

A MAN AND A WOMAN, OR GENDER
MARKING
IN A NOMINAL SYSTEM

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Gender coding

Many Chadic languages encode a two-gender distinction in the reference system, specifically in the system of subject, object, and possessive pronouns. It appears that outside of the system of pronouns there is no gender marking in the verbal system, although no specific studies have been conducted on this subject. We do not yet have a comparative study of gender marking in the nominal system that would include languages from all three (or four, depending on classification) branches of Chadic languages. What we do have are studies of individual languages and SCHUH's brief comparative remarks made in conjunction with his study of gender in Miya. SCHUH (in press) states that in West Chadic, gender systems evolved in one of two directions : Some languages have developed overt gender marking on nouns (Hausa, Bade, Warji, Ron-Fyer), while others have lost gender as a lexical distinction in nouns. The interest of the gender marking in Mupun lies in the fact that we may

observe a development of gender marking at its very early stages, *in statu nascendi* as it were. That may enable us to compare the independent development of the same category in several related languages. In Hausa (NEWMAN 1979 : 199ff) three processes were involved in the development of feminine forms : derivation (suffix *-nyàa*), inflection (suffix *-aa*), and overt marking, also by the ending *-aa*. The only proposal for the historical origin of *-aa* is that of SKINNER 1975, who derives it from a form containing /t/.

Most nouns in Mupun are not formally marked for gender. Nevertheless, nouns denoting female humans are referred to by one of the third person feminine pronouns, *war*, *wa*, *de*, *den*, *paa*. Thus gender distinction is grammatically encoded in the reference system. What these reference pronouns indicate is only the sex of the humans and some animals, whenever there is a need to make a distinction. The gender distinction is not a property of nouns, but rather of the objects to which the nouns refer. It is thus a different system from the one encountered in languages with grammatical gender such as Indo-European and Semitic, where nouns are inherently masculine, feminine, or neuter. A notable exception to this general pattern is a class of proper names. This class is interesting for general linguistics because it enables us to observe how a formal gender distinction in nouns may emerge.

Gender of proper names.

As is to be expected of languages in general, there are many sources of proper names in Mupun, some borrowed from English, Hausa, or other languages spoken in the area, and there are several types of native names. One type with which we will not be concerned here consists of names that are compounds. These names can be appellative of either a man or a woman, i.e., these names do not indicate the gender of the bearer of the name, e.g. :

(1)

| | | | | |
|---------|------|----------|------|---------------|
| pèlwút | pèl | 'flower' | wút | 'bush papaya' |
| plánáan | plán | 'thank' | náan | 'God' |
| planzák | " | | zák | 'again' |

There is also one type that indicates the gender of the bearer. The proper names of this type have the form : $n\grave{a}+X$ "female proper name" and $\grave{d}\grave{a}+X$ "male proper name". The prefix $n\grave{a}$ is related to the independent lexeme $n\grave{a}a$ "woman!", and the prefix $\grave{d}\grave{a}$ is related to the independent lexeme $\grave{d}\grave{a}a$ "man!", both of which are used in contemporary Mupun only in vocative expressions, e.g. :

(2) oo,a zen naa

oh, Cop truth woman

'oh, that is true indeed, madam'

(3) oo,a zen daa
 oh, Cop truth woman
 'oh, that is true indeed, man'

(4) a ta bak daa
 2m take slowly man
 'take it easy, man'

(5) a nok mbwake tek daa
 2m stop 2mR Assoc attention
 'man, don't pay any attention to it'

(6) surep de yak se mo hay daa
 women Rel time Dem P1 Neg
 'contemporary women, no way, man'.

It is important to realize that the proper names are not derived through productive constructions meaning "man/woman who is X". Thus the proper name nãlõŋ, wich derives from lõŋ "wealth, cattle", does not mean "a wealthy woman". For this Mupun has a construction consisting of two nouns, viz., ngù lõŋ "a rich man" and mǎt lõŋ "a rich woman".

The two prefixes may be added to the same stem (X), which can be a noun, a verb, or an adjective. The interesting fact about the resulting formation is that the meaning of the proper noun is not the sum of its components. The speakers with whom I worked provided various, often conflicting interpretations of the "meaning" of the proper name. The following is a sample of the names I have in my data. While I give only one

form - either male or female - it must be remembered that for each example both forms, male and female, are possible and actually occur in the language.

When X is inherently a noun :

(7)

| | | |
|-------|-----|--------------------------------|
| dàmór | mór | 'oil' |
| dàbít | bít | 'morning' |
| nàlón | lón | 'wealth, cattle' |
| nàciá | ciá | 'rattle, a musical instrument' |
| dàkóm | kóm | 'peanut' |
| nàpús | pús | 'sun' |
| dàjós | Jos | toponym |
| dàsít | sít | |
| dàgón | gón | |

When X is inherently a verb :

(8)

| | | |
|--------|------|---------|
| dàgés | gés | 'shift' |
| nàyé | yé | 'think' |
| dàsùúm | sùúm | 'dream' |
| dàlép | lép | 'put' |
| dàwél | wél | |

When X is inherently an adjective :

(9)

| | | |
|--------|------|----------------|
| dàráp | ráp | 'dark, dirty' |
| dàwúrù | wúrù | 'smart, quick' |
| nàbáyè | báyè | 'small' |
| dàré | ré | 'nice' |
| nàkúur | kúur | 'close' |

There is one case of a proper name that is composed of the prefix *nà* and a pronoun. The word *nàwàr* indicates a female idol and is most probably composed with the third person feminine peronoun *wàr*.

Further lexicalization of gender.

If we assume that the addition of morphemes *naa* and *daa* to proper names was one of the first steps in the development of gender marking in the nominal system, we would expect this process to have an impact on some other part of the vocabulary as well. There is at least one morpheme whose categorial status, at least functionally, falls somewhere between a noun and a pronoun and which also can take the prefixes *na* and *da*. The morpheme in question is *kómták*, a form that does not appear in isolation and whose internal structure is obscure. When prefixes *na* and *da* are added to the stem *kómták* they produce the forms : *nákómták* 'such and such woman' and *dákómták* 'such and such man', e.g. :

(10)

wu man nà paa get dík n-dakomtak
 3m know Comp 3f Past marry Prep-such and such
 male
 'he would know that she married such and such'

There is evidence that the markers *nà* and *dà* have penetrated into other areas of the vocabulary of Mupun. In particular the two

prefixes have become components of names of animals, but they may also be found in nouns denoting non-animate objects. But interestingly they do not constitute part of the binary system as is the case with proper names. Each prefix is the only one available with a given name. Compare the following examples :

| | |
|--------|------------------------------|
| (11) | |
| dàkúr | 'turtle' |
| dàwúp | 'grasscutter' |
| dàfúan | 'hare' |
| dàcím | 'hedgehog' |
| nàwú | 'cattle egret (white egret)' |

Their behavior is thus rather different from the Indo-European gender markers on nouns. Most of the time gender markers of Indo-European languages are used to derive feminine nouns from masculine, or masculine nouns from feminine, as the case may be. This procedure is used with respect to proper names as well; e.g., in Polish, with respect to both native names and names borrowed from Romance or Germanic languages, we find the following pairs :

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| (12) | |
| <u>Masculine</u> | <u>Feminine</u> |
| Boleslaw | Boleslaw-a |
| Bogumil | Bogumil-a |
| Féliks | Feliks-a |
| Józef | Józef-a |
| Henryk | Henryk-a |

Therefore we have theoretically two possibilities : The existing gender markers are used to indicate the gender of the proper name, or the device that indicates the gender of the proper name becomes a grammatical morpheme to indicate the gender in the rest of the grammatical system of the language. Of the two possibilities only the first one is documented. The second remains in *potentiam*.

Origin of the gender markers.

In other languages from the Angas subgroup there are formal and functional equivalents of the indefinite *dākómták* and *nākómták*. In Sura these forms are *daa seri* and *naa seraa* respectively (information from a conversation among speakers of Mupun). JUNGRAITHMAYR 1963/1964 gives *dãã* as 'Herr, Titel eines Alteren' and for *naa* he gives 'meine Mutter'.

One of the most interesting things about the gender markers *na* and *da* seems to be the fact that they are not words retained from a Proto-Chadic, or even Proto-West Chadic, but rather that they have been borrowed from a non-Chadic language. Thus in Birom, a Plateau language of the Benue Congo branch of the Niger-Congo family there exists a morpheme *dãã* which BOUQUIAUX translates as 'father'. This morpheme is used in various syntactic constructions in a reduced form

ḍá where **ḍá** does not mean father any more. BOUQUIAUX 1970 : 218ff analyses those constructions as consisting of modifier-modified, where **ḍá** is the modifier, e.g. :

(13)

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------|
| ḍá-goy | 'God' | goy | 'sun' |
| ḍá-rwéy | 'an influential person' | rwéy | 'rich' |

These constructions differ from constructions with **ḍáa** meaning father, e.g. :

ḍáa gòm 'father of the chief'

Now this construction is quite similar to the proper names in Mupun, where **na** and **ḍa** are also used as modifiers of the following element. Even more importantly, there appear to exist proper names in some Plateau languages formed with **na** and **ḍa**.

The reader may surmise from the above that Mupun, and presumably other languages from the Angas group, have simply borrowed from Birom the whole construction, or at least the morphemes designating 'man' and 'woman'. The situation is not that simple. Although it is certain that the Angas languages have borrowed the morphemes involved and possibly the whole construction, it is by no means clear from what Plateau languages they have borrowed the morphemes in question. The feminine equivalent of **ḍá** in Birom is **hwa** 'woman'. Recall that in

Mupun it is ná. The exact source of the Mupun loan words has yet to be found, but it appears that it must be one of the languages from the Plateau group. Roger BLENCH informs me that forms ða and na are reconstructed for proto-Benue-Congo 'father' and 'mother' respectively. This is sufficient confirmation for the general source of the masculine and feminine markers.

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Abstract

The gender distinction in Mupun, encoded in the reference system, is not a property of nouns, but rather of the objects to which the nouns refer. A notable exception to this general pattern is a class of proper names where gender is encoded on nouns. This class is interesting for general linguistics because it enables us to observe how a formal gender distinction in nouns may emerge.

Résumé

La distinction du genre en mupun, encodée dans le système de référence n'est pas une propriété des noms mais plutôt des objets auxquels les noms réfèrent. Une classe de noms propres où le genre est contenu dans les noms constitue une exception remarquable à ce modèle général. Cette classe intéresse la linguistique générale car elle nous rend aptes à observer comment une distinction formelle de genre peut émerger dans les noms.

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