internal structure. Central Berom includes the Du dialect described by Bouquiaux (1970, 2001) as well as both Vwang (Vom) and Ryom (Riyom). The speakers of Vwang are the most numerous, but the main dialect used for literacy and bible translation is the Eastern dialect, roughly centred on Foron, spoken by only a minority. The other minority dialect is Rim, south and east of the main centres. Data on Berom presented here is based on long-term fieldwork on the Foron dialect and shows marked differences with the Du of Bouquiaux.

Berom noun pluralisation strategies are extremely varied. The most common are:

- a) prefix addition or alternation

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Beromic/Comparative%20Beromic.pdf>.

- b) tone-raising
- c) (de)labialisation
- d) consonant alternation
- e) number marking in verbal nouns replicating corresponding verbal plurals

In some cases, two procedures can be applied to mark a plural, suggesting the dynamics of renewal. The great majority of Berom singular nouns have no prefix, while nouns that are marked for plural, the *be-* prefix is predominant. Berom shows ‘echo’ concord, where a small subset of concordial adjectives exactly copy the nominal prefix of the noun they qualify. Where the noun has no prefix, the adjective shows no concord. Berom also has just three suppletive plurals in a dictionary which includes more than 2000 nouns. Due to this relatively large database, it is possible to estimate the frequency of nominal prefix alternations in Eastern Berom seen in Table 14.

Table 14: Nominal prefix alternations in Eastern Berom

llL2cmQ	
sg.	pl. Incidence Semantics
∅-	<i>be-/pe- common loanwords, miscellaneous</i>
∅-	<i>ba- occasional body parts, grasses</i>
∅-	<i>nè- common Miscellaneous</i>
kè-	<i>nè- common Diminutives</i>
<i>ne-/n-/ŋ-/m-</i>	<i>∅- common colours, abstracts, mass nouns, diminutives</i>
<i>*ra-, re-, rɛ-</i>	<i>ba- common body parts, miscellaneous</i>
<i>se- ∅-, ba-, ne-</i>	<i>rare unpaired class marks abstracts, paired classes miscellaneous</i>
<i>-w-</i>	<i>∅- common Miscellaneous</i>
<i>wò-</i>	<i>be- occasional ‘person of, from’</i>
<i>-y-</i>	<i>∅- common</i>
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	

Tone-marks show the most characteristic tone for this class, with mid-tone unmarked. However, there are numerous unexplained exceptions, which may reflect interaction with the stem-vowel. *ra-* is not attested synchronically as a productive prefix, since all singular nouns in current Berom with stem-initial *ra-* have a zero singular prefix and a plural prefix *be-*. However, many words have

*ra-* as a first syllable, such as *rato* ‘head’ where the *ra-* is not historically part of the root, because *-to* is widely attested across Benue-Congo for ‘head’.

The alternation *wo-/be-*, notably attested in (3), the ethnonym for the Berom people, is probably not originally a noun class pair. *wo* is a personal pronoun and *be-* a generic plural marker.

*Wòrom* ‘Berom person’

*Berom* ‘Berom people’

The labial and palatal infixes *-w-* and *-y-* almost certainly originally derive from *u-* and *i-* prefixes which have been incorporated into the stem, as in many other Plateau languages. Kießling (2010) has described analogous processes in the languages of the Grassfields of Cameroun. Tonal changes accompany number marking suggest that the tone of the lost prefix vowel affected the stem tone of the noun.

The nasal prefixes form a complex set. It is most likely there is a diminutive marker *ne-* which shows up both as a plural prefix and unpaired in non-count nouns, as well as in *ke-/ne-* alternations marking small entities in (15). The *ke-* is probably cognate with Bantu *ka-* which has a similar diminutive function (Maho1999).

Table 15: *ke-/ne-* alternation in Berom

III		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘small calabash’	<i>kèkyók nèkyók</i>
	‘any small bird’	<i>kènòn nènòn</i>
	‘little town’	<i>kèrèpomo nèbàpomo</i>

*ne-* is also a plural marker for a set of miscellaneous nouns in Table 16:

Berom also has an *n-*, *ne-* unpaired marker for liquids, colours and abstracts as in Table 17, comparable to the *ma-* class 6 in Niger-Congo.

An optional *se-* prefix, noted with parentheses in Table 18, marks abstract states:

There is no trace of either Bantu class 3, *mù-* for trees and plants, or Class 9, *nì-* for animals. Berom has a small set of nouns showing initial consonant mutation in Table 19

Presumably these originally had a singulative, *fu-*, and the stem-initial *t-* was deleted, converting the high back vowel into a labial.



Table 16: *ø*-/ne- alternation in Berom

III		
Gloss	sg.	pl. Also
'knife'	<i>bá</i>	<i>nebá</i>
'lie'	<i>bɔs</i>	<i>nebɔs</i>
'household head'	<i>dá lɔ</i>	<i>beda nelɔ</i>
'limb, place'	<i>dèm</i>	<i>nedem</i>
'soil being dug'	<i>fòŋol</i>	<i>nèfòŋol n̄fòŋol</i>
'spirit'	<i>gabik</i>	<i>nègabik begabik</i>
'place'	<i>kwón</i>	<i>nèkwōn</i>

Table 17: Unpaired *n*-, *ne*- prefix in Berom

XX	
Gloss	Berom
'brownness'	<i>nèrós</i>
'blackness'	<i>nèsi</i>
'redness'	<i>nèsinàng</i>
'stubbornness'	<i>nèshágárák</i>
'intense sweetness'	<i>nèrókrók</i>
'dirtiness'	<i>nèrwík</i>
'friendship, fellowship'	<i>nèsá</i>
'blood'	<i>nèmí</i>
'milk (of animal or human being)'	<i>nèvasal</i>
'local salt (made from acca straw)'	<i>ntow</i>
'urine'	<i>ntyěk</i>

Table 18: An optional *se*- abstract prefix in Berom

XX	
Gloss	Berom
'leprosy'	<i>(se-)kwa</i>
'madness'	<i>(se-)lolon</i>
'slavery'	<i>(se-)sesàm</i>
'fascination, temptation'	<i>setógós</i>

Table 19: Consonant mutation in Berom

XXX	
Gloss sg. pl.	
‘hut for pounding’	<i>fwaŋ tàŋ</i>
‘cave’	<i>fware tàre</i>
‘thigh’	<i>fwa tà</i>

2.3 West-Central

2.3.1 General

West-Central Plateau consists of what used to be known as the ‘Southern Zaria’ languages. Published and manuscript sources include Koelle1854; Gerhardt1971; Gerhardt1974; Gerhardt1983a; Gerhardt1994; AdwiraahHagen1983; Adwiraah1989; McKinney1979; McKinney1983; Norris1984; Norris1990; Follingstad1991; Follingstadnd Although these languages are clearly linked, no published evidence supports their coherence as a group. The languages Nandu [=Ndun] and Tari [=Shakara] were listed in CrozierBlench1992 as part of this group. This is erroneous; Ndun-Shakara, together with the newly discovered Nyeng, form their own group, Ndunic (§2.4). The West-Central Plateau languages are a coherent geographical clustering and undoubtedly show numerous links with one another, but their genetic unity is unproven. Gerhardt (1983a: 67 ff.) presents a comparative wordlist showing cognates between Rigwe, Izere and Tyap. However, with both new insights into the phonology of these languages, and in particular the large number of lects still unrecorded at that period, a new comparative analysis is still to be undertaken. Figure 3 presents the known groups of West-Central Plateau as a flat array.

for tree=delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges [West-Central Plateau [Rigwe] [Tyapic] [Izeric] [Hyamic] [Koro] [Gyongic] ]

Figure 3: West-Central Plateau subgroups

2.3.2 Rigwe

The Rigwe language is spoken southeast of Jos. It is notable for an extremely complex phonology (Anon2006). Any former system of extensive alternating affixes has been replaced by a standard pluralising prefix or by a variety of tonal

changes. Analysis of Rigwe was undertaken by the author in co-operation with Daniel Gya. Table 20 lists the strategies for plural marking in Rigwe with their allomorphs:

Table 20: Nominal plural marking in Rigwe

No.	Strategy	Allomorph
I.	addition of <i>rè-</i> prefix	
II.	<i>rV-/Ñ</i> alternation	$\emptyset$ -/Ñ- alternation
III.	tone-raised on initial nasals with low tone	+ stem-tone raising
IV.	extra-low tone initial nasal raised to mid	extra-low stem-tone-raising

Class II nouns have a *rV-/Ñ*- alternation. *rV-* is realized as *ri-* when the stem vowel is front, and as *ru-* when the stem-vowel is back. *Ñ*- is realised as *ɲ*- before palatals *ɲ*- and *j*- and as *n*- elsewhere. Table 21 presents examples of the operation of this class:

Table 21: *rV-/Ñ*- alternations in Rigwe nouns

XXX		
	Gloss	Sg. Pl.
	'head'	<i>ritʃi ñtʃi</i>
	'eye'	<i>rijii ɲji</i>
	'tooth'	<i>riɲi ɲɲi</i>
	'horn'	<i>rité ñtè</i>
	'hole'	<i>ruvó ñvó</i>

As the glosses show, the nasal prefix is associated with human and animal body parts, which seems to be innovative. The Class III alternation in Rigwe is  $\emptyset$ -/Ñ-, where *Ñ*- is homorganic with the following consonant, realised as *ɲ*- before palatals, *ŋ*- before velars and *n*- elsewhere. Only /a/, /e/ and /u/ have been recorded as stem vowels in Class III. Unlike the other classes, the stem tone changes and is always low, regardless of the tone in the singular. Table 22 presents examples of this class. This class is equally associated with body parts but is otherwise miscellaneous.

In Class IV, an extra-low nasal prefix is raised to mid, and an extra-low stem-tone becomes falling, shown in Table 23.

Table 22:  $\emptyset$ -/ $\tilde{N}$ - alternation in Rigwe nouns

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘bone’	<i>kú</i>	<i>̀̀kù</i>
‘corpse’	<i>k<sup>w</sup>é</i>	<i>̀̀k<sup>w</sup>è</i>
‘firewood’	<i>ek<sup>w</sup>é</i>	<i>̀̀k<sup>w</sup>è</i>
‘food’	<i>jâ</i>	<i>̀̀jà</i>
‘hand’	<i>vá</i>	<i>̀̀vâ</i>
‘leg’	<i>tá</i>	<i>̀̀tà</i>
‘part of’	<i>klá</i>	<i>̀̀klâ</i>

Table 23: Extra-low nasal raising in Rigwe plurals

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘chair’	<i>̀̀tɛ̀̀</i>	<i>̀̀tɛ̀̀</i>
‘chief’	<i>̀̀g<sup>w</sup>ɛ̀̀</i>	<i>̀̀g<sup>w</sup>ɛ̀̀</i>
‘agama lizard’	<i>̀̀dâ</i>	<i>̀̀dâ</i>
‘scar’	<i>̀̀mgbɛ̀̀</i>	<i>̀̀mgbɛ̀̀</i>
‘boyfriend’	<i>̀̀tɛ̀̀</i>	<i>̀̀tɛ̀̀</i>

Rigwe has innovated in nominal affixing to such an extent that no obvious connection with postulated classes for either Niger-Congo or Bantu can be discerned.

### 2.3.3 Tyapic

The Tyapic languages are named for Tyap, or Kataf in older sources. The group consists of six languages (Tyap, Gworok, Atakar, Kacicere, Sholyo, and Kafancan), with the closely related Jju<sup>7</sup>. Only Tyap itself is well-described (Follingstad1991). The prefixed elements appear to be innovative and consist of a(Ca-) and its allomorphs. However, the noun is also followed a variety of alternating CV suffixes. These are almost certainly noun-class affixes, now placed after the stem. Table 24 shows a summary of Tyap nominal affixes and concord as well as examples of

<sup>7</sup> It is usual to list Jju separately from the Tyap cluster but this seems increasingly to reflect ethnic separation rather than linguistic reality.

nominal pairs.

The elements marked ‘post-concord’ in Table 24 were almost certainly former CV prefixes which have been copied at the end of the word, a procedure attested elsewhere in Niger-Congo. They are written in the orthography as distinct words as they do not show phonological merger with the root they follow.

Table 24: Tyap nominal affixes and concord. Source: **Follingstad1991**

[inline]Check whole table  
p0.5cm p1cm@l@ll Qp1.5cml

Noun class	Number	Prefix	Tone change on root	Post- Concord Element	Gloss	Sg.	Pl.
	1 sg.	ə wu		‘hare’			
		‘chief’ əsòm wù					
				əgwàm wù			
	2a pl.	əyə ba		‘hares’	əyəsom bà		
	2b pl.	ə + ba		‘chiefs’	əgwam bà		
	3 sg.	ə ji		‘cricket’			
		‘place’ jèt jì					
				tyàn jì			
	4a pl.	ə + ji		‘crickets’	jet jì		
	4b pl.	redup. jí		‘places’	tityàn jí		
	5 sg.	ə ka		‘tree’			
		‘farm’					
		‘tooth’ əkən ka					
		əbin ka					
				ənyuŋ kâ			
	6a pl.	əkə na		‘trees’	əkəkwen nà		
	6b pl.	ə + redup. hu		‘farms’	bibin hu		
	6c pl.	ə + redup. ba		‘teeth’	ənyũnyuŋ ba		
				6d pl. ə + na			
	7 sg.	ə hu		‘hand’			
		‘root’ bwak hu					
				ənan ka			
	8a pl.	N- na		‘hands’	mbwàk nà		
	8b pl.	ə + redup. ba		‘roots’	əninan bà		
	9 sg/pl.	ə na		‘water’	əsəkhwôt nà		

Plurals reduplicate by doubling the first syllable of the root. Thus (4):

Plurals reduplicate the first root syllable

*əkwenka* ‘tree’ *əkəkwen nà* ‘trees’

Classes 1/2, with the suffixes *wu/ba*, probably corresponds to Bantu class 1/2

and includes many Tyap nouns for human beings. Class 9, which is unpaired, includes liquids such as *àsàkhwôt nà* ‘water’ and *àbààn na* ‘milk’ which is semantically similar to Niger-Congo Class 6. The homorganic plural nasal prefix in Class 8a is possibly to be compared with Bantu Class 6 where it is the plural of Class 5 ‘paired things’, e.g. *mbwàk na* ‘hands’.

Follingstad1991 shows that concord in Tyap is much reduced with only a few adjectives and lower numerals showing any agreement. The agreement is of the ‘direct-copy’ or ‘echo’ type, where the numeral has the same prefix as the noun it agrees with.

#### 2.3.4 Izeric

The Izeric languages consist of northwest Izere, northeast Izere, Cèn, Ganàng and Fəràn.<sup>8</sup> The language which is best-known is Izere of Fobur but wordlists suggest that the affix pairings in the other languages are broadly similar<sup>9</sup>. Blench2000b is a more detailed description of Izere number marking. Nominal plurals in Izere of Fobur are formed in four ways:

- a. affix alternation
- b. stem-tone alternation
- c. deverbal nouns that copy the alternations of verb stems
- d. suppletion

Affix alternation and stem-tone alternation are frequently combined producing a very large number of plural formations. Izere of Fobur has a relatively restricted set of segmental noun-class prefixes. Table 25 shows Izere nominal affix pairings:

Tone cannot be specified for most Izere prefixes, since it reflects the tone of the stem. The unpaired mass noun prefix, corresponding to Niger-Congo Class 6, is always low tone. *ka-* and its allomorph *ki-*, realised when the noun stem contains a palatal, can function as a diminutive prefix. Paired *ka-* and *ku-* were probably allomorphs of one another historically, since there is a tendency for stem-vowels following *ka-* to be front or central and those following *ku-* to be back. However, exceptions now abound, suggesting a historical class split.

---

<sup>8</sup> These last three are essentially single settlements, whereas the others represent clusters of villages, hence the rather asymmetric geographical names.

<sup>9</sup> Analysis of Izere was undertaken by the author in collaboration with Bitrus Kaze.

Table 25: Izere nominal affix pairings

lQQ		
Singular	Plural	Semantics
<i>a-</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>persons, loanwords</i>
<i>i-</i>	<i>i-</i>	<i>miscellaneous</i>
<i>ka-</i>	<i>ki-</i>	<i>diminutive</i>
<i>ka-</i>	<i>na-</i>	<i>birds, trees, miscellaneous</i>
<i>ku-</i>	<i>a-, i-</i>	<i>miscellaneous</i>
<i>nà-</i>	<i>ø-</i>	<i>liquids, solids, abstracts</i>
<i>ri-</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>miscellaneous</i>

Izere has an unpaired *nà-* prefix for liquids and solids which probably corresponds to the *ma-* prefix in Niger-Congo, shown in Table 26.

Table 26: Examples of Izere unpaired prefix *nà-*

XX@	XX
Gloss Izere	Gloss Izere
‘breast-milk’ <i>nàbàsang</i>	‘tears’ <i>nànyisi</i>
‘poison, venom’ <i>nàdɔm</i>	‘dirt, fertiliser’ <i>nàrik</i>
‘gum’ <i>nàgàng</i>	‘blood’ <i>nàsòk</i>
‘oil, pomade’ <i>nàmè</i>	‘local potash’ <i>nàtòk</i>
‘dew’ <i>nàming</i>	‘sap’ <i>nàwùn</i>

There is no evidence for a link between the common *na-* prefix in Izere and Bantu nasal prefixes.

### 2.3.5 Hyamic

The Hyamic languages are spoken between Kwoi and Nok, southwest of Jos and are now central to the prehistoric Nok culture. The members of the Hyamic cluster are as follows:

- Cori
- Hyam cluster (incl. Kwyeny, Yaate, Sait, Dzar, Hyam of Nok)
- Shamang

• Zhire-Shang

Many of these languages are very poorly known and existing descriptions are tonally and phonologically inadequate (e.g. **Dihoff1976; Jockers1982**).

Hyam has a wide range of strategies to mark nominal plurals. Analysis of Hyamic languages is based solely on fieldwork by the author. The most important are shown in Table 27:

Table 27: Examples of Hyam noun pluralisation strategies

IXXX			
Strategy		Gloss	Sg. Pl.
Tone-raising		tree	<i>ki kí</i>
Prefix addition		leaf	<i>ɖàŋ maɖàŋ</i>
		person	<i>nèt mò-nèt</i>
Prefix alternation		blacksmith	<i>na-naa fu-naa</i>
Palatalisation		vine	<i>rik ryik</i>
Depalatalisation		seed/grain	<i>saŋ sán</i>
Labialisation		fear/fright	<i>hyoŋ hywoŋ</i>
Consonant mutation		path	<i>fwor swor</i>

Transcription of tone is best described as schematic; Hyam has a highly complex tone-system which is far from being fully understood, but which includes multiple contour tones, combining different levels of the underlying three-tone system.

All of these point to the former existence of nominal prefix alternation and palatalisation and labialisation to incorporated *i-* and *u-* prefixes. The *ma-* prefix on ‘leaf’ is exceptional and not linked with the Class 6 prefix. The *mò-* prefix is applied to most humans, large animals and reptiles, but not other animals, and a small scatter of miscellaneous lexemes. The *na-/fu-* singular/ plural alternation is only recorded for a few nouns related to occupations as in (5), and may be some sort of reassigned relative marker (‘one who’) rather than a relic nominal affix.

*na-/fu-* singular/ plural alternation

<i>na-hywes</i>	‘witch’	<i>fu-hywes</i>	‘witches’
<i>na-kyat kpyo</i>	‘sorcerer’	<i>fu-kyat kpyo</i>	‘sorcerers’
<i>na-naa</i>	‘blacksmith’	<i>fu-naa</i>	‘blacksmiths’

Almost all verbs and adjectives have obligatory plural forms and many undergo the same phonological shifts or mutations as nouns. Adjectives agree in



number, i.e. where the noun is plural, the plural adjective is obligatory, but they do not show the type of alliterative concord characteristic of noun-class languages.

The Shang language, while lexically Hyamic, has a nominal affix system resembling Tinɔr and similar Koro languages (§2.3.7).<sup>10</sup> Shang has a reduced system of nominal affixes. The main noun-class pairs are between zero affixes in the singular and plural *a-* and *i-* prefixes seen in Table 28. Rare plural prefixes include *ka-*, *u-* and *ru-*. No singular affix, either productive or fossil, has been recorded. Some nouns referring to persons have a singular/plural alternation *nè-/fú-* (as in Hyam) but these are probably not old affixes but compounded terms for ‘person’. The tone on the vowel of the plural affix always appears to be low.

Table 28: : Shang nominal affix pairings

XXXX			
Affix	sg.	pl.	Gloss
ø-/a-	ɕàṇ	à-ɕàṇ	‘leaf’
ø-/i-	tàà	ì-taa	‘stone’
ø-/u-	xá	ù-xá	‘load’
ø-/ka-	kwè	kà-kwè	‘nose’
à-/ru-	à-bin	rù-bin	‘thing’

Semantic correlations are not very clear for most of these pairings. However, there is a strong predominance of body parts with the *ka-* plural affix. Most nouns relating to persons have an *a-* prefix in the plural, but since this is statistically the most common prefix, this may not be significant. There is no trace of nasal prefixes.

### 2.3.6 Gyongic

Gyongic is the closest relative of Hyamic and consists of two languages, Gyong [Kagoma] and Angan [Kamanton]. Neither language is well-known but there is a description of Gyong which includes information on noun-classes (Hagen1988). According to this, Gyong marks plurals with prefix alternation, palatalisation alternation and tone. The data tables below follow her presentation. The reduced prefix system is as follows in Table 29.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Hyamic/Shang/Shang%20wordlist.pdf>

Table 29: Gyong nominal affixes

XX	
sg.	pl.
∅-	<i>bɔ̌, kì-</i>
<i>kì-</i>	<i>∅-, rì-</i>

Interestingly, liquids, abstracts and mass nouns fall into the unpaired *kì-* class in Table 30.

Table 30: Gyong mass noun *ki-* prefix

XX	
Gloss	Gyong
blood	<i>kidzí</i>
water	<i>kìməláŋ</i>
oil	<i>kìtsɛ̀s</i>
death	<i>kìkpó</i>
ashes	<i>kìtɔ̌ŋ</i>
smoke	<i>kìdzɔ̌ŋ</i>
jealousy	<i>kìɣwúp</i>

Stem-tone changes multiply the possible number-marking strategies. Hagen1988 gives examples of adjectival agreement in (6):

Gyong adjectival agreement

kìpèndèm kilúm    pèndèm rúm  
large farm    large farms

The data is not extensive enough to fully understand the system. Demonstratives do show alliterative concord in (7):

Gyong demonstrative concord  
 kɪhá kɪhónà      ríhá rídú(nà)  
 house that house those

### 2.3.7 Koro

The Koro cluster consists of five languages spoken in Central Nigeria, north of Keffi. The published literature is sparse and based on limited data (**Gerhardt19723bnot; Goroh2000**). All the material presented on the Koro languages is based on field-work by the author. Figure 4 shows a tentative outline classification of the languages in the Koro cluster.

for tree=delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges [Proto-Koro [  
 [Waci[=Begbere]] [Ashe] ] [[Nyankpa-Barde]] [ [Idū] [Gwara] ] ]

Figure 4: Classification of the Koro languages

Waci has retained a much richer noun-class system than any of the related languages, although it is in decay – see Table 31. There is a strong tendency to cite some types of nouns, especially those to do with living things, without a singular prefix and to reduce the pluralisation marker to an *a*-prefix. Moreover, there are a very large number of singular/plural pairings, many of them only occurring once suggesting a complex process of re-analysis is under way. Some prefixes have several allomorphs probably prefiguring class merger. There is some semantic correlation with prefix pairings: for example, humans commonly have *u-/bV*-prefixes and animals most often *i/i-*, but the correlation is far from perfect.

There is no evidence for a distinctive mass noun prefix. Some liquids, such as water (*bàm*) and blood (*bèḍí*) show no singular/plural prefix alternation, while others, such as tears, saliva and urine, have diverse singular/plural affix pairs.

The *bV*- plural prefix almost always marks persons and is usually, but not always paired with *u*- singular Table 32. The vowel is underspecified and very often copies the stem vowel, although *b* + high vowel (i.e. *bi*- and *bu*-) is apparently not permitted:

There is a tendency for the *V*- of other plural prefixes to copy the  $\pm$ ATR properties of the stem vowel where these are mid. See Table 33:

But there are exceptions as in (8):

Ill ‘song’ *wù-v<sup>w</sup>ɔm* *ò-v<sup>w</sup>ɔm*

Table 31: : Waci nominal affix pairings

lQQ		
Singular	Plural	Semantics
∅-, ì-, ù-	bV-	human beings
i-	i-	large or salient animals, trees
i-	a-, bV-, ri-	Miscellaneous
gV-	ru-, ro-	Miscellaneous
gV-	bV-	Miscellaneous
o-	i-	Miscellaneous
wu-	a-, E-, O-	Miscellaneous
yV-	bV-	Miscellaneous

Table 32: bV- plural prefixes in Waci

QQQ		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘person/people’	ù-ndirà	bà-ndirà
‘husband’	ù-sá	bá-sà
‘wife’	ù-cé	bè-cé
‘masquerade type’	keberè	be-keberè
‘leper’	ì-kpín	bè-kpín
‘masquerade type’	ú-kù	bó-kù
‘brother’	ù-cóbò	bò-cóbò
‘friend’	ù-dõrì	bò-dõrì

Table 33: (C)V- prefixes in Waci, illustrating ±ATR vowel copying

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘death’	gà-pú	rù-pú
‘Senegal coucal’	gbodotùtù	o-gbodotùtù
‘story’	wù-sósògò	ò-sósògò
‘wound’	wù-sò	ò-sò

*wu-* (*gu-* in some speakers) is a very common prefix which can be paired with almost any plural *V-* prefix as in Table 34.

Table 34: Waci *wu-* singular prefix and its pairings

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘leaf’	<i>wù-yí(i) à-yí(i)</i>
	‘root’	<i>wù-nán à-nán</i>
	‘rubbish-heap’	<i>wù-rírí è-rírí</i>
	‘village/settlement’	<i>wù-sép é-sép</i>
	‘arm, hand’	<i>wù-bó ò-bó</i>
	‘story’	<i>wù-sósògò ò-sósògò</i>
	‘wall (of room)’	<i>wù-gúgò ò-gúgò</i>

*u-* may also be an allomorph of *wu-* in Table 35.

Table 35: Waci *u-* prefix and its plural pairings

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘large river’	<i>ù-hék é-hék</i>
	‘thing’	<i>ù-bín è-bín</i>
	‘wart-hog’	<i>ù-jì e-jì</i>
	‘tail’	<i>ù-sáp ì-sáp</i>
	‘load’	<i>ù-cá ì-cá</i>
	‘day’	<i>ù-nóm í-nòm</i>
	‘night’	<i>ù-ǵí é-ǵí</i>
	‘bark (of tree)’	<i>ù-gùgúb ò-gùgúb</i>

*i-* prefixes alternating with other prefixes than *i-* are quite rare and somewhat inconsistent in (9):

III ‘thorn’ *ì-dídók bà-dídók*  
‘year’ *ì-yé gè-yé*

The Waci prefix *yV-* where *V* is always a front vowel is usually paired with *bV-* in the plural seen in Table 36, although these nouns do not refer to persons as might be expected by analogy to the pairing of *mu-/ba-*(classes 1/ 2) for persons

in Bantu .

Table 36: *yV*- prefixes in Waci

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘star(s)’	<i>gè-jǐ</i> ~ <i>yì-jǐ</i>	<i>bà-jǐ</i>
‘fire’	<i>gì-rá</i> ~ <i>yì-rá</i>	<i>bà-rá</i>
‘boil’	<i>yì-kpì</i>	<i>bè-kpì</i>
‘pygmy mouse’	<i>yì-kìríko</i>	<i>bò-kìríko</i>
‘bird (generic)’	<i>yè-nò</i>	<i>bà-nò</i>
but:		
‘faeces’	<i>yè-bì</i>	<i>ru-bi</i>

One of the most striking alternations is *gV*-/*rV*-, which does not seem to have any immediate parallel in other Koro languages. The *-V*- in *gV*- can be any vowel except the high back vowels. The vowel quality in the *gV*- prefix partly reflects stem vowels although the correlation is not perfect. Similarly, most plurals have *rV*- with a few exceptions (Table 37). Some *yV*- prefixes, such as ‘faeces’ in (36) may well be allomorphs of *gV*- to judge by the *rV*- plurals.

The Waci nominal affix system seems to have undergone major renewal. Apart from a class pair for persons and a rather weak animal class, there is no evidence for an unpaired non-count noun prefix and no evidence for semantically clustered prefix pairs elsewhere.

## 2.4 Ndunic (=Ahwai)

Ndunic is a new name proposed here for the languages previously called ‘Nandu-Tari’. Existing sources list two languages, but a third language, Ningon, was first recorded in 2003. The Ndunic languages are spoken in a small area southwest of Fadan Karshi. The correct names for these languages are Ndun (Nandu), Shakara (Tari) and Ningon. The languages are extremely close to one another. The Ndunic peoples have recently adopted the name ‘Ahwai’ as a cover term for all three languages (RueckEtAl2008). Shakara has a much reduced set of nominal affixes, but Ndun has numerous nominal singular/plural affix pairs. All the tables for Ndunic languages are based on fieldwork by the present author. The main attested noun-class pairings of Ndun are shown in Table 38.

However, there are also numerous plurals created by tonal change and by presence and absence of labialisation and palatalisation. Sporadic nasalisation

Table 37: gV- prefixes in Waci

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘compound’	<i>gá-hà rú-hà</i>
	‘forest’	<i>gà-kwéy rù-kwéy</i>
	‘death’	<i>gà-pú rù-pú</i>
	‘stick’	<i>gá-tì ró-tì</i>
	‘gecko’	<i>ge-mé kpikpi ru-mé kpikpi</i>
	‘tongue’	<i>gè-tém rù-tém</i>
	‘rope’	<i>ge-rì ru-rì</i>
	‘genet cat’	<i>gibikɔn bɛbikɔn</i>
	‘thigh’	<i>gì-cáy ùdà à-cáy àdà</i>
	‘stomach’	<i>gì-ní bà-ní</i>
	‘sandfly’	<i>gì-zù bò-zù</i>
	‘bag’	<i>gò-gúr rù-gúr</i>
	‘snake (generic)’	<i>go-sɔ ru-sɔ</i>

appears between the stem and the prefix as a result of fossil nominal prefixes, although Ndun still preserves a few productive nasal prefixes. Ndun has many noun-class pairings that only occur once, in part due to the underspecified vowels. The tones are too insecurely marked to be sure that there are no additional contrasts on the V- prefixes.

Table 38: Ndun nominal affix pairings

XX	
	sg. pl.
	<i>ø- e-, i-, i(Cy)-, -y-</i>
	<i>a-, a(n)- i-, me-, na-</i>
	<i>e- ø-, be-, i(n)-</i>
	<i>i- be-</i>
	<i>m-, ma-, me(n)- ø-</i>
	<i>n- be-</i>
	<i>u- e-, i(Cy)-, n-</i>
	<i>-y- ø-</i>

Palatalisation can be applied to almost any initial consonant in singular/plural formation, often combined with primary affix alternation as in Table 39. The likely historical explanation is that there was an initial *i*- prefix which was incorporated into the stem and then a new plural affix (ironically sometimes a new *i*-prefix) was applied subsequently.

Table 39: Ndun nominals with contrastive palatalization

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘dream’	<i>nári</i>	<i>ínyári</i>
‘relations’	<i>ùgap</i>	<i>ìgyàp</i>
‘song’	<i>úhwá</i>	<i>ihywa</i>
‘body’	<i>ilyak</i>	<i>ilak</i>

Ndun also shows numerous examples of sporadic inserted nasals in affix alternations as in Table 40.

Table 40: Ndun nominals with sporadic inserted nasals in prefixes

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘cheek’	<i>upǎŋ</i>	<i>empaŋ</i>
‘grandparent’	<i>ininkyer</i>	<i>íníkyer</i>
‘chief’	<i>ètùm</i>	<i>entùm</i>
‘horn’	<i>anshem</i>	<i>meshèm</i>
‘spider’	<i>tìntàn</i>	<i>intíntàn</i>

Only a single example of an alternating *n*-prefix showing alternation has been recorded, shown in Table 41.

Table 41: Only example of alternating *n*-prefix

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘thorn’	<i>ùshayí</i>	<i>ñshayî</i>

In addition there are many nouns with initial homorganic nasals (*m*-, *n*-, *ŋ*-)



which seem to have been incorporated during an earlier wave of prefix incorporation.

It is not uncommon for Ndun nouns for persons to be *-r* final Table 42:

Table 42: Ndun nominals with final *-r*

XXX	
Gloss	sg. pl.
‘person/people’	<i>ènèr bènèr</i>
‘man’	<i>èromir béromír</i>
‘grandparent’	<i>ininkyer íníkyer</i>
‘friend’	<i>èsamir bésamir</i>

In one case, the final *-r* alternates with a final nasal as in (10).

III ‘woman’ *nyaan nyaar*

These are probably the traces of former prefixes which have moved to final position and have almost lost their class pair alternation. Semantic correlations with noun-class affix pairings are weak at best. The *e-/be-* prefix pair includes many nouns referring to persons (Table 43).

Table 43: Ndun *e-/be-* prefixes marking persons

III	
Gloss	sg. pl.
‘person/people’	<i>ènèr bènèr</i>
‘man’	<i>èromir béromír</i>
‘father’	<i>èdâ bédâ</i>
‘friend’	<i>èsamir bésamir</i>
‘guest/stranger’	<i>èkyen békyen</i>

Most liquids have initial *m-* or *mV-* and this presumably reflects Niger-Congo Class 6 Table 44.

However, where *mV-* appears as a plural number marker it seems to show no semantic correlation. No other Ndun prefixes show any tendency to reflect semantic classes such as body parts, trees or salient animals.

Shakara now has a much reduced system, but proto-Ndunic clearly had a wide range of nominal affix pairs, with fragmentary evidence for a suffix alternation

Table 44: Ndun *mV*- prefixes marking liquids

XX	
Gloss	Ndun
‘water’	<i>mákúri</i>
‘blood’	<i>mémiŋ</i>
‘tear’	<i>mémil</i>
‘saliva’	<i>méntí</i>
‘sweat’	<i>mfɔɔr</i>
‘urine’	<i>ménfiri</i>

to do with persons. Nasal prefixes were clearly very common but have become so generalised across the system it is now difficult to discern what part they may have played in the original affix alternations.

## 2.5 Ninzic

Ninzic, formerly Plateau IV, is probably the most difficult group to characterise and weak data on several languages make it unclear whether certain peripheral languages really belong to it. The name Ninzic is introduced here, reflecting the element *nin-*, which is part of many ethnonyms. The Ninzic languages are spoken south of Fadan Karshi in Plateau, Nassarawa and Kaduna States. The membership of Ninzic has changed quite significantly between various publications noted in Table 45.

General overviews can be found in [Gerhardt19723a](#); [Gerhardt1983a](#) and materials on specific languages in [Hoffman1976](#); [Hörner1980](#); [Price1989](#); [Wilson2003](#)

The number marking systems of Ninzic must originally have been paired affixes with alliterative concord, as fragments of such systems are found across the group. However, in most languages the system has broken down or become severely eroded and compensatory strategies have evolved. This section uses examples from Ninzo based on [Hörner1980](#); [NinzoLanguageProjectCommittee1999](#) and fieldwork in Fadan Wate in 1995.<sup>11</sup> Ninzo prefix pairings are in Table 46.

Many words have unproductive prefixes and singular and plural is now marked only by tone. Some *u-/a-* prefix alternations are co-associated with *u-/i-* alternations in the first vowel of the stem in Table 47:

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Ninzic/Ninzo%20wordlist.pdf>

Table 45: Changing composition of the Ninzic language group.

Key: Blank = not listed; + = assigned to group; - = assigned to another group ? thus in source.

1 QQQQQ@										
[3cm]Greenberg1963 HansfordEtAl1976 Gerhardt1989 CrozierBlench1992										
This paper										
Ce [=Rukuba]	+	+	+	+	+					
Ninzo [=Ninzam]	+	+	+	+	+					
Mada	+	+	+	+	+					
Nko		+								
Katanza		+								
Bu-Niṅkada	-	-	-	-	+					
Ayu	+	+	+	?	?					
Nungu	-	-	-	+						
Ninkyob [=Kaninkwom]	+	+	+	+	+					
Anib = Kanufi	+	+	+	+	+					
Nindem	+	+	+	+	+					
Gwantu cluster	+	+	+	+	+					
Ningye		+								
Ninka		+								
Kwanka-Boi-Bijim-Legeri	+	+	+	+	-					
Shall-Zwall	+	?	-							
Pe[=Pai]	-	+	-	-						

Table 46: Ninzo prefix pairings

XX	
sg.	pl.
∅-	à-, ì-
i-	à-
ù-	à-, ì-

Table 47: Ninzo *u-/i-* alternations in first vowel of stem

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘man’	ù-nùru a-nirú
	‘old person’	ù-tuce a-tice
	‘senior in age’	ù-nunku a-ninku
	‘bow’	ù-tuta <sup>+</sup> i-tita

Other *u/a-* prefix alternations also incorporate alternations of CV syllables of the stem as in Table 48, particularly *u-nV-/a-bV-*:

Table 48: Ninzo prefix pairs *u-nV-/a-bV-*

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘guest/stranger’	ù-ni-cir a-bi-cir
	‘doctor’	ù-ni-fù a-bi-fù
	‘hunter’	ù-ni-zhá à-bi-zhá
	‘thief’	ù-nà-yí à-bà-yí
	‘blacksmith’	u-ni-là a-bi-là
	But:	
	‘witch’	ù-nu-tri a-da-tri

These suggest an unusual process, the retention of a former *ni-/bi-* alternation with the addition of an innovative prefix system preceding it. The *bV-* plural marker is reminiscent of Niger-Congo *ba-* but this may be coincidence; the core lexemes for persons in Ninzo do not have this alternation. A partial development from this is the formation of plural with *VnV-* prefixes Table 49. For example, à- and i- singular prefixes alternate with ànV- plural prefixes.

As Table 49 shows there is quite a strong correlation between animals and the *anV-* plural prefix, which is highly reminiscent of the Bantu Class 9 *nì-* singular prefix for animals. Ninzo shows no obvious active or fossil morphology for non-count nouns although the word for ‘water’, *amasíŋ*, has inherited the *ma-* affix from related Plateau languages.

A common number marking process, which can be combined with prefix alternations, is reduplication of the first syllable of the root seen in Table 50. The vowel of the reduplicated syllable is usually /i/, but /u/ in two unexplained cases.

Table 49: Ninzo prefix pairs *V-/anV-*

XXX	
Gloss	sg. pl.
‘death’	<i>ì-kfu áni-kfu</i>
‘leopard’	<i>ì-ce áni-ce</i>
‘guinea-fowl’	<i>ì-tsì áni-tsì</i>
‘kob antelope’	<i>à-kùrù áná-kùrú</i>
‘cat’	<i>à-músâ ána-músâ</i>
‘chameleon’	<i>a-kanda anu-kanda</i>

Table 50: Plural marking with reduplication in Ninzo

XXX	
Gloss	sg. pl.
‘senior in status’	<i>àṅkpyè aṅkpyè</i>
‘ankle’	<i>í-gblédzá à-gbígblédzá</i>
‘navel’	<i>í-mgbèkù í-mgbímgbèkè</i>
‘liver’	<i>ì-sur ì-sisur</i>
‘animal (bush)’	<i>í-názhù í-nínazhù</i>
‘hoe’	<i>à-kla í-kikla</i>
‘termite’	<i>í-yó í-yíyó</i>
‘knife (small)’	<i>á-njî í-njínjî</i>
‘gown, small’	<i>à-nkru í-nkinkru</i>
‘basket (generic)’	<i>à-sà í-sísà</i>
‘arrow’	<i>à-wyírr í-wyiwyírr</i>
‘friend’	<i>ù-kpà á-kpukpà</i>
‘king’	<i>ù-tù á-tútù</i>

Ninzic languages have highly diverse nominal morphology and space precludes describing all of them. Many have a non-count noun prefix, but this seems to vary from one group to another. For example, Table 51 shows the prefix for liquids in Ce, *bə-*, which is quite consistent, but which seems to be segmentally unrelated to Niger-Congo Class 6, usually *mV-*.

Table 51: Ce prefix for liquids *bə-*

XX	
Gloss	Ce
‘oil’	<i>bə-nyì</i>
‘fat/grease’	<i>bə-nhyò</i>
‘boiled sorghum’	<i>bə-kò</i>
‘potash’	<i>bə-tòk</i>
‘sorghum-beer’	<i>bə-hi</i>
‘milk’	<i>bə-nsə</i>
‘sweat’	<i>bə-cilí</i>

This is an example of metatypy, the copying of a structural feature without the associated segments.

The Mada language has undergone a striking collapse of characteristic affix alternations, which have then been rebuilt using grammaticalisation strategies, which have resulted in highly idiosyncratic marking of nominal plurals. These can be divided into six categories:

- I tone-change
- II initial syllable reduplication
- III prefix addition
- IV person nouns grammaticalised as pseudo-prefixes
- V diminutives grammaticalised as pseudo-prefixes
- VI suppletives

Prefixes marking size can alternate with non-prefixed nouns creating a plethora of additional forms. Some nouns usually take diminutive prefixes in speech, but these are not easy to predict. The historical layering of these number marking strategies can be detected through the existence of multiple forms, sometimes

with, for example, tone-raising applied to a noun formerly which also has first syllable reduplication or prefix addition. The consequence of this has been that the tone-plurals of Mada show extremely low levels of predictability as in Table 52.

Table 52: First syllable reduplication in Mada nouns

XXXX		
Pattern	sg.	pl. gloss
<i>be</i> → <i>bə</i>	<i>bě</i>	<i>be, bəbe</i> ‘seed’
<i>bwə</i> → <i>bə</i>	<i>bwǎ</i>	<i>bābwə</i> ‘pocket’
<i>cu</i> → <i>cu</i>	<i>cūn</i>	<i>màcùn, mǎcūcùn</i> ‘chief’
<i>gbu</i> → <i>gbu</i>	<i>gbù</i>	<i>gbūgbu</i> ‘town, hill’
<i>gyə</i> → <i>gi</i>	<i>gyǎr</i>	<i>gigyər</i> ‘mother’
<i>kpa</i> → <i>kpə</i>	<i>kpān</i>	<i>kpākpàn</i> ‘friend’
<i>kri</i> → <i>kə</i>	<i>kri</i>	<i>kākri</i> ‘yam’
<i>lɔ</i> → <i>lə</i>	<i>lɔn</i>	<i>mālālɔn</i> ‘husband’
<i>ci</i> → <i>ci</i>	<i>mācī</i>	<i>mācici</i> ‘father-in-law’
<i>mbə</i> → <i>mbə</i>	<i>mbā</i>	<i>mbāmbā</i> ‘wife, woman’
<i>mgbə</i> → <i>mə</i>	<i>mgbān</i>	<i>māmgbān</i> ‘armpit’
<i>mkpi</i> → <i>mkpə</i>	<i>mkpīr</i>	<i>mkpāmkpīr</i> ‘hip’
<i>mɫə</i> → <i>mə</i>	<i>mɫā</i>	<i>māmɫā</i> ‘first born’
<i>mpə</i> → <i>mpə</i>	<i>mpā</i>	<i>mpāmpā</i> ‘sore, wound’
<i>nci</i> → <i>nci</i>	<i>nci</i>	<i>ncīnci</i> ‘traditional district’
<i>nji</i> → <i>nji</i>	<i>njī</i>	<i>njīnji</i> ‘knife’
<i>njo</i> → <i>nju</i>	<i>njò</i>	<i>njūnjo</i> ‘horn’
<i>nkɔ</i> → <i>nkɔ</i>	<i>nkɔn</i>	<i>nkōn, nkōnkōn</i> ‘road, way, door’
<i>ri</i> → <i>ri</i>	<i>rì</i>	<i>rīrī</i> ‘day’
<i>te</i> → <i>tə</i>	<i>tè</i>	<i>tē, tēte</i> ‘father’
<i>tse</i> → <i>tse</i>	<i>tse</i>	<i>tsātse</i> ‘town’

To give a sense of the variety of number marking strategies in Mada, Table 52 above shows the operation of first syllable reduplication in Mada nouns, and selected examples in Table 53 and Table 54 below display recently adopted plural strategies.

The most recent addition to the Mada repertoire of plural strategies is probably the *mə*- prefix. This appears to have two realisations, *mǎ*- and *mā*-. The low-tone form seems to have no strongly-defined semantic field Table 53, but mid-tone *mā*-

is applied quite strictly to persons Table 54. The examples in these tables and in other sections show the prefix has been added, sometimes subsequently to other strategies, such as tone-raising or reduplication, providing evidence for its recent genesis. Most nouns taking a *mə̀-* prefix conserve stem-tone in Table 53:

Table 53: Mada *mə̀-* prefixes where stem tone is conserved

[inline]diacritics XXX		
Sg.	Pl.	Gloss
	<i>bān mǎbān</i>	'law'
	<i>gōn mǎgōn</i>	'back'
	<i>gā mǎgā</i>	'shoulder'
	<i>gbrīn mǎgbrīn, gbāgbrīn</i>	'spirit'
	<i>jūjū mǎjūjū</i>	'hole'
	<i>kpā mǎkpā</i>	'female agama lizard'

Table 54: Mada *mā-* prefixes where stem tone is conserved

[inline]diacritics XXX		
Sg.	Pl.	Gloss
	<i>brē mābrē</i>	'grave'
	<i>lānggā mālānggā</i>	'enemy'
	<i>mīa māmīa</i>	'relation'
	<i>nē mānē</i>	'person'
	<i>vānggā mānggā</i>	'girl'

Mada provides a striking example of how rapidly a nominal affix system can break down and then be rebuilt using processes of grammaticalisation thereby illustrating the difficulties of tracing synchronic affixes back to a presumed proto-system.

## 2.6 Alumi

One subgroup of Plateau languages spoken in Central Nigeria has effectively no published data. These languages are Hasha [=Yashi], Sambe, Alumu-Təsu and



Toro [=Turkwam]. Except for Sambe, they have apparently been classified in previous lists on the basis of geographical proximity. Sambe is moribund, as there were only two speakers over 90 in 2005, and none remain in 2017. The rest have at most a few hundred speakers. All data and analyses given here were the result of fieldwork by the author.<sup>12</sup>

The group is here named Alumeric, after the language with the most speakers, but this term can be regarded as provisional. The Alumeric languages are now scattered geographically, and isolated among the Ninzic (=Plateau IV) languages. The very different sociolinguistic histories may explain their striking morphological diversity. The internal structure of the Alumeric group is shown in Figure 5:

for tree=delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges [ [ [Sambe]  
[Hasha] ] [ [Alumu-Tesu] [Toro] ] ]

Figure 5: : The relation of Sambe to Hasha and the Alumeric languages

Alumu, Toro and Sambe no longer have functioning noun class systems, but the nouns have transparent fossil prefixes. Hasha has developed a highly idiosyncratic system of reduplicating the first syllable of the stem to mark plurality in both nouns and verbs, apparently under the influence of a neighbouring Chadic language, Sha. Təsu has entirely converted to a system of a single plural suffix, with no functioning noun-prefixes. Nonetheless, these can be recovered in part from the existing nouns, especially by comparison with cognate forms in other Plateau languages. Although many nouns have zero prefixes, fossil V- and N-prefixes are quite widespread. The most common prefix is à- and ə- is probably its allomorph. Table 55 shows some characteristic examples:

Table 55: Təsu à-/ə- prefixes

[inline]diacritics			
IXX IXX			
a-	Gloss	Təsu	ə- Gloss Təsu
	'tree (generic)'	à-gbè	'song' ə-humu
	'mushroom'	à-wá	'leaf' ə-fu
	'thorn'	à-tòtò	'road' ə-ki
	'sand'	à-senge	
	'farm'	à-yi	

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Alumeric/AluOP.htm>

Nouns for persons typically have an *à-* prefix as in Table 56:

Table 56: Təsu *à-* prefix for persons

XX
Gloss sg.
‘man, husband’ <i>à-tsiyà</i>
‘child’ <i>à-yà</i>
‘woman, wife’ <i>à-meré</i>
‘father’ <i>à-da</i>

Other fossil prefixes are given in Table 57.

Table 57: Fossil prefixes

IQQIQQ
<i>e-</i> Gloss Təsu <i>i-</i> Gloss Təsu
‘cloud’ <i>è-vírí</i> ‘algae’ <i>ì-bu</i>
‘mouth’ <i>è-né</i> ‘tomorrow’ <i>í-kyá</i>
‘grasshopper’ <i>é-sə</i> ‘large stone’ <i>ì-tre</i>
‘spear’ <i>é-mbè</i> ‘cloud’ <i>ì-ve</i>
<i>Ñ-</i> Gloss Təsu <i>u-</i> Gloss Təsu
‘smoke’ <i>ñ-zu</i> ‘bush-fowl’ <i>úgró</i>
‘evening’ <i>η-vifi</i>
‘work’ <i>ñ-dəmə</i>
‘land/country’ <i>ñ-zimbəɾə</i>
‘navel’ <i>η-bu</i>

There is no trace of a semantic association for other prefixes. Liquids and non-count nouns show no characteristic morphological pattern.

Sambe no longer has a functioning noun-class system, perhaps a consequence of the switch to Ninzo. However, it clearly existed until recently and many words were cited with fossil prefixes. Indeed, sometimes a word would be cited in one elicitation with the prefix and again without it, showing the language in transition prior to its inevitable death. The tones marked are best characterised as approximate, with speakers varying between elicitation sessions. Three prefixes can be discerned in the data, *kV-*, *bV-* and *tV-*, each with an underspecified or

‘hollow’ vowel. In some languages this shows concord with the stem vowel, but this does not seem to have been the case with Sambe. The most common prefix is *kV-* in Table 58.

Table 58: *kV-* fossil prefixes in Sambe

XXX		
Prefix	Gloss	Attestation
<i>ka-</i>	‘basket’	<i>kàjese</i>
<i>ke-</i>	‘jar for local ‘beer’	<i>kèya</i>
	‘head’	<i>kècu</i>
<i>ki-</i>	‘spear’	<i>kìnkwar</i>
	‘divination (types)’	<i>kitsu</i>
<i>ku-</i>	‘winnowing tray’	<i>kùhùn</i>
	‘mortar (wood)’	<i>kùtù</i>
	‘skink’	<i>kùva</i>
	‘faeces’	<i>kùbwà</i>

Table 59 shows words with a *bV-* fossil prefix.

Table 59: *bV-* fossil prefixes in Sambe

XXX		
Prefix	Gloss	Attestation
<i>ba-</i>	‘sorghum-beer’	<i>bàfù</i>
	‘ant (generic)’	<i>bàtúnú</i>
	‘ancestors’	<i>bàgúgó</i>
<i>be-</i>	‘fat/grease’	<i>bènkun</i>
<i>bi-</i>	‘small hoe’	<i>bíkíta</i>
<i>bu-</i>	‘today’	<i>búrùmi</i>
	‘salt’	<i>bùwan</i>
	‘rib’	<i>bùkyé</i>

Table 60 shows words with a *tV-* fossil prefix.

Sambe probably also had a nasal prefix which was homorganic with the following consonant, see Table 61:

Many nouns referring to persons have an *a-* prefix and some which are naturally plural, such as ‘ancestors’ have a *ba-* prefix, see Table 62:

Table 60: tV- prefixes in Sambe

XXX		
Prefix	Gloss	Attestation
<i>ta-</i>	'name'	<i>tánásè</i>
	'breath'	<i>tawùrì</i>
<i>ti-</i>	'guinea-fowl'	<i>tìmìsì</i>
	'word'	<i>tìmìvàn</i>
	'squirrel (tree)'	<i>tító</i>
<i>to-</i>	'hippo'	<i>tòbàrì</i>

Table 61: N- prefixes in Sambe

XX	
Gloss	Sambe
'hair'	<i>mfu</i>
'brother/sister'	<i>mlànà</i>
'Senegal coucal'	<i>mpàlàn</i>
'leaf'	<i>ṅgbá fì</i>
'cock'	<i>ṅgwà</i>
'vervet monkey'	<i>njīnjèhun</i>
'sheep'	<i>ntùmà</i>

Table 62: a/ba- prefixes in Sambe

XX	
Gloss	Sambe
'man'	<i>àróro</i>
'woman'	<i>àhìn</i>
'father'	<i>adídá</i>
'mother'	<i>aya</i>
'relations'	<i>bàruhwin ninamláni</i>
'ancestors'	<i>bàgúgó</i>

From this we can conclude that Sambe originally had an *a-/ba-* noun class pair for humans. No other fossil prefixes have any semantic associations, and neither mass nouns nor liquids show any common features. The strong presence of CV- prefixes with underspecified vowels is extremely rare in this area, although common in Kainji languages (Blench, this volume).

## 2.7 East

The three languages constituting Greenberg's Plateau 6, Fyem, Bo-Rukul [=Mabo-Barkul] and Horom were placed together in the BCCW as SE Plateau. Although named Southeastern (e.g. in **CrozierBlench1992**) it is here named 'East' as a better reflection of its direction in relation to the Plateau centre of gravity. However, it is highly uncertain that they do indeed form a coherent group as Bo-Rukul is very distinct from Fyem and Horom. In Figure 1 they have been separated as branches of Plateau with a tentative linkage marked. **Nettle1998a** is a sketch grammar of Fyem, and **Nettle1998b** short wordlists of all three languages, but Bo-Rukul and Horom remain virtually unknown (although see **Blench2003** for their relation with the Ron (Chadic) languages). Since Horom has the most elaborate system of nominal affixing, it is discussed in detail in this section. Data and analysis are based on fieldwork by the author.

Number marking in Horom nouns is characterised by a great diversity of strategies. V-/CV- prefix alternation is the most characteristic process and the possibilities are numerous. Of these, the *i-* plural prefix is applied in the majority of cases. The singular and plural class/pairings identified so far are shown in Table 63:

Table 63: Singular/plural affix pairings in Horom

XXX		
Singular	Plural	Comment
∅-	à-, bà-, bè-, dī-, ì-, ù-	
a-	bà-, i-	
dī-	a-, bà-	
dū-	à-, bà-, be-	
ì-	bà-	
nà-	bènè	A single example
ò-	bà-	A single example
ù-	à-, bà-, bè-	

Horom also demonstrates some striking semantic unities with respect to plural markers. Singulars are diverse, but almost all animals, from mammals to insects, have *i-* plural prefixes. Similarly, nouns referring to persons have a *ba-* prefix (and sometimes a suffix) but with no corresponding singular prefix. Mass nouns and liquids have no defining morphological character. Horom shows no evidence for nasal prefixes; in one apparent case the widespread Plateau root for ‘person’ has grammaticalised as an affix.

The most striking typological feature of Horom is the evolution of a nominal suffixing system, characterised either by vowels or –NV structures. The singular nouns are diverse, with either zero or a wide array of prefixes. The plurals are all prefixed with *ba-*, and a vocalic or –NV segment. Table 64 shows the nouns so far recorded with both prefixes and suffixes.

Horom also has ‘broken plurals’. In words with stems of CVCCV(C) structure, an epenthetic vowel, either *-i-* or *-ə-*, is inserted between the two syllables of the stem as in Table 65.

These may be infixes or simply a phonological extension of the syllable. None of these words are transparent compounds, but this may be their historical origin, in which case each element of the compound would have retained its plural prefix, with the second prefix undergoing centralisation in some environments.

## 2.8 South

### 2.8.1 General

South Plateau is named for two language groups, Jilic and Eggonic, which are here put together. ‘Southern’ was applied to Jilic alone in CrozierBlench1992 Figure 6 shows this new proposal:

for tree=delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges [South Plateau  
[Jilic [ [Ujijili] [Koro-Ija] [Koro-Zuba] ] [[Mijili]] ] [Eggonic [[Ake]] [[Eggon]]  
] ]

Figure 6: Classification of the Jilic-Eggonic languages

The Jilic or Koro languages are spoken in scattered communities across a wide swathe of Central Nigeria and this is usually attributed to persistent slave-raiding in the nineteenth centuries. As speakers have lost contact with one another, their languages have rapidly diversified.

Table 64: Horom nominal suffixes

[inline]tones missing for ‘compound’, ‘door’, ‘skin’, ‘rope’, ‘sorghum’, ‘mother’,  
‘father’, ‘friend’ lQQl

Suffix	Gloss	sg.	pl.
<i>a</i>	‘river’	<i>u-lap</i>	<i>ba-lab-a</i>
<i>a</i>	‘bush’	<i>ù-háp</i>	<i>bà-háb-à</i>
<i>á</i>	‘bundle’	<i>dĩ-bwát</i>	<i>bá-bwád-á</i>
<i>e</i>	‘moon/month’	<i>u-fel</i>	<i>ba-pel-e</i>
<i>è</i>	‘song’	<i>u-sem</i>	<i>ba-sem-e</i>
<i>è</i>	‘sore / wound’	<i>u-cel</i>	<i>ba-cel-e</i>
<i>è</i>	‘compound’	<i>kyèn</i>	<i>bà-kyèn-è</i>
<i>è</i>	‘door’	<i>kèn kubok</i>	<i>bà-kèn-è kubok</i>
<i>i</i>	‘root’	<i>u-liṅ</i>	<i>bè-liṅ-i</i>
<i>i</i>	‘fireplace’	<i>a-fik</i>	<i>ba-fik-i</i>
<i>ì</i>	‘mat (cornstalk)’	<i>ú-jír</i>	<i>bá-jír-ì</i>
<i>ì</i>	‘canoe’	<i>u-bit</i>	<i>ba-bit-i</i>
<i>ye</i>	‘needle (thatching)’	<i>bwi</i>	<i>ba-bwi-ye</i>
<i>ò</i>	‘skin’	<i>hòr</i>	<i>bà-hòr-ò</i>
<i>ò</i>	‘rope’	<i>ù-zòr</i>	<i>bà-zòr-ò</i>
<i>ò</i>	‘sorghum’	<i>pòl</i>	<i>bà-pòl-ò</i>
<i>u</i>	‘knife’	<i>mbok</i>	<i>ba-mbuk-u</i>
<i>nè</i>	‘mother’	<i>wò</i>	<i>bà-wò-nè</i>
<i>nè</i>	‘father, grandfather’	<i>tè</i>	<i>bà-tè-nè</i>
<i>mò</i>	‘friend’	<i>dìsì</i>	<i>bà-dìsì-mò</i>

Table 65: Horom ‘broken’ plurals

lXX			
	Gloss	sg.	pl.
	‘okra’	<i>zabla</i>	<i>i-zab-i-la</i>
	‘shoe’	<i>paksak</i>	<i>i-pak-ə-sak</i>
	‘sweet potato’	<i>damfik</i>	<i>i-dam-ə-fik</i>
	‘gourd-bottle ( <i>L. siceraria</i> )’	<i>yóktál</i>	<i>í-yók-tí-tál</i>

### 2.8.2 Jilic

Jilic consists of at least two languages, Mijili [=Koro of Lafia] and Ujijili [=Koro Huntu], now separated by a considerable geographic distance, but clearly related.<sup>13</sup> There is a microfiched grammar of Mijili by **Stofberg1978** while Ujijili is known from an unpublished wordlist. Koro Ija and Koro Zuba, two languages spoken northwest of Abuja, are said to be nearly intelligible with Ujijili, although no language data exists to demonstrate this. This section will focus on Mijili as described by **Stofberg1978** but with additional material from fieldwork in 2003. Mijili has a system of number marking on nouns based on prefix alternations. Table 66 is a matrix showing the possible pairings of singular and plural prefixes.

Table 66: Matrix showing matching of singular and plural prefixes in Mijili. Adapted from **Stofberg1978**

.8l l  llllllllll		Plural prefixes			
12* Singular Prefixes		á-	à-	àmà-	í- mǐ- mǐ- mú- mù- Ñ-
	cù-				+
	jì-				+
	kí-	+			+
	kú-				+
	lú-		+		+
	mí-				+
	mú-				+
	Ñ-				+
	Ñ-	+	+	+	+
	ò-/ɔ-	+	+	+	+
	rí-	+			+
	rú-				+
	ø-	+	+	+	+

Once allomorphy of the prefixes is taken into account, the number of underlying prefixes is considerably reduced. As elsewhere in Plateau, singular nouns

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/South/SouthOP.htm>



referring to human beings have variable morphology. Many nouns for persons have a former *nV*- prefix, now apparently lexicalised, but still in alternation in one root, the word for ‘young man’ in Table 67. Plural prefixes in Mijili nouns for persons are either *mV*- or *a*-.

Table 67: Singular and plural prefixes for person nouns in Mijili

[inline]missing diacritics XXX	
Gloss	sg. pl.
‘old person’	<i>nyékúkõ mínyékúkõ</i>
‘in-laws’	<i>nyélõ mínyélõ</i>
‘doctor’	<i>nyemũgá minyemũgá</i>
‘man’	<i>nyevelè mínyevelè</i>
‘guest/stranger’	<i>nyèzõ mínyèzõ</i>
‘young man’	<i>nyézhò ázhò</i>
‘woman’	<i>nyinyrà mínyinyrà</i>
‘uncle’	<i>òcã múcã</i>
‘male ancestor’	<i>òco múco</i>
but:	
‘thief’	<i>oyi áyi</i>

The *nV*- prefix in singulars is unlikely to be a ‘true’ prefix but a recent grammaticalisation of the nouns for ‘person’ (12):

*nnyè* ‘person’      *mínyè* ‘person/people’

Almost all liquids and non-count nouns have an unpaired *n*- prefix as in Table 68:

Table 68: Mass nouns with *n*- prefixes in Jili

[inline]missing diacritics XXXX			
Jili	Gloss	Jili	Gloss
<i>ñcẽ</i>	‘saliva’	<i>ñsã</i>	‘salt’
<i>ñjẽ</i>	‘fat/grease’	<i>ñsí</i>	‘tear’
<i>ñkwálè</i>	‘water’	<i>ñswàná</i>	‘hair’
<i>ñnoro</i>	‘mud’	<i>ñzẽ</i>	‘blood’
<i>ñno</i>	‘oil’	<i>ñzõ</i>	‘smoke’

No other semantic correlations with noun class pairs have been detected.

## 2.8.3 Eggonic

Eggonic consists of just two languages, Eggon and Ake, spoken around Akwanga. These have previously been put together with Ninzic, although this is more a supposition based on geography than historical linguistics. The Eggon people are numerous and their language is divided into numerous dialects, while Ake (=Aike) is spoken in only three villages. Although the languages share enough common glosses to be put together, they are still quite distant from one another. Eggon has a limited system of nominal morphology, while Ake has lost its system entirely. All data and analyses in this section are based on fieldwork by the author.

Ake nouns no longer have morphologically marked plurals, with a few exceptions in the case of persons. However, there is considerable evidence for prior systems of CV prefixes, many of which survive in frozen form preceding the stem. The key to detecting such affixes is external cognates. Many words appear with different prefixes in related languages. Thus, although proto-Ake almost certainly had a *ki-* prefix, in the word *kipindye* ‘village/settlement’ the *ki-* is not a prefix, since it is cognate with forms in remote Plateau languages such as Hyam *khep*, Jili *kúpɔ̃*, and the *-ndye* element would then be a compounded element. Such evidence is not available for all the terms with potential affixes, so only more elaborated morphological comparisons will increase certainty. The former V- prefixes often have two distinct tones and may therefore be ultimately of different origins or it may be that this is the result of a now-lost morphophonemic process. However, since they exist in high-low pairs for almost all the hypothetical prefixes reconstructed in Table 69:

Table 69: Ake fossil noun prefixes

[inline]missing diacritics XX	
Prefix	Allomorphs
<i>a-</i>	à-,á-
<i>i-</i>	ì-,í-
<i>kV-</i>	kà-, kè-, kì-, kí-, kù-, kú-
<i>mu-</i>	mù-, mú-
<i>O-</i>	ɔ̃-, ɔ́-, ɔ̀-, ɔ́-
<i>rV-</i>	rì-, rí-, rù-, rú-
<i>u-</i>	ù-, ú-

Ake has a variety of *kV-* prefixes which constitute possible evidence for an

original affix with an underspecified vowel, such as occur both in Sambe (§2.6) and East Kainji languages such as Boze (see Blench, this volume). Examples are given in Table 70.

Table 70: Ake *kV*- prefixes

XX
Gloss Ake
‘world’ <i>kàyùnzà</i>
‘ground’ <i>kàfè</i>
‘masquerade’ <i>kàngìrì</i>
‘grave’ <i>kèmi</i>

An intriguing feature of Ake prefixes, not apparently found in related or nearby Plateau languages, is semantic clustering around specific segments. Some examples are found in (13):

check how to typeset this Ake prefixes semantic clustering around specific segments

ɔ̌-/ɔ̌-

This prefix is strongly associated with body parts:

IX ‘mouth’ *ɔ̌mu*

‘tongue’ *ɔ̌lé*

‘neck’ *ɔ̌lwa*

‘shoulder’ *ɔ̌kyɛ*

‘armpit’ *ɔ̌ngwɔ*

ò-/ó-

This prefix is strongly associated with animals:

IX ‘calf’ *òyèna*

‘castrated small ruminant’ *òki*

‘colobus monkey’ *òkpɛsɛ̃*

‘hare’ *òzwè*

‘electric fish’ *òrĩ*

‘fish sp.’ *ópò*

ŋ-

Strikingly, and in contrast to most other Plateau languages, the velar nasal

prefix is not homorganic synchronically. Almost all the words with  $\eta$ - prefixes are in the same semantic area, reptiles, crustaceans and insects. See (14).

Ake  $\eta$ - prefix  
 [inline]diacritics XX ‘hammer’  $\eta b\grave{u}k\grave{u}$   
 ‘fish sp.’  $\eta g\acute{a}s\acute{a}r\acute{e}$   
 ‘river turtle’  $\eta g y\acute{a}k\grave{l}\grave{a}$   
 ‘skink’  $\eta b\acute{o}k\acute{l}\acute{o}$   
 ‘toad’  $\eta b\acute{a}w\grave{u}$

Ake has almost certainly reprefixed stems with former velar nasal prefixes in words such as those in Table 71:

Table 71: Reprefixed stems in Ake

XX	
Gloss	Ake
‘chameleon’	$\eta b r\check{u}$
‘bee’	$\eta w\grave{e}$
‘giant snail’	$\eta g\grave{i}r\grave{a}$

It is conceivable this is related Bantu Class 9,  $n\grave{i}$ -, for animals, although large salient species in Ake do not have an  $\eta$ - prefix.

There is weak evidence for an  $mV$ - prefix defining liquids in (72):

Table 72: Ake  $mV$ - prefix defining liquids

XX	
Gloss	Ake
‘blood’	$m\grave{i}f\acute{e}$
‘tear(s)’	$m\acute{i}n y\acute{i}$
‘urine’	$m\grave{a} \eta g b\grave{a}$

Nouns referring to persons do not have any morphologically unifying characteristics.

## 2.9 Tarokoid

The Tarokoid languages consist of four distinct languages and the Kwang cluster. Tarok is numerically the most dominant, spoken in a large area around Langtang,

while the others are spoken in small communities isolated from one another between Langtang and Jos. Yangkam is moribund, spoken only by men over fifty years of age. Figure 7 shows the internal structure of Tarokoid:

for tree=delay=where content=shape=coordinate, forked edges [Proto-Tarokoid  
[ [Kwang cluster] [Sur] ] [ [Yangkam] [ [Tarok] [Pe] ] ] ]

Figure 7: Internal structure of Tarokoid

Within Tarokoid there is a considerable range of nominal morphology. Tarok itself has both the most complete prefix system and alliterative concord. Yangkam has lost functioning affix alternation but has partially developed a system of reduplicating the initial syllable of the stem. Sur has also lost any functioning affixes without the evolution of a compensatory process, perhaps under the influence of the Chadic language Ngas.

Kwang marks number with singular/plural prefix pairings, but these are extremely reduced compared with Tarok or Pe.<sup>14</sup> With very few exceptions, all plurals are marked with an *à-* prefix. Kwang has a small number of nouns where plurality is marked with a tone-change, Low/High or Mid/High, and some irregular plurals which may be examples of residual consonant mutation. Changes in the stem vowel occur in the plurals of some lexemes connected with persons. Table 73 shows the nominal prefixes of Kwang. By far the most common singular prefix is *ø-* and plural *à-*.

Table 73: Kwang nominal prefixes

XX	
Singular	Plural
<i>ø-</i>	<i>à-</i>
<i>i-</i>	<i>kí-</i>
<i>ki-</i>	
<i>n-</i>	

However, the large number of palatalised and labialised stems in Kwang suggests that *i-* and *u-* prefixes were formerly present. By far the most common singular/ plural alternation is *ø-/à-*, as shown in Table 74:

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Tarokoid/Kwanka%20wordlist%20paper%20Unicode.pdf>

Table 74: Kwaŋ ø-/à- prefix pairing

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘root’	<i>liŋ</i>	<i>àliŋ</i>
‘bark’	<i>púr</i>	<i>àpur</i>
‘thorn’	<i>rèk</i>	<i>àrèk</i>
‘mountain’	<i>fif</i>	<i>àfif</i>
‘relations’	<i>zyeŋ</i>	<i>àzyeŋ</i>
‘name’	<i>sàk</i>	<i>àsàk</i>

Kwang seems to have deleted the prefixes on singular nouns very extensively, as most of these now show only the root with no fossil morpheme. Nouns referring to persons all take à- plurals, but the singulars have no distinctive features. Some nouns copy the number marker at the end of the word, and assimilate the stem vowel if it is not the same –a as in Table 75:

Table 75: Kwaŋ ø-/à- prefix pairing with suffixed copy vowel

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘wall (of room)’	<i>lâr</i>	<i>àlârà</i>
‘person/people’	<i>sùm</i>	<i>àsùmà</i>
‘strength’	<i>sòtɔn</i>	<i>sòtɔna</i>
‘woman’	<i>yì</i>	<i>àya</i>
‘husband’	<i>dimà</i>	<i>lòg àdàmà lòg</i>

[inline]diacritics

The next most common pairing is ò-/á- as in Table 76:

Kwang also has occasional stem-initial consonant mutation as in Table 77.

Despite the example of ‘blood’ there is no association between mass nouns or liquids and nasal prefixes.

The noun classes of Tarok have been described in **Sibomana1981** with additional material in **Longtau2008** **Sibomana1981** sets up 6 singular and plural noun classes for Tarok (Table 8):

The order of the numbers seems less than ideal, but since it is reprised in **Longtau2008** it is also used here. Historically, these pairings must result from the merger of a more complex system, as in many singular/plural pairs there are

Table 76: Kwan̄ ñwan̄ prefix pairing

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘feather’	ñzùna ázùna
	‘gum/glue’	ndúr ádúr
	‘forehead’	ñjan ájan
	‘catfish (spp.)’	ndurum ádurum
	‘blood’	ñjì —

Table 77: Stem-initial consonant mutation

XXX		
	Gloss	sg. pl.
	‘child’	fàn àmàn
	‘young girl’	fàyì àwàyì

changes in the stem tone. Some of these seem to show semantic correlations, others do not, again suggesting class merger. Tarok also has a rich inventory of adjectives with concordial prefixes. Nasal prefixes are homorganic with the following consonant, with *m*-preceding bilabials and *n*-all others.

Persons in Tarok are almost exclusively in Class 1/2, i.e. with a *u*-/*o*- prefix alternation, as shown in Table 78:

There is a strong tendency for mass nouns, liquids and abstracts to have the unpaired homorganic *N*- prefix as in Table 79:

No other semantic set, such as large animals, trees or body parts, shows a tendency to cluster around a particular prefix pairing.

- |     |      |   |     |          |
|-----|------|---|-----|----------|
| 1.  | ù-   | → | 2.  | o-       |
| 3.  | ì-   | → | 4.  | i-       |
| 5.  | m/ñ- | → | 6.  | m/n-     |
| 7.  | a-   | → | 8.  | agá -    |
| 9.  | i-   | → | 10. | igá -    |
| 11. | m/n- | → | 12. | m/nggá - |

Figure 8: Tarok noun-class pairings

Table 78: Tarok *u-/o-* prefix alternations

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
‘husband’	ùb̄ar	ōbar
‘wife, woman’	ùc̄ar	oc̄ar
‘ancestors’	ùk̄a	ok̄a
‘mother’	ùn̄aŋ	on̄aŋ
‘man, person’	ùn̄àm	on̄am
‘father’	ùp̄ò(n)	op̄ó
‘ancestor’	ùr̄im	or̄im
‘soldier’	ùsh̄ózhà	osh̄ózhà
‘child’	ùȳèn	ov̄án

Table 79: Tarok *N-* prefixes on mass nouns

XX		
Gloss	Tarok	
‘oil’	m̄mì	
‘urine’	m̄p̄àŋg	
‘fat’	m̄p̄ì	
‘blood’	ñc̄ir	
‘water’	ñd̄əŋg	
‘smoke’	ŋḡù	

## 2.10 Eloyi

The Eloyi or Afo language is spoken in about twenty villages in Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The principle sources on the language are **Mackay1964** and **Armstrong1964**; **Armstrong1983**; **Armstrong1984**<sup>15</sup>). The classification of Eloyi has been disputed, all the more so because the lexical database for comparison has been so weak. All the preliminary sources classified Eloyi as Plateau 2, i.e. together Izere, Tyap etc. (e.g. **Greenberg1963**; **WilliamsonShimizu1968**; **deWolf1971**). **Armstrong1983** set out the case for classifying Eloyi as Idomoid, which is a West Benue-Congo or Volta-Niger subgroup, classified together with Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe and Edo. However, in Armstrong’s (**Armstrong1984**29) final published discussion of the sub-

<sup>15</sup> Despite its title, this is about Eloyi.



ject he expresses some doubts, concluding ‘Eloyi does not now seem as close to Idoma as it did when only Varvil’s list was available’. Eloyi has a rich system of alternating nominal prefixes, in contrast to the remainder of Idomoid, and is provisionally treated here as Plateau, though with significant influence from Idomoid. The analysis here is based on the cited published sources, and an unpublished wordlist collected by Barau Kato at the request of the author.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the complex affix-pairings, many words have zero prefixes, perhaps due to the impact of extensive bilingualism with Idomoid languages. Many alternations have only one or two cases so far recorded, which makes setting up the system highly provisional. Table 80 shows the nominal prefix pairings in Eloyi.

*kV-* prefixes are probably the most common in Eloyi singulars and *IV-* for plurals. Although usually some type of stem harmony would be expected to operate there is no evidence for this in Eloyi.

Table 80: Nominal prefix pairings in Eloyi

XXXX	
Underlying sg.	Underlying pl.
<i>a-</i>	<i>a- mba-</i>
<i>ε-</i>	<i>ε- mbε-</i>
<i>O-</i>	<i>o-, ɔ- a-</i>
<i>O-</i>	<i>o-, ɔ- E- e-, ε-</i>
<i>O-</i>	<i>o- i-</i>
<i>u-</i>	<i>u- a-</i>
<i>u-</i>	<i>u- i-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>kO- a-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ko- e-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ko- IV- lo-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>kɔ- O- ɔ-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ku- E- e-, ε-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ka- IV- lɔ-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ki- IV- lu-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>ke- IV- lo-</i>
<i>kV-</i>	<i>kε- IV- lu-</i>
<i>rE-</i>	<i>rε- a-</i>
<i>rE-</i>	<i>re- e-</i>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Plateau/Eloyi%20wordlist%20paper.pdf>

Eloyi noun-class pairings do not show much semantic clustering. Most nouns referring to persons have diverse singulars, and plurals in *a-* or *e-*. Mother and father have an exceptional class prefix pair which may reflect the Niger-Congo persons class seen in Table 81.

Table 81: Eloyi prefixes *V-/mba-*

XXX		
Gloss	sg.	pl.
'father'	<i>á-da</i>	<i>mbá-da</i>
'mother'	<i>éné</i>	<i>mb-éné</i>

There is no evidence for a distinctive morphology for non-count nouns and no trace of nasal prefixes.

### 3 Conclusion: Plateau nominal affixing

The numerous examples illustrate the problems of making any generalisations about nominal affixes in Plateau and only weak conclusions can be drawn about its relationship with other branches of Benue-Congo. This represents a common problem of historical linguistics in such a significant contact zone. Traces of prefixes familiar from Bantu and Niger-Congo are found scattered across the family, and in the light of external data it might seem likely that these were present in proto-Plateau. However, on the basis of synchronic data in Plateau alone it would be rash to reconstruct them. Taking the data as a whole we can conclude that:

- a) Plateau languages originally had a rich noun class system with CV- and V- prefixes and alliterative concord
- b) A wave of renewal and analogical re-alignment led to many of the CV- prefixes disappearing or becoming unproductive and replaced by a much smaller set of V- prefixes.
- c) There is some evidence for underspecified vowels in CV- prefixes showing concord with stem vowels although this is too rare to be conclusive.
- d) There is evidence for a class pair for persons, probably *V-/bV-*, although the segment in the singular prefix are less certain (e.g. Tables 43 and 48. This can be compared with the Niger-Congo person class.

- e) Proto-Plateau almost certainly had an unpaired nasal class marking liquids, mass nouns and abstracts, corresponding to Niger-Congo (e.g. 14, 34). Unlike Kainji, this is rarely realised as *ma-* and several branches of Plateau have *nV-*. Ndun in Table 44 does display *ma-*, *me-*, and *m-*. Other unpaired classes exhibit quite different segments which may be innovative.
- f) There is strong evidence that proto-Plateau had *N-* prefixes, homorganic with the following consonant, and present in most branches. However, there is no evidence for any consistent semantic association.
- g) There is weak evidence that the Bantu Class 9 prefix, *nì-*, existed in early Plateau (cf. Table 49).

Based on the synchronic evidence from Plateau, the connection with Niger-Congo noun classes remains tenuous. Only the non-count nouns and the person class show similarities and even these are obscured by innovative affixes. Similarly, there is no single affix alternation that provides evidence for the genetic unity of Plateau. This can only be deduced from lexical isoglosses (e.g. in **Blench2000a**). The paper presents a summary of what is known about number marking strategies on nouns in the Plateau languages. Further work will enrich the picture, but it is unlikely to contribute to a coherent reconstruction, as affix renewal has been very extensive.

## Abbreviations and conventions

.45lX A any central vowel

C consonant

E any mid-front vowel

N any nasal

.45lX O any mid-back vowel

S s or ʃ

V vowel