Morphological classes and gender in əná-Yungur

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Abstract
This paper provides an analysis of the gender system of Ɓə́ná-Yungur (glottocode: bena1260), distinguishing noun classes proper, defined as agreement classes, from morphological classes, defined in terms of number marking on nouns. The gender system is typologically unusual in its symmetry and simplicity. Ɓə́ná-Yungur has three noun classes in the singular and the same three classes in the plural. All logically possible singular-plural pairings are attested, except one. Morphological classes are much more numerous than noun classes and they show a high degree of singular-plural polarity. We argue that many of the morphological class markers are historically stacked, and therefore that their high number does not reflect a complex proto-system. This is important, because the comparison of noun class systems is used as the main criterion for the genealogical classification of languages currently classified as Adamawa and Gur.
Keywords: morphological classes, noun classes, gender, stacking

1   Introduction

This paper analyses nominal classification in the Ɓə́ná-Yungur language of Nigeria. The existence of noun classes in the Ɓə́ná-Mboi group is known since the pioneering work on these languages by Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer (1991, 1993, 1996), who relies heavily on noun class morphology in his (so far unpublished) efforts to classify the languages of the Gur and Adamawa families. By keeping a strict distinction between noun classes and morphological classes in our synchronic analysis of nominal classification (following Corbett 1991), we show that the gender system is typologically unusual in its simplicity and symmetry. With symmetry we here mean that all singular noun classes also exist in the plural and vice versa. Moreover, the analysis of the rich morphological class system shows that its complexity can be reduced by subgrouping class markers into sets that consist of a basic marker and one or two markers presumably diachronically derived from it by means of stacking. This insight has consequences for the reconstruction of class markers in the Ɓə́ná-Mboi group, and hence ultimately for language classification.

Traditionally, specialists of the Niger-Congo languages use four criteria to define noun classes, viz. agreement, class marking on nouns, number distinctions, and membership of singular-plural pairings. In this tradition, two nouns are analysed as belonging to different noun classes if they trigger different agreement patterns, or if they have a different class affix, or if one is a singular noun and the other a plural noun, or if they belong to different singular-plural pairings. These criteria are often implicit and they can be combined in different ways. Among Bantuists, for instance, it is common to distinguish two noun classes in a set of singular nouns that trigger the same agreement pattern, if they have different class affixes and if their plurals belong to different classes (defined along the same lines). The convenience of this approach is that it tracks historical changes in the noun class systems of individual languages, thereby helping to identify cognate class markers across languages of the same family. If two agreement

patterns merged, for instance, the classes they defined can still be distinguished by means of other criteria. However, this approach does not always result in the most insightful synchronic analysis of nominal classification in individual Niger-Congo languages, and we think that it is better reserved for comparative studies. We will therefore equate noun classes with agreement classes: sets of nouns that trigger the same agreement pattern. Following a Niger-Congo terminological convention, we will use the term *genders* for singular-plural pairings of noun classes. Genders correspond to controller genders in Corbett's (1991) terminology and noun classes to target genders. *Gender* is also the term for the grammatical feature. Morphological classes are sets of nouns that have the same class marker, a marker that signals whether the noun has singular or plural number and that gives a more or less reliable indication of the noun class assignment of the noun. Although the link between noun classes and morphological classes is perfectly obvious, there is rarely a one-to-one relation between both.

This paper is based on original data from field work we carried out in Nigeria. We gathered initial data with about ten speakers in the village of Dumne during a pilot study in Adamawa State. Due to the insecurity in the region, we subsequently invited native speaker consultants to come and work with us in Kwara State for longer periods in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Our main consultants are Sabeta Bukta and Bitrus Andrew, two male mother tongue speakers in their early thirties who use Ɓə́ná-Yungur on a daily basis. We recorded many texts, including dialogues, which are partly transcribed and translated. However, the data used in this paper are almost entirely elicited. Even if the use of naturalistic data might alter the description at some points, we are confident of the overall validity of our analysis. The scope of the paper is restricted to a basic analysis of nominal classification. The distribution of class markers in the noun phrase and the possible link with construct forms of nouns need further study.

Section 2 provides an introduction to the Ɓə́ná-Yungur language. It is followed by a section on the gender system (Section 3), an analysis of the morphological classes (Section 4), a discussion of gender assignment (Section 5) and a concluding discussion with a comparative perspective.

2   The Ɓə́ná-Yungur language

The Ɓə́ná-Yungur language is a language from the Ɓə́ná-Mboi group traditionally classified as a subgroup of the Adamawa family of Niger-Congo, in which it probably occupies an isolated position according to Kleinewillinghöfer (to appear). The speakers refer to their languages as *ě: ɓə́nā* 'mouth/language of Ɓə́ná'. The name *Yungur* is originally an exonym, but today it is regularly used by the Ɓə́ná themselves. Since speakers of the Lala varieties of the Ɓə́ná-Mboi group identify themselves as Ɓə́ná as well, Kleinewillinghöfer (1993) proposes to use *Ɓə́ná-Yungur* as the name of the language, a convention we will follow.

Ɓə́ná-Yungur is spoken in an area north of the Benue river in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The largest settlement is the town of Dumne, where the use of the Pə́rá dialect is predominant. Our consultants are all Pə́rá speakers from Dumne. Ɓə́ná-Yungur is used vigorously in its area, but we have often observed Ɓə́ná-Yungur children speaking Hausa. Attitudes towards Ɓə́ná-Yungur are positive. According to Bitrus Andrew, speakers recently started using Ɓə́ná-Yungur in their encounters with Fulani herdsmen, where previously they used Fula. There is a language committee in place in Ɓə́ná country, the Yungur Luke Partnership Project, which created and distributed several editions of a brochure that makes proposals for a spelling and contains some grammar notes. A native speaker, Saul Samuel, studied linguistics and wrote a term paper on modality and aspect in Ɓə́ná-Yungur (Samuel 2013), and also assisted Bitrus

Andrew in successfully learning to use WeSay, a lexicographical tool created by SIL to assist non-linguists in making a dictionary of their language.

In our preliminary analysis Ɓə́ná-Yungur has twenty six consonant phonemes: /b, p, d, t, t͡ʃ, g, k, gb, kp, ʔ, ɓ, ɗ, f, z, s, ʃ, h, m, n, ɲ, ŋ, l, v̰, r, y, w/. So far, we found the labial-dental flap (/v̰/) in one ideophone only. We currently analyse geminates and prenasalised stops as successions of two phonemes. Ɓə́ná-Yungur distinguishes six phonological vowel qualities /i, e, a, ə, o, u/. All can be phonologically nasal, with the possible exception of ə. Vowel length is contrastive throughout the vowel system. This brings the vowel inventory to twenty two phonemes. Utterance-initially, vowels are often pre-glottalised and voiced stops partially or fully devoiced, with the exception of /gb/, but including implosives. Optional initial devoicing is especially common with fricatives. Pre-pausal glottalisation is regular with stops and also occurs with continuants, nasals, /l/ and vowels. Consonant lengthening is another important phonetic property associated with the pre-pausal position.

There are three level tones, viz. Low, Mid and High, which can combine into every logically possible contour on any syllable type: LM, LH, ML, MH, HM, and HL. More complex contours, such as HLH, exist as well, but any restrictions on their occurrence are yet to be studied. The lexical distribution of tones is intriguing. In stem initial position, there is a very strong correlation between tone and onset consonant such that the voiced plosives (i.e. /b, d, g, gb/) are almost exclusively followed by a L tone and the majority of other consonants by either M or H. The behaviour of prenasalised stops depends on their place of articulation. Bilabial /mb/ and alveolar /nd/ do not behave as voiced stops. Only three out of 39 are followed by a L tone. Velar /ŋg/, in contrast, is followed by a L in ten out of thirteen cases. The phonemes /s/ and /m/ have an ambiguous behaviour too, but for /s/ comparative data show that it is the result of a merger of *s and *z and that the reflexes of *z are followed by a L and those of *s by H or M. Tonology is fairly straightforward. There are two important tone rules: tone spread and contour simplification. L and M do not behave as distinct tones in the application of these rules. The morphotonology of the language is more complicated. For instance, nouns that are entirely H or entirely L each split into two tone classes when in certain syntactic positions, especially that of dependent in a genitive construction.

Both open and closed syllables are possible. In their citation form, most words end in an open syllable. Final closed syllables are more common in minor word classes, such as adverbs. Utterance-internally, word final vowels are often reduced and in some constructions deleted. When the final vowel is deleted, the result is a word-final closed syllable. The resulting final consonant may be optionally glottalised comparably to the pre-pausal context. Vowel-initial syllables are rare. They are found mostly in function words and borrowings. Consonant clusters are possible across word boundaries and within words, either across syllable boundaries or in syllable onsets, but there are no pre-pausal or phrase-internal word-final consonant clusters in Ɓə́ná-Yungur. Consonant clusters in syllable onsets are of two types. The first one involves a sequence of a homorganic nasal and a voiced stop. The second one involves a sequence of a stop and /w/, /l/ or /r/. In careful speech, some of the clusters of the second type are broken up by a schwa transforming a monosyllabic sequence into a bisyllabic one, as in *t(ə́)wá* 'guinea fowl' with an optional schwa vs. *twá:twá* 'wide' where no such option exists. The two cluster types can combine provided the first consonant is a homorganic nasal, as in *mb(ə́)rã̌* 'water'.

Bound segmental morphology is mostly suffixing. Modifiers follow the element they modify. Basic clause structure is SVO, although in some TAM constructions first and second person pronominal objects are preposed to the verb. Negative polarity is marked by a clause-final negative marker *ré* in combination with some negative morphology earlier in the

clause. Basic TAM categories, including Perfective, Habitual, Progressive and Future, are marked syncretically on the verb and the subject pronominal. Pronominal agreement targets agree in animacy with their controller, where animacy basically reflects the self-locomotion ability of the referent. Inanimate pronominal targets are mostly realized as absence of an overt pronominal. Non-selective interrogative pronominals make a distinction between human *yānā* 'who?' and non-human *mbīː* 'what?'. A clusivity distinction is made in 1PL between inclusive and exclusive 1PL pronominals, both as subjects and non-subjects. Dedicated singular and plural logophoric forms exist for animate subject and possessive pronominals.

3   Gender in Ɓśná-Yungur

Ɓśná-Yungur has gender agreement on nominal modifiers, including demonstratives, indefinite determiners, possessive pronouns, adjectives and participles. Pronominal agreement targets agree in animacy with their controller, not in gender. There are three distinct agreement patterns, which we represent by means of the form of the demonstrative without their M tone diacritic, viz. *wa*, *ya* and *ɓa*. These three agreement patterns are always given in the same order in the following examples of demonstrative (1), possessive (2), adjectival (3) and indefinite determiner (4) targets.

(1)   a. fśtáː wâ 'this horn'
       b. ét yâ 'this person'
       c. án ɓâ 'this place'

(2)   a. dòbrɜ̀ wānō 'my bush'
       b. rèːké yánē 'my sugar cane'
       c. ám ɓánā 'my children'

(3)   a. páː ʧéɓ-ô 'black sesame'
       b. ét ʧéɓ-ê 'black person'
       c. ɓét ʧéɓ-â 'black people'

(4)   a. gòː kǒ 'a certain chicken'
       b. é(t) ké 'somebody (lit. some person)'
   c. ɓót ká 'a certain tree'

Comparing the demonstrative agreement targets with singular controllers in (1) with those with plural controllers in (5), shows that exactly the same agreement patterns are used with singular and plural controllers, a situation that is not attested in any other language that we are aware of.

(5)   a. wùmsɜ̂ wā 'these owls'
       b. bàŋgē yā 'these palm trees'
       c. ám ɓā 'these children'

When we look at singular-plural pairings, we see that every logically possible gender is attested in our data, except *ɓa-ɓa*. The absence of the latter is no doubt due to the fact that, both in the singular and in the plural, agreement pattern *ɓā* is rare. In the singular, it is triggered by the nouns *ándá* 'place' and *mbú* 'thing', but not by phrasal compounds headed by these nouns, such as *mbú kɜ́fā* 'food' (lit. 'thing to eat'). In the plural, it is triggered by some terms for human

beings. This gender system, summarised in Figure 1, is typologically exceptional in its symmetry and simplicity.

Figure 1: The Ɓɔ́ná-Yungur gender system

SG   PL

wa   wa

ya   ya

ɓa   ɓa
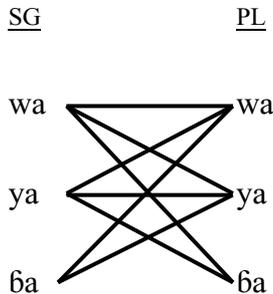
We will come back to the gender system in Section 5, which discusses gender assignment.

4   Morphological classes in Ɓɔ́ná-Yungur

Morphological classes are sets of nouns that have the same number marking. Ɓɔ́ná-Yungur has about thirty of them. Most class markers are postposed, but some plural class markers are preposed or circumposed. It is not yet entirely clear whether these markers should be analysed as affixes, clitics or separate words. They are probably not a homogeneous group in terms of their degree of morphological bonding. For the time being, we represent them all as affixes. We provide class markers without tone marking, because their underlying tone is not always clear yet and often partly or fully lexically determined. The tone of the markers *-ra*, *-ta* and *-o*, for instance, is usually H if the last syllable of the noun stem is H and M if the last stem syllable is M. When the last stem tone is L, nothing can be predicted about the tone of these class markers. Table 1 provides an overview of the morphological classes, arranged in columns according to their type of coding, viz. singular and plural coded, only plural coded and no coding. Some classes, presented between brackets, contain less than three nouns in our current lexical database. The table is not fully exhaustive, but all major classes are represented.

Table 1: The morphological classes of Ɓɔ́ná

SG / PL	∅ / PL	∅
-a / -e	(∅ / -a)	SG = PL
(-a / -me)	(∅ / am-)	no PL
(-a / -sa)	(∅ / -ma)	
(-a / -se)	∅ / -me	
-e / -a	∅ / -mse	
-e / am- … -a	∅ / yòː-	
-e / -ma	(∅ / -se)	
(y-)…-e / ɓ- -a	∅ / -sa	
-e / -sa	∅ / -ta	
(-e / -ta)		
-o / -sa		
(-o / am^{M}-…-a)		
(-o / -ta)		

-o / -a		
-ra / -ta		
suppletion		

When determining the morphological class of a word, we take a strictly synchronic approach, recognising a class marker only when it commutes with another one. The final -*a* and -*o* of the singular nouns in (6) are analysed as class markers, because they commute with -*e* and -*sa* in the plurals in (7). The final *a* and *o* of the singular nouns in (8) may undergo some morphonological alternations, but they do not commute (9) and are analysed as part of the stem.

(6) a. sàb-ā 'tamarind tree'
     b. dìk-ō 'game'
(7) a. sàb-ē 'tamarind trees'
     b. dìk-sâ 'games'
(8) a. pīrā 'walking stick'
     b. sóktó 'sieve'
(9) a. pīrā-ːmē 'walking sticks'
     b. sóktɔ́-sâ 'sieves'

Consequently, we also do not analyse the final *ma* in the mass nouns in (10) as a class marker, although there is no doubt that it is the reflex of one. In other Ɓǝ́ná-Mboi languages, for instance, nouns ending in *ma* trigger a specific agreement pattern (demonstrative *ma*). The formal and functional resemblance with the Bantu class 6 prefix *ma-* is also obvious.

(10) dùːmà 'salt'
      hwɑ̄̃ːmā 'paste'
      mēːmā 'milk'
      mūtmā 'blood'
      sómmâ 'urine'
      bàːmà 'chaff'

Now that it is clear how the zeroes in Table 1 should be interpreted, we will first discuss the morphological classes of the second and third column, and then turn to those presented in the first column. Most of the plural markers used with nouns that have an unmarked singular (column 2), can also be found in the plural of nouns with a marked singular (column 1). The two exceptions are -*mse* and *yòː-*. The latter of these two is not attested in the other Ɓǝ́ná-Mboi languages and often marks the plural of borrowings (11).

(11) yòː-bwàtɔ́rè 'white people, Europeans' (< Hausa)
      yòː-dàŋkálē 'sweet potatoes' (< Hausa)
      yòː-máŋgòrò 'mangoes'
      yòː-gwéːvà 'guavas'

Turning to the third column of Table 1, more than thirty percent of nouns have no number marking. In a few of these cases, our consultants state that the form of the singular noun is identical to that of the plural (12). Some of these nouns are used to refer to staple foods and could be thought to be mass/uncount on semantic grounds. However, they can be the object of

pluractional verbs (13b), showing that they can be plural, and therefore count, and that number is simply not coded on them. In this respect, compare (14) where *dwàlò* 'ritual whip' is clearly count and equally has no number marking.

(12) a. sḕːkē 'flute/s (sp.)'
      b. ṓː 'field/s (sp.)'
(13) a. tóː dásè 'Take a bean / a quantity of beans.'
      b. hāː dàsè 'Take.PLURAC (several individual) beans.'
(14) a. tóː dwálò 'Take a ritual whip.'
      b. hāː dwàlò 'Take.PLURAC ritual whips.'

Interestingly, for the majority of nouns that lack a class marker in the singular, our fluent native speaker consultants say that they do not know or have never heard the plural. This is all the more surprising, since the *yòː-* plural, used with many borrowings, could be expected to act as a default plural marker. At the same time, our consultants normally accept using such uncoded nouns with pluractional verbs.

Figure 2 shows the data from the first column of Table 1 in the type of chart traditionally used for representing Niger-Congo noun class systems. Full lines represent common SG-PL pairings and dotted lines exceptional pairings. The width of the full lines is proportional to the number of nouns that belong to the class pairing. Note that the number of morphological class markers in the plural is twice as high as in the singular, which is typologically rather unusual (but perfectly explainable, see below).

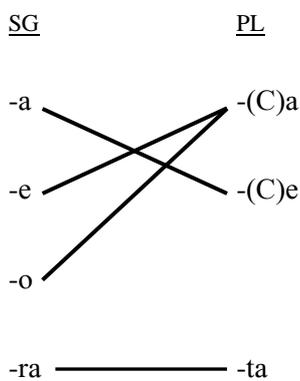Figure 2: Morphological class markers (of nouns marked in the SG and the PL)
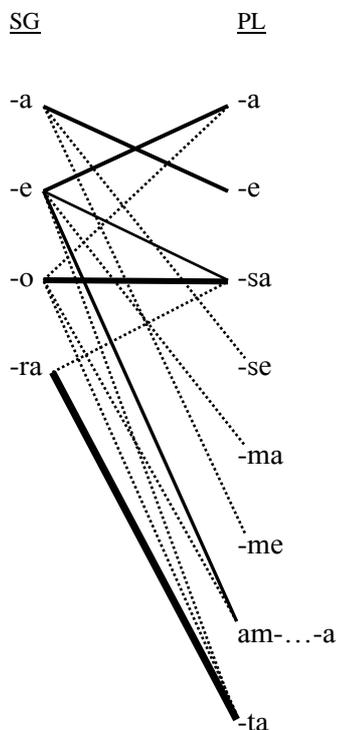
A comparison of Figure 2 to Figure 1 suggests that the system of morphological classes is structurally very different from the gender system, and much more complex. This may lead

comparativists to the hypothesis that the morphological class system is the reflex of a rich noun class system in a proto stage of the language, the breakdown of which is more advanced in the agreement patterns than in the nominal class markers

However, the morphological class system of Ɓóná-Yungur shows parallels with its simple and symmetrical gender system, and some further analysis can reduce its complexity. An obvious parallelism with the gender system is that two morphological class markers, -a and -e, are used with singular nouns as well as with plural nouns. Note also that all plural markers end in a or e. Ignoring the markers -ra and -ta, and the words for 'place' and 'thing',[1] all nouns that take the singular marker -a have a plural marker that ends in e and all nouns that have -e or -o in the singular end in a in the plural.[2] Thus, -se and -me are like -e in marking the plural of nouns with a singular in -a. Likewise, -sa and -ma form a sub-paradigm with -a.

Figure 3: Morphological class markers (simplified)

<u>SG</u>   <u>PL</u>

-a   -(C)a

-e   -(C)e

-o

-ra —————— -ta

An alternative hypothesis to assuming that the morphological class markers are reflexes of numerous proto-forms, is therefore that many of them are historically stacked forms. The plural marker -mse which occurs with nouns that lack marking in the singular, appears to be doubly stacked: -m-s-e. The hypothesis of historical stacking in the class markers -ma, -me, -sa, -se and -mse is strengthened by a number of clear cases of synchronic stacking in plural marking (15), and in denominal derivation (16-17).

(15)   hő:-rá 'tick' / hő:-tɔ́-sâ 'ticks'
(16)   tā̄:-rā / tā̄:-tā 'blind person/s' → tā̄:-tɔ̄-sô 'blindness'
(17)   a. bàt-ā / bàtʃ-ē 'baobab tree/s' → bàt-ɔ̀-rá / bàt-ɔ̀-tá 'baobab fruit/s'
        b. kūml-á / kūml-é 'tree/s (sp)' → kūml-ā:-rá / kūml-ā:-tá 'kumla fruit/s'

Likewise, the many nouns that end in a non-commuting o or a in the singular, are likely to have historically stacked suffixes (SG + PL) in their plural form too, see the examples in (8-9). Finally, multiple marking of plural number is not restricted to stacked suffixes. Many nouns with a plural suffix -a also have a plural prefix ám^M-. Although this preposed plural marker is most probably grammaticalised from ámbá 'children', it often occurs on nouns that are not used to refer to animate beings.

(18)   a. bàmlè / ám bàmlà 'donkey/s'
        b. bwàdē / ám bwàdā 'calabash/es (sp)'
        c. pwé: / ám pwǎ: 'knife/knives'

The assignment of nouns to morphological classes shows some semantic regularities, but for the majority of nouns, we did not find a clear semantic motivation for their class assignment. The clearest case of semantic assignment are the names of trees, which have SG -*a* and PL -*e*, with very few exceptions. Conversely, the -*a* /-*e* class pairing is almost entirely dedicated to names for trees. The two exceptions in our lexical database are nouns with human reference: *yámá* 'Libo person' and *də̀wà* 'singer (sp)', but for the latter our consultants have doubts on which of the two forms, *də̀wà* or *də̀wè*, is singular and which is plural. Names of fruits are usually derived from the tree name by suffixing -*ra* (PL -*ta*). About thirty percent of the nouns that are used to refer to human beings have the suffix -*e* in the singular and, consequently, a suffix that ends in *a* in the plural, sometimes with a *ɓ*- prefix in the plural and/or some degree of suppletion in the stem. The nouns for animals for which our consultants gave a plural form are mostly -*o/-sa, -ra/-ta* or /-*sa*.

5   Gender assignment

When we elicit information on the gender assignment of nouns, we are faced with variation and hesitations that remind of the difficulties that otherwise fluent speakers have to give the plural form of many nouns. This variation suggests that the gender assignment of nouns is unstable in the language, in that different systems coexist in the speech community. This does not necessarily mean that the gender system is on its way of being lost. Agreement targets HAVE TO agree, and only some speakers generalise one agreement pattern to the detriment of the others. A first distinction must be made between the *ɓa*-pattern and the two others, viz. *wa* and *ya*. Few nouns trigger the *ɓa*-pattern, but the nouns that do are rather frequent. In the singular these are the nouns *ándá* 'place', *gǎː* 'sun' and *ɓótá* 'tree'. Agreement within phrasal compounds headed by *mbú* 'thing', such as *mbú kə́fā* 'food' and *mbú tómā* 'thing to do', also follows the *ɓa*-pattern, but these compounds do not themselves trigger the *ɓa*- agreement. In the plural, the *ɓa*-class contains nouns that are used to refer to human beings, as well as the noun *ríá̰* 'foxes.' Although not all nouns with human reference trigger the *ɓa*-class in the plural, assignment to the *ɓa*-class in the plural is clearly semantically motivated, as can be observed in polysemous words such as *ká̰ːmá* (19).[3] All nouns that trigger *ɓa*-agreement, whether in the singular or the plural, can alternatively trigger *wa*-agreement.

(19)   a.   *ká̰ːmə́ wá* 'these seeds'
          b.   *ká̰ːmə́ ɓá* 'these paternal consanguinal relatives'

Assignment to the *wa*- and *ya*-classes is not semantically motivated. Here, different speakers have different rules of assignment. Two of our main consultants have a formal assignment rule based on the last segment of the noun, irrespective of whether this belongs to the stem or to a morphological class marker. Words that end in *a* or *o* tend to trigger the *wa*-pattern, all other words the *ya*-pattern. Another consultant tends to generalise the *wa*-pattern to all nouns in elicitation, the most noticeable exception being frequent singular nouns that end in *e*. For less common singular nouns that end in *e*, the *ya*-pattern is always accepted, but not necessarily provided spontaneously. This speaker also has the *ɓa*-gender with *wa* as an alternative gender assignment. The gender system shown in Figure 1 is therefore valid for all speakers, but speakers differ in the way they assign nouns to genders.

6   Summary and comparative notes

We saw that Ɓə́ná-Yungur has only three noun classes – each of which can contain singular and plural nouns – but eight genders and up to thirty morphological classes. The scenario that is most appealing to specialists of the Niger-Congo languages in such a situation is one in which a historically complex noun class system has been simplified, in this case starting with the agreement patterns. Simplified noun class systems, i.e. simpler systems that can be shown to have evolved from more complex systems, are very widely attested in many branches of Niger Congo (Good 2012). In the case of Ɓə́ná-Yungur, however, the complexity of the morphological class system is more likely to be an innovation, brought about by the creation of new class markers and the stacking of existing ones.

The closest relatives of Ɓə́ná-Yungur have similar systems of nominal classification, but with slightly more noun classes. Kleinewillinghöfer (1991) signals five paradigms of agreement markers in Mboi of Livo (*wa*, *ya*, *ta*, *ma*, *za*), six in Mboi of Gulungo (*wa*, *ya*, *ra*, *ta*, *ma*, *za*), and seven in Ɓə́ná-Laala of Yang (*wa*, *ya*, *ɓa*, *ra*, *ta*, *ma*, *za*). The gender systems of these Ɓə́ná-Mboi languages are summarised in figures 4-6. These languages all have a core of classes that occur both in the singular and in the plural, corresponding to the classes found in Ɓə́ná-Yungur. Interestingly, the singular-plural pairings in these core noun classes show some of the polarity that can be found in the Ɓə́ná-Yungur morphological classes. This is especially clear in Mboi of Gulungo, where the genders *wa/ya* and *ya/wa* are attested, but not *wa/wa* and *ya/ya*. The classes that do not exist in Ɓə́ná-Yungur, viz. *ra, ta, za* and *ma*, are restricted to either singular or plural controllers in the other languages. Some gaps in the figures may be due to incomplete documentation, since Kleinewillinghöfer (1991) is based on survey work.

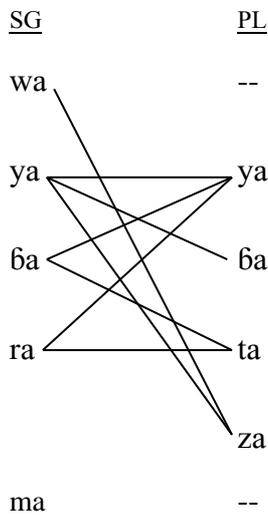Figure 4: The Laala Yang gender system
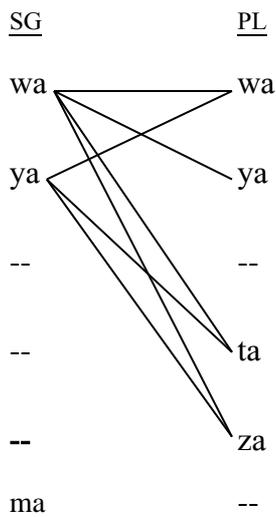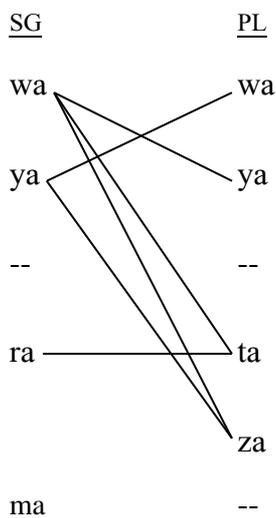
Figure 5: The Mboi Livo gender system

SG	PL
wa	wa
ya	ya
--	--
--	ta
--	za
ma	--

Figure 6: The Mboi of Gulungo gender system

SG	PL
wa	wa
ya	ya
--	--
ra	ta
	za
ma	--

We hope to have shown that the typologically unusual aspects of nominal classification in Ɓəná-Yungur can only be appreciated if we follow the practice of distinguishing between noun classes (or target genders) and genders (or controller genders) on the one hand and between noun classes and morphological classes on the other. The rich set of morphological class markers is an innovation in the Ɓəná-Mboi languages, created mostly through stacking, which should be kept in mind in the search for cognates among class markers in the Adamawa and Gur languages.

Notes

[1] The words for 'place' *ándá* and 'thing' *mbú* are also the two nouns that make up agreement pattern *ɓa* in the singular. They are both marked *-sa* in the plural: *án-sâ* 'places' and *mbú-sâ* 'things'.

[2] This is reminiscent of the phenomenon often called *gender polarity* in Afro-Asiatic languages such as Somali, which, at least in Somali, could better be called *morphological class polarity*.

[3] This reminds of the relation between nouns with human reference and gender 1/2 in most Bantu languages: all nouns that belong to this gender have human reference, but not all nouns for humans are found in that gender.

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