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. IIn 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 + gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ', 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 + gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'*

Pluralization of a great majority of nouns involves a very productive process which can be simply stated as Noun + gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ' 'many.' When a singular noun is followed by gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ', 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.	lɛ̀tɔ̀	'head'	lɛ̀tɔ̀	gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'
2.	rɪ̀ŋ	hair	uncountable noun, henceforth,	
	UC			
3.	zéŋ	eye	zéŋ	gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'
4.	ɪɔ̀tɔ'	ear	ɪɔ̀tɔ'	gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'
5.	zɔ'ɪ	'nose'	zɔ'ɪ	
6.	kámá	'mouth	kámá	
7.	égá	'jaw'	égá	
8.	ɪódá	'chin'	ɪódá	
9.	èwàwà	'beard'	U C	
10.	ɪókér	'neck'	ɪókér	
11.	ɪìbéé	'breast'	ɪìbéé	
12.	ɔ̀fífí	'liver'	ɔ̀fífí	
13.	ɪɛ́tɔ'ɪ	'heart'	ɪɛ́tɔ'ɪ	

14.	ɪémɛ̀	'belly' 'stomach'	ɪémɛ̀
15.	ɪétú	'instestine'	U C
16.	ɪékúf	'navel'	ɪékúf
17.	ímèrè	'back'	U C
18.	kɔ̀gbɔ'	'arm'	kɔ̀gbɔ'
19.	kàfàáfà	'arm pit'	kàfàáfà
20.	kénnɔ̀	'finger'	kénnɔ̀
21.	ìkór é kénnɔ̀	'finger	ìkór é kénnɔ̀ " nail,
22.	ɪɔ́ŋɔ'	'buttocks'	ɪɔ́ŋɔ́ gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́
23.	ɪétà	'penis'	ɪétà
24.	énù	'vagina'	énù
25.	Kàtàátà	'thigh'	Kàtàátà
26.	ékpɛ̀	'leopard'	ékpɛ́
27.	éɲi	'elephant'	éɲi lgbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'
28.	ɛ̀túm	'bushcow'	ɛ̀túm
29.	èfúm	'cow'	éfúm
30.	ɛ̀kúɪ	'tortise'	ɛ̀kúɪ
31.	ɛ̀tɔ̀ŋ	'sheep'	ɛ̀tɔ̀ŋ
32.	èjìm	'horse'	èjìm
33.	ègbúó	'dog'	ègbúó
34.	ézūgbò	'pig'	ézūgbò
35.	éfɔ́r	'rabbit'	éfɔ́r
36.	ɛ̀kpɛ̀ɪùŋ	'hawk'	ɛ̀kpɛ̀ɪùŋ
37.	ìkpì	'rat'	ìkpì
38.	zɔ̀	'snake'	zɔ̀
39	kɔ̀kál	'crab'	kɔ̀kál
40	lègbɔ̀ŋ	'mosquito'	lègbɔ̀ŋ
41.	kénɔ̀ŋ	'bird'	kénɔ̀ŋ
42.	útúùmù	'lizard'	útúùmù
43.	kɛ̀kɔ́ɔ́	'chicken'	kɛ̀kɔ́ɔ́
44.	ɔ̀kúkùbá	'duck'	ɔ̀kúkùbá

2.2 *Phoneme Alternation*

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

Examples:

Singular	Plural	Phoneme alternation
45. ìlágbá 'woman'	gbìlágbá	/ì/ → /gb-/
46. ódūāŋ 'girl'	édūāŋ	/ó-/ → /é-/

47. wàdúm 'man'	gbàdúm	/w- / ⟶ /gb- /
48. wàátí 'child'	gbùátí	/w -/ ⟶ /gb- /
49. òkóróΦìà 'boy'	ìkóróΦìà	/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 /i-/ 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)	$n^{w}áŋ^{w}èwáŋ$ 'grandchild'	$n^{w}áŋ^{w}èwáŋ$
(55)	ákáká 'grandmother'	ákáká
(56)	wàátí e¯ wàdúm 'son'	gbúátí e¯ wàdúm
(57)	wàátí e¯ lágúá 'daughter'	gbvátí e¯ lágúá
(58)	gbàıémé 'brother'	gbàgbàıémé
(59)	òkóróφlà 'boy'	ìkóróφlà

(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 /i- / 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 gbílé '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:

	Subject		Plural	
Person	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1st	Náá 'I'	Náá 'me'	gbílé ánɔ'r 'we'	ánɔ'r. 'us'
2nd	ánɔ' 'you'	ánɔ' 'you'	ájɔ' 'you'	ájɔ' 'you'
3rd	Údè 'he/she/it'	ámèè 'him/her/it'	gbée 'they'	gbéè '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:

(61) ikpì è wàsèlè è kèkpàn è
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 gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ'.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural
(62)	kàφìà è The market	kàφìà gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ' market many markets
(63)	ıódɜì è 'The river.	ıódɜì gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ' 'rivers'
(64)	kìdèm è river the	kìdèm gbɔ'dɔ'rɔ' '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)	íyè 'these (ones)
(67)	Úwè 'that' (one)	íyèkèkè 'these'

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

	Singular	Plural
(67)	Wàdúm úwì man this 'this man'	gbàdùm íyè men these 'these men'
(68)	èjìm úwè horse that 'that horse'	èjìm íyèkèkè horse these 'these horses'
(69)	*ódūāŋ úwè girl that	*e˜dūáŋ íyèkèkè 'that girl'
(70)	ógbá úwè gown that 'that gown'	ógbá íyèkèkè gown these 'these gowns'

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

reject co-occurrence with úwè and íyèkèkè. It is pertinent to observe that some nouns in the above examples such as èjìm 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 * èjìm ' íyèkèkè gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'. 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 gbɔ̀dɔ̀ɾɔ́ suffixation which occurs phrase finally while the adjective remains invariable.

Examples:

	Singular	Plural
(71)	Wàdúm éré	gbàdúm éré
	man good	'good men'
	'good man'	
(72)	kèrè útétéré	kèré útétéré gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'.
	tree tall	tree tall many
	'tall tree'	'tall trees'
(73)	émārā ɔ'làlàr	émārā ɔ'làlàr gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'.
	house white	house white many
	'white house'	'white houses'
(74)	óbà úgbùò gbùò	óbà úgbùò gbùò gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'
	cloth yellow yellow	cloth yellow yellow
	'yellow cloth'	'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	ézú étùù gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'.
	Bad road	bad road many
	'bad road'	'bad roads'
(76)	ɔ̀sérā ógbá é	ɔ̀sérā ógbá gbɔ'dɔ'ɾɔ'.
	Dry gown the	dry gown many

'the dry gown' 'dry gowns'

(77) ɔ'túŋɔ'n ɔ̄ ē wàdúm ɔ'túŋɔ'n ɔ̄ ē gbàdúm
Old/elder ART man old/elder ART men
'the old man' 'old men'

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 íwɛ́ı ɛ́fɔ'm	áŋɔ'r íwɛ́ı ɛ́fɔ'm
	1.SING AGR kill cow	We2. PL. AGR kill cow
	'I kill/killed a cow	We kill/killed a cow'
(79)	ánú áwɛ́l ɛ́fɔ'm	ájɔ' áwɛ́l ɛ́fɔ'm
	You 2. SING AGR kill cow	you 2. PL AGR. Kill cow
	'you kill/killed a cow'	'you kill/killed a cow'
(80)	Wáðúm ówɛ́l ɛ́fɔ'm	gbɛ́ē áwɛ́l ɛ́fɔ'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 wɛ́l, 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'rɔ', 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/ɛ prefix. The names of the other animals which are smaller in size start with other syllabic prefixes such as /ì-/, /ɔ/, /ù-/ and some consonants like /k-/. 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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