

Evidence of noun classes in languages of the Yungur (Bəna-Mboi) group

Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer

0. Preface

This article is the written version of a paper presented to the conference "Language Use and Language Change in the Lake Chad Area", University of Maiduguri, October 1991. It was submitted in 1992 to be included in the proceedings. The proceedings were never published. In the absence of up-to-date studies on this topic, I post the paper in this form. It has to be borne in mind that it essentially reflects the state of the art of 1992. (UK 2014.)

1. Introduction

The overview presented here is a first evaluation of data which was mainly collected in 1990 during brief visits in Adamawa State, Nigeria.¹ Therefore, its conclusions are preliminary; the research is still on-going. Neither the phonologies nor the tonologies of the languages dealt with are studied in detail. However, since to the best of my knowledge nothing substantial has been published on the noun classes of the languages of the group, I take the opportunity to present an overview of my findings so far.

The languages of the Bəna-Mboi group are mainly spoken in the northern part of the Adamawa State in Northeast Nigeria. The group is classified by Greenberg 1963 as Group 7 of the Adamawa Branch, of the Adamawa-Eastern (= Adamawa-Ubangi) family of Niger-Congo. Bennett 1983 combines the Yungur group with Greenberg's Adamawa groups 1, 9 and 10 (the Tula-Waja, Bikwin-Jen, and Longuda groups respectively) to form a linguistic unit which he calls "Trans-Benue". He argues that "Trans Benue" may have an intermediate status forming a link between the eastern branches of the Gur languages and the remaining Adamawa-Ubangi groups (1983: 41).²

In terms of speakers Bəna-Mboi languages in general are small. An exception is Bəna Yungur which is spoken in more than a dozen settlements. All languages are very poorly documented. In 1992, the wordlists and phrases in Meek 1931 on Yungur, Libo, Roba, and Mboi were the only language materials published. Blench (1990), probably on the basis of unpublished data, subdivides the Yungur group into a Bəna group (comprising of Bəna proper (Yungur), Voro, Lala and Roba) and a Gəna group (comprising of Gəna [= Mboi], Handa and Banga), while the position of Libo is not clear. Based on my own notes Libo - or Kaan as the people refer to themselves - forms a third branch within the Yungur group.

The designation 'Yungur' used in the literature as the name for the entire language group derives from the largest ethnic group which is called Yungur (or Yongor) by their neighbours, while the Yungur refer to themselves as 'Bəna'. The people known as Laala who speak variants of a language closely related to (Bəna) Yungur, however, refer to themselves as 'Bəna' as well. Thus the name "Bəna subgroup" comprising all the languages of the various Bəna peoples is more suitable as a term of reference. The reference terms for the individual Bəna languages are accordingly composites, i.e. Bəna Yungur and Bəna Laala.

As designation for the Gəna subgroup of Blench 1990, we prefer to retain "Mboi", as used by Meek (1931). This is how the various Mboi peoples refer to themselves and their respective languages. In their terminology they differentiate the two main sections as 'Mboi' and ('Mboi' of) 'Haanda'. As regards the name of the higher grouping, they strongly objected to be subsumed under "Yungur". On the basis of the two main divisions of the group, the name "Bəna-Mboi Group" may thus be proposed instead.

With respect to noun classes in Bəna-Mboi languages Greenberg observes that: "In Yungur we find some unexplained suffix alternations as clear instances of the ma noun class." (1963: 10); and in general

¹ Research was conducted within the framework of the multi-disciplinary research project "Kulturentwicklung und Sprachgeschichte im Naturraum Westafrikanische Savanne (SFB 268)" based at the University of Frankfurt and was generously financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

² See also Boyd (1989: 180) on the plausibility of Bennett's 'Trans-Benue' subgrouping.

that: "the drift in Niger-Congo has been in the direction of the simplification of the nominal classificational system" (1963: 9). The 'unexplained suffix alternations' he mentions are, as demonstrated in this study, clear signs of noun class systems in the Bəna-Mboi languages. Yet, also the second statement holds true for Bəna-Mboi languages. We notice that most languages seem to have simplified the nominal classificational system. Specifically as regards the complexity and diversity of the accompanying concord systems, the sets of morphemes affixed to qualifiers, adjectives, pronouns etc in agreement with the noun class of the head noun appear to be eroded.

Noun classes are wide spread in the different branches of Niger-Congo and usually seen as part of the common heritage. Thus, even though the class systems of the Bəna-Mboi languages must have diverted from the inherited system, they are still likely to have retained certain features also found elsewhere in Niger Congo. We notice a particular class which almost exclusively contains nouns denoting human beings, other classes contain the majority of animals, trees and things made from wood, minerals, fruits and so forth. However, since the number of noun classes is limited, different categories may/must be combined in one class. In addition the languages may have evolved along different lines so that the ordering principles may have been reinterpreted or even lost. The overall semantics of a given noun class in any of the languages presented here is difficult to satisfactorily define. One usually finds nouns which - at least from an outside point of view - could also be assigned to a different class or else the presence of a particular noun in a certain class does not agree with what one may reflect to be the semantic category of that class. However, as we can also notice for the Bəna-Mboi languages certain classes seem to have preserved (inherited) semantic features to some extent and accordingly certain nouns (or items) do stick to certain classes while others may have shifted to other classes.

The following study is an overview of the nominal classificational system in several Bəna-Mboi languages. We notice in general that the concord morphemes often resemble the respective noun suffixes. However, there is also a tendency of using general concord markers. This may be an indication that older systems of class agreement by affixing a discrete concord morpheme for each noun class are in the process of being reduced. At this stage we therefore base the presentation of the presumed noun classes mainly on the form of the respective noun affixes, as they become apparent when one compares the respective singular and plural forms. The nouns are thus grouped according to their affixes, singular and plural forms are separated by a slash. Columns on the right generally show the concord suffixes where they are known. The concord suffixes are presented in the form as they are suffixed to e.g. adjective stems. Variant noun forms and concord morphemes are separated by "~". The variations are usually phonological in nature. Lacking adequate insight in the tonologies of the respective languages, tonal differences of the noun suffixes and or concord morphemes mainly remain unheeded.

2. Noun classes in the Mboi subgroup

The languages of the Mboi subgroup are mainly spoken in Song L.G.A. (Local Government Area) in Adamawa State. Overviews of the noun classes in the languages of the Mboi of Gulongo and the (Mboi of) Haanda are presented here. According to their speakers the two variants are mutually intelligible.

Nouns denoting 'human beings' largely have a singular suffix *-e* while the plural is mainly formed by a suffix *-aa*. Most nouns have in addition a prefix *a-* in the singular.

(1) <u>Mboi:</u>		<u>concord suffixes</u>
a-cén-è / tón-àà	woman	-ya ~ -e / -wa ~ -a
a-gèn-àà / gèn-àà	person	
a-kór-é / kór-áá	man	
áá / mbaa	child	
<u>Haanda:</u>		
a-cén-ì / tón-àà	woman	-e / -a
a-gèn-àà / gèn-àà	person	
a-kər-e / kər-aa	man	

A large number of nouns form the plural by suffixing *-za* to the noun stem. The concord morpheme is segmentally identical. Most singular form show the vowel *-o* as the suffix. Their respective concord morphemes are *-wa ~ -o*. The majority of nouns denoting animals are to be found in this gender, but also other nouns like 'grease', 'tail' and 'eye'.

(2) Mboi:

shʔh-ó / shʔhí-zá	fish	-wa ~ -o / -za
zangáy-ó / zangáy-zà	louse	
yar-ó / yar-za	grease	
tòl-ò / tòl-zà	tail	
nam-ó / nam-zá (~ namtáá)	flesh	
nuu / nuu-za	eye	

Haanda:

shʔh-ú / shʔhí-za	fish	-wa / -za
zankár-ò / zankár-zà	louse	
tol-o / tol-zà	tail	
yar-ò / yár-zà	grease	
fəntér-ó / fəntér-zà	claw	
nuu / nuu-zà	eye	

Not all animal names were recorded with the suffix alternations as in (2). There are a few cases where the singulars are apparently formed morphologically in the same way as the nouns denoting humans in (1). The plurals are, however, formed with *-za* like the plural of animals in (2). In Mboi 'bird' has a plural variant which appears to be a compound of 'child' and 'bird' with the suffix *-àà*. Suffix *-àà* is characteristic in Mboi and Haanda for nouns denoting humans (cf. (1)).

(3) Mboi:

á-rém-é / rem-zá	bird
~ á-rém-é / mbáá-rém-àà	bird
a-buá / bua-zá	dog

Haanda:

á-rém-i / rem-zà	bird
a-bua / búá-zà	dog

The singulars of the nouns in (4) and (5) are formed with the suffix *-o* as well. Yet, their plural suffixes differ. The examples in (4) do not represent a common gender (or singular/plural suffix alternation), they are rather single cases. They show a plural suffix *-da* in Mboi and *-ta* in Haanda. This suffix is very common as the plural class marker in (6) below. The singular form of 'tooth' appears to be formed with a suffix *-bo*. Instead of assuming a *-bo* singular class of which 'tooth' would be the only example, we rather assume a phonologically conditioned variant, i.e. the singular suffix is *-o*, as in (2), and the stem final /b/ will be dropped in front of the *-da ~ -ta* plural suffix. Since the concords in Mboi for 'claw' and 'tooth' are identical this interpretation seems to be justified.

(4) Mboi:

find-ó / findi-dá	claw	-wa / -ta
dəm-b-ó / dəm-dá	tooth	-wa / -ta

Haanda:

tumatum-ó / tumatum-tá	dew
dəm-b-ó / dəm-tà	tooth

The plural of the nouns in (5) is formed by a suffix *-e*, and a prefix *a-*. Their concord morphemes are *-e ~-ya*. The nominal affixes as well as the concords resemble what is presented for singulars of nouns denoting persons in (1) and animals in (3) above. While the prefix *a-* in (1) and (3) may be derived from the lexeme 'child' (cf. (1)) this explanation is not feasible here; unless we assume that the nouns in (5) form their plurals with the same class. In Haanda, we notice a palatalization of the stem final /t/ when followed by /e/. Another Haanda example showing this sound law can be seen when comparing the lexemes for 'woman' in (1) and the corresponding lexemes of Bəna in (10).

(5) Mboi:

ngɔd-ó / a-nged-é	tree	-wa~-o / -e ~-ya
nád-ó / a-nad-e	foot	

Haanda:

ɲbót-ó / a-ɲbéc-è	tree	-o / -e
nát-ó / a-nac-e	foot	

The nouns in (6) represent one of the major genders or noun class pairings known in Mboi and Haanda. Many examples can be found the singular of which is marked by a suffix *-ya* while the plural is marked by a suffix *-da* in Mboi. The suffix equivalents in Haanda are *-ra /-ta*. The singular is cognate to one of the widest spread Niger-Congo noun classes. This class has been reconstructed for example as *li or *di for Proto-Bantu, Benue-Congo and Gur respectively. It usually contains items like 'egg', 'breast', 'tooth', 'stone', and so forth. The examples show that the singular suffix *-ya* in Mboi corresponds to the suffix *-ra* in Haanda. Since the suffix alternation *-ra /-ta* is also attested in all other Yungur languages, we can assume that Haanda has preserved the older forms. The *-ya /-da* alternation in Mboi (of Gulungo) is a phonological peculiarity. (Another variant of Mboi, the one from Livo, has the suffix alternation *-ya /-ta* instead.)

(6) Mboi:

shij-ya / shij-da	egg	-ya / -da
luu-yá / luu-dá	cloud	
dungul-ya / dungul-da	stone	
zǐ-yá / zii-dá	breast	
ndi-à / ndii-dà	name	

Haanda:

shii-rà / shíí-tà	egg	-ra / -ta
liu-ra / liu-ta	cloud	
dungul-à / dungul-tà	stone	

The nouns in (7) form the plurals with the suffix *-za*, which we already saw with nouns in (2). The singulars here, however, belong to a different noun class. This is shown by the different concord morpheme *-ya* (as against *-wa* in (2)). The nominal suffix of the singulars seems to be *-á*.

(7) Mboi:

wáyá / wáyá-zá	fire	-ya / -za
pía / pía-zá	mountain	

Haanda:

wár-á / wár-zà	fire	
ftá / ftá-zà	horn	

A few nouns (8) in Mboi and Haanda have a peculiar singular plural affix alternation. The singulars apparently show the same affixes as the singulars in (1) and the plurals in (6). The plurals of the nouns

in (8) are formed in Mboi with a prefixed *won-*, the etymology of which cannot be given; whereas in Haanda the plural of 'month' shows a prefixed *ban-*, which cannot be explained as well. In Haanda the plural of 'hand', however, seems to have the morpheme 'children' (cf. (3) above) prefixed to the noun stem. In addition, the plurals of all these nouns are marked by the suffix *-ma*, which, at least segmentally, resembles the suffix of the class which contains liquids and masses in (9).

(8) Mboi:

a-dǝ́f-é / won-dǝ́f-ə̀mà	moon / month
a-nii / won-níí-mà	hand

Haanda:

a-dǝ́f-è / ban-dǝ́f-mà	moon / month
a-nii / mba-nii-mà	hand

Finally in Mboi and Haanda a noun class marked by a suffix *-ma* contains chiefly nouns denoting masses and liquids. This again is cognate to a very widespread Niger-Congo class the semantic and class marker of which can be found in almost all subgroups. Its existence in the languages of the Yungur group was already noted by Greenberg (1963: 10) as has been quoted earlier on.

(9) Mboi:

kaa-má	seed	-ma
madə-ma	blood	

Haanda:

kaa-mà	seed	-ma
mátó-má	blood	

It is shown that the class system of Mboi resembles the one of Haanda to a very high degree. The main differences are of phonological (and possibly tonological) nature. Intervocalic /t/ in Haanda corresponds to /y/ in Mboi, thus the probably older form of the singular class suffix *-ra* is preserved in Haanda, while Mboi shows a suffix *-ya* instead. The plural suffix *-ta* in Haanda in (4) and (6), likewise corresponds to the plural suffix *-da* in Mboi of Gulungo. The sound correspondence of intervocalic /t/ in Haanda and /d/ in Mboi is also evident in 'tree' and 'foot' in (5).

3. Noun classes in languages of the Bəna subgroup

All languages of the Bəna subgroup have noun class systems. The noun class suffixes of Bəna Yungur as spoken around Dumne in Song L.G.A. and those of Bəna Laala as spoken around Bodwai (Bǝde) in Shellen L.G.A. both in Adamawa State, are presented here. In Bəna Yungur it appears that the concord system is on the brink of erosion, the contributors had a tendency to only use a limited selection of the concords irrespective whether or not they agree with the particular noun class of the head noun. There was also variation across speakers. This became evident when I compared the recordings with the data in the variants of the Bəna Laala. There a much more elaborated set of concord particles/morphemes appears to be generally maintained.

3.1 Bəna Yungur.

In Bəna Yungur most nouns denoting human beings are marked in the singular by a suffix *-e* and in the plural by a suffix *-a*, similarly to what we noted for Mboi in (1).

(10) céén-é / thóón-á	woman
éét-é / ǝ-éét-á	person
ed-bár-è / ǝ-ed-bár-à	man
áwé / ámbá	child

The same class morphemes are also suffixed to nouns denoting animals as shown in (11). The prefix *ám-* which is part of the plural marking of 'dog' and 'bird' is most likely cognate to the plural of 'child'. This resembles what we saw in Mboi in the case of 'bird' (cf. (3) above).

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------|------|
| (11) | sé-é / siy-áà | fish |
| | rímb-é / ám-rímb-á | bird |
| | ~ ríb-é / ám-rib-á | bird |
| | bùy-è ~ bwe-è / ám-bú-à | dog |

The singular/plural suffix alternation *-u ~-o /-sa ~-za* is one of the major genders in Bəna Yungur (cf. (2) for Mboi). It contains the majority of the nouns denoting animals as well as nouns of different semantics.

- | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| (12) | nám-ú, nám-ó / nam-zà ~ nam-sà | meat; animal |
| | núú / núú-sá | eye |
| | gin-ò / gin-zà ~ gin-sà | smoke |

The same plural class *-sa ~ -za* also forms the plurals of the nouns in nouns in (13). Yet their singular affix and class is *-é* like the animate nouns in (10) and (11).

- | | | |
|------|----------------|------|
| (13) | nét-é / nét-sà | foot |
| | ném-é / ném-sà | hand |

The nouns in (14) represent the gender *-ra /-ta*. This class pairing has been discussed for Mboi already (cf. (6)). In Bəna Yungur we find almost the very same items represented.

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------|--------|
| (14) | liu-ra / liu-tá | cloud |
| | sumboo-rá / sumboo-tá | egg |
| | dǝn-da / dǝn-ta | name |
| | dǝd-rà / dǝd-tà | breast |
| | kùndùù-rá / kùndùù-tá | stone |
| | ~ kùdùùrá | |

Of interest is the plural of 'head' which has the suffix *-te*, while the singular suffix is *-ra*.

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------|------|
| (14a) | dúú-rá / dúú-té | head |
|-------|-----------------|------|

Synchronically plural suffix *-te* could be seen as a phonological variant, since it is the only example in the data available. However, diachronically this noun is probably a remainder of the gender *-ra /-te* which is known in other languages of the Bəna subgroup and which regularly contains 'head'. Examples in Bəna Laala are shown in (22).

The nouns in (15) represent nouns which share the singular suffix *-á* (mainly bearing a high tone) and the concord suffix *-ba*. In the case of 'tooth' the singular suffix seems to be *-bá* in one of the two variants, yet we still regard the suffix to be *-á*, and the loss of /b/ in front of the plural marker *-tá* as phonologically conditioned. Even though the singular concord suffix is *-ba*, a nominal suffix *-ba* has not yet been attested in any Bəna language. The plural suffixes and respective concord marker show that these nouns belong to two different genders. In (15) they form their plural with *-tá*, and the plural concord is *-ta*. The nouns in (15) mainly form their plurals with *-mé*, though the plural concord suffix is *-ya*. The plural of 'tree' (which is 'regular' in its 'irregularity' in all Bəna-Mboi languages) is marked by a plural suffix *-e* instead. Nominal suffix *-e* with concord suffix *-ya* is also characteristic for the singulars of nouns denoting humans and animals in (10) and (11).

- | | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| (15) | | | <u>concord suffixes</u> |
| | tǝf-á / tǝp-tá | bone | -ba / -ta |
| | dǝm-b-á ~ dǝf-á / dǝm-tá | tooth | |

(15a)	óf-á / óp-mé	moon, month	-ba / -ya
	pál-á / pəla-mé	wing	
	bot-a / nbwec-e	tree	-ba / -ya

The plural class with the suffix *-mé* and concord *-ya* also forms the plurals of the nouns in (16), yet their singular suffix is probably *-é*. This singular joins them with the singular of the nouns in (16a) 'hand' and 'foot'.

(16)	ʔéé / ʔéé-mé	mouth
	gwéé / gwéé-mé	ear

The nouns in (17) apparently bear the suffix *-má*. Their class is cognate to the well-known Niger Congo *ma class containing liquids and often mass nouns.

(17)	kwád-má	blood
	~ mun-ma	blood
	káá-má	seed

3.2 Bəna Laala.

In the Bəna Laala variant of Bodwai (Bɔdɛ) nouns denoting human beings show a suffix *-é* in the singular while the plurals are formed with the suffix *-á*. Both suffixes seem to bear a high tone. 'Moon' apparently belongs to the same gender.

(18)			<u>concord suffixes</u>
	tóón-é / tóón-á	woman	-ya / -ba
	yeet-é / beet-á	person	
	au-kár-í / am-kər-á	man	
	auw-é / amb-á	child	
	wóp-é / wop-á	moon / month	

The nouns in (19) represent a gender which contains among others animal names. It predominantly forms the singular with the high tone suffix *-ó*, while the plural is formed by a low tone suffix *-à*. Thus the plural suffix differs only tonally from the plural of humans in (18). That these two are distinct plural classes becomes clear by the difference in the concord morphemes they require.

(19)	shiy-ó / shiy-à	fish	-wa / -ja
	rimb-á / rimbà-à	bird	
	yól-ó / yól-à	mountain	
	tól-ó / tól-à	tail	

The group of nouns in (20) may represent a different gender, although the concord morphemes are the same as for the nouns in (19). Possible interpretations include, (i) plural suffix *-à*, as in (19), represents a distinct plural class which has lost its former concord marker and merged with plural class *ja*, (ii) plural suffix *-à*, as in (19), and plural suffix *-jà*, as in (20) are allomorphs of the same class, phonologically conditioned by unknown sound laws. The singular suffix in (19) and (20) is probably the same. In (20) it may have amalgamated with the noun stem in the first two examples and apocopated in the case of 'louse' (cf. 'louse' in the variant spoken in Yang). The plural *-jà* corresponds to *-sa ~-za* of Bəna Yungur and *-za* of Mboi. *-zà* is also the plural suffix in the Yang variant of Bəna Laala.

(20)	nyóó / nyoo-jà	hair	-wa / -jà
	nuú / nuu-jà	eye	
	jángár / jángír-jà	louse	(cf. zangár-ó / zangár-zà in Bəna Laala of Yang)

The singular plural suffix alternation *-ra ~ -da /-ta* of the nouns in (21) does not need further comments. This gender is cognate to the gender *-ra /-ta* in Mboi and Bəna Yungur.

(21)	liu-rá / liu-tá	cloud	-ra / -ta
	sumbu-rá / sumbu-tá	egg	
	đín-dá / đín-tá	name	

The singular class suffix of the nouns in (22) is *-ra* as well, but these nouns form the plural with the suffix *-te*. The plural concord morpheme *-ya* differs as well. Thus *-ra /-te* represents a different gender or class pairing. In Laala Bəna this gender has a number of examples, unlike in Bəna Yungur where 'head' is the only example known so far (cf. (14)).

(22)	đúú-rá / đúú-té	head	-ra / -ya
	kwɛɛ-ra / kwɛɛ-te	neck	
	kon-dà / kón-tè	stone	

The singular of the nouns in (23) is formed with the suffix *-á* mainly with a high tone. The plural suffixes differ. The singular/plural suffixes of these nouns resemble the two genders of the respective Bəna Yungur nouns in (15). One group of nouns form their plurals with a suffix *-ta*, whereas the plural suffix of 'horn' and 'bow' is *-mé* (23a). The plural of 'tree' shows the suffix *-é*.

(23)	təp-a / təu-tá	bone	
	đəm-b-á / đəm-tá	tooth	
(23a)	pət-á / pəta-mé	horn	
	biy-á / biya-mé	bow	
	boot-á / ŋgwaat-é	tree	

The singular and plural suffixes of the nouns in (24) represent the gender shown for Bəna Yungur in (16). The singular suffix of these nouns is probably *-é*. The plural of 'ear' and 'mouth' is formed by *-mé* while the plural of 'hand' is again in a different plural class *-jà*.

(24)	nyéé / nyéé-mé	mouth	-ya / -ya
	gwɛɛ / gwɛɛ-mé	ear	
(24a)	ném-é / ném-jà	hand	

Finally the *-ma* suffix of mass nouns and liquids occurs with 'seed' and 'milk'. Similar to the evidence in Bəna Yungur this suffix differs from the plural suffix *-mé* of the nouns in (23) and (24).

(25)	kaamá	seed	
	mee-ma	milk	

4. Noun classes in Kaan (Libo).

Kaan or Libo, as it is called in the literature, is spoken in and around the Libbo Hills to the northwest of the confluence of the rivers Benue and Gongola, in Numan L.G.A., Adamawa State. Among the Bəna-Mboi languages Kaan has the most reduced noun class system. In Kaan the suffix *-má* has become a general plural marker which has apparently replaced in many cases older plural formations. Nouns denoting human beings still show a plural suffix *-a*, resembling what we saw in the other languages of this group. Yet, *-má* is used here as well. The singular suffix is *-i* in one case and uncertain in others.

(26)	toŋn-í / tóŋn-à	woman	
	ʔere / báŋvirŋ-mâ	person	
	đíkír / đikir-má ~ đikir-á	man	

Peculiar to Kaan is the suffix $-^2o$ which marks the plural of only a few nouns in my data. The respective singular forms mainly bear a suffix $-a$. When comparing these examples with the other languages we note that $-^2o$ seemingly corresponds to $-ja \sim -za$ and $-sa$ respectively.

- (27) feem-à / feem- $^2\hat{o}$ tail
 isa- $^2\acute{a}$ / is- $^2\hat{o}$ fruit
 nóm- 2a / nəm- $^2\hat{o}$ arm
 neer / neer- $^2\hat{o} \sim$ neer-təm- $^2\hat{o}$ foot

The nouns in (28) are residues of the $-ra$ / $-ta$ gender attested in Mboi/Haanda and Bəna. In Kaan we note double suffixation, the plural marker $-má$ is added to the expected older plural suffix $-tV$.

- (28) sombo-ra / sombo-tə-má egg
 kwandər / kwandər-tə-má stone
 təfə-ra / təfə-tə-má bone

The plural of the majority of nouns in Kaan, however, is formed by simply suffixing $-má$ to the singular form; thus, the respective singular suffixes appear to be $-\emptyset$ in most cases. The nouns in (29a) are separated out of diachronic reasons. These nouns semantically and/or lexically correspond to nouns in Mboi which form their plurals with the suffix $-ma$ as well. In the Bəna subgroup the corresponding nouns have the plural suffix $-mé$ respectively.

- (29) ndər / ndər-má name
 shəy / shəy-má fish
 zúzùntú / zúzùntu-má cloud
- (29a) twi / twii-má ear
 twarà / twarà-mâ mountain
 ar-a / ar-má fire

Of interest is the group of nouns in (30) representing the inherited $*ma$ class of liquids and masses. Even though 'seed' shows that the suffix $-má$ is also found with mass nouns, the other two nouns 'blood' and 'water', rather indicate that the inherited older suffix of the $*ma$ class is reduced to $-m$.

- (30) morúm blood
 barəm water
 səmorəmá seed

The noun stem denoting 'seed' is peculiar to Kaan and appears to be an innovation or borrowing. Thus the source of the general plural marker $-má$ in Kaan is probably not the suffix of the $*ma$ class, but rather the suffix of a formerly distinct plural class, which still manifests in the plural forms of the nouns in (29a), and which is cognate to the plural class suffix $-ma$ in Mboi and $-mé$ in the Bəna languages respectively.

5. Conclusion

In summary, it has been demonstrated that languages of the Bəna-Mboi or Yungur group possess noun class systems which show a remarkable degree of correspondences in their regularity and irregularity. The noun classes are marked by specific class morphemes which are mainly suffixed to the various noun stems. Due to the limitations of the available material grammatical agreement and the respective concord elements could not be discussed in detail. We nevertheless observed already that - apart from Kaan - all languages of the group mark grammatical agreement on dependent elements in the noun phrase, based on the noun class of the respective head nouns. The various concord morphemes segmentally often resemble the nominal suffixes.

When we consider the more complex class systems to represent an older stage, the class systems of the languages presented show various stages of reduction. The most complex systems exist in languages of the Bəna subgroup, while the number of noun classes in the Mboi subgroup appears to be more reduced. The most eroded stage is noted in Kaan where the suffix *-má* has become a general plural marker which replaced older plural suffixes in the majority of nouns. This becomes most evident in those cases where older plural suffixes are still maintained and *-má* is suffixed in addition.

Reduction and simplification is also observable as regards the grammatical agreement patterns. Although we recorded in all languages, except Kaan, distinct and complex sets of concord morphemes, we nevertheless noted a tendency to use only a limited selection of these concords irrespective whether or not they agree with the particular noun class of the head noun. This was observed in Bəna Yungur as well as local variants of the other languages, but also across speakers of the same variant.

Literature:

- Bennett, Patrick R. 1983. Adamawa-Eastern: Problems and prospects. In: Dihoff, Ivan R. (ed). *Current Approaches to African Linguistics 1*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications; 23-48.
- Berns, Marla C. 1986. *The Essential Gourd. Art and History in Northeastern Nigeria*. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Blench, Roger. "The Adamawa languages of Nigeria". (Paper prepared for the Mega-Chad Conference, Paris, September 1990).
- Boyd, Raymond. 1989. Adamawa-Ubangi. In: Bendor-Samuel, John. (ed.) *The Niger-Congo Languages*. Lanham - New York - London: SIL; 178-215.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. *The Languages of Africa*. Den Haag.
- Hoffmann, Carl. 1976. The languages of Nigeria compiled by language family. In: Hansford, Keir, John Bendor-Samuel & Ron Stanford. *An Index of Nigerian Languages. Studies in Nigerian Languages 5*. Appendix 1: 169-190.
- Kleinewillinghöfer, Ulrich. 1993. Nominalklassen im Mboi und Bəna Lala der Yungur- bzw. Bəna-Mboi-Gruppe. *Afrika und Übersee*, 76: 3-13.
- Meek, Charles K. 1931. *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*. 2 vols. London.