

PLURALIZATION IN KORING

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The central concern of this paper is to describe the rules underlying plural formation in Koring. The number distinction is essentially between singular and plural. Three levels of pluralization are identified: word, phrasal and sentential. Our analysis demonstrates that there are several rules involved in pluralization in Koring.

1.0 Introduction:

The notion of accountability is language universal. The category of number is most commonly manifested in the distinction between singular and plural in relation to nouns. (cf. Lyons 1968:28, Jespersen 1975:188-212, Robins 1971: 262). It is formally expressed in the following word classes – nouns, pronouns, verbs, determiners.

1.1 Introductory Information on the Koring language.

Koring is the language of the Oring people who live in parts of Ebonyi and Benue States of Nigeria. In Ebonyi State, there are four Koring-speaking communities located at Okpoto, Effium and Ntezi in Ishielu Local Government Area, Amauda in Ohaukwu Local government Area. In Benue State, there are Utonkon and Offia. Koring belongs to the Upper-Cross group of the Delta-Cross sub-branch of the Cross River Language family (Williamson and Blench 2000:3; Crozier and Blench 1992:118). In spite of the scattered nature of their locations, the systematic sound system, the stability of tone and the surprisingly common vocabulary are the factors that make mutual intelligibility possible. The Okpoto dialect is chosen for the present analysis because it is the variety spoken by my informants.

Okpoto is situated on the outskirts of Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. It is bounded to the North by Eziulo, to the East by Ntezi/Ezza, to the West by the Ebonyi River and to the South by Ohafia Agba in Ezzakumoru. It is about fifteen kilometers from Abakaliki, occupying an area of about 259 square kilometers, and it has a population of about 28,000 according to the 1963 census, and 54,229 in 1991 (taken from the National Population Commission of Ebonyi State).

If steps are not urgently taken, Koring may become extinct. Koring is endangered for the following reasons:

- Nearly all primary and secondary school teachers are Igbo-speaking, therefore they interact easily in Igbo and hardly in Koring which they do not understand.
- Koring is not used as a medium of communication in public places such as the churches, the schools, etc.
- It is mostly used at home and in local markets
- Igbo is regarded as the prestige language, so they prefer speaking it and answering Igbo names.

1.2 The pluralization rules examined include the following: N + gb'nd'nd', phoneme alternation, zero affixation, prefix reduplication; plural formation rules that pertain to the pronoun and certain deictic categories such as the definite article and demonstratives. Other rules apply to phrase and sentence levels:

2.1 N + gb'nd'nd'

Pluralization of a great majority of nouns involves a very productive process which can be simply stated as Noun + gb'nd'nd' 'many.' When a singular noun is followed by gb'nd'nd', meaning 'many', a plural is formed. The following data made up of body parts, animal names attest to the wide applicability of the rule. Some nouns such as (9) (15), (17) reject the pluralization rule. The reason for this is not quite clear. One informant argued that they are uncountable by nature. While 'beard' is definitely so, and 'intestine' possibly so, 'back' appears to be countable.

Examples:

Singular	Plural
1. lëtɓ 'head'	lëtɓ gb'nd'nd'
2. rɪŋ 'hair'	uncountable noun, henceforth,
UC	
3. zɛŋ 'eye'	zɛŋ gb'nd'nd'
4. ɪɓɪ 'ear'	ɪɓɪ gb'nd'nd'
5. z'ɪ 'nose'	z'ɪ
6. kámá 'mouth'	kámá
7. éǵá 'jaw'	éǵá
8. íódá 'chin'	íódá
9. èwàwà 'beard'	UC
10. íókér 'neck'	íókér
11. ìibéé 'breast'	ìibéé
12. ɔ́lfi 'liver'	ɔ́lfi
13. iét'ɪ 'heart'	iét'ɪ

14.	íémè	'belly' 'stomach'	íémè	"
15.	íétú	'instestine'	U C	"
16.	íékúf	'navel'	íékúf	"
17.	ímèrè	'back'	U C	"
18.	kògbò	'arm'	kògbò	"
19.	kàfááfà	'arm pit'	kàfááfà	"
20.	kénnò	'finger'	kénnò	"
21.	ikór	é kénnò 'finger'	ikór, é kénnò	" nail,
22.	ìḡḡ	'buttocks'	ìḡḡ gbòḡḡ	"
23.	íétà	'penis'	íétà	"
24.	énù	'vagina'	énù	"
25.	Kàtáátà	'thigh'	Kàtáátà	"
26.	ékpè	'leopard'	ékpè	"
27.	éni	'elephant'	éni	" Igbò'dò'ḡ
28.	étúm	'bushcow'	étúm	"
29.	éfúm	'cow'	éfúm	"
30.	ékúí	'tortise'	ékúí	"
31.	ètḡ	'sheep'	ètḡ	"
32.	èjim	'horse'	èjim	"
33.	égbúò	'dog'	égbúò	"
34.	ézūgbò	'pig'	ézūgbò	"
35.	éfḡ	'rabbit'	éfḡ	"
36.	ékpeìḡ	'hawk'	ékpeìḡ	"
37.	ikpì	'rat'	ikpì	"
38.	zò	'snake'	zò	"
39.	kòkál	'crab'	kòkál	"
40.	lègbòḡ	'mosquito'	lègbòḡ	"
41.	kénòḡ	'bird'	kénòḡ	"
42.	útúùmù	'lizard'	útúùmù	"
43.	kèkòḡ	'chicken'	kèkòḡ	"
44.	òkúkùbá	'duck'	òkúkùbá	"

2.2 Phoneme Alternation

Some nouns undergo pluralization by changing the initial phonemes of the affected nouns.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural	Phoneme alternation
45.	lágbá 'woman'	gbilágbá	/l/ → /gb-/
46.	ódūāḡ 'girl'	édūāḡ	/ó-/ → /é-/

47. wādúm 'man'	gbādúm	/w- / →	/gb- /
48. wāáti 'child'	gbuáti	/w- / →	/gb- /
49. òkóróφià 'boy'	ìkóróφià	/ò- / →	/ì- /

In (45)- (49) front vowels and semi vowels appear as prefixes which mark the singular noun. The labial-velar /gb-/ functions as the prefix plural marker in (45) , (47) and (48) while two front vowels /é-/ and /ì-/ perform an identical function in (46) and (49).

2.3

Kinship terms and plural forming rules

Some data from kinship terms were subjected to analysis. The study shows that some morphological rules operate in plural formation among kinship terms. These rules hierarchically vary from productive, semi-productive, idiosyncratic, to highly idiosyncratic. Chomsky's (1965:184) claim that derivational processes are typically sporadic and only quasi-productive is confirmed in the data below:

Singular	Plural
(50) àràà 'father'	àràà
(51) ássá/áká 'mother'	ássá/áká
(52) édédé 'grandfather'	édédé
(53) étété 'baby'	étété
(54) n ^w án ^w èwán 'grandchild'	n ^w án ^w èwán
(55) ákáká 'grandmother'	ákáká
(56) wāáti e ⁻ wādúm 'son'	gbuáti e ⁻ wādúm
(57) wāáti e ⁻ lágúá 'daughter'	gbváti e ⁻ lágúá
(58) gbàìémé 'brother'	gbàgbàìémé
(59) òkóróφià 'boy'	ìkóróφià

(50) – (55) are invariable whether that they are used to express a singular or a plural notion. In (56) and (57) the singular forms have the prefix /wa -/ which is transformed to /gbu- / in the plural. In (58) plural formation involves the reduplication of the initial syllable of the singular form.

In (59) the initial vowel prefix /ò- / changes to /ì- / in the plural.

The above data show that among kinship terms.

(i) Zero affixation in the formation of plural forms is very productive. Sixty percent of the data confirm this (see (50) to (55)). And it is probably true

of the language generally. The exact situation will be known before long. A dictionary of the language will soon be available.

- (ii) /wà- / → /gbù - / alternation is idiosyncratic since only (56) and (57) could undergo that rule. The reduplication rule forming the plural of (58) and the /ò- / → /ì- / alternation rule of (59) are highly idiosyncratic.

The Pronoun System

The pronoun system of a language is intimately associated with the category of number because they have singular and plural forms whose occurrences are determined grammatically. In the table below, the first person singular subject shares the same form with the first person singular object. Similarly the second person singular subject and object terms are identical. The situation is different in the third person singular subject and object. In the plural, first person subject and object have identical forms; although the subject also has a synonym *gbilé* 'we'. The forms in both the second and third person plural subject and object are identical. The only difference in the third person is tonal: while the subject has a downstep on the final vowel, the object maintains a low tone as shown below:

Person	Subject		Plural	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1 st	Náá 'I'	Náá 'me'	gbilé áńǎ'r 'we'	áńǎ'r 'us'
2 nd	áńǎ' 'you'	áńǎ' 'you'	ájǎ' 'you'	ájǎ' 'you'
3 rd	Údè 'he/she/it'	ámèè 'him/her/it'	gbée 'they'	gbée 'them'

In Anagbogu (2003a:693) it is shown that number and person markers are obligatorily prefixed to verb stems to mark person and number concord with the subject noun or pronoun.

2.4 Definite Article

Every Koring noun has a definite article enclitic.

Examples: ikpì è wásèlè è kèkpan è
(61) rat the fish the basket the
 The rat the fish the basket

When they are pluralized, the definite articles are obligatorily deleted and replaced with the plural marker gbá'dá'rá'.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural
(62)	kàfià è The market	kàfià gbá'dá'rá' market many markets
(63)	íódzì è 'The river.	íódzì gbá'dá'rá' 'rivers'
(64)	kidèm è river the	kidèm gbá'dá'rá' 'rivers'

2.5 The demonstratives

Like the definite article, the demonstratives occur immediately after the nouns they modify. The demonstratives are presented below:

	Singular	Plural
(65)	Úwì 'this' (one)	iyè 'these (ones)
(67)	Úwè 'that' (one)	iyèkèkè 'these'

The following examples show how (65) and (66) occur with the nouns they modify.

	Singular	Plural
(67)	Wádúm, úwì man this 'this man'	gbádúm iyè men these 'these men'
(68)	èjím, úwè horse that 'that horse'	èjím iyèkèkè horse these 'these horses'
(69)	*ódūān, úwè girl that	*e'dūān iyèkèkè 'that girl'
(70)	ógbá, úwè gown that 'that gown'	ógbá iyèkèkè gown these 'these gowns'

The above examples demonstrate that úwì and iyè cooccur with nouns that have the features [+human] and that nouns that have the [+human] feature

reject co-occurrence with *úwè* and *iyèkèkè*. It is pertinent to observe that some nouns in the above examples such as *èjlm* and *ógbá* are singular in form but the plural demonstrative with which they occur above accords them the plural status. In other words, one does not say **èjlm iyèkèkè gb'ò'ò'*. The later appears to be obligatorily deleted when the plural demonstrative in question occur with the noun.

3. The Noun Phrase

In a phrase with the structure N + Adj. the noun, if it has a particular plural form, undergoes the appropriate pluralization rule; if not, it undergoes the rule of *gb'ò'ò'* suffixation which occurs phrase finally while the adjective remains invariable.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural
(71)	Wádúm éré man good 'good man'	gbádúm éré 'good men'
(72)	kéré útétére tree tall 'tall tree'	kéré útétére gb'ò'ò' tree tall many 'tall trees'
(73)	émārā ɔ'làlār house white 'white house'	émārā ɔ'làlār gb'ò'ò' house white many 'white houses'
(74)	óbà úgbùò gbùò cloth yellow yellow 'yellow cloth'	óbà úgbùò gbùò gb'ò'ò' cloth yellow yellow 'yellow clothes'

The N + Adj. Sequence is commonly found among Niger-Kordofanian languages (cf. Welmers 1973). But interestingly sequences of Adj + N. are also attested in the language.

Examples:

2. (75)	ézú étùù è Bad road 'bad road'	ézú étùù gb'ò'ò' bad road many 'bad roads'
(76)	ɔ'serā ógbá é Dry gown the	ɔ'serā ógbá gb'ò'ò' dry gown many

'the dry gown':

'dry gowns':

(77) ɔ'túŋɔ'n ɔ̄ ē wādúm

Ojd/elder ART man

'the old man'

ɔ'túŋɔ'n ɔ̄ ē

old/elder ART men

'old men'

gbádúm

4. **Number/Person/Concord**

Inflexional prefixes or person markers are used to reflect agreement between the subject noun phrase and the verb phrase. The markers are attached to the verb stems of utterances. The examples below are taken from Anagbogu (2003a:693)

Singular**Plural**

(78) náá íwéí éfɔ'm
1.SING AGR kill cow
'I kill/killed a cow'

áŋɔ'r íwéí éfɔ'm
We2. PL. AGR kill cow
'We kill/killed a cow'

(79) ánú áwéí éfɔ'm
You 2. SING AGR kill cow
'you kill/killed a cow'

ájɔ' áwéí éfɔ'm
you 2. PL AGR Kill cow
'you kill/killed a cow'

(80) Wádúm ówéí éfɔ'm gbéē áwéí éfɔ'm
(The) man 3. SING. AGR kill cow They 3 PL. AGR. kill cow
'The man kill/killed a cow' 'They kill/killed a cow'

In (78) náá, first person singular subject, agrees with the first person singular agreement marker /í-/ prefixed to the verb stem wéí, in (79) second person marker singular anu agrees with /á-/ and wadum agrees with /ó-/ which represents the third person singular agreement marker. The same concordial relationship is observed in the plural examples of (78) áŋɔ'r and /í-/ of (79) ájɔ' and /á-/ of (80) gbé ē and /á-/. It is clear from the above that there are prefixes that mark agreement with singular nouns/pronouns in subject positions and those that operate with plural nouns. (of Anagbogu of cit).

5. **Conclusions**

Some conclusions based on the above analysis are inevitable:

- (i) at word level, there are at least seven rules some are productive such as N + gbɔ'dɔ'ɔ', but two are idiosyncratic such as phoneme alternation and prefix reduplication.

- (ii) At phrase level, the adjective is invariable, only the noun undergoes the pluralization rule.
- (iii) At sentence level, the rule is productive and seems to apply to Koring as it does to remote classical Latin and modern French where grammatical concord between singular subject NPS and VPS, and between plural subject NPS and VPS are morphologically indicated:

Endnotes

1. It is important to observe that the names of most animals (see Nos. 26-36) have the *e/z* prefix. The names of the other animals which are smaller in size start with other syllabic prefixes such as *l-l*, *l-l*, *l-l* and some consonants like */k-l*. It would seem that such occurrences are not entirely accidental. Welmers (1993: 189-91) has persuasively argued that the presence of such prefixes is reminiscent of a formerly existing noun class system in the language in question, since in languages where the noun class system operates, nouns are classified according to the prefixes, not stems, which is why it could be claimed that Koring probably had a noun class system and that those animals, sharing the *E*-prefix originally belonged to a noun class of their own. Though, as in Igbo, the noun class appear to be extinct, the presence of an identical prefix for a group of nouns suggest that such prefixes are unquestionably vestiges of a formerly existing noun class system in Koring.

Furthermore it is noteworthy that while nearly all the nouns representing animals have vowel initial, prefixes those representing body parts are consonant initial in form reinforcing our argument presented above.

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