# The Plural Prefix in Kx'a, !Ui and Taa

Chris Collins
Henry Honken[1]

## 1.    Introduction

In this paper we show that some of the Kx'a, !Ui and Taa languages have a plural strategy involving a prefix with the shape kV-. We first document the phenomenon for each language where it exists. Then we discuss the commonalities between the plural prefix in the various languages and suggest that it has been inherited from a common ancestor which we call Proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa. We discuss whether or not the existence of this prefixal plural in the various languages could have been the result of borrowing, and conclude that borrowing scenarios are not generally plausible. We conclude that the plural prefix in Kx'a, !Ui and Taa provides support for the existence of Proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa.

Greenberg (1966) proposed that all the Khoisan languages form a single family of genetically/historically related languages (see Güldemann 2008 for critical discussion of Greenberg's data). Most modern Khoisan scholars take a more conservative approach, justifying languages groupings more carefully (in the spirit of Westphal (1971), see also Sands (1995)). The current most widely accepted model is based on Bleek's (1929c) classification of the Khoisan languages into Northern (see Heine and Honken (2010), Honken (2012)), Central (see Vossen (1998)) and Southern (see Güldemann (2005), and Hastings (2001)). We make the novel proposal that the southern group (including !Ui and Taa) and the northern group (including Kx'a) are historically related. Hence, we propose a bipartite classification of the Khoisan languages into Central and Non-Central (including Kx'a, !Ui, and Taa, but not including Sandawe and Hadza).

We dedicate this paper to the memory of Tony Traill, who held the belief (personal communication) that ǂHòã is the Gordian knot in understanding the relationship between Northern and Southern Khoisan languages (see the discussion in Traill 1973, 1974, Westphal 1974). We hope by this paper to start unraveling that knot using ǂHòã as a starting point.

## 2.    Plurality in ǂHòã

We start with ǂHòã, because the richness of plural marking in ǂHòã allows it to serve as a useful jumping off point for the comparison of the languages in the Kx'a, !Ui and Taa families. It is also the non-central Khoisan language for which plurality has been the most extensively studied. Collins (2001) gives a comprehensive description of plurality in ǂHòã (building on work of Gruber 1975a, 1975b). Collins and Gruber (2012) give an overview of plural strategies in ǂHòã.

ǂHòã is a member of the Kx'a group of languages, which has two branches, ǂ'Amkoe (the word for "person" in the two member languages ǂHòã and Sasi) and Ju, also known as Northern Khoisan (see Heine and Honken 2010, Honken 2012).

There are four different strategies for expressing the plurality of non-possessed nouns in ǂHòã: a regular plural marker, a diminutive plural marker -ǀkà'a, the irregular plural marker -nǀne, and a number of suppletive noun plurals. The regular plural suffix is illustrated below:

---

(1)  a.    göme -qà      'cows'
     b.    kyĕama-qà    'dogs'

In addition to the regular plural marker, there is a complex system of plural marking involving inalienably possessed nouns. Inalienable possession is found with expressions involving kinship terms, spatial relations (postpositions), body parts and a few artifacts. The morphosyntactic classes of inalienable nouns are: the Kin-class, the Many-class and the kí[PL]-class. Only the kí[PL]-class is of relevance to this paper.

The largest class of inalienable nouns is the kí[PL]-class. The nouns in the kí[PL]-class are inalienable nouns which are in neither the Kin-class or the Many-class. In the kí[PL]-class, if the head noun is plural, the plural prefix *kí-* appears between the possessor and the possessed. Otherwise, no possessive particle appears (mid-tones are unmarked).

(2)  a.    gyá"m-sǐ      !ko
           child-DIM      stomach
           'the child's stomach'

     b.    gyá"m-|kà'a   kí-      !ko-(*qà)
           child-DIM.PL PL-      stomach-PL
           'the children's stomachs'

(3)  a.    Ɵ'ú   Ɵnúũ
           duiker head
           'the duiker's head'

     b.    Ɵ'ú-qà         kí-      Ɵnúũ-(*qà)
           duiker-PL       PL-      head-PL
           'the duikers' heads'

(4)  a.    ǂ'àmköe        !kôa
           person          house
           'the person's house'

     b.    čòõ-!ka'e      kí-      !kôa-(qà)
           people          PL-      house-PL
           'the people's houses'

In the above examples, the plural suffix *–qà* is obligatorily absent in (2) and (3) even though the head noun is semantically plural. In (2) one is talking about a set of stomachs and in (3) about a set of heads. In (4), the plural marker *-qà* is optional with no change in meaning.

When the head noun is plural, and the possessor is singular, *kí-* is obligatory:

(5) a. ǂ'àmköe      kí-     !kôa-*(qà)
       person          PL-    house-PL
       'the person's houses'

    b. ǂ'àmköe      kí-     Ɵnúũ-*(qà)
       person          PL-    head-PL
       'the person's heads'

    c. gyá"m-sï    kí-     |köam-*(qà)
       child-DIM    PL-    sack-PL
       'the child's sacks'

These examples and the example in (4b) illustrate *double plural marking,* where plurality is marked twice on one noun. For example, in (5a), plurality is marked once with the regular plural suffix –*qà*, and again with the plural prefix *kí-*.

The same plural prefix is used in the expression of pluractionality. A pluractional suffix indicates that the action of the verb takes place more than once. The –‖*qò* suffix indicates that the action of the verb is sequentially repeated at several different places. For example, in (6) Jeff is walking around to different places.

(6) Jefo   'a      kí-     kyà"o-‖qò
     Jeff    PROG PL-   go-around
     'Jeff is walking around.'

The pluractionality suffix –*ču* also entails that the action is repeated several times, as illustrated in the following example.

(7) Jefo    kí-     ‖q'ao-ču-'a         ǂ'àmköe
     Jeff    PL-    stab-REP-PFV     person
     'Jeff stabbed the person repeatedly.'

If either of the plurality suffixes listed above are used, then *kí-* must also be obligatorily used (see Collins 2001 for a detailed discussion of pluractionality). The combination of the *kí-* prefix and a pluractionality suffix is another case of double plural marking.

Lastly, the *kí-* prefix is used with predicate adjectives when the subject of the predicate adjective is plural (see Gruber 1975):

(8) a. ‖kà'a   kŭru
       thing   hot
       'The thing is hot.'

    b. ‖kà'a   -qà    kí-kŭru
       thing   -PL    PL-hot
       'The things are hot.'

(9)  a.  gyá"m-sï̀    šù
         child-DIM    beautiful
         'The child is beautiful.'
     b.  gyá"m-ǀkà'a          kí-šù
         child-DIM.PL         PL-beautiful
         'The children are beautiful.'

(10) a.  'ă"ri-ǁgá"i    čà'a
         woman         tall
         'The woman is tall.'

     b.  ǀqhà          kí-    čà'a
         women         PL-    tall
         'The women are tall.'

      In summary, ǂHöã has a complicated system of plural marking with inalienable nouns involving both the *kí-* prefix and the *–qà* suffix. Within that system there is often double plural marking (involving both a *kí-* prefix and a *–qà* suffix). Furthermore, ǂHöã has a rich system of pluractional markers. Lastly, predicate adjectives are marked with the *kí-* prefix when the subject of the predicate adjective is plural.

      As we will see below, various languages in !Ui and Taa retain various parts of the ǂHöã system.

## 3.  Plurality in Nǀuu

      Nǀuu is a member of the !Ui group. The data in this section comes from Collins and Namaseb 2011.

      First, it is important to note that Nǀuu is generally a suffixing language, not a prefixing language. So the existence of a plural prefix *ka-* is an exception to the otherwise exceptionless generalization that Nǀuu uses suffixation.

      To put a noun into the plural, one of three basic strategies is followed: suppletion (an idiosyncratic change to the noun stem), ka-prefix, and ke-suffix. These strategies are also combined in certain cases. The way that a noun forms its plural must be memorized for each noun. We leave aside suppletive noun plurals here (which are common to all of non-Central Khoisan).

      The first class of nouns form their plurals with a ke-suffix. These nouns are called ke-plurals. Note that in the case of nouns ending in the singular suffix *-si*, the plural suffix replaces the singular suffix[2]. Tones are not marked, since the tonal system of Nǀuu has not been worked out.

(11) a.  gom        'cow'        gom-ke      'cattle'
     b.  ǂhii       'tree'       ǂhii-ke     'trees'

---

[2]    On the view we are advocating in this paper, where Kx'a, !Ui and Taa have descended from a common ancestor, it is possible that the *–si* suffix in Nǀuu is cognate with the diminutive singular suffix *–si* of ǂHöã.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| c. | blom-si | 'flower' | blom-ke | 'flowers' |
| d. | doŋki-si | 'donkey' | doŋki-ke | 'donkeys' |
| e. | beker-si | 'cup' | beker-ke | 'cups' |
| f. | hãa-si | 'horse' | hãa-ke | 'horses' |

The second class of nouns form their plurals with the ka-prefix. These nouns are called ka-plurals.

| (12) | a. | mƟõa | 'cat' | ka- mƟõa | 'cats' |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b. | ǂqhii | 'hat' | ka-ǂqhii | 'hats' |
| | c. | ku ǁq'ãa | 'his stomach' | kın ka-ǁq'ãa | 'their stomachs' |
| | | | | (alternative: kın ka-ǁq'ane) | |
| | d. | ku xuu | 'his face' | kın ka-xuu | 'their faces' |
| | e. | ku ǂquu | 'his neck' | kın ka- ǂquu | 'their necks' |

Note that (12c,d,e) are inalienable body part nouns. This is why we include the pronominal possessor in the examples. Although a full scale study of nominal plurality in N|uu has not been done, we speculate that inalienable body part terms regularly have ka-plurals.

It is often the case that ke-plurals take an optional ka-prefix, and that ka-plurals take an optional ke-suffix, giving rise to double plural marking.

(13)   a.      (ka-)gom-ke
               PL-cow-PL
               'cows'

       b.      ka- mƟõa(-ke)
               PL-cat-PL
               'cats'

A near minimal pair showing the difference between ke-plurals and ka-plurals is 'hat' ǂqhii (ka-plural) and 'tree' ǂhii (ke-plural).

(14)   a.      ka-ǂqhii        'hats'
       b.      ǂhii-ke         'trees'

In general, in the use of the ka-prefix and ke-suffix there is a great deal of variation between speakers. Speakers differ from each other as to the kind of plural affix a noun takes, and whether or not both a ka-prefix and a ke-suffix may be used simultaneously. Individual speakers change the form from time to time (even seconds apart).

The ka-prefix is sometimes used with a verb to indicate a repetitive action:

(15)   ku      ka-!qora      ka-!qora      ka-!qora      ka-!qora
       3SG     REP-play      REP-play      REP-play      REP-play
       'She played and played and played and played.'

(16)  ǂqhaeke      ke      ka-          ǂhũu-cĩi
      boys         DECL    REP-         jump-lie
      'The boys are jumping around.'

We assume that this use of the ka-prefix is a pluractional marker.

Although not represented in Collins and Namaseb 2011, there are two recordings on file of the stative verb 'sick' using a ka-prefix with a plural subject. The prefix seems to be optional, even for the two speakers who used it. No such instance of a ka-prefix occurs with a singular subject (across all speakers investigated). We have not investigated such plural adjectives systematically in N|uu, but the recordings are clear:

(17)  a.    ku      ke      Ɵ'ui-'ii
            3SG     DECL    sick-STAT
            'He is sick.'

      b.    kin     ke      ka-     Ɵ'ui-'ii
            3PL     DECL    PL-     sick-STAT
            'They are sick.'

## 4.    Plurality in ǁXegwi

ǁXegwi is an extinct language of the !Ui Family, originally spoken near Lake Chrissie in the eastern Transvaal. Only two of the several field studies of ǁXegwi have been published, Ziervogel (1955) and Lanham and Hallowes (1956), but the field notes from Westphal's and Köhler's expeditions are available in university libraries. The analysis in this section represents a synthesis of all available data on the topic of concern here and differs from the published accounts in a number of respects (see Honken 2011).

ǁXegwi appears to have a variety of singular/plural classes, a point which both Ziervogel and Lanham and Hallowes discuss briefly without giving any clear idea of the system. Fortunately, Westphal gives singular and plural forms for over seventy nouns and Köhler for thirty-four and an analysis of these suggests that ǁXegwi had more than a dozen classes. The one of relevance to this paper forms the plural by prefixing *ge-/gi-* and sometimes attaching the most common plural suffix *-ŋ*. We believe it is also significant that the nouns in this class are mostly typical inalienable nouns.

Lanham & Hallowes and Ziervogel both note that ǁXegwi has two possessive constructions: juxtaposition and use of the morpheme *gi*, but seem to regard these as stylistic variants. Lanham and Hallowes call them "optional alternatives" and say juxtaposition is the commoner. We believe their evidence shows instead there is a semantic difference between the two.

An analysis of all the possessive constructions cited in the two studies shows that with juxtaposition (Lanham and Hallowes 26 examples, Ziervogel 15 examples) the possessed noun is almost always a kin term, body part or locative noun. The two exceptions in Lanham and Hallowes are 'name' and 'knife', both typical inalienable nouns (on 'knife' as inalienable in ǂHöã see Collins 2001: 458).

In the other construction, the possessed nouns are 'book', 'top of mountain', 'food', 'side', 'European', 'grave', 'water', 'bag' in Lanham and Hallowes and 'cow', 'water', 'dog',

'European' in Ziervogel. We suggest this data can be best understood in terms of a distinction of alienability.

Examples of each are given in (18) and (19).

(18)  a. kwi-q'iŋ    chazi
         person-FEM breast
         'a woman's breast'                                            (L&H, 1956)

      b. !kxwaa   ‖gii
         cow       horn
         'cow's horn'                                                  (Ziervogel, 1955)

(19)  a. klhumi-ŋ  gi    ǀkxoŋ
         dog-PL    POSS European
         'dogs of the European'                                        (L&H, 1956)

      b. ń    tù:bì  k͡lwa    ki-‖x'éu k͡le
         1SG hear  affair    POSS-people
         'I hear the people's affair.'                                 (Köhler, field notes, 1967)

The most intriguing data which emerges from the analysis is the distribution of the element *gi-*. Ziervogel gives some examples of plurals with *ki-* or *gi-* but doesn't clearly distinguish these from other occurrences of *gi-*. In Table 1, we give Westphal's examples (in frame sentences as he does: *ħaa-* 'it is a…' and *ħɲa-* 'they are…").

The tone of the plural marker *gi-* is uncertain. Only Westphal and Köhler regularly mark tone in their ‖Xegwi material. Note in Table 1 that Westphal gives this marker a high tone or no tone mark at all, whereas Köhler generally leaves it unmarked. We follow the transcription system of Honken 2011.

**Table 1. The distribution of plural prefix *gi-* in Westphal's field notes.**

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | kidney | ɦaa | ǀuriŋ | ɦɳ̀à | g̊í-ǀúrí-ŋ́ | |
| 2. | tongue | ɦa | ǀwiŋ | ɦɳa | i-ge-ǀwiŋ | (our tongues) |
| 3. | knife | ɦáá | dʰèbè | ɦɳa | kí-dḛ̌-ŋ̀ | |
| 4. | ear | ɦa 'n | dlwi | ɦɳ̀à 'ŋ́ | gé-dlumi | |
| 5. | village | ɦaa | dlaba | ɦɳa | ki̧-dla-ŋ | |
| 6. | thorn | ɦa | ǃeloŋ | ɦĩya | ge-ǃéló-lé | |
| 7. | neck,throat | há ŋ́ | ǃ'ele (my neck) | ɦɳa | ge ǃ'ele | |
| 8. | hole | ɦá | gɦùmì | ɦɳ̀à | g̊í-gɦumiⁿ | |
| 9. | cow | ɦa | ǃxhwa | ɦɳ̀à | gɦíŋ ǃxhwà-ŋ | |
| 10. | doctor | ɦa | ǃxá'aŋ | ɦɳa | kĩ ǃxá'àŋ | |
| 11. | lelapa | ɦa | ǃx'ó'aŋ | ɦɳa | ki ǃx'ó'àŋ | |
| 12. | tail | ɦaá | khí | ɦɳa | gi-khĩ-ŋ | |
| 13. | frog | ɦá | k'óló'ò | ɦɳa | gi-kolo'o-ŋ | |
| 14. | heart | ɦaŋ | keleŋ | ɦɳa | ge-kele | |
| 15. | breast | ɦaa | kha-zi | ɦaa | ge-khaa | |
| 16. | path | ɦaá | ḵ̊áŋ | ɦɳ̀à | kú-ḵaá | |
| 17. | horn | ɦáá | ǁí | ɦɳa | (gi)-ǁí-ŋ | |
| 18. | cheek | ɦaŋ | ǁha'a | ɦɳa | ge-ǁhà'à-ŋ | |
| 19. | tooth | ɦaŋ | ǁçi | ɦɳa | ge-ǁçi | |
| 20. | pus | | | ɦɳa | ge ǁx'waŋ | |
| 21. | lung | ɦaŋ | ǁgunu'u | ɦɳa | ge-ǁguᵗnu-ŋ | |
| 22. | house | ɦa | ŋǁeiŋ | ɦɳa | gɦíŋ ŋǁèi-ŋ | |
| 23. | chest | ɦáà | ʃagu | ɦɳ̀à | (í-ge) ʃaagũⁿ | (our chest) |
| 24. | skin | ɦáà | tũũ | ɦɳa | ki-tũ-ŋ | |
| 25. | sore | ɦa | ts'oã'a | ɦɳ̀à | gú-ts'óã̀'á-ŋ | |
| 26. | spring | ɦáà | ts'àgùŋ (ḵí ʃaa) | ɦɳa | gí-ts'aguŋ | |
| 27. | ancestor | | | ɦɳ | gí-βùmì-ŋ | |
| 28. | pot | ɦaá | ʧũá | ɦɳa | gi-ʧũà-ŋ | |
| 29. | bag | ɦáa | tɬ'ó | ɦɳàà | ḵíⁿ-tɬ'oó-ŋ́ | |
| 30. | ribs | | | ɦɳa | ge-tɬ'eũ | |
| 31. | egg/testicle | | | ɦɳ̀à | gî̃-tɬ'wí | |
| 32. | penis | ɦaŋ | ʒeŋ | | í-gè-ʒáàlé | (our penises) |

What the pattern in Table 1 recalls, more than any possessive pattern elsewhere in Khoisan, is the form taken by inalienable possessive constructions in ǂHòã. In an alienable possessive construction in ǂHòã, a dependant noun is linked to the head by the particle *ši*. In the inalienable possessive construction the nouns are linked by juxtaposition and, depending on other factors, a particle *kí-* precedes the head noun (see section 2).

Of the 32 examples found in Westphal's Xegwi Dictionary Notes of *gi-/ge-/ki-* plurals, half (16) are body part terms. Another five are cultural artifacts ('knife', 'village', 'house', 'pot', 'bag') (see Collins 2001: 458 where there are some cultural artifacts in the kí[PL]-class in ǂHòã,

including 'house'). These data suggest that inalienablity played a role in determining the plural class of ‖Xegwi nouns.

Another notable similarity is that some nouns have a double plural, just as in ǂHoã and N‖uu: ‖ha'a 'cheek', *ge-‖hà'à-ŋ* PL-NOUN-PL 'cheeks' (Köhler, field notes, 1967).

## 5. Plurality in Ku‖ha:si

Ku‖ha:si is an extinct click language which Güldemann (2005) places in the Lower Nossop branch of Taa. Only a small amount of linguistic data has been collected on Ku‖ha:si.

In 1936, Donald Bain persuaded 70 odd San individuals to join his camp at Tweerivieren in preparation for an exhibit at the Johannesberg Empire Exhibition. Most of the San were |'Auni or ǂKhomani speakers. Among the remainder were a few speakers of a language variously called Vaalpens, Khatia or ǂEĩkusi.

During the Exhibition, Bain's group of San stayed at the University's Botanical Research Station, where Robert Story had been working on his M.Sc., and during his week-end visits Story began to study the language of one of the Khatia women, Tatabesa or Kabala. Story called this language Ku‖ha:si. Story's material remained unpublished for many years, and it is due to the efforts of Anthony Traill that Story's manuscript was at last published in the Khoisan Forum Working Papers (Story1999).

Plurals may have been more complex in Ku‖ha:si than appears from the surviving data. The most common way of forming the plural was by prefixing *ka-* (Story, 1999: 29-30). But Story says that "many nouns appear to have the same form for singular and plural" and some nouns reduplicate the final vowel for the plural. There is one example of a suppletive plural, the word for 'woman'. There may be further Ku‖ha:si ka-plurals listed in BC_151_A3_30, produced by Kabala and collected by D. Bleek.

**Table 2 Plural formed by ka-N**

| Gloss | Singular | Plural |
|---|---|---|
| woman | |ĩ | ḱa |ã |
| lion | ´ǂnhu gu | ḱa ´ǂnhu: gu |
| springboks | ‖ãm | ḱa ‖ãm |
| dogs | ǂhaaŋ | ḱa ǂhaaŋ |
| ostrich | ʔɔ | ḱa ʔɔ |
| tree | ǂhai | ḱa ǂhai |
| stick | Ɵbœi | ḱa Ɵbœi |

The limited data leave us uncertain whether Ku‖ha:si had double plurals or an alienable/inalienable distinction correlated with the *ka-* plural prefix or the use of the *ka-* prefix in pluractionality and adjectives. The most that can be said is that Ku‖ha:si also employed a prefix *ka-* as a plural marker with some nouns.

## 6. Plurality in |'Auni

In spite of the close relationship between Ku‖ha:si and |'Auni, the latter does not have *ka-*plurals. But it does show a few examples of a verbal prefix *ka-,* which appears to mark repetition like the similar prefix in N‖uu (Collins and Namaseb 2011: 20). We assume that this repetitive *ka*

is distinct from the *ka* which is a verbal particle meaning past or perfect (on which see Bleek 1937a).

The examples are from the Dorthea Bleek notebooks in the archive The Digital Bleek and Lloyd. The glosses and translations are very provisional. They are based on the glosses given in the notebooks, and the data in Bleek (1937a,b).

(20)  a.  n     ka- ǀnau     a       ǃkɔra    a      ka- ǀnau       ka- ǀnau
         1SG REP-sweep  ?       clean   ?      REP-sweep    REP-sweep
         'I will sweep and clean, sweep, sweep.'              (BC_151_A3_022)

      b.  ǂnansi e    ka-   taĩtaĩ     e   ka-  ǀke   ǁk'wi    n     ǁara    a
              ?    REP-  walk-walk  ?  REP-  take  pick.up  ?     stick   this
         'ǂNansi walks along and picks up the stick.'          (BC_151_A3_30, p 532)

In some cases, the *ka-* prefix seems to have a plural meaning. For example, it signals that the direct object is plural in the following example.

(21)  hi        ǀi   e   ǁk'wi    n     ǀka      ka-   ǁgɔra
      that    fire ?   out    1SG light.up  REP-  roast
      'That fire is out. I will roast them.'              (BC_151_A3_30, p 484)

This evidence suggests that ǀ'Auni had a pluractional prefix *ka-*. It also opens up the possibility that Kuǀha:si had a pluractional prefix (although not attested in the existing data).

## 7.     Plurality in ǃXóõ

Although there is no indications in the writings of Traill (1985, 1994) that there are kV-nominal plurals, kV- plurals show up on some predicate adjectives. According to Traill, adjectives always appear in sentences preceded by either the particle *kâ* or by a tense marker (Trail, 1994: 33). In example (22), a plural subject is used, but no *ka-* prefix appears on the adjective:

(22)     èh ǀnūɲa-tê  ń     ǀgáh'la
         it nose-PL  TNS wide.apart
         'Its nostrils are widely separated.'         (Traill 1994: 57)

However, with the adjective "pretty", when the subject is plural a *ka-* prefix appears on the predicate adjective:

(23)  a. èh   ń      qáĩ
         she TNS    pretty
         'She is pretty.'

      b. ùh  ń      kâ   qáɲa
         they TNS  COP  pretty
         'They are pretty.'                          (Traill 1994: 27)

10

Although !Xóõ doesn't regularly mark adjective plurals, in suppletive singular/plural adjective pairs, the plural form always requires *kâ* as in (23b). There are roughly half a dozen such suppletive adjectives in !Xóõ. Even though Traill seems to interpret this *kâ* as a copula, the consistent association with the plural forms another link between !Xóõ and ǂHöã.

**Table 3 Adjectives in !Xóõ with suppletive singular/plural forms**

| Gloss | Singular | Plural |
|---|---|---|
| beautiful | ń qáĩ | ń kâ qáɲa |
| little | ń ǀʼûi | ń kâ ǀqʼán-tá |
| short | ń ǂʼāba | ń kâ ǂʼāõ |
| tall | ń !ʼám | ń kā !ʼāã |

## 8.      Plurality in Kuli Dialect of !Xóõ

Some of the Western !Xóõ dialects are also known to employ a prefix *ka-* to form plurals. The information in Table 4 is from Anthony Traill (field notes, pc) from the Kuli dialect.

**Table 4 Ka-plurals in Kuli**

| Gloss | Singular | Plural |
|---|---|---|
| mortar | ka!gai | ka-!gaba-le |
| goat | puri | ka-puru-te |
| path | dao | ka-dao-le |
| wart | idzųi | ku-dzųa-le |
| upper lip | idzum | ka-dzuma-ni |

One point to note in Table 4 is that Kuli !Xóõ has double plurals of the form ka-NOUN-le/ni. It is not possible to tell, at this point, if *ka-* plurals are restricted to inalienable nouns, or whether *ka-* plays a role in pluractionality or predicate adjectives.

## 9.      Synthesis

Putting all the information of the previous sections together, we have Table 4:

**Table 5 Table of Plurality Features**

|  | ‡'A | !Ui | | Taa | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | ‡H | N| | ‖X | |'A | Ku‖h | !X-K | !X |
| Form of Prefix | kí- | ka- | gi/ge- | ka- | ka- | ka- | ka |
| Tone | H | ? | H? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| kV-Noun Possible | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Double Plurals Possible | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | ? | Yes | No |
| Inalieanability Plays a Role | Yes | Yes? | Yes | No | ? | ? | No |
| Used in Pluractionality | Yes | Yes | ? | Yes | ? | ? | No |
| Used with Predicate Adjectives | Yes | Yes? | No | ? | ? | ? | Yes |

The most immediate question is what the proto-form of the plural prefix is. We suggest the following:

(24)    Proto-Kx'a, !Ui, Taa Plurality Prefix: kí- (high tone)

This hypothesis would explain immediately why ‡Höã (a Kx'a language) and ‖Xegwi (a !Ui language) have closely related plural prefixes (*kí-* ‡Höã and *gí-/gé-/kí-* in ‖Xegwi), even though they are distantly related. In fact, we speculate that the system of ‡Höã is the closest to the system of the proto-language, with various parts of the system (but not all of it) surviving into the various languages.

For the four Taa languages in Table 5, we propose that the [a] of the *ka-* is is related to the agreement system one finds with grammatical particles in the !Xoõ languages. !Xoõ has a complicated gender system with the following concords (see Trail 1994: 20):

(25)    Class        Concord
        1            –i
        2            -ã
        3            -e
        4            -u
        5            n

These concords appear on verbs which have noun phrase complements, adjectives and relative clauses. Traill (1994: 30) notes that "Verbs with the variable transitivizing formative kV/tV and sV or the variable dative formative |naV, form their intransitive nominalizations by suffixing *–sà* to these formatives. In their neutral shape kV and tV appear as *kâ* and *tâ*, respectively; |naV appears as *|nàa*; sV appears as *sí*."

We take this as evidence that there is a default (genderless) concord [a] that is used when an agreeing morpheme cannot be supplied with a gender in agreement with some noun. We assume (without argument) that the vowel [i] chosen with sV is related to the alveolar position of

the [s]. We propose that this default [a] is the same [a] as the one being used with the plural prefixes in Kuli, Ku|ha:si, |'Auni and !Xóõ.

In the case of the adjective prefix of !Xóõ, such an analysis is natural. There is no reason to think that adjectives have inherent gender with which the adjective prefix could agree. Therefore, in the structure kV-ADJ, since kV- cannot agree with any noun, it takes the default vowel [a]. A similar account is natural for the pluractionality prefix in |'Auni.

The plural prefixes of Kuli and Ku|ha:si require more comment. A noun with a plural prefix has a gender, so it is natural to ask why the plural prefix could not agree with the gender of the noun. We assume that syntactic agreement is a relation between a word that shows gender agreement (e.g., a verb or an adjective) and an independent phrase (e.g., the object of a verb, or a modified noun). In the case of the plural prefix, one has a single word kV-N (not a word and an independent phrase), hence agreement is impossible and the default vowel must be used.

Historically, the plural prefix *kí-* in Proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa was inherited by Proto-Taa. Because of the (presumed) noun class system of Proto-Taa, *kí-* lost its vowel in the same way that other functional morphemes lost their vowel in Proto-Taa (e.g., the transitivity suffix and the linker, see Collins and Honken 2012). Then, the plural prefix took on the default vowel of the gender system, which is [a]. Of course, such a historical scenario raises many questions that we cannot answer. For example, did proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa have a noun class system, and if so, is the above explanation consistent with its existence?

Then we are only left with explaining the *ka-* form of the plural prefix in N|uu. The first possibility is that N|uu borrowed the *ka-* form from !Xóõ (or more southern Taa languages). However, there is no independent evidence for this borrowing or for prolonged contact between the two groups. The second possibility is that N|uu once had a gender system like that of !Xóõ, and that the *ka-* plural in N|uu has the default [a] vowel of that system. At the present stage of N|uu, there is no gender agreement (see Collins and Namaseb 2011). Such an account would raise the question of why ǁXegwi, also a !Ui language, does not have a *ka-* plural (since if N|uu had a gender system, so would have ǁXegwi). For the moment, we leave the vowel [a] of the *ka-* plural prefix in N|uu a mystery.

## 10.   Against Borrowing

First, note that the kV- plural prefix could not have been borrowed from any central Khoisan language (e.g., Khoekhoe, G|ui, Kua, etc.). None of the central Khoisan languages has a plural prefix. Rather, all the central Khoisan languages have plural suffixes that are integrated into the PGN (Person-Number-Gender) system. So the only way borrowing could have taken place is directly between non-Central Khoisan languages.

It is certainly the case that lexical borrowing has taken place between various Khoisan groups. A rough count of words shared between G|ui, a language of the Khoe Family, and non-Khoe languages showed that G|ui shares some 270 words with Ju|'hoan and over 300 words with !Xóõ. Neither Ju|'hoan nor !Xóõ is considered related to G|ui, and since Nakagawa's provisional G|ui dictionary is smaller than the dictionaries available for the other two languages, a fuller knowledge of G|ui vocabulary would probably greatly increase the number of shared words. In spite of the heavy degree of borrowing among these three languages, however, aside from a few markers such as the nominalizing suffix *-sà* G|ui grammar remains essentially Central Khoisan.

Vossen (1998) has suggested that lexical borrowing would be facilitated by trading. We will argue that even if lexical items could be spread far and wide by borrowing chains, it is

extremely unlikely that the plural prefix and its associated grammar could have been passed from language to language.

The borrowing of a deep grammatical feature like the plural prefix would have necessitated prolonged contact between two small groups. In contrast, the borrowing of a word like 'spoon' could have taken place with a shorter term contact. Let's take a particular pair for concreteness: ǂHõã and ǁXegwi. This pair is also important because of the spectacular similarity of the system of plurality for inalienable nouns. A possible hypothesis (which we will reject) is that ǂHõã and ǁXegwi share the plural prefix on inalienable nouns by borrowing. But such a hypothesis seems inconsistent with the small number of cognates between ǂHõã and ǁXegwi. The total number, from all available sources is just a handful:

**Table 6: Possible Cognates between ǁXegwi and ǂHõã**

| Gloss | ǁXegwi | ǂHõã |
|---|---|---|
| many | gɣõĩ | qáẽ 'three' |
| return | khóáne | khóa |
| land | cçeu [<*kʰau] | khào 'treeless plain' |
| thing | gĩⁿ ǁ'a | ǁàʔa |
| dance | ʧʼa-e | kyxä́i |
| to know | ts'ia | tsí̃ 'see', tsí̃ ʔá 'know' |
| buttock | ŋ!aa'a | ŋ!ä̃ˤne |
| grass | ǀhee | ǀqhùi |
| chief | !xa'a | !xä̈e |

To explain this data, either (a) the languages would have had to have been in close contact without borrowing many lexical items, or alternatively, (b) they borrowed lexical items but subsequently lost them (retaining the kV- plural prefix). Scenario (a) seems absurd. Certainly if two languages are in close enough contact to share a grammatical morpheme, they will share a lot of basic vocabulary. Scenario (b) while possible, involves postulating the incorporation and subsequent loss of borrowed vocabulary, for which there is no evidence. Both scenarios seem less plausible than simply attributing the *ki-* plural prefix to inheritance from a common ancestor. Since there is very little common vocabulary, the degree of historical separation must be very deep.

## 11.    Kx'a, !Ui and Taa Languages without the kV- Plural Prefix.

Although the kV- plural prefix is widely distributed amongst the Kx'a, !Ui and Taa languages, it is not universal.

Starting with Kx'a, in Juǀ'hoan (spoken in Northwestern Botswana and Northeastern Namibia) there are no kV- prefix plurals[3]. There are none in the Ju languages more generally (see König and Heine 2001, König and Heine forthcoming, Heikkinen, 1987).

In !Ui, the grammatical sketch of ǀXam in Bleek (1929a,b) does not give any kV- plurals, although the sketch gives a long and careful list of other plural classes (mostly based on

---

[3]    We believe that there is a possible connection between the *ka* of Class 5 in Juǀ'hoansi (see Dickens 2005), and the kV- plural prefix that is the subject of this paper. We cannot develop this speculation here.

reduplication). Nor is there any evidence in the archival papers on other !Ui languages such as ‖Ng or ǂUngkwe.

In summary, some of the languages in the three groups Kx'a, !Ui and Taa have the kV-plurals and some do not. Two theories can account for this range of data. One theory states that the presence of kV-plurals in some languages is due to borrowing. For example, perhaps contact between ǂHŏã and western !Xóõ led to kV- plurals in western !Xóõ (or vice-versa). A different theory states that proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa possessed kV- plurals and then these plurals were lost in a subset of the languages descended from the proto-language. Since we have already discounted borrowing for one pair of languages (see section 10), we propose that the second theory is correct in the general case.

## 12.    Conclusion

The data presented in this paper offers a challenge to certain widely-held beliefs about southern African Khoisan. Currently, many Khoisan researchers adhere to some version of Dorothea Bleek's original tripartite division of Khoisan into Northern, Central and Southern groups. But if Northern and Southern Khoisan are genetically unrelated, it means that basic grammatical markers can be transfered across genetic boundaries. In addition to the case discussed in this paper, all Northern and Southern Khoisan languages have a linker morpheme which in many cases has the form kV (see Collins and Honken 2012 for specific proposals on how the linker systems are related). Furthermore, they all share a second person singular pronoun *a* (with the exception of ǂ'Amkoe) and a third person singular pronoun *ha/ya*. So the problem for future research is to show that the conditions which would make such borrowing likely or even possible were present in the Khoisan-speaking communities.

We have argued on the contrary, that such intimate borrowing was unlikely considering what is known of the historical situation in southern African Khoisan communities. Our data supports a bipartite division in southern African Khoisan between Khoe (Central Khoisan) as one family and Northern/Southern (Kx'a-!Ui-Taa) as the other. The second would be an ancient connection, so distant that much of the supporting lexical data has been lost or obscured by borrowing, whereas certain grammatical morphemes remain.

Our data would support this classification with a specific grammatical marker which is deep enough in the grammar to make borrowing unlikely and which has a number of defining properties:

1.  It is typologically unusual: it is a prefix in languages all of which have suffixal plurals, and which are all predominantly suffixing. Furthermore, the relevant languages are surrounded by the Central Khoisan languages which only have suffixal plurals.
2.  It shares a specific phonetic shape kV- with the specific vowel a/i correlating with the vowel found in the linker (!Xoõ *ka*, ǂHŏã and Sasi *ki*), see Collins and Honken (2012).
3.  It has a strong association with inalienable nouns in ǂHŏã and ‖Xegwi, languages from quite distant branches of the proposed family.
4.  It is associated with double plural marking.
5.  In some languages, it is prefixed to non-nouns, as with pluractional verbs and predicate adjectives (ǂHŏã, N|uu, |'Auni, !Xóõ).

Given these striking commonalities, and the lack of any serious argument for a borrowing scenario, we conclude that the kV- plural prefix supplies a strong argument for Proto-Kx'a-!Ui-Taa. Furthermore, ǂHöã with its rich system of plurality played a pivotal role in building this argument, supporting Traill's idea that ǂHöã is the key to understanding the link between the Northern and Southern Khoisan languages.

**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | first person |
| 3 | third person |
| COP | copula |
| DECL | declarative |
| DIM | diminutive |
| FEM | feminine |
| PFV | perfective |
| PL | plural |
| POSS | possessive |
| PROG | progressive |
| REP | repetitive |
| SG | singular |
| STAT | stative |
| TNS | tense |

**References**

Bleek, Dororthea F. (1929a) Bushman Grammar: A Grammatical Sketch of the Language of the |xam-ka-!k'e. *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, vol. 19, pp 81-98.

Bleek, Dorothea. (1929b) Bushman Grammar: A Grammatical Sketch of the Language of the |xam-ka-!'e (continuation). *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, vol. 20, pp 161-174.

Bleek, D. F. (1929c) *Comparative Vocabularies of Bushman Languages*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bleek, D. F. (1937a) Grammatical notes and texts in the |Auni language. *Bantu Studies* 11, pp 253-258.

Bleek, D. F. (1937b) |Auni vocabulary. *Bantu Studies* 11, pp 259-278.

Bleek Collection. Special Collections and Archives, University of Cape Town Libraries. (Unpublished). (http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/)

Collins, Chris (2001) Aspects of Plurality in ǂHoã. *Language* 77, pp 456-476.

Collins, Chris and Henry Honken (2012) The Linker in Kx'a, !Ui and Taa. Manuscript.

Collins, Chris and Levi Namaseb (2011) *A Grammatical Sketch of N|uuki with Stories.* Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

Dickens, Patrick (2005) A Concise Grammar of *Ju|'hoan, with a Ju|'hoan-English glossary and a subject index.* Edited by Rainer Vossen and Megan Biesele. (Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung/Research in Khoisan Studies, 17.) Koln: Rudiger Koppe.

Güldemann, Tom (2005) Tuu as a language family. In: Tom Güldemann (ed.) *Studies in Tuu (Southern Khoisan).* (University of Leipzig Papers on Africa, Languages and Literatures 23). Leipzig: Institut für Afrikanistik, Universität

Güldemann, Tom (2008) Greenberg's "case" for Khoisan: the morphological evidence. In: Dymitr Ibriszimow (ed.) *Problems of linguistic-historical reconstruction in Africa*. Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika 19. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, pp 123-153.

Greennberg, Joseph (1966) *The Languages of Africa*. Indiana University, Bloomington.

Gruber, Jeffrey (1975a) Plural Predicates in ǂHoã. In: Anthony Traill (ed.) *Bushman and Hottentot Linguistic Studies (A.S.I. Communication 2)*, pp 1-50. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: African Studies Institute.

Gruber, Jeffrey (1975b) Bushman Languages of the Kalahari: ǂHoã – vocabulary -- stems, ǂHoã – vocabulary – recorded utterances. Technical project report to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington D.C.

Hastings, Rachel (2001) Evidence for the genetic unity of Southern Khoesan. *Cornell Working Papers in Linguistics*, pp 225-240.

Heine, Bernd and Henry Honken (2010) The Kx'a Family: A New Khoisan Genealogy. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 79, pp 5-36.

Heikkinen, T. (1987) *An Outline of the !Xũ Language spoken in Ovamboland and Western Kavango*. South African Journal of African Languages, Volume 7, 1987, Supplement 1). 8th International    Conference of African Linguistics.

Honken, Henry (2011) A Short Grammar and Dictionary of ǁXegwi. Manuscript.

Honken, Henry (2012) ǂHoã as a Northern Khoesan Language. Manuscript.

König, Christa and Bernd Heine (2001) The !Xun of Ekoka  A demographic and linguistic report. In: Yvonne Treis (ed.) *Khoisan Forum. Working Paper 17*. Cologne: University of Cologne.

König, Christa and Bernd Heine (2008) The !Xun language; A dialect grammar.

Lanham, L. W. and Hallowes, D. P. (1956) An outline of the structure of Eastern Bushman. *African Studies* 15(3), pp 97-118.

Sands, Bonny (1995) *Evaluating Claims of Distant Linguistic Relationships: The Case of Khoisan*. UCLA Dissertations in Linguistics, Number 14. University of California, Los Angeles.

Story, Robert (1999) K'u‖ha:si Manuscript. ed. A. Traill. *Khoisan Forum WP* 13.

Traill, Anthony (1973) 'N4 or S7': another Bushman language. *African Studies* 32, pp 25-32.

Traill, Anthony (1974) Westphal on 'N4 or S7': A Reply. *African Studies* 33, pp 249-255.

Traill, Anothony (1985) *Phonetic and Phonological Studies of !Xóõ Bushman*. QKF 1. Hamburg: Helmut Buske.

Traill, Anthony (1994) *A  !Xóõ Dictionary*. QKF 9. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

Vossen, Rainer (1991) What Do We Do with Irregular Correspondences? The Case of the Khoe Languages. *History in Africa* 18, pp 359-79.

Vossen, Rainer (1998) Historical Classification of Khoe (Central Khoisan) Languages of Southern Africa. *African Studies* 57.1, pp 93-106.

Westphal, E.O.J. (1980) Xegwi Dictionary Notes (E O J Westphal Papers BC1143, D2). Special Collections and Archives, University of Cape Town Libraries. (Unpublished).

Westphal, E. (1971) The Click Languages of Southern and Eastern Africa. In: Sebeok, T. (ed.)  Linguistics in Sub-Saharan Africa (pp. 367-420).  *Current Trends in Linguistics 7*. The Hague:  Mouton.

Westphal, E.O.J. (1974) Notes on A. Trail 'N4 or S7'. *African Studies* 33, pp 243-247.

Ziervogel, Dirk. (1955) Notes on the language of the eastern Transvaal Bushmen. In: E.F. Potgieter (ed.) *The disappearing Bushmen of Lake Chrissie*, pp 34-64. Pretoria: JL van Schaik. Pretoria.