Chapter Thirteen

THE EXPRESSION OF NOMINAL PLURALITY IN EGGON

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Abstract

This paper examines the various ways of forming nominal plurality in Eggon, a Central Nigerian language. Plural formation is a crucial phenomenon in human languages. In an attempt to examine pluralization of Eggon nouns, the following methods were revealed: zero affixation, 'mo' prefixation, vowel alternation, reduplication, tonal permutation and vowel insertion. It was observed that vowel alternation involved the vowel 'o' changing to 'e' and the vowels 'ọ/o' changing to 'a'. In complete reduplication, the whole word repeats itself. Partial reduplication involves the repetition of the second syllable of a noun in order to form its plural. The vowels 'a' and 'e' are inserted immediately after the onset of the second syllable.

Introduction

Counting is an indispensable phenomenon in language. The basic evidence of the category of number is observed in the distinction between singular and plural in relation to nouns (see Lyons, 1968 and Robins, 1971). Eggon belongs to Plateau language group of Benue Congo language family (Greenberg, 1963). It is spoken in Nasarawa state of Nigeria.

Some scholars have studied plural formation in different languages. Ejele (1997) examined the expression of plurality in Esan. She established five different ways of pluralizing involving different word-classes. These are by (a) vowel alternation in nouns examples:

úkpọ̀n 'cloth'	íkpọ̀n	→	'clothes'	/u/ →	/i/
óràn	'wood/tree'	→	éràn 'woods/trees'	/o/ →	/e/

(b) The choice of the form of the determiner as in

ọ́nì	'the' (singular)	ọ́nì ọ̀gọ́ 'the bottle'
énì	'the' (plural)	énì ọ̀gọ́ 'the bottles'

(c) The reduplication of nouns. For instance

àbá	'father'	àbáàbá	'grandfather/mainly fathers'
èkhù	'door'	ékhúékhú	'doors'

(d) The addition of the suffix – nV to verbs as can be seen in

dẹ	'buy'	dẹnẹ	'buy many times'

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      bọ   'build'   bọnọ   'build many times'

(e)   Using inherently plural verbs. For example
      rié   ébè   'take (a) book'   h⬚ ébè 'pack books'
      rie   òkhúò   'take (a) wife'   h⬚ ikhúò 'pack wives'
                 = marry one wife   = marry many women

Anagbogu (2005), in an attempt to study Koring plurals, identified about five pluralization rules. He observed that pluralization of a great majority of nouns involves a very productive process which can be simply stated as noun + gbɔdɔrɔ 'many'.

For example:

      lὲtɔ   'head'   lὲtɔ gbɔdɔrɔ 'heads'
      zéŋ   'eye'   zéŋ gbɔdɔrɔ 'eyes'

Phoneme alternation also results in plural formation. For instance
      ìlágbá   'woman'   gbìlágbá   'women'   /i/ → /gb/
      ódūāŋ   'girl'   édūāŋ   'girls'   /o/ → /e/

Zero affixation in the formation of plural forms is very productive in Koring. This can be seen in the following data.
      àràà   'father'   àràà   'fathers'
      ássá/áká 'mother'   ássá/áká   'mothers'

The demonstratives have singular and plural forms. As in:
      wàdúm úwì   gbàdúm   íyè
      man   this   men   these
      'this   man'   'these   men'
      èjìm   úwè   èjìm   íyèkèkè
      horse   that   horse   those
      'that   horse'   'those   horses'

The above examples demonstrate that úwì and íyè co-occur with nouns that have the feature [+ human] while nouns that have [- human] feature co-occur with úwè and íyèkèkè. Ejele (1997) and Anagbogu (2005) note that the Esan and Koring pronoun systems are associated with the category of number because they have singular and plural forms whose occurrences are determined grammatically.

Similarly, Omachonu (2003) and (2008) present instances of noun plural formation in Igala. The studies show that the plural morpheme 'àb' co-occurs with human specific terms while

    156   ith animate objects. This suggests that human terms may take 'àb' and 'àm' but ~~other animate~~ terms cannot take 'àb'. 'Àb' is exclusively for human terms. Inanimate objects do not take any of these forms.

'Àb' plural morpheme is illustrated as follows:

ónekèle	'male'/'man'	àbókǝ̀lǝ	'males'/'men'
ímọtọ	'child'	àbímọtọ	'children'

'Àm' plural morpheme is evident in the following.

íye	'mother'	àmìye	'mothers'
ẹ́wẹ	'bird'	àmẹwẹ	'birds'

In the same vein, Nkamigbo (2009) examined lexical pluralization in Jaba. She observed the following pluralization strategies in the language: zero affixation, 'mò' prefixation, 'fu' prefixation, consonant alternation, reduplication, morpheme alternation and tonal permutation.

Methods of Pluralizing in Eggon
The pluralization strategies examined include:
i.   zero affixation
ii.   'mo' prefixation
iii.   vowel alternation
iv.   reduplication
v.   tonal permutation
vi.   vowel insertion

Zero Affixation
The data presented below are invariable whether they are used to express a singular or a plural notion.

	Singular	**Plural**
ground	ubing	ubing
water	amyi	amyi
fire	ọvrọ	ọvrọ
farm	agbi	agbi

Mo-Prefixation
The prefix – 'mo' is added to certain nouns in order to form plural.

	Singular	**Plural**
mother	ana	moana
child	anwye	moanwye
boy	anwyanọm	moanwyanọm
hunter	atọta	moatọta
thief	asi	moasi

Vowel Alternation
Ejele's (1997) study shows that many nouns mark pluralization by a difference in the initial vowel of the singular and plural pair. Similarly, Anagbogu's (2005) work demonstrates how some nouns undergo pluralization by changing the initial phonemes (consonants and vowels)

of the nouns in question. In Jaba, it is also observed that certain lexical items undergo pluralization by differences in their initial consonants.

In affirmation to Ejele's (1997) work, this study observes that certain nouns in Eggon form their plural through the process of vowel alternation. This suggests differences in the initial vowels of the nouns. The under listed demonstrate vowel alternation in Eggon:

	o ⟶ e	
	Singular	**Plural**
tongue	onom	enom
road	ozhẽ	ezhẽ
town	osku	esku
sickness	ololo	elolo
case	ombugu	embugu

	ọ/o ⟶ a	
	Singular	**Plural**
cloth	ọkyen	akyen
horn	ọgzọ	agzọ
house	ọdne	adne
chest	ongwu	angwu
rock	ongbre	angbre
corn	ogulu	agulu

2.4 Reduplication
Complete reduplication and partial reduplication are strategies of plural formation in Eggon. Partial reduplication also involves vowels. The inserted vowels are either 'a' or 'e'.
Complete reduplication

	Singular	**Plural**
tree	aki	akiaki
ancestor	ashim	ashimashim
knife	ekon	ekonekon

Partial reduplication

	Singular	**Plural**
room	aku	akuku
picture	amu	amumu
cloud	akpashi	akpakpashi

Partial reduplication with vowel insertion

	Singular	**Plural**
spoon	ashko	asheshko
throat	arogo	ararogo
skin	akpa	akpekpa

Tonal Permutation

Tonal variations constitute semantic change in tone languages. In Igbo, for example, the application of different tones to a certain lexical item brings about different meanings of the word. For instance, 'akwa'

akwa	'cry'
akwà	'cloth'
àkwa	'egg'
àkwà	'bed'

(High tones are left unmarked.)

This study observes that the application of pitch variations to certain lexical items results in the distinction along the dichotomy of singularity and plurality. This is unlike in Igbo. Pitch variations in Igbo have semantic undertone while they have both semantic and morphological undertones in Eggon. The Eggon language attests three level tones namely: high´, mid¯ and low`. The following plural forms based on tonal permutation are observed:

	Singular	**Plural**
lizard	àgá	ágá
housefly	èdzú	édzú
chicken	ènú	énú

Vowel Insertion

The vowels 'a' and 'e' are inserted at the word initial position to form nominal plural in Eggon.

'a' insertion

	Singular	**Plural**
flute	mada	amada
palm oil	masin	amasin
box	kpatu	akpatu

'e' insertion

	Singular	**Plural**
waist bead	bida	ebida
compound	kpazhi	ekpazhi
ladder	ngbaha	engbaha

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to examine methods of pluralizing in Eggon. The following methods were identified: zero affixation, 'mo' prefixation, vowel alternation, reduplication, tonal permutation and vowel insertion. Vowel alternation involves the vowel 'o' changing to 'e' and the vowels 'ọ/o' changing to 'a'.

Complete and partial reduplication are involved in plural formation. In complete reduplication, the whole word repeats itself. Partial reduplication involves the repetition of the second syllable of a noun in order to form its plural. The vowels 'a' and 'e' are inserted immediately after the onset of the second syllable.

In tonal permutation, it is observed that the first vowels of the words bear low tones for singular and they change to high tones for plural while the words remain unchanged. The vowels 'a' and 'e' are inserted at the word initial position to form nominal plurals.

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Language and culture complement each other in that as the environment changes, they typically respond by creating new terminology to describe it