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List of abbreviations

1sg	First person singular
1pl	First person plural
2sg	Second person singular
2pl	Second person plural
3sg	Third person singular
3pl	Third person plural
1/2obj	First or second person object
ATT	Attitude maker
APPL	Applicative
CON	Connector
DEM	Demonstrative
FUT	Future
HAB	Habitual
IPV	Imperfective
LOC	Locative
OBJ	Object
OM	Object marker
PFV	Perfective
POSS	Possessive
PST	Past

Number Marking in the Fur Language of the Sudan (Nilo-Saharan)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the nature of the number-marking system in the Fur language. The Fur Language is spoken in the Sudan's westernmost region of Darfur province. A small number of the Fur people live across the border in Chad.

1. Introduction

The Fur are an ethnic group inhabiting the Darfur region in western Sudan, where they are the largest group. This ethnic group speaks "Poor'ín Belé," the Fur language, which is a Nilo-Saharan language. Darfur is named after this group, bearing the meaning "The homeland of the Fur people." Some of the Fur live across the border in Chad.

This paper will introduce different kinds of number marking, explaining both singular and plural for the nouns, possessive pronouns and adjectives.

The number marking system is made by placing affixes attached to a word. The singular marking system of nouns has two prefixes and one suffix. "The Fur number-marking system, for example, involves plural suffixes, and one singulative suffix, and a singulative and plural prefixes (sometimes accompanied by tonal modification)" (Dimmendaal, 2000: 217).

2. Singulative marking system

Nouns may mark their singular by one of the singular prefixes and the suffix, others may be marked by either a preffix or the suffix -ŋ.

If the suffix -ŋ occurs, the noun is said to be singular, if it does not belong to the root. The reason is there are some noun which have (d&n) as their initial letter but do not represent singulative. Here are three tables illustrating singulative the system.

In table1, d- and n- are singulative prefixes.

Fur Singular	Fur Plural	English
d-arma	k-arma	skin
d-ida	k-ida-ŋa	grainary
d-olpá	k-olpa	horn
n-ima	k-ima-nta/k-ima-ŋa	shadow
n-ansá	k-ansá-ntá	breast

Table.1: (d- and n-) marking singular

Table 2, shows singular nouns that have a singular prefix and a suffix.

Fur Singular	Fur Plural	English
n-íná-ŋ	k-íná	louse
n-uma-ŋ	k-uma	kuma tree
d-urtá-ŋ	k-urtá	semsem

Table 2: (d- and -ŋ) are singulative affixes

In table 3, singular nouns are marked by the singulative suffix (ŋ)

Fur Singular	Fur Plural	English
sooraŋ	soora	dry porridge
meeraŋ	meera	special tree

Table 3: Here the suffix -ŋ is marking singulative.

3. Plural marking system

The plural number marking system of nouns has a single prefix and various suffixes. The plural prefix is *k-* and the plural suffixes are *a/á, ŋa/ŋá, ta/tá, nta/ntá, ŋta/ŋtá*. "The set of prefixes marking number is independent from the suffixed systems" (Waag 2010: p 60-61). The pluralization system of the Fur language nouns in some cases is accompanied by tone modifications.

The Fur language has four tones patterns as they are indicated here: low (NOT written), high ('), falling (^), and raising (~). The four tones behave differently as they mark their plural. If the last tone of the singular noun is low, the last vowel in plural suffix remains low. For nouns with high tones on their last vowels, the plural suffixes get high tones as shown in tables: (4,5&7). But in the case of the other two tones is a bit different. If the vowel of the singular is falling, the last vowel in the plural suffix remains low. For the case of the raising tone, the plural suffix usually has high tone at the last vowel.

Here are a few examples, for the plural number marking system.

3.1 Plural number marking

Fur Singular	Fur Plural	English
d-aarú	k-aaru	bone
n-usá	k-usa	squash
d-ṁó	k-wa	person
d-ṁṁ	k- ṁṁ	bean

Table 3: Plural prefix (k-)

1. ...márrá namá k-wa nyét -sí perra piá.
volcano CON people all OBJ displace 3sg.did
"...then the volcano displaced all the people."
2. K-ṁṁ - sí dáús k̄ra naṅ -si dog keseli.
pl-bean OBJ soup 3pl.cook app also 3pl.boil.
"beans can be cooked to soup and also can be boiled."
3. K-wa k-usa - sí baḡṁṁa - lé kí weél kusuṅe.
pl-people pl-squash OBJ garden.pl LOC in autumn 3pl-grow.
"In autumn people grow squashes in the gardens."

Fur Singular	Fur Plural (a)	English	Fur Singular	Fur Plural (á)	English
boot	boot-a	rope	sáár	sáár-á	half
seem	seem-a	bud	sóól	sóól-á	guest
tírim	tírim-a	spot	míís	míís-á	spec. insect
sereet	sereet-a	pen	súúl	súúl-á	smoke

Table 4: Plural marking suffixes (-a,- á)

1. Yeeṅ dírbo -sí s kí boot-a táráásiṅ kíḡaḷ.
They shelter OBJ app with rope-pl very well 3pl-tied
"They tied the shelter very well with ropes."
2. Abá sóól-á kéle bás túllên bitíré.
If guest-pl 3pl-come just warmly 2pl-welcome
"If guests come, welcome them warmly."

Fur Singular	Fur Plural (ṁa)	English	Fur Singular	Fur Plural (ṁá)	English
kása	kása-ṁa	calabashe	gaasí	gaasí-ṁá	pot
daage	daage-ṁa	spec. grass	táárí	táárí-ṁá	job
pende	pende-ṁa	arrow	maaná	maaná-ṁá	spec. maggot
kona	kona-ṁa	name/song	ṁamú	ṁamú-ṁá	crocodile

Table 5: Plural marking suffixes (-ŋa, -ŋá)

1. Áwlá-ŋá karáb-a - sí kí pende-ŋa kiriwe.
 hunter-pl animal-pl obj with arrow-pl 3pl-kill
"The hunters kill animals with arrows."

Fur	Fur	English	Fur	Fur	English
Singular	Plural (ta)		Singular	Plural (tá)	
roo	roo-ta	rivers	ray	răytá	fields

Table 6: Plural marking suffixes (-ta, -tá)

1. Root-a răy-tá - sí saa soŋá kïire.
 river-pl field-pl obj very much erode
"The rivers erode the field a lot. "

Fur	Fur	English	Fur	Fur	English
Singular	Plural (nta, ŋta)		Singular	Plural (ntá, ŋtá)	
dīlpan	k-īlpa-nta	trap	durú	k-urú-ntá	upper arms
dolma	k-olma-nta	a tool for hunting	dáwrá	k-áwrá-ntá	iron

Table 7: Plural marking suffixes (nta, ntá, ŋta, ŋtá)

1. Poora túúrú-ŋá na k-úťí -sí kí k-īlpa-nta kééli
 Fur squarrel-pl and pl-rat obj with pl-trap-pl 3pl-catch
"The Fur people catch squarrels and rats with kilpanta (traps)."
2. Miir ótá k-áwrá-ŋtá -lé teer.
 blacksmith things pl-iron-pl from 3sg-make
"A blacksmith makes things from iron."

4. Possessive pronouns number marking

Number marking as on nouns is also occurring on possessive pronouns. The tables above contain examples for nouns, below examples are provided to indicate the occurrence of number marking on the possessive pronouns.

There are seven personal pronouns in the Fur language, ká (1sg), jí (you-2sg), yé (3rd-sg), kí (we), bí (you-2pl), yię (3rd-pl human) and yeę (3rd-pl Not human). These pronouns do not possess any of the above characteristics of the number marking system.

The possessive pronouns in the Fur language are marked similar to nouns. The singular number marking on the possessive pronouns is made by placing the singular prefix *d-*. For the plural marking, possessive pronouns have the plural

prefix *k-*. The number refers to the number of the possessed item

Fur (Singular Poss. Pro)	Fur (Plural Poss.Pro)	English
d-úí-ŋ (1 st sg)	k-úí-ŋ	my, mine
d-íí-ŋ (2 nd sg)	k-íí-ŋ	your, yours
d-éé-ŋ (3 rd sg)	k-éé-ŋ	his, her/hers and its
d-áí-ŋ (1 st pl)	k-áí-ŋ	our, ours
d-íe-ŋ (2 nd pl and 3 rd pl human and not human)	k-íe-ŋ	your/their, yours/theirs

Table 8: Possessive pronouns

1. Tóoríg bá yáa toy kéná ná d-éé-ŋ ray saa sunná kiri,...
once CON woman old 3sg-was CON her field very much 3sg-produced

“Once there was an old woman, whose field produced a lot of crops...”

2. In d-íe-ŋ lá toŋ -ii? Ee, d-íe-ŋ -ii.
this your Q house 3sg-is Yes, our 3sg-is

“Is this their house? Yes, it is their”

D-íe-ŋ in the question is used as English possessive adjective and in the answer is used as possessive pronouns.

5. Number marking on adjectives:

Adjectives in the Fur language agree in number with the nouns that they describe. The difference of their number marking system to nouns is that they do not have prefixes for singular and plural adjectives, and they do not have singular suffixes.

Examples

Fur Singular	Fur Plural	English
Pattâ	pattá-ŋa	white
puyyâ	puyyá-ŋa	bitter
raarê	raaré-ŋa	transparent
kussê	kussé-ŋa	rough
appâ	appá-ŋa	big
leppê	leppé-ŋa	flat

Table 9, number marking on adjectives

5. Conclusion

The number marking system in the Fur language is made by placing affixes attached to nouns, possessive pronouns and adjectives. In marking singular nouns, the singular uses one of the two prefixes (d- and n-) while the singulative suffixation is made with the suffix -ŋ. However, some singular forms are unmarked. In the Fur language the plural number marking system has a single prefix and various suffixes. Possessive pronouns mark their plural by using singular prefixes and suffixes. The possessive pronouns have the plural prefix *k-* and plural suffix -ŋ. Adjective is another part of speech in the Fur which has a number marking system as nouns and possessive pronouns, except that it does not have singular and plural prefixes but a plural suffix only.

References:

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