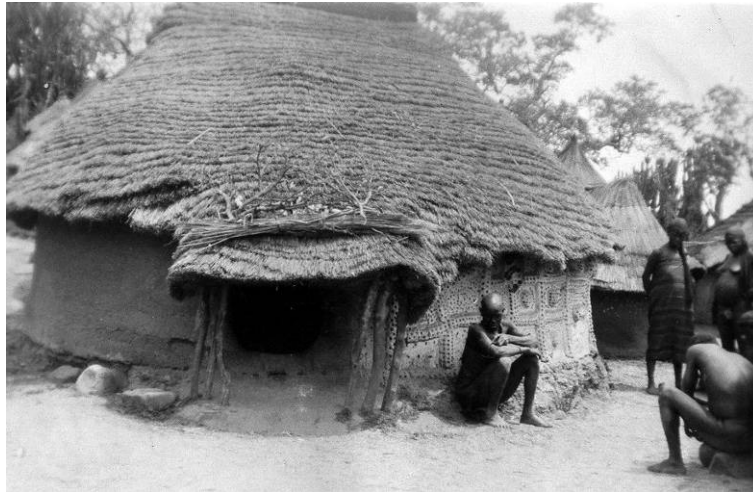


Nominal affixes and number marking in the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

The Plateau languages consist of between sixty and eighty languages spoken in central Nigeria, spreading from Lake Shiroro to the banks of the Benue River. A major branch of Benue-Congo, proto-Plateau is usually considered to have a system of alternating nominal affixes marking number combined with alliterative concord. The paper reviews the overall internal classification and then reviews the evidence for individual subgroups, taking a specific language as an exemplar. It turns out that Plateau has undergone extensive affix renewal, and thus what may be the former system is present only in fragments. Based only on internal evidence from Plateau it seems likely that;

- a) There were underspecified vowels in CV- prefixes showing concord with stem vowels
- b) There was a class pair for persons, probably V-/bV-, although the segments of the singular prefix are less certain
- c) Proto-Plateau almost certainly had an unpaired class marking liquids, mass nouns and abstracts.
- d) Proto-Plateau had N- prefixes, homorganic with the following consonant, and present in most branches. However, there is no evidence for a consistent semantic association

1. Introduction: Plateau languages

The Plateau languages consist of between sixty and eighty languages spoken in central Nigeria, spreading from Lake Shiroro to the banks of the Benue River (Map 1). Although most Plateau populations are small (2-10,000 speakers), there are probably more than a million speakers of Plateau languages, with the bulk of the numbers made up from large groups such as Berom and Eggon. Some Plateau languages, such as Sambe and Yangkam, are moribund and others are severely threatened, such as Ayu. Plateau languages represent one of the four major branches of Benue-Congo, together with Kainji, Jukunoid and Cross River. Internally, they are divided into a large number of subgroups, whose inter-relations are not well understood. Plateau languages remain extremely poorly studied, with no complete grammar or dictionary for any language except Berom (which is in French and thus inaccessible to Nigerians). Basic overviews of ethnography and ethnic distribution can be found in Temple (1922), Meek (1925, 1931) and Gunn (1953, 1956).

Map 1. The Plateau languages



The most striking feature of Plateau is its morphological and typological diversity. It is usually assumed that proto-Plateau would have had a system of paired nominal prefixes with semantic associations and alliterative concord, similar to but probably less elaborate than Bantu. However, these systems have collapsed and been rebuilt or in some cases disappeared completely. Compensatory morphology has evolved, including highly complex consonantal inventories and rich tone-systems. Synchronically, Plateau languages display systems of consonant mutation, contrastive length, as well as palatalisation, labialisation, lateralisation of initial consonants and combinations of all these. Marriage systems within the Plateau region often involve linguistic exogamy, which, combined with marital instability, result in pervasive multilingualism which almost certainly played a role in the evolution of complex ‘mixed’ systems of number marking.

Plateau languages are assumed to form part of the broader unit represented by Benue-Congo (Williamson 1971, 1989; Williamson & Blench 2000). The earliest source for Plateau, Koelle (1854) gives wordlists of Ham (Hyam), Koro of Lafia (Migili) and Yagwa (Yeskwa). Westermann (1927) assigned the few languages for which he had data to a ‘Benue-Cross’ family, corresponding to present-day East Benue-Congo, although later in Westermann & Bryan (1952) these were classified as ‘isolated units’. However, the modern

subclassification of Plateau derives principally from the work of Joseph Greenberg (1963) who proposed dividing Westermann's 'Benue-Cross' languages into seven co-ordinate groups (including modern-day Kainji and Jukunoid). With numerous emendations and additions these have been reprised in almost all subsequent works (notably Williamson and Shimizu 1968; Williamson 1971, 1972, 1989; Maddieson 1972; Gerhardt 1989; Crozier and Blench 1992; Blench 1998, 2000a). Blench (ined.) reflects the most recent understanding of Plateau subgrouping.

Comparative studies of number marking in Plateau are scarce; Bouquiaux (1967) represents an initial attempt to discern commonalities across a small number of languages. Although some Plateau languages retain complex systems of nominal affixes and alliterative concord, notably Kulu and other members of the northwest cluster and Tarok, many languages, such as Cara and the Ninzic cluster, include some affix alternation as part of a repertoire of number marking strategies, while subgroups such as Ndunic and Ake, have completely lost these systems. Other languages, such as Izere, have systems which look elaborate at first sight, but when segmental and tonal allomorphs are taken into account, the underlying number of pairings is considerably reduced. The existence of these systems certainly suggests alternating affixes and concord were a feature of proto-Plateau, but actual segmental correspondences between affixes are few, pointing to a continuing process of renewal. Plateau also has frequent nasal prefixes, as well as numerous examples of unproductive nasals preceding C_1 of the stem (Miehe 1991). Some of these are reflected more widely in other branches of Benue-Congo or even further afield in Kwa. However, the correspondences between noun classes and semantic subsets (humans, trees, animals, paired things) characteristic of Bantu are far more fragmentary.

The analytic challenge of Plateau is to account for synchronic number marking systems through the lens of the erosion of affix alternation. In the light of this, the confident assertions of authors such as De Wolf (1971) in reconstructing the prefixes of proto-Benue-Congo seem very optimistic. Such reconstructed forms reflect a prior knowledge of Bantu and a large pool of miscellaneous data from which exemplars can be chosen. This paper¹ is an overview of nominal affixing in the Plateau languages, based principally on my own fieldwork materials². It describes the systems in individual subgroups and then asks what evidence these provide for the situation in proto-Plateau.

None of the authors who have classified Plateau languages have presented evidence for their classifications. This is not a criticism; faced with large arrays of data it is easier to set out what appears to be the case impressionistically than to write a monograph demonstrating it. The series of publications on Plateau subgroups, especially Plateau II and IV, by Gerhardt (1969a,b, 1971, 1972/3a,b, 1973/4, 1974, 1983a,b, 1988a,b, 1989, 1994) assume the boundaries of these groups. A particular issue in the internal classification of Plateau and Jukunoid is the notion of a 'Benue' grouping. Shimizu (1975a:415) proposed that some branches of Plateau should be classified with Jukunoid. In particular, he argued that Eggon (and by implication the other Plateau V languages, including Nungu and Yeskwa) and Tarokoid (at that time consisting only of Yergam (=Tarok) and Basherawa (=Yankam)) formed a group together with Jukunoid. This emerged from his lexicostatistic tables and was further supported by five isoglosses, the words for 'drink', 'tail', 'meat', 'fire', and 'four'. This expanded group he christened 'Benue'. Gerhardt (1983b) questioned Shimizu's hypothesis noting both that his own lexicostatistical work (Gerhardt & Jockers 1981) did not support this, and casting doubt on the five isoglosses proposed by Shimizu. The 'Benue' group continued in a sort of half-life, appearing in Gerhardt (1989) as a subgrouping of Jukunoid and Tarokoid against the rest of Plateau. Blench (2005) has presented evidence that there is a genuine boundary between Plateau and Jukunoid, drawing on lexical and morphological evidence.

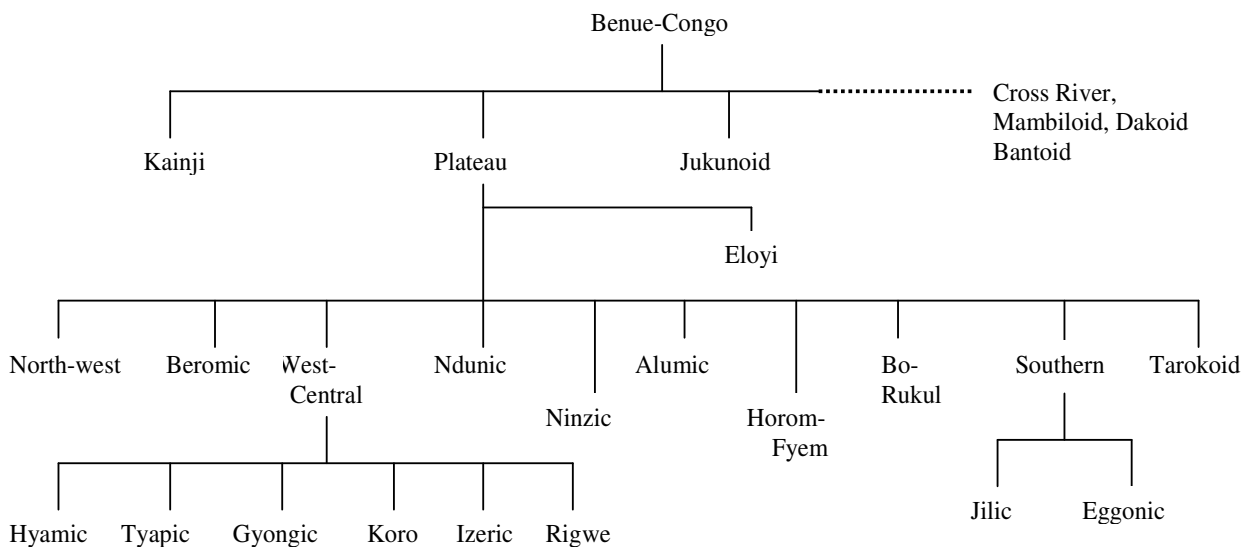
¹ It would be impossible to list all those who have acted as informants, but Barau Kato, Daniel Gya and Selbut Longtau have been my principal co-workers on field data collection. Bitrus Kaze, Deme Dang, Ruth Adiwu, Barnabas Dusu (†), Gideon Asuku, Alex Maikarfi and Wayo Bai and have been crucial to the development of extended materials in their languages. Staff members at NBTT and SIL Jos have been always helpful in giving me access to unpublished materials and to discuss issues relating to particular languages. I would particularly like to thank Mark Gaddis for arranging workshops on the Koro cluster languages.

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

This uncertainty is a reflection of a more general problem, the evidence for a bounded group ‘Plateau’ in opposition to Kainji, Jukunoid, Dakoid or Mambiloid, other members of the Benue-Congo complex. The relationships between Plateau languages, their coherence as a grouping and their links with Jukunoid and Kainji remain undetermined. Rowlands (1962) was the first to suggest that there was a dichotomy between certain languages of the Jos area, which he linked to West Kainji, and the remainder, but his short wordlists were far from constituting linguistic proof. Comparative analysis has produced some tentative evidence for isoglosses defining Plateau, but so far no phonological or morphological innovations that would define the group have been proposed. Some of this diversity is undoubtedly due to long-term interactions with the mosaic of Chadic languages also occurring on the Jos Plateau (Blench 2003).

With these caveats, Figure 1 presents a new subclassification of Plateau, within the context of Benue-Congo. This is clearly not final, as there are too many co-ordinate branches and too little internal structure. But until further analysis is undertaken, provisional versions of Plateau which do not promote too many unwarranted assumptions are the best that can be produced.

Figure 1. Benue-Congo languages: proposed classification



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

2. Plateau languages by subgroup

Table 1 shows a comprehensive list of Plateau languages, by subgroup, and a summary of the system of number-marking, as far as it is known. Where there is a published reference on a specific language, it is given, although I do not always agree with the analysis and the text presents my own summary. No entry in the reference column means the summary is based on my own fieldwork.

Table 1. Nominal affixing in Plateau Languages

Branch	Subgroup	Language	Comment and if any	Reference
Northwest		<u>E</u> da	Reduced alternating prefixes, concord	
		<u>E</u> dra	Reduced alternating prefixes, concord	
		Acro	Reduced alternating prefixes	
		Obiro	Reduced alternating prefixes	
		Kulu	Extensive alternating prefixes, elaborate allomorphy, concord	Seitz (1993)
		Ejẹgha [Idon]	Extensive alternating prefixes, elaborate allomorphy, concord	

Branch	Subgroup	Language	Comment and if any	Reference
Beromic		Doka	Data very poor	
		Èhwa [Iku-Gora-Ankwe]	Reduced alternating prefixes	
		Berom	Reduced alternating prefixes, consonant mutation, concord	Wolff (1963), Bouquiaux (1970)
		Cara	Restricted alternating prefixes, stem-tone change, consonant mutation, concord	
		Iten	Reduced alternating prefixes, consonant mutation, concord	Bouquiaux (1964)
West-Central		Shall-Zwall	Data very poor but affix system apparently heavily eroded	
	Izeric	Izere of Fobur	Restricted alternating prefixes, and extensive stem-tone changes.	Blench (2000b)
		Icèn, Fàrà̀n	Ganàng, Similar to others in group	
	Rigwe	Rigwe	Innovative system, with residual concord	Anon (2006), Blench & Gya (2012)
	Southern Zaria	Jju	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements	McKinney (1979), Hyuwa (1986)
	Tyapic	Tyap	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements	Follingstad (1991)
		Gworok	Innovative prefix system, suffixed elements	Adwiraah & Hagen (1983)
		Atakar, Kacicere, Sholyo, Kafancan	Presumably similar to others in group	
	Koro	Ashe	Very reduced affix alternation	
		Tinɔ̀r (Waci-Myamya)	Very reduced affix alternation	
Hyamic		Idũ, Gwara	Very reduced affix alternation	
		Nyankpa-Bade	Very reduced affix alternation	
		Shamang	As Hyam cluster	
		Cori	As Hyam cluster	Dihoff (1976)
		Hyam cluster	Nominal prefixes almost lost and replaced by consonant mutation and stem-tone change	Jovkers (1982)
		Zhire	As Hyam cluster	
		Shang	Small number of alternating prefixes but ? borrowed	
Ninzic	Gyongic	Gyong (=Kagoma)	Very restricted alternating prefixes, palatalisation, concord	Hagen (1988)
		Kamanton	Presumably similar to Gyong	
		Ninzo	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
		Ce	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	Hoffmann (1976)
		Bu-Niṅkada	No morphological plurals	
		Mada	Very restricted alternating prefixes, some concord, multiple other number-marking strategies	Price (1989)
	Numana-Nunku-Gwantu-Numbu	Information inadequate		
	Ningye-Ninka	Alternating prefixes lost, tone		

Branch	Subgroup	Language	Comment and if any	Reference
		Anib	plurals Very restricted alternating prefixes	
		Ninkyob	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
		Nindem	Very restricted alternating prefixes	
		Nungu	Information inadequate	
		Ayu?	a. prefix alternation or addition b. consonant mutation c. tone-change d. nasal insertion	
Ndunic		Ndun-Nyeng-Shakara [=Tari]	Extremely reduced system, retaining Niger-Congo a/ba person class	Rueck et al. (2008)
Alumic		Toro, Alumu-Tosu Hasha	No functioning noun-prefixes and a single plural suffix. Innovative system, reduplicating first syllable of stem	
		Sambe (†)	No functioning noun-prefixes and a single plural suffix.	
Southern	Eggonic	Eggon	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord, evolution of single pluralising prefix.	Maddieson (1982, n.d. a), Sibomana (1985)
	Jilic	Ake Jili	No functioning noun-prefixes Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	Stofberg (1978)
		Jijili	Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	
Southeastern		Fyem	Very reduced nominal affix pairings, suffixing, stem initial syllable reduplication	Nettle (1998a)
		Horom	Very reduced nominal affix pairings, circumfixing	Nettle (1998b)
		Bo-Rukul	Alternating prefixes with extensive allomorphy and concord	Nettle (1998b)
Tarokoid		Tarok	Alternating prefixes and concord	Sibomana (1981a), Longtau (2008)
		Pe [=Pai]	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord	
		Kwang-Ya-Bijim-Legeri	Very reduced nominal affix pairings and concord	
		Yanjkam [=Bashar]	Fragmentary nominal affix pairings, may be a problem of informant recall	
Eloyi		Sur [=Tapshin] Eloyi	No functioning noun-prefixes Elaborate alternating prefixes and concord	Armstrong (1964), Mackay (1964)

2.1 Northwest Plateau

Northwest Plateau consists of Eda/Edra, Acro-Obiro [=Kuturmi], (i)Kulu, Idon, Doka and Iku-Gora-Ankwe. No new data has been published since this group was set up, although a wordlist of Kulu has been circulated (Moser 1982 and analysed in Seitz 1993) and Shimizu (1996) has posted a grammar sketch on the Internet. Recent interest in Eda [=Kadara] language has resulted in an unpublished dialect survey, a preliminary alphabet book and the launching of an alphabet chart in 2009. Kadara is correctly known as ‘Eda’ and there

is a closely related lect, Ɛdra (which is presumably the source of the common Hausa name). Two other lects for which information is recorded, Eǰegha and Eǰhwa, correspond to Idon and the Iku-Gora-Ankwe clusters. They are so different from each other and from Ɛda that they clearly deserve separate language status. Northwest Plateau remains a high priority for further research.

Table 2 shows the singular/plural prefix pairings recorded in Kulu including tonal variants. A postulated ‘underlying’ prefix is given together with its allomorphs. The mid-front vowel shows harmony with the stem-vowel. The bracketed nasals in the plural prefixes show their sporadic appearance. They are homorganic with the following consonant and only follow /i/.

Table 2. Kulu prefix pairings

Underlying	Singular	Underlying	Plural
E-	è,e,é,è,é	bE-, a-	bè,bé,a
dì-	dì, di	a, be-, e-	a,bé,è,e
gE-	gè,ge,gé,gè,gé	bE-	be,bé
gì-	gì,gi,gí	bE-, Ni-	be, i(m), i(ŋ), nì, ni, nǐ, ní(n), ñí(n)
gù-	gù,gu	E-, Ni-	é,è,e,ì,i(n)
ì-	ì	Ni-	m, nì(n)
ù-	ù,u	bE-, i-	be,ì

Tonal variation in prefixes is driven by the stem-tone (as in many Plateau languages, cf. Blench 2001) and that the different surface tones do not in themselves mark distinct pairings. The numerous forms of a *gV-* prefix point to these all originally having a single underspecified vowel which has gradually diverged.

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

water	gé-llam	chin	gè-llán
storm	gu-llúru	hyena	gè-llibì

Semantic associations in Kulu are weak, but the majority of nouns for persons show *E-/bE-* prefix alternation. Most domestic animals have a *gV-* singular prefix but no consistent plural. Wild animals, on the other hand, almost all have tonal plurals. Trees, body parts, abstracts and even mass nouns have no consistent affix pairs. The *ni-* prefix for noun plurals is extremely uncommon and surprisingly, it is strongly correlated with household items (Table 3);

Table 3. The ni- plural prefix in Kulu

Gloss	sg.	pl.
knife	gí-ŋmáŋ	ní-ŋmáŋ
bag	gi-mpak	ni-mpak
mortar (wood)	gí-ŋklu	ní-ŋklu
pot (generic)	gí-nugu	ní-nugu
head-board	gí-ŋgwel	ní-ŋgwel
basket (generic)	gi-ndzili ⁺	ni-ndzili ⁺
spoon	gi-ŋfàk	ni-ŋfàk
fish-trap	gí-sak	nín-sak

However, Kulu does operate a principle of using prefixes to assign size and quality by means of prefixes, as for example;

Locust tree	gí-n-yoŋ
Locust fruit	gé-n-yoŋ
Locust-pod powder	u-yoŋ

2.2 Beromic

The term ‘Beromic’ has been adopted here to cover former Plateau 2 languages. Beromic now consists of Berom, Iten, Cara and two other languages, Shall-Zwall. The principal publications on Berom are Bouquiaux (1970, 2001) and Kuhn & Dusu (1985), and on Iten, Bouquiaux (1964). Recent unpublished materials are dictionaries of Berom and Iten. Cara (Teriya) was reported in a mimeo paper by Shimizu (1975b) who first proposed a link with Berom. Shall and Zwall, two small, closely related languages in Bauchi State, were previously classified with the Ninzic languages (Plateau 4), but are better placed with Beromic.

Beromic languages show a broad range of number-marking systems, although none have a full noun-class system and Shall-Zwall has lost all nominal affixing, perhaps under the influence of Chadic. A summary of Beromic number marking is shown in Table 4;

Table 4. Number-marking in Beromic

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

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

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

- a) prefix addition or alternation
- b) tone-raising
- c) (de)labialisation
- d) consonant alternation
- e) replicating verbal plurals

In some cases, two procedures can be applied within the same pluralisation process, suggesting the dynamics of renewal. Berom also has a small number of suppletive plurals.

The great majority of Berom singular nouns have no prefix and number is thus only marked on plurals, where the *be*-prefix is predominant. Berom shows ‘echo’ concord, where adjectives, for example, exactly copy the nominal prefix of the noun they qualify. Table 5 shows the nominal prefix alternations in Eastern Berom;

Table 5. Nominal prefix alternations in Eastern Berom

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

ra- is not attested synchronically as a productive prefix, since all nouns beginning in *ra-* in current Berom have a plural prefix *be-*. However, many words have *ra-* as a first syllable, such as *rato* 'head' where the *ra-* is not historically part of the root. The alternation *wo-/be-*, notably attested in;

Wòrom pl. Berom Berom person

is probably not originally a noun class pair. *wo* is a personal pronoun and *be-* a generic plural marker.

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

The nasal prefixes form a complex set of allomorphs. It is most likely there is a diminutive marker *ne-* which shows up unpaired in both singular and plural and alternating with *ke-*. The *ke-* is almost certainly cognate with Bantu *ka-* which has a similar diminutive function (Maho 1999: 88). *ne-* is also a plural marker for a set of miscellaneous nouns (Table 6);

Table 6. ∅-/ne- alternation in Berom

Gloss	sg.	pl.	Also
knife	bá	nebá	
lie	bɔs	nebɔs	
household head	dá lɔ	beda nelɔ	
limb, place	dèm	nedem	
soil being dug	fòŋol	nèfòŋol	ñfòŋol
spirit	gabik	nègabik	begabik
place	kwón	nèkwón	

Berom also has an *n-*, *ne-* unpaired marker for liquids, colours and abstracts (Table 7);

Table 7. Unpaired n-, ne- prefix in Berom

Berom	Gloss
nèróš	brownness
nèsi	blackness
nèsinàng	redness
nèshágárák	stubbornness
nèrókrók	intense sweetness
nèrwík	dirtiness
nèśá	friendship, fellowship
nèmí	blood
nèvasal	milk (of animal or human being)
ntow	local salt (made from acca straw)
ntyĕk	urine

comparable to the *ma-* class 6 in Niger-Congo.

An optional *se-* prefix also marks abstract states;

Table 8. se- abstract prefix

Gloss	Berom
leprosy	(se-)kwa
madness	(se-)loloŋ
slavery	(se-)sesàm
fascination, temptation	setógós

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

fwang	tàng	hut for pounding
fware	tàre	cave
fwa	tà	thigh

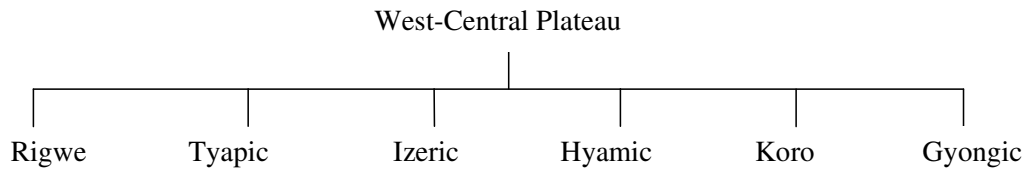
Presumably these originally had a singulative, *fu-*, and the stem-initial *t-* was deleted, converting the high back vowel into a labial.

2.3 West-Central

2.3.1 General

West-Central Plateau consists of what used to be known as the ‘Southern Zaria’ languages. Published and manuscript sources include (Koelle 1854; Gerhardt 1971, 1974, 1983a, 1984 Adwiraah & Hagen 1983; Adwiraah 1989; McKinney, Carol 1979, 1983; McKinney, Norris 1984, 1990; Joy Follingstad 1991; Carl Follingstad, n.d.). Although these languages are clearly linked, no published evidence has supported their coherence as a group. The languages Nandu [=Ndun] and Tari [=Shakara] were listed in Crozier & Blench (1992) as part of this group. This is erroneous; Ndun-Shakara, together with the newly discovered Nyeng, form their own group, Ndunic (§2.6). The Central Plateau languages are a coherent geographical clustering and undoubtedly show numerous links with one another, but their genetic unity is unproven. Gerhardt (1983a: 67 ff.) presents a comparative wordlist showing cognates between Rigwe, Izere and Tyap. However, with both new insights into the phonology of these languages, and in particular the large number of lects still unrecorded at that period, a new comparative analysis is still to be undertaken. Figure 2 presents the known groups of West-Central Plateau as a flat array.

Figure 2. West-Central Plateau subgroups



2.3.2 Rigwe

The Rigwe language is spoken southeast of Jos. It is notable for an extremely complex phonology (Anon 2006). Any former system of extensive alternating affixes has been replaced by a standard pluralising prefix or by a variety of tonal changes. Table 9 lists the strategies for plural marking in Rigwe with their allomorphs;

Table 9. Nominal plural marking in Rigwe

No.	Strategy	Allomorph
I.	addition of <i>rè-</i> prefix	
II.	<i>rV-/Ñ</i> alternation	\emptyset -/ \grave{N} - alternation
III.	initial low tone nasal tone-raising	+ stem-tone raising
IV.	extra-low nasal tone-raising	extra-low stem-tone-raising

Class II nouns have an *rV-/Ñ* alternation. *rV-* is realized as *ri-* when the stem vowel is front, and as *ru-* when the stem-vowel is back. \grave{N} - is realised as \grave{j} - before palatals \grave{j} - and \grave{j} - and as \grave{n} - elsewhere. Table 10 presents examples of the operation of this class;

Table 10. *rV-/Ñ* alternations in Rigwe nouns

Gloss	sg.	pl.
head	ritʃĩ	ñtʃì
eye	rijĩ	ñjì
tooth	riɲĩ	ñɲì
horn	rité	ñtè
hole	ruvó	ñvò

As the glosses show, the nasal prefix is associated with human and animal body parts, which seems to be innovative. The Class III alternation in Rigwe is \emptyset -/ \grave{N} -, where \grave{N} - is homorganic with the following consonant, realised as \grave{j} - before palatals, $\grave{\eta}$ - before velars and \grave{n} - elsewhere. Only -a, -e and -u have been recorded as stem vowels in Class III. Unlike the other classes, the stem tone changes and is always low, regardless of the tone in the singular. Table 11 presents examples of this class;

Table 11. \emptyset -/ \grave{N} - alternation in Rigwe nouns

Gloss	sg.	pl.
bone	kú	ñkù
corpse	k ^w é	ñk ^w è
firewood	ek ^w é	ñk ^w è
food	jâ	ñjà
hand	vá	ñvâ
leg	tá	ñtà
part of	klá	ñklâ

This is equally associated with body parts but is otherwise miscellaneous. Rigwe has innovated in nominal affixing to such an extent that no obvious connection with postulated classes for either Niger-Congo or Bantu can be discerned.

2.3.3 Tyapic

The Tyapic languages are named for Tyap, or Kataf in older sources. The group consists of six languages (Tyap, Gworok, Atakar, Kacicere, Sholyo, and Kafančan), with the closely related Jju³. Only Tyap itself is well-described (Follingstad 1991). The prefixed elements appear to be innovative and consist a(Ca)- and its allomorphs. However, following the noun there are a variety of CV suffixes. These are almost certainly noun-class affixes, now placed after the stem. Table 12 shows a summary of Tyap nominal prefixes and concord;

Table 12. Tyap nominal prefixes and concord

Noun class	Number	Prefix	Root	Suffix
1	sg.	ə		wu
2a	pl.	əyə		ba
2b	pl.	∅	tone	ba
3	sg.	∅		ji
4a	pl.	∅	tone	ji
4b	pl.	redup.		jí
5	sg.	ə		ka
6a	pl.	əkə		na
6b	pl.	ə + redup.		hu
6c	pl.	ə + redup.		ba
6d	pl.	∅	tone	na
7	sg.	∅		hu
8a	pl.	N-		na
8b	pl.	ə + redup.		ba
9	sg/pl.	ə		na

Source: Follingstad (1991)

The elements marked suffix in the table were almost certainly CV prefixes, but are now written as distinct words as they do not show phonological merger with the root they follow. Plurals reduplicate by doubling the first syllable of the root. Thus;

tree əkwən ka trees əkəkwen nə

Classes 1/2, with the suffixes wu/ba, probably corresponds to Bantu class 1/2 and includes many Tyap nouns for human beings. Class 9, which is unpaired, includes liquids such as əsəkwət nə ‘water’ and əbàn na ‘milk’ which is semantically similar to Niger-Congo Class 6. The homorganic plural nasal prefix in Class 8a is possibly to be compared with Bantu Class 6 where it is the plural of Class 5 ‘paired things’, e.g. mbwàk na ‘hands’.

Follingstad (1991: 79) shows that concord in Tyap is very reduced with only a few adjectives and lower numerals showing any agreement. The agreement is of the ‘direct-copy’ type, where the numeral has the same prefix as the noun it agrees with.

2.3.4 Izeric

The Izeric languages consist of northwest Izere, northeast Izere, Cèn, Ganàng and Fəràn. The language which is best-known is Izere of Fobur (Blench 2000) but wordlists suggest that the affix pairings in the other languages are broadly similar. Nominal plurals in Izere of Fobur are formed in four ways;

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

³ It is usual to list Jju separately from the Tyap cluster but this seems increasingly to reflect ethnic separation rather than linguistic reality.

Affix alternation and stem-tone alternation are frequently combined producing a very large number of plural formations. Izere of Fobur has a relatively restricted set of segmental noun-class prefixes. Table 13 shows Izere nominal affix pairings

Table 13. Izere nominal affix pairings

Singular	Plural	Semantics
a-	a-	persons, loanwords
i-	i-	miscellaneous
ka-, ki-		diminutive
ka-	na-	birds, trees, miscellaneous
ku-	a-, i-	miscellaneous
na-	∅-	liquids, solids, abstracts
ri-	a-	miscellaneous

ka- and its allomorph *ki-*, realised when the noun stem contains a palatal, can function as a diminutive prefix. Paired *ka-* and *ku-* were probably allomorphs of one another historically, since there is a tendency for stem-vowels following *ka-* to be front or central and those following *ku-* to be back. However, exceptions now abound, suggesting a historical class split.

Izere has a common *nà-* prefix for liquids and solids which must correspond to the *ma-* prefix in Niger-Congo (Table 14).

Table 14. Izere unpaired affix *na-* examples

Izere	Gloss	Izere	Gloss
nàbàsang	breast-milk	nànyìsi	tears
nàdòm	poison, venom	nàrìk	dirt, fertiliser
nàgàng	gum	nàsòk	blood
nàmè	oil, pomade	nàtòk	local potash
nàming	dew	nàwùn	sap

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

2.3.5 Hyamic

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

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

Many of these languages are very poorly known and existing descriptions are tonally and phonologically inadequate (e.g. Dihoff 1976; Jockers 1982).

Hyam has a wide range of strategies to mark nominal plurals. The most important are shown in Table 15;

Table 15. Hyam nominal pluralisation strategies

Strategy	Gloss	sg.	pl.
Tone-raising	tree	ki	kí
Prefix addition	leaf	dʒàŋ	madʒàŋ
	person	nèt	mò-nèt
Prefix alternation	blacksmith	na naa	fu naa
Palatalisation	vine	rik	ryík
Depalatalisation	seed/grain	ʃaŋ	sáŋ
Labialisation	fear/fright	hyoŋ	hywoŋ
Consonant mutation	path	fwor	swor

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

witch	na hywes	fu hywes
sorcerer	na kyat kpyo	fu kyat kpyo
blacksmith	na naa	fu naa

Almost all verbs and adjectives have obligatory plural forms and many undergo the same phonological shifts or mutations as nouns. Adjectives agree in number, i.e. where the noun is plural, the plural adjective is obligatory, but they do not show the type of alliterative concord characteristic of noun-class languages.

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

Table 16. Shang nominal affix pairings

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

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

2.3.6 Gyongic

Gyongic is the closest relative of Hyamic and consists of two languages, Gyong [Kagoma] and Angan [Kamanton]. Neither language is well-known but there is a description of Gyong which includes information on noun-classes (Hagen 1988). According to this, Gyong marks plurals with prefix alternation, palatalisation alternation and tone. The reduced prefix system is as follows;

ø-	bò, kì-
kì-	ø-, rì-

Interestingly, liquids, abstracts and mass nouns fall into the unpaired *kì-* class (Table 17).

Table 17. Gyong mass noun ki-prefix

Gyong	Gloss
kìdzí	blood
kìmàláj	water
kìtsès	oil
kìkpó	death
kìtòŋ	ashes
kìdzòŋ	smoke
kìywúp	jealousy

Stem-tone changes multiply the possible number-marking strategies. Hagen (1988: 139) gives examples of adjectival agreement;

pèndèm	kílúm	kìpèndèm	rúm
large	farm	large	farms

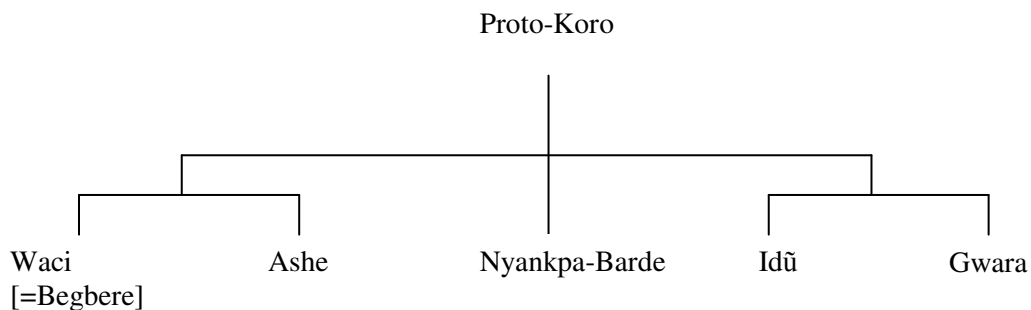
The data is not extensive enough to fully understand the system. Demonstratives do show alliterative concord;

kì.há	kì.hónà	rì.há	rì.dú(nà)
house	that	house	those

2.3.7 Koro

The Koro cluster consists of five languages spoken in Central Nigeria, north of Keffi. The published literature is sparse and based on limited data (Gerhardt 1972b; Goroh 2000). Figure 3 shows a tentative outline classification of the languages in the Koro cluster.

Figure 3. Classification of the Koro languages



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

Table 18. Waci nominal affix pairings

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

There is no evidence for a distinctive mass noun prefix. Some liquids, such as water (*bàmi*) and blood (*bèdʒi*) have no prefix, while other lexical items such as tears, saliva and urine have diverse singular/plural affix pairs.

The *bV-* plural prefix almost always marks persons and is usually, but not always paired with *u-* singular (Table 19). The vowel is underspecified and very often the copies the stem vowel, although *b* + high vowel (i.e. *bi-* and *bu-*) are apparently not permitted;

Table 19. bV- plural prefixes in Waci

Gloss	sg.	pl.
person/people	ù-ndìrà	bà-ndìrà
husband	u-sa	ba-sa
wife	u-cɛ	bɛ-cɛ
masquerade	keberè	be-keberè
leper	i-kpiŋ	be-kpiŋ
masquerade	u-ku	bo-ku
brother	u-cɔbɔ	bɔ-cɔbɔ
friend	u-dǒrĩ	bɔ-dǒrĩ

There is a tendency for the *V-* of other plural prefixes to copy the \pm ATR properties of the stem vowel (Table 20);

Table 20. (C)V- prefixes in Waci, illustrating \pm ATR vowel copying

Gloss	sg.	pl.
death	ga-pò	rò-pò
Senegal coucal	gbodotùtù	o-gbodotùtù
story	wu-sɔsɔgɔ	ɔ-sɔsɔgɔ
wound	wù-sò	ò-sò

but there are plenty of striking exceptions;

song wu-vɔŋ o-vɔŋ

wu- (*gu-* in some speakers) is a very common prefix which can be paired with almost any *V-* prefix;

Gloss	sg.	pl.
leaf	wu-yi	a-yi
root	wu-naŋ	a-naŋ
rubbish-heap	wu-riri	ɛ-riri
village/settlement	wu-sep	ɛ-sep
arm, hand	wu-bɔ	ɔ-bɔ
story	wu-sɔsɔgɔ	ɔ-sɔsɔgɔ
wall (of room)	wu-gúbo	o-gúbo

u- may also be an allomorph of *wu-*

large river	ù-hèg	è-hèg
thing	u-bin	e-bin
wart-hog	ù-jì	e-ji
tail	u-sap	ì-sap
load	ù-cǎ	ì-cǎ
day	ù-nɔm	ì-nɔm
night	u-ǰĩ	ì-ǰĩ
bark (of tree)	u-gugub	ɔ-gugub

i- prefixes alternating with other prefixes than *i-* are quite rare and somewhat inconsistent;

thorn	ì-dìdòg	bà-dìdòg
charcoal on fire	ì-kǎ	a-kǎ
year	i-yɛ	ri-yɛ

The Waci prefix *yV-* where *V* is always a front vowel is usually paired with *bV-* in the plural, although these nouns do not refer to persons (Table 21).

Table 21. *yV-* prefixes in Waci

Gloss	sg.	pl.
star(s)	yì-ǰĩ	ba-ǰĩ
fire	yì-rá	bà-rá
boil	yì-kpì	bè-kpì
pygmy mouse	yì-kìrìko	bò-kìrìko
bird (generic)	yè-nò	bà-nò
faeces	yè-bì	ru-bi

One of the most striking alternations is *gV-/rV-*, which does not seem to have any immediate parallel in other Koro languages. The *-V-* in *gV-* can be any vowel except the high back vowels. The vowel quality in the *gV-* prefix partly reflects stem vowels although the correlation is not perfect. Similarly, most plurals have *rV-* with a few exceptions (Table 22). However, *gV-* and some *yV-* prefixes may well be allomorphs of *gV-* to judge by the *rV-* plurals.

Table 22. *gV-* prefixes in Waci

Gloss	sg.	pl.
compound	ga-ha	ru-ha
forest	ga-kwey	ru-kwey
death	ga-pò	rò-pò
stick	ga-ti	ro-ti
gecko	ge-mé kpikpi	ru-mé kpikpi
tongue	ge-ɾɛm	ru-ɾɛm
rope	ge-ri	ru-ri
genet cat	gi-bíkɔn	bè-bikɔn
thigh	gì-cáy ùdá	bà-cáy ùdá

stomach	gi-ni	bà-ni
sandfly	gì-zù	bò-zù
bag	go-gur	ru-gur
snake (generic)	go-sù	ru-sù

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

2.4 Ndunic

Ndunic is a new name proposed here for the languages previously called ‘Nandu-Tari’. Existing sources list two languages, but a third language, Ningon, was first recorded in 2003. The Ndunic languages are spoken in a small area southwest of Fadan Karshi. The correct names for these languages are Ndun (Nandu), Shakara (Tari) and Ningon. The languages are extremely close to one another. The Ndunic peoples have recently adopted the name ‘Ahwai’ as a cover term for all three languages (Rueck et al. 2008). Shakara has a very reduced set of nominal affixes, but Ndun has numerous nominal singular/plural affix pairs. Table 23 shows the singular and plural affixes of Ndun;

Table 23. Ndun nominal affixes

sg.	pl.
∅-	∅-
a-, a(n)-	be-
e-	e-
i-	i-,i(Cy)-
n-	me-
u-	n-, na-
∅-	-y-

The main attested noun-class pairings are shown in Table 24;

Table 24. Ndun nominal affix pairings

sg.	pl.
∅-	e-, i-, i(Cy)-, -y-
a-, a(n)-	i-, me-, na-
e-	∅-, be-, i(n)-
i-	be-
m-, ma-, me(n)-	∅-
n-	be-
u-	e-, i(Cy)-, n-
-y-	∅-

However, there are also numerous plurals created by tonal change and by presence and absence of labialisation and palatalisation. Sporadic nasalisation appears between the stem and the prefix as a result of fossil nominal prefixes, although Ndun still preserves a few nasal prefixes that are productive. Ndun has many noun-class pairings that only occur once, in part due to the underspecified vowels. The tones are too insecurely marked to be sure that there are no additional contrasts on the V- prefixes.

Palatalisation can be applied to almost any initial consonant in singular/plural formation, often combined with primary affix alternation (Table 25). The historical explanation is likely to be that there was an initial i- prefix which was incorporated into the stem and then a new plural affix (ironically sometimes a new i- prefix) was applied subsequently.

Table 25. Ndun nominals with contrastive palatalisation

Gloss	sg.	pl.
dream	nári	ínyári
relations	ùgap	ìgyàp
song	úhwá	ihywa
body	ilyak	ilak

Ndun also shows numerous examples of sporadic inserted nasals in affix alternations (Table 26);

Table 26. Ndun nominals with sporadic inserted nasals in prefixes

Gloss	sg.	pl.
cheek	upǎŋ	empaŋ
grandparents	ìnìnkyer	íníkyer
chief	ètùm	entùm
horn	anshem	meshèm
spider	tìntàn	intìntàn

Only a single example of a productive n- prefix has been recorded;

Gloss	sg.	pl.
thorn	ùshayí	ñshayî

In addition there are many nouns with initial homorganic nasals (m-, n-, ŋ-) which seem to have been incorporated during an earlier wave of prefix incorporation.

It is not uncommon for Ndun nouns for persons to be -r final (Table 27);

Gloss	sg.	pl.
person/people	ener	bener
man	eromír	beromír
grandparents	ìnìnkyer	íníkyer
friend	esamir	besamir

and in one case, the final -r alternates with a final nasal.

Woman nyaan nyaar

These are probably the traces of former prefixes which have moved to final position and have almost lost their class pair alternation.

Semantic correlations with noun-class affix pairings are weak at best. The e-/be- prefix pair includes a number of nouns referring to persons;

Gloss	sg.	pl.
person/people	ener	bener
father	edâ	bédâ
friend	esamir	besamir
guest/stranger	èkyen	bekyen

Most liquids have initial m-, mV- and this presumably reflects Niger-Congo Class 6.

Gloss	Ndun	Gloss	Ndun
water	mákùrì	saliva	méntí
blood	memiŋ	sweat	mfɔɔr
tear	memil	urine	ménfirì

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

Shakara now has a much reduced system, but proto-Ndunic clearly had a wide range of nominal affix pairs, with fragmentary evidence for a suffix alternation to do with persons. Nasal prefixes were clearly very common but have become so generalised across the system it is now difficult to discern what part they may have played in the original affix alternations.

2.5 Ninzic

Ninzic, formerly Plateau IV, is probably the most difficult group to characterise and weak data on several languages make it unclear whether certain peripheral languages really belong to it. The name Ninzic is introduced here, reflecting the element nin-, which is part of many ethnonyms. The Ninzic languages are spoken south of Fadan Karshi in Plateau, Nassarawa and Kaduna States. The membership of Ninzic has changed quite significantly between various publications (Table 28).

Table 28. Changing composition of the Ninzic language group

Author	Greenberg (1963)	Hansford et al. (1976)	Gerhardt (1989)	Crozier & Blench (1992)	This paper
Name in Source	Plateau IV	Eastern Plateau g.	Southwestern subgroup cluster a	Southwestern subgroup cluster 1	Ninzic
Ce [=Rukuba]	+	+	+	+	+
Ninzo [=Ninzam]	+	+	+	+	+
Mada	+	+	+	+	+
Nko					+
Katanza					+
Bu-Niṅkada		-	-	-	+
Ayu	+	+	+	?	?
Nungu		-	-	-	+
Ninkyob [=Kaninkwom]	+	+	+	+	+
Anib = Kanufi		+	+	+	+
Nindem		+	+	+	+
Gwantu cluster		+	+	+	+
Ningye					+
Ninka					+
Kwanka-Boi- Bijim-Legeri		+	+	+	-
Shall-Zwall		+		?	-
Pe[=Pai]		-	+	-	-

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

General overviews can be found in Gerhardt (1972/3a, 1983a) and materials on specific languages in Hoffmann (1976), Hörner (1980), Price (1989), Wilson (2003).

The number marking systems of Ninzic must originally have been paired affixes with alliterative concord, as fragments of such systems are found across the group. However, in most languages the system has broken down or become severely eroded and compensatory strategies have evolved. This section uses examples from Ninzo based on Hörner (1980), Ninzo Language Project Committee (1999) and fieldwork in Fadan Wate in 1995.

Ninzo prefix pairings are;

ø- à-, ì-
i- à-
ù- à-, ì-

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

Gloss	sg.	pl.
man	ù-nùru	a-nirú
old person	u-tuce	a-tice
senior in age	u-nunku	a-ninku
bow	u-tuta ⁺	i-tita

Other u/a- prefix alternations also incorporate alternations of CV syllables of the stem, particularly nV-/bV-;

Table 29. V-/anV- prefix pairs in Ninzo

Gloss	sg.	pl.
guest/stranger	u-nicir	a-bicir
doctor	u-nifù	a-bifù
hunter	ù-nìzhá	à-bìzhá
thief	ù-nàyí	à-bàyí
blacksmith	u-nìlà	a-bílá
But;		
witch	u-nutri	a-datri

These suggest an unusual process, the retention of a former *ni-/bi-* alternation with the addition of an innovative prefix system preceding it. The *bV-* plural marker is reminiscent of Niger-Congo *ba-* but this may be coincidence; the core lexemes for persons in Ninzo do not have this alternation. A partial development from this is the formation of plural with *VnV-* prefixes (Table 30). For example, *à-* and *ì-* singular prefixes alternate with *ànV-* plural prefixes;

Table 30. V-/anV- prefix pairs in Ninzo

Gloss	sg.	pl.
death	i-kfu	ani-kfu
leopard	i-ce	ani-ce
guinea-fowl	ì-tsi	ani-tsi
kob antelope	à-kùrù	áná-kúrú
cat	à-músâ	àna-músâ
chameleon	a-kanda	anu-kanda

As Table 30 shows there is quite a strong correlation between animals and the *anV-* plural prefix, which is highly reminiscent of the Bantu Class 9 *nì-* singular prefix for animals. Ninzo shows no obvious active or fossil morphology for non-count nouns although the word for ‘water’ *amasíŋ* has inherited the *ma-* affix from related Plateau languages.

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

Table 31. Plural marking with reduplication in Ninzo

Gloss	sg.	pl.
senior in status	àŋkpyè	àŋkpyè
finger	vivriŋo	i-mimaraŋo
ankle	í-gblédzá	à-gbígbledzá
navel	i-mgbeku	i-mgbimgbeku
liver	i-sur	i-sisur
animal (bush)	í-názhù	í-nínazhù
hoe i	a-kla	i-kikla
termite	í-yó	í-yíyó
knife (small)	á-njî	i-njinji
gown, small	a-nkru	i-nkinkru
basket (generic)	à-sà	í-sísà
arrow	à-wyírr	i-wyiwírr
friend	u-kpà	a-kpukpà
king	u-tù	a-tútù

Ninzic languages have highly diverse nominal morphology and space precludes describing all of them. Many have a non-count noun prefix, but this seems to vary from one group to another. For example, Table 32 shows the prefix for liquids in Ce, *bə-*, which is quite consistent, but which seems to be unrelated to Niger-Congo Class 6.

Table 32. Ce liquids prefix *bə-*

Gloss	Ce
oil	bə-nyì
fat/grease	bə-nhyò
boiled sorghum	bə-kò
potash	bə-tòk
sorghum-beer	bə-hi
milk	bə-nsə
sweat	bə-cilí

2.6 Alumic

One subgroup of Plateau languages spoken in Central Nigeria has effectively no published data. These languages are Hasha [=Yashi], Sambe, Alumu-Təsu and Toro [=Turkwam]. Except for Sambe, they have apparently been classified in previous lists on the basis of geographical proximity. Sambe is moribund, with only two speakers over 90 in 2005, while the rest have at most a few hundred speakers. The group is here named Alumic, after the language with the most speakers, but this term can be regarded as provisional. The Alumic languages are now scattered geographically, and isolated among the Ninzic (=Plateau IV) languages. The very different sociolinguistic histories may explain their striking morphological diversity. Alumu, Toro and Sambe no longer have functioning noun class systems, but the nouns have transparent fossil prefixes. Hasha has developed a highly idiosyncratic system of reduplicating the first syllable of the stem to mark plurality in both nouns and verbs, apparently under the influence of a neighbouring Chadic language, Sha.

Təsu has entirely converted to a system of a single plural suffix, with no functioning noun-prefixes. Nonetheless, these can be recovered in part from the existing nouns, especially by comparison with cognate forms in other Plateau languages. Although many nouns have zero prefixes, fossil V- and N- prefixes are quite widespread. The most common prefix is a- and ə- is probably its allomorph.

a-	Gloss	Təsu	ə-	Gloss	Təsu
	tree (generic)	à-ghè	song	ə-humu	
	mushroom	à-wá	leaf	ə-ʃu	
	thorn	à-tòtò	road	ə-ki	
	sand	à-seŋge			
	farm	a-yi			

Nouns for persons typically have an à- prefix;

man, husband	à-tsiqà
woman, wife	à-qa
child	à-meré
father	à-da

Other fossil prefixes are;

e-	cloud	è-víri	i-	algae	ì-bu
	mouth	è-né		tomorrow	í-kyá
	grasshopper	é-sɔ		large stone	ì-tre
	spear	é-mbè		cloud	ì-ve
Ñ-	smoke	ñ-zu	u-	bush-fowl	úgró
	evening	ŋ-viʃi			
	work	ñ-dòmɔ			
	land/country	ñ-zimbɔrɔ			
	navel	ŋ-bu			

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

Sambe no longer has a functioning noun-class system, perhaps a consequence of the switch to Ninzo. However, it clearly existed until recently and many words were cited with fossil prefixes. Indeed, sometimes a word would be cited in one elicitation with the prefix and again without it, showing the language in transition prior to its inevitable death. Three prefixes can be discerned in the data, *kV-*, *bV-* and *tV-*, each with an underspecified or ‘hollow’ vowel. In some languages this shows concord with the stem vowel, but this does not seem to have been the case with Sambe. The most common prefix is *kV-* (Table 33);

Table 33. kV- fossil prefixes in Sambe

Prefix	Attestation	Gloss
ka-	kàjese	basket
ke-	kèqa	jar for local beer
	kècu	head
ki-	kìnkwar	spear
	kìtsu	divination (types)
ku-	kùhûn	winnowing tray
	kùtù	mortar (wood)
	kùva	skink
	kubwà	faeces

Table 34 shows words with a *bV-* fossil prefix;

Table 34. bV- fossil prefixes in Sambe

Prefix	Attestation	Gloss
ba-	bàfũ	sorghum-beer
	bàtúnú	ant (generic)
	bàgúgó	ancestors
be-	bènkun	fat/grease
bi-	bíkíta	small hoe
bu-	búrùmi	today
	bùwan	salt
	bùkyé	rib

Table 35 shows words with a *tV*- fossil prefix;

Table 35. tV- prefixes in Sambe

Prefix	Attestation	Gloss
ta-	name	tánásè
	breath	tawùrì
ti-	guinea-fowl	tìmìsì
	word	tìmìvèn
	squirrel (tree)	tító
to-	hippo	tòbàrì

Sambe probably also had a nasal prefix which was homorganic with the following consonant;

Table 36. N- prefixes in Sambe

Gloss	Sambe
hair	mfu
brother/sister	mlànà
Senegal coucal	mpàlàn
leaf	ŋgbá,fi
cock	ŋgwà
vervet monkey	njînjèhun
sheep	ntùmà

Many nouns referring to persons have an *a*- prefix and some which are naturally plural, such as ‘ancestors’ have a *ba*- prefix (Table 37);

Table 37. a/ba- prefixes in Sambe

Gloss	Sambe
man	àróro
woman	àhìn
father	adídá
mother	aya
relations	bàruhwin ninamláni
ancestors	bàgúgó

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

2.7 East

The three languages within SE Plateau (=Greenberg's Plateau 6), Fyem, Bo-Rukul [=Mabo-Barkul] and Horom were placed together in the BCCW. This group has previously been named Southeastern (e.g. in Crozier & Blench 1992) but is here named 'East' as a better reflect of its direction in relation to the Plateau centre of gravity. Nettle (1998a) is a sketch grammar of Fyem, and Nettle (1998b) short wordlists of all three languages, but Bo-Rukul and Horom remain virtually unknown (although see Blench 2003 for their relation with the Ron (Chadic) languages). Since Horom has the most elaborate system of nominal affixing, it is discussed in detail in this section.

Number marking in Horom nouns is characterised by a great diversity of strategies. V-/CV- prefix alternation is the most characteristic process and the possibilities are numerous. Of these, the *i-* plural is applied in the majority of cases. The singular and plural class/pairings identified so far are shown in Table 38;

Table 38. Singular/plural affix pairings in Horom

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

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

The most striking typological feature of Horom is the evolution of a nominal suffixing system. The singulars are diverse with either zero or a wide array of prefixes. The plurals are all prefixed with *ba-*, but followed by either a vowel or a nasal. Table 39 shows all the nouns so far recorded with prefixes and suffixes.

Table 39. Horom nominal suffixes

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

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

Table 40. Horom ‘broken’ plurals

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

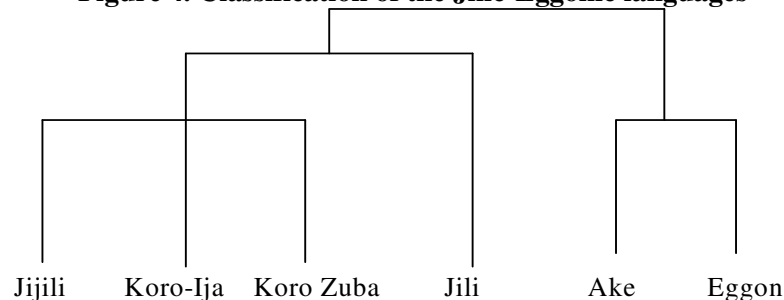
These may be infixes or simply a phonological extension of the syllable. None of these words are transparent compounds, but this may be their historical origin, in which case each element of the compound would have retained its plural prefix, with the second prefix undergoing centralisation in some environments.

2.8 South

2.8.1 General

South Plateau is named for two language groups, Jilic and Eggonic, which are here put together. ‘Southern’ was applied to Jilic alone in Crozier & Blench (1992). Figure 4 shows this new proposal;

Figure 4. Classification of the Jilic-Eggonic languages



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

2.8.2 Jilic

Jilic consists of at least two languages, Mijili [=Koro of Lafia] and Ujjili [=Koro Huntu], now separated by a considerable geographic distance, but clearly related. There is a microfiched grammar of Mijili by Stofberg (1978), while Ujjili is known from an unpublished wordlist. Koro Ija and Koro Zuba, two languages spoken northwest of Abuja, are said to be nearly intelligible with Ujjili, although no language data exists to demonstrate this. This section will focus on Jili (i.e. Mijili) as described by Stoffberg (1978), but with additional material from fieldwork in 2003.

Jili has a system of number marking on nouns based on prefix alternations. Table 41 is a matrix showing the possible pairings of singular and plural prefixes.

Table 41. Matrix showing matching of singular and plural prefixes in Jili

Singular prefixes	Plural prefixes								
	á-	à-	àmà-	í-	mí-	mì-	mú-	mù-	Ń-
cù-							+		
jì-						+			
kí-	+			+					
kú-	+								
lú-				+					+
mí-				+					
mú-				+					
Ń-				+					
Ń-			+		+		+		
ò-/ô-	+			+			+	+	
rí-	+								+
rú-									+
ø-	+	+		+	+		+	+	

Adapted from Stoffberg (1978:316)

Once allomorphy of the prefixes is taken into account, the numbers of underlying prefixes is considerably reduced. As elsewhere in Plateau, singular nouns referring to human beings have variable morphology, with a common *nV-* prefix. Plurals prefixes in Jili are either *mV-* or *a-* (Table 42).

Table 42. Singular and plural prefixes for person nouns in Jili

sg.	pl.	Gloss
oyi	áyi	thief
nyézhò	ázhò	young man
nyèzḑ	minyèzḑ	guest/stranger
nyéló	mínyéló	in-laws
nyekúkḑ	mínyekúkḑ	old person
nyemūgá	minyemūgá	doctor
nyevelè	mínyevelè	man
nyinyrǎ	mínyinyrǎ	woman
òcā	múcā	uncle
òco	múco	male ancestor

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

̀nye	mínye	person/people
------	-------	---------------

Almost all liquids and non-count nouns have an unpaired *n*- prefix (Table 43).

Jili	Gloss	Jili	Gloss
̀cè	saliva	̀sá	salt
̀jè	fat/grease	̀sí	tear
̀kwálè	water	̀swàná	hair
̀noro	mud	̀zè	blood
̀nɔ	oil	̀zɔ	smoke

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

2.8.3 Eggonic

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

Ake nouns no longer have morphologically marked plurals, with a few exceptions in the case of persons. However, there is considerable evidence for prior systems of CV prefixes, many of which survive in frozen form preceding the stem. The key to detecting such affixes is external cognates. Many words appear with different prefixes in related languages. Thus, although proto-Ake almost certainly had a *ki*- prefix, in the word *kipindyè* ‘village/settlement’ the *ki*- is not a prefix, since it is cognate with forms in remote Plateau languages such as Hyam *khep*, Jili *kúpɔ̀*, and the *-ndye* element then a compounded element. Such evidence is not available for all the terms with potential affixes, so only more elaborated morphological comparisons will increase certainty. The former V- prefixes often have two distinct tones and may therefore be ultimately of different origins or it may be that this is the result of a now-lost morphophonemic process. However, since they exist in high-low pairs for almost all the hypothetical prefixes reconstructed in Table 44,

Table 44. Ake fossil noun prefixes

Prefix	Allomorphs
a-	à-,á-
i-	ì-,í-
kV-	kà-, lè-, kì-, kí-, kù-, kú-
mu-	mù-, mú-
O-	ò-, ó-, ò-, ó-
rV-	rì-,rí-, rù-,rú-
u-	ù-, ú-

Ake has a variety of *kV*- prefixes which constitute possible evidence for an original affix with an underspecified vowel, such as occurs in Sambe and East Kainji languages such as Boze. Examples are;

Gloss	Ake
world	kàyùnzà
ground	kàʃe
masquerade	kàngìrì
grave	kèmì

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

ò/ó-

This prefix is strongly associated with body parts;

Gloss	Ake
mouth	òmu
tongue	òlé
neck	òlwa
shoulder	ókye
armpit	óngwò

ò-/ó-

This prefix is strongly associated with animals;

calf	òyèna
castrated small ruminant	òkì
colobus monkey	òkpesě
hare	òzwè
electric fish	òrĩ
fish sp.	ópò

ɲ-

Strikingly, and in contrast to most other Plateau languages, the velar nasal prefix is not homorganic synchronically. Almost all the words with ɲ- prefixes are in the same semantic area, reptiles, crustaceans and insects.

Gloss	Ake
hammer	ɲbùkù
fish sp.	ɲgásóré
river turtle	ɲgyáklà
skink	ɲbókíó
toad	ɲbáwù

Ake has almost certainly reprefixed stems with former velar nasal prefixes in words such as;

chameleon	íɲbrũ
bee	ìɲwè
giant snail	ìɲgìrà

It is conceivable this is related Bantu Class 9, *nì-*, for animals, although large salient species in Ake do not have an *ŋ-* prefix.

There is weak evidence for an *mV-* prefix defining liquids;

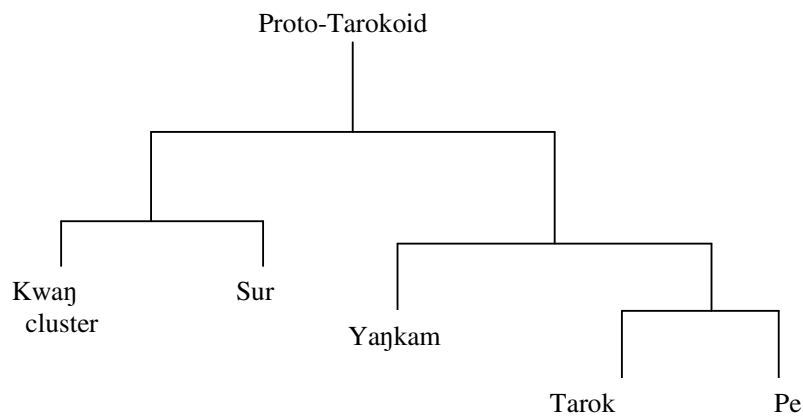
blood	mìfe
tear(s)	mínyi
urine	màṅgbà

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

2.9 Tarokoid

The Tarokoid languages consist of four languages and the Kwang cluster. Tarok is numerically the most dominant, spoken in a large area around Langtang, while the others are spoken in small communities isolated from one another between Langtang and Jos. Yangkam is moribund, spoken only by men over fifty years of age. Figure 5 shows the internal structure of Tarokoid;

Figure 5. Internal structure of Tarokoid



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

Kwaṅ marks number with singular/plural prefix pairings, but these are extremely reduced compared with Tarok or Pe. With very few exceptions, all plurals are marked with an *à-* prefix. Kwaṅ has a small number of nouns where plurality is marked with a tone-change, Low/High or Mid/High, and some irregular plurals which may be examples of residual consonant mutation. Changes in the stem vowel occur in the plurals of some lexemes connected with persons. Finally, some *à-* plurals have a suffixed copy vowel and these may assimilate to the stem-vowel if this is not a central vowel. Table 45 shows the nominal prefixes of Kwaṅ. By far the most common singular prefix is *∅-* and plural *à-*.

Table 45. Kwaṅ nominal prefixes

Singular	Plural
∅-	à-
i-	kí-
kì-	
ṅ-	

However, the large number of palatalised and labialised stems in Kwang suggests that *i-* and *u-* prefixes were formerly common. Kwang also has occasional stem-initial consonant mutation;

child fàn àmàn
 young girl fàyì àwàyì

By far the most common singular/ plural alternation is \emptyset -/à-, as shown in Table 46;

Table 46. Kwaŋ \emptyset -/à- prefix alternation

Gloss	sg.	pl.
root	liŋ	àliŋ
bark	púr	àpur
thorn	rèk	àrèk
mountain	ʃiʃ	àʃiʃ
relations	zyeŋ	àzyeŋ
name	sàk	àsàk

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

Gloss	sg.	pl.
wall (of room)	lâr	alara
person/people	sum	asuma
strength	sòtɔn	sòtɔna
woman	yì	aya
husband	ðimà lɔg	àðamà lɔg

The next most common pairing is ñ-/á-;

Gloss	sg.	pl.
feather	ñzùna	ázùna
gum/glue	ñdúr	ádúr
forehead	ñjan	ájan
catfish (spp.)	ñdurum	ádurum
blood	ñji	

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

The noun classes of Tarok have been described in Sibomana (1981) with additional material in Longtau (2008). Sibomana (1981) sets up 6 singular and plural noun classes for Tarok (Table 47);

Table 47. Tarok noun-class pairings

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

The order of the numbers seems less than ideal, but since it is reprised in Longtau (2008) it is also used here. Historically, these pairings must result from the merger of a more complex system, as in many

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

Persons in Tarok are almost exclusively in Class 1/2, i.e. with a *u-/o-* prefix alternation, as shown in Table 48;

Table 48. Tarok u-/o- prefix alternations

sg.	pl.	Gloss
ùb̄ar	ōbar	husband
ùc̄ár	oc̄ár	wife, woman
ùk̄à	ok̄à	ancestors
ùnang	onáng	mother
ùnəm	onəm	man, person
ùp̄ò(n)	opó	father
ùrìm	orìm	ancestor
ùshózhà	oshózhà	soldier
ùyèn	ován	child

There is a strong tendency for mass nouns, liquids and abstracts to have the homorganic N- prefix (Table 49);

Table 49. Tarok N- prefixes on mass nouns

Tarok	Gloss
̀m̀m̀ì	oil
̀m̀p̀ə̀ŋ	urine
̀m̀p̀ì	fat
̀ǹc̀ìr	blood
̀ǹd̀ə̀ŋ	water
̀ǹg̀g̀ù	smoke

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

2.10 Eloyi

The Eloyi or Afo language is spoken in about twenty villages in Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The principle sources on the language are Mackay (1964) and Armstrong (1964, 1983, 1984⁴). The classification of Eloyi has been disputed, all the more so because the lexical database for comparison is been so weak. All the preliminary sources classified Eloyi as Plateau 2, i.e. together Izere, Tyap etc. (e.g. Greenberg 1963; Williamson & Shimizu 1968; De Wolf 1971). Armstrong (1983) set out the case for classifying Eloyi as Idomoid. However, in Armstrong's (1984:29) final published discussion of the subject he expresses some doubts, concluding 'Eloyi does not now seem as close to Idoma as it did when only Varvil's list was available'. Eloyi has a rich system of alternating nominal prefixes, in contrast to the remainder of Idomoid, and is provisionally treated here as Plateau, though with significant influence from Idomoid.

Despite the complex affix-pairings, many words have zero prefixes, perhaps due to the impact of extensive bilingualism with Idomoid languages. Many alternations have only one or two cases so far recorded, which makes setting up the system highly provisional. **Table 50** shows the nominal prefix pairings in Eloyi.

⁴ Despite its title, this is about Eloyi.

Table 50. Nominal prefix pairings in Eloyi

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

kV- prefixes are probably the most common in Eloyi singulars and *IV-* for plurals. Although usually some type of stem harmony would be expected to operate there is no evidence for this in Eloyi. Eloyi noun-class pairings do not show much semantic clustering. Most nouns referring to persons have diverse singulars, and plurals in *a-* or *e-*. Mother and father have an exceptional class prefix pair which may reflect the Niger-Congo persons class.

V-/mba-

Gloss	sg.	pl.
Father	á-da	mbá-da
Mother	éné	mbéné

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

3. Conclusion: Plateau nominal affixing

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

- Plateau languages originally had a rich noun class system with CV- and V- prefixes and alliterative concord
- A wave of renewal led to many of the CV- prefixes disappearing or becoming unproductive and replaced by a much smaller set of V- prefixes
- There is some evidence for underspecified vowels in CV- prefixes showing concord with stem vowels although this is too rare to be conclusive
- There is evidence for a class pair for persons, probably V-/bV-, although the segments of the singular prefix are less certain

- e) Proto-Plateau almost certainly had an unpaired class marking liquids, mass nouns and abstracts. Unlike Kainji this rarely realised as *ma-* and several branches of Plateau have *nV-*. However, there are unpaired classes with quite different segments which may be innovative
- f) There is strong evidence that proto-Plateau had *N-* prefixes, homorganic with the following consonant, and present in most branches. However, there is no evidence for a consistent semantic association
- g) There is weak evidence that the Bantu Class 9 prefix, *nì-*, existed in early Plateau

The paper presents a summary of what is known about number marking strategies on nouns in the Plateau languages. Further work will enrich the picture, but it is unlikely to contribute to a coherent reconstruction, as affix renewal has been very extensive.

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⁵ URL <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/Benue-Congo/Plateau/Vienna%202005%20paper.pdf>

⁶ URL <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Africa/Nigeria/Atlas%20of%20Nigerian%20Languages-%20ed%20III.pdf>

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