Aspects of the phonology and grammar of the Yebu [=Awak] language in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This is a summary phonology and a study of aspects of the grammar of the Yebu [=Awak] l language spoken in Kaltungo LGA, Gombe State, Nigeria. There have been no prior dedicated studies of the language, although a Reading and Writing Guide exists (2007). Yebu is an Adamawa language, part of the Tula-Waja group. Other related languages still partly conserve more complete noun class suffix alternations; these have almost disappeared in Yebu and been replaced by a universal number marker. The grammar sketch concentrates on the unusual verbal system and aspects of the pronominals.

Keywords: Yebu; Adamawa; phonology; grammar

1. Introduction

The Yebu [=Awak] language spoken in Kaltungo LGA, Gombe State, Nigeria. Yebu is an Adamawa language, part of the Tula-Waja group. Apart from a very brief account in Jungraithmayr (1968) there are no dedicated studies of the language. Kleinwillinghöfer (UKW) (n.d.) has released a comparative Swadesh list for the languages of the Tula-Waja group, A Reading and Writing Guide (2007) exists prepared in the context of a project to translate the New Testament, and this is in use, but it is problematic in terms of linguistic description.

As a consequence, in conjunction with the Yebu community, a three-day workshop was held in Jos in November 11-13, 2019, to record a broad range lexical material and to provide tone-marked data to justify a phonological description. The present document is the outcome of that workshop. The Yebu speakers attending were Layu Umaru and Joseph Magaji. Gareth Mort, SIL, kindly facilitated the workshop in Jos. Solomon Sukukum of CONAECDA also came to speak to the participants about further language development. Transcription was by Roger Blench and Michael Bulkaam. A short lexicon is being released in conjunction with this study.

2. Location, history and sociolinguistic situation

2.1 Location and settlements

The Yebu formerly lived in five settlements on Awak Hill and each settlement spoke a distinct variant of their common language. When the Yebu moved down to new settlements in the surrounding plains they initially maintained their former settlement patterns. In 1995 when UKW conducted research was there were still five distinct Yebu variants spoken. Some variation remains between speakers in 2019 although this does not impede mutual comprehension. There are fourteen Yebu villages as shown in Table 1;

Table 1. Yebu villages

IPA	Common name	Hausa/Fulfulde	Comment
ɓʷărâ	Bwara		
féːkâ	Feka	Jauro Gotel	70% Yebu
fúùn	Fun	Bagaruwa	
kʲèwúr	Kewur		
kùjèŋí	Kungge		
kūrân	Kuran		
kʷàplākē	Kwabilakɛ		
mòmīdī	Momidi		
sòlóŋ	Soblong		
tàŋgá	Tangga		
ɓʸāáká	Wuyaka	Sabon Layi	
jèrí tàːjó	Yeri-Tayo		
ʧʷélàŋí	Cwelangi		
jèbŏ	Yebo		

There are also villages where the residents are non-Yebu but fall under the authority of a Yebu chief. These are;

Fulani villages under a Yebu chief

Tɔrɛ, Langgarɛ, Lugayidi

Hausa villages under Yebu chief

Daura, Dundaye, Salifawa, Dogon Ruwa (Hausa/Yebu), Garin Bako, Garin Korau, Garin Barau

2.2 Language status

Based on the number of villages there are probably between 5-8000 speakers of Yebu. The language appears to be widely spoken and being transmitted to children, although Hausa is an important second language. Other languages

spoken include Waja, Kamo, Tangale and Tula. Fulfulde must formerly have been of some importance since Yebu has a number of Fulfulde loans. The Yebu language is known as Yiin Yebu.

2.3 Anthropological background

The only description of Yebu society is in CAPRO (1995: 35-38). They are a segmentary lineage society with no original secular chief, although this is changed since the imposition of indirect rule. Christianity is quite widespread, and there are a few Muslims among them.

3. Summary phonology

3.1 Vowels

Yebu has a complete set of ±ATR vowels as follows;

Front	Central	Back
i		u
ɪ		ʊ
e	ə	o
ɛ		ɔ
	a	

If these are arranged in a 5+5 harmony set they appear as follows;

+ ATR	- ATR
i	ɪ
u	ʊ
o	ɔ
e	ɛ
a	ə

Strict vowel harmony operates in Yebu. The vowels in one word should always only be form a single harmony set, although this rule can be broken in recent compounds.

Length contrast is fairly uncommon in Yebu and has only been recorded for the cardinal vowels of the +ATR set (Table 2).

Table 2. Length in Yebu vowels

Yebu	Gloss
bá:bīr	groundnut
dé:lə́ŋ	to lick
fĭ:fĭ	spider
dò:yā	cassava
kù:gú	bone

The logic of this restriction is unclear and it is a possibility that the appearance of length is phonetic and there is no underlying contrast.

Yebu has doubled vowels where the second vowel bears a tone different from the first, hence not a true length contrast. As a consequence, contrasts such as the following are possible;

| sűr | pot |
| sūún | hunger |

3.2 Consonants

The Yebu consonant inventory is quite small and the lack of voiceless counterpart for /b/ and /d/ is notable, though also found in other languages of the group.

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alve-olar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		d			k (g)	gb	
Implosive	ɓ							
Fricative		f v	s	ʃ		x		[h]
Affricate				ʧ				
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ		
Trill			r					
Lateral			l					
Approximant					y		w	

The presence of /ɓ/ is surprising and may not be contrastive. /h/is not a phoneme, but a small number of words which are -r final have an aspirated release.

bĭrʰ   well
jìndɪ́rʰ   medicine
tì: fʷérʰ   tree sp.
wé:rʰ   pot

This appears to be contrastive. See for example;

bá:bīr   groundnut
dĕr   wound
fŭr   to bury

Geminated consonants occur in compounds at morpheme boundaries or in loanwords. Some as yet unexplained cases are shown in Table 3;

Table 3. Yebu geminated consonants

Yebu	Gloss
mmó	I
ŋŋātó	to slaughter
ⁿnǐ	mouth
nàmè ròddɔ́	bush animal
ɓāttā:	guinea-corn type

Labialised consonants are extremely common and are contrastive before front and central vowels. Examples are shown in Table 4;

Table 4. Yebu labialised consonants

Cw	Example	Gloss
bw	bʷĕ	child
ɓw	ɓʷàrá	ear
tw	tʷî	to bear a child
dw	dʷágûm	dream
kw	kʷă	sickle
gw	gʷ̀ètɔ̀	ant sp.
gbw	gbʷím	war
fw	fʷát	five
lw	lʷōp	to fight
mw	mʷārē	oil
mbw	mbʷā:	cave
nw	nʷā	to hear
sw	sʷèlí	load
ʧw	ʧʷā	to shoot

ʔww	wwí	cry

Palatalisation is far rarer and is usually only recorded as a single case for several words;

ḿbʲen	none
mʲ̄ĩ	to swallow
rʲ̄ĩm	to swell

3.3 Tone

Yebu has three phonetic tone heights, but no minimal triplets, suggesting that underlyingly it is a two-tone system. The phonetic inventory of tones is;

High	ʹ
Mid	ˉ
Low	ˋ
Rising Low-High	ˇ
Rising Mid-High	ˏ
Falling High-Low	ˆ

The tone heights can be heard in a pair such as;

yàmbá	sky
yámbā	God

where the second syllable of 'God' is not as low as the first syllable of 'sky'. Probably a rule where a low tone after a high is upstepped would account for some of these cases.

The different types of rising tone are contrastive in Yebu, so the following constitute minimal pairs.

ně	mother	nē̋	to give
tě	father	tē̋	to shoot

4. Morphology

4.1 Nouns

Yebu is related to languages where alternating suffixed noun-class markers showing concord are still active. However, these systems have largely disappeared in Yebu and most plurals are marked by an invariant suffixed *tòlànshín*. This not a true plural but simply a form of 'many'. Where the noun stem ends in a vowel -n is inserted before the following consonant. Significantly, the tone of the plural noun is neutralised to Mid-Mid regardless of the tone of the singular. Table 5 shows a sample of such plurals.

Table 5. Yebu non-morphological plurals

Gloss	sg.	pl.
dog	yèdí	yēdīn-tòlànshín
cow	kārōwā	kārōwān-tòlànshín
house	lɔ̌	lɔ̄n-tòlànshín
knife	tɔ̌	tɔ̄n-tòlànshín
head	dǔr	dūr-tòlànshín

Yebu has a small set of irregular plurals, either suppletives or showing alternations inherited from the period when the nominal class alternations were functional. All of these are nouns referring to persons. One subgroup has the generic plural marker *-bòtɔ́*, but the remainder are quite various. These are shown in Table 6;

Table 6. Yebu morphological plurals

Gloss	sg.	pl.
man	bàrɛ́	bàtĭm
woman	wòrɛ́	wòtóm
child	bwĕ	nābìyăng
young woman	bwɛ̀bɛ́	nēbă
boy	bwɛ̀tò-bàrɛ́	nàn-bàtím
girl	bwɛ̀tò-wòrɛ́	nàn-wòtóm
old man	yīl sɛ̀lɛ́	sɛ̀lbɔ́
father	tɛ̀ɛ́	tɛ̀ɛ̀bòtɔ́
mother	nɛ̀ɛ́, nɛ̀nɛ́	nɛ̀ɛ̀bòtɔ́
relative	yììmí	yìbòtɔ́
friend	fárɛ̆	fàrbòtɔ́
uncle	kɛ̄nɔ̄	kɛ̀nɔ̀bòtɔ́
aunt	kwáná	kwànàbòtɔ́

4.2 Verbs: tense and aspect

4.2.1 Overview

Most Yebu verbs are CV in their simplest form, and this is taken as the imperative. However, they undergo morphological shifts, to mark tense/aspect. These can be summarised as follows;

Simple present: The verb stem is reduplicated, with the intransitive form of the verb preceding the perfective. The intransitive is marked by a final bilabial nasal and a lengthened stem vowel, where the root has a single vowel. The intransitive form undergoes tonal changes in relation to its citation form.

    CV   CV(V)M-CV
    CVCVM   CVCVM-CVCVM

Continuous present: formed by adding -*tɔ* or -*tu* to the verb root.

    CV   CVtɔ/tu

Perfective: verb stems which end in a vowel, lengthen the vowel and add final -m. Verb stems which end in a consonant remain unaltered and are identical with the citation form. This is interpreted as an underlying aspect system where the citation form of the verb is the perfective.

    CV   CVVM
    CV(CV)M   CV(CV)M

Future: marked with the same reduplicated pattern as the simple present, except that the tonal pattern is different, with High-Rising on monosyllabic verb stems. The pronouns are the same as the subject pronouns (Table 15). An auxiliary is inserted between the subject and the verb stem which is of the form *Cà*. The consonant is indexed to the pronoun.

4.2.2 Simple present

The simple present is formed by reduplicating the verb stem, with the perfective form of the verb preceding the unmarked or imperative. Where the root has a single vowel, the usual perfective is marked by a final bilabial nasal and a lengthened stem vowel. There are, however, some exceptions, for examples *yă*, 'to go' which has the perfective *yāŋín*. Where the verb already ends in a final -m, it is reduplicated exactly, apart from tone. Table 7 presents some examples of these.

Table 7. Yebu verb forms marking present

Yebu	Gloss
shɔ̄ kwéèm-kwě	he/she runs
shɔ̄ dὲέm-dɛ̌	he drinks
shɔ̄ yíìm-yí	he sits
shɔ̄ kūrúm-kùrùm	he pierces
shɔ̄ mwàlím-mwàlím	he writes
shɔ̄ tām-tǎm	he holds
shɔ̄ kóòm-kō	he sees
shɔ̄ kɔ́m-kɔ̄m	he hits/beats
shɔ̄ yāŋín-yǎ	he goes
shɔ̄ tōōm-tǒ	he steps
shɔ̄ yābbím-yàbbǒ	he jumps

4.2.3 Present continuous

The present continuous is formed by an invariant auxiliary *dì/dì* preceding the verb and by the addition of *-tɔ* or *-tu* to the verb root. These are patterned as follows;

   -tɔ is added where the stem vowels of the verb are from the -ATR set, i.e. a, ɛ, ɪ, ɔ, ʊ

   -tu is added where the stem vowels of the verb are from the +ATR set, i.e. ə, e, o, u

This is illustrated in Table 8 and Table 9;

Table 8. Yebu verbs illustrating formation of the present continuous with -tɔ

Yebu	Gloss	Yebu	Gloss
shɔ̄ dàám-dǎ	he/she lies down	shɔ̄ dì dátɔ̄	he is lying down
shɔ̄ fàám-fǎ	he gets	shɔ̄ dì fātɔ́	he is getting
shɔ̄ kὲέm-kɛ̌	he touches	shɔ̄ dì kɛ̄tɔ́	he is touching
shɔ̄ fὲέm-fɛ̃	he pays	shɔ̄ dì fɛ́tɔ̌	he is paying
shɔ̄ dὲέm-dɛ̌	he drinks	shɔ̄ dì dɛ́tɔ̌	he is drinking
shɔ̄ tìím-tǐ	he stands	shɔ̄ dì tíítɔ̄	he is standing
shɔ kwìím-kwǐ	he unties	shɔ̄ dì kwītɔ́	he is untying
shɔ yɔɔm-yɔ	he keeps	shɔ̄ dì yɔtɔ	he keeps, is keeping
shɔ wɔɔm-wɔ		shɔ̄ dì wɔtɔ	he carries, is carrying
shɔ kʊʊm-kʊ		shɔ̄ dì kʊtɔ	he nails, is nailing
shɔ tʊʊm-tʊ		shɔ dɪ tʊtɔ	he steps on, is stepping on
shɔ dʊrʊm-dʊr		shɔ dɪ dʊrtɔ	he amends, is amending
shɔ mwalɪm-mwal		shɔ dɪ mwaltɔ	he writes, is writing

Table 9. Yebu verbs illustrating formation of the present continuous with -tu

Yebu	Gloss	Yebu	Gloss
shɔ boom-bo	he wanders	shɔ dì botu	he is wandering
shɔ keem-ke	he says	shɔ dì ketu	he says, is saying
shɔ koom-ko		shɔ dì kotu	he sees, is seeing
shɔ kuum-ku		shɔ dì kutu	he steals, is stealing
shɔ kwéèm-kwě		shɔ dì kweetu	he runs, is running
shɔ kwel ɪm-kwel		shɔ dì kweltu	he opens, is opening (eye) wide
shɔ riim-ri		shɔ dì titu	he fills, is filling
shɔ wuum-wu		shɔ dì wutu	he chews, is chewing
shɔ yiim-yi		shɔ dì yitu	he saves, is saving

4.2.4 Past/perfective

The perfective is adapted in various combinations in different tenses, albeit with altered tones. For verb roots which end in a vowel, it is usually formed by lengthening the last vowel of the verb root and adding the suffix *–em* or *–m* (Table 10).

Table 10. Yebu perfective formation for CV verb roots

Root	Perfective	Gloss
ke	kéēm	said
kɛ	kɛ̄m	touched
ko	kóōm	saw
kɔ	kɔ̄m	refused
ka	káām	covered
ku	kúūm	stole
kʊ	kōm	nailed
yii	yíīm	saved
yi	yīm	sat

For CVm verb roots, where V is a central vowel, the perfective and citation form are segmentally identical. For example;

Citation	Perfective	Gloss
tăm	tām	hold
də̆m	də̄m	take

However, where the verb root ends in other consonants, nasals or resonants, the perfective usually adds an additional -VN syllable (Table 11). The irregular verb *ya* 'go' behaves in this way, rather than lengthening the vowel, as do other similar verbs.

Table 11. Yebu perfective formation with consonant-final roots

Citation	Perfective	Gloss
yel	yelim	dance
kur	kurum	pierce
faŋ	fangɪn	beg
tʊŋ	tʊngɪm	push
ya	yangɪn	go, went

The perfective uses the following pronominal set;

I	you sg.	he	we	you pl.	they
má	mā	á	ná	ká	shíyə́

The tones of both the pronoun and the verb stem are invariant in the perfective paradigm (Table 12);

Table 12. Yebu perfective paradigms

I	you sg.	he	English
má kūnūm	mā kūnūm	á kūnūm	he stood
má tām	mā tām	á tām	he held
ma etc	ma	á dāmīn	he refused
ma	ma	á tábīm	he forgot
ma	ma	á kúrūm	he pierced
ma	ma	á yáŋīn	he went
ma	ma	á yēlīm	he danced
ma	ma	á fáŋīn	he begged
ma	ma	á tōngīm	he pushed

4.2.4 Future

The future is marked with a verbal auxiliary, *Cà*, inserted between the head noun or pronoun and the verb, which in turn is indexed to the pronoun (Table 13). The verb stem shows the same reduplicated pattern as the simple present, except that the tonal pattern is different, with High-Rising on monosyllabic verb stems. The pronouns are the same as the subject pronouns (Table 15).

Table 13. Yebu future auxiliaries with example paradigm

Person	No.	Gloss	Auxiliary	Yebu example	Gloss
sg.	1	I	mà	Mɔ̀ mà kwéém-kwě	I will run
	2	you sg.	mà	M�5̄ mà kwéém-kwě	You sg. will run
	3	he/she/it	bà	Shɔ̄ bà kwéém-kwě	He will run
pl.	1	we	nà	Nīn nà kwéém-kwě	We will run
	2	you pl.	kà	Kīm kà kwéém-kwě	You (pl) will run
	3	they	bà	Shì bà kwéém-kwě	They will run

Table 14 illustrates further examples of the patterns of verb stem reduplication in future constructions;

Table 14. Patterns of verb stem reduplication in future constructions

Yebu	Gloss
Shɔ bà tɪɪm-tɪ	he will stand
Shɔ bà dɛɛm-dɛ	he will drink
Shɔ bà yɛlɪm-yɛlɪm	he will dance
Shɔ bà daam-da	he will sleep
Shì bà fɪɪm-fɪ	they will sow
Shì bà kwiim-kwi	they will climb
Shì bà twalɪm-twalɪm	they will beat
Shì bà lɛɛm-lɛ	they will die
Shì bà toom-to	they will abuse

4.3 Pronouns

4.3.1 Subject pronouns

The subject pronouns in Yebu are given in Table 15;

Table 15. Yebu subject pronouns

Person	Number	Gloss	Yebu
singular	1	I	mɔ̌
	2	you	mɔ̄
	3	he, she, or it	shɔ̄
plural	1	we	nǐ̄n
	2	you pl.	kīm
	3	they	shí

4.3.2 Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns in Yebu follow the noun they qualify and the initial vowel shows concord with the stem vowel of the noun, although these rules seem to have exceptions for individual nouns. The possessives for each person therefore show considerable allomorphy. Table 16 summarises the possessive pronouns and their allomorphs. Plural possessive pronouns do not show segmental concord with the head noun, but do show some type of tonal concord. Since in some cases, the stem tones of the noun qualified are affected, examples of each allomorph in operation are given in the tables following. In some cases, the noun stem may undergo changes, for example, lengthening the final vowel.

Table 16. Yebu possessive pronouns

Person	Number	English	Allomorphs
singular	1	my	mǎ, mɔ̌, mɛ̌, mǐ, mɔ̌, mǐn, mǐn
	2	your	mā, mɔ̄, mɛ̄, mī, mɔ̄, mīn, mīn
	3	his, hers, its	shā, shɔ̌, shɛ̌, shî, shɔ̌, shín, shín
plural	1	our	nīyɔ̄, nīyɔ̌
	2	your pl.	kīmɔ̄, kìmɔ̌
	3	their	shīyɔ̄, shìyɔ̌

The tables below show the application of the various allomorphs of the possessive adjectives.

Where the final vowel of the qualified noun is -a, the possessive is invariant mǎ, and the final vowel of the noun stem is lengthened. Where the structure is CVCV, the tone of the noun drops to Low-Low, regardless of its tone in isolation. This is illustrated in Table 17;

Table 17. Yebu possessive pronoun mǎ

Head noun	Qualified	Gloss
nā	nāā mǎ	my leg
kàdǎ	kàdàà mǎ	my shirt, cloth
twárā	twàràà mǎ	my cap
kɔ́dā	kɔ̀dàà mǎ	my room
mìyá	mìyàà mǎ	my neck

Where the final vowel of the qualified noun is -ə, the possessive is invariant mɔ̌. The final vowel of the noun is not lengthened and the stem tone changes are less predictable. This is illustrated in Table 18;

Table 18. Yebu possessive pronoun mɔ̌

Noun	Qualified	Gloss
bwērɔ̄	bwērɔ̄ mɔ̌	my back
dəkǎ	dəkə̀ mɔ̌	my spear
kōmɔ̌	kōmə̀ mɔ̌	my market
nūngdɔ̌	nūngdə̀ mɔ̌	my road
wùlɔ̌	wùlə̀ mɔ̌	my shadow

Nouns ending in /-ɛ/ are qualified by mɛ̌ (Table 19). The tone of the head noun is also changed according to various patterns, hence the examples. The deletion of the final vowel of *fárɛ̌* 'friend' is unusual while the exceptional tone on the possessive in *wòrɛ́* 'woman' is separated from the other items.

Table 19. Yebu possessive pronoun mɛ̌

Noun	Qualified	Gloss
fárɛ̌	fār'mɛ̌	my friend
mwɛ̀	mwɛ̄ɛ̄ mɛ̌	my water
nɛ̀ɛ́	nɛ̄ɛ̄ mɛ̌	my mother
ngàrɛ́	ngàrɛ̀ mɛ̌	my farm
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ̀ mɛ̌	my shoe
yɛ̀mɛ́	yɛ̀mɛ̀ mɛ̌	my soup
wòrɛ́	wòrɛ̀ mɛ́	my woman

Where the final vowel of the qualified noun is -i, the possessive is invariant *mǐ*. A pattern whereby a Mid-Mid noun is raised to High-High is apparent but in the other words the tones are more diverse.

Table 20. Yebu possessive pronoun mǐ

Noun	Qualified	Gloss
nūŋī	núŋí mǐ	my eye
lēbī	lébí mǐ	my feather
lōttī	lóttí mǐ	my bag
kɔ́bǐ	kɔ̄bì mǐ	my slave
shwèlí	shwèlì mǐ	my load

An additional possessive, *mǐn*, is used with nouns which end in a consonant, or nouns which are plural, or perhaps are considered as such in Yebu culture, for example 'buttock'. Examples of these are shown in Table 21.

Table 21. Yebu possessive pronoun mǐn

Noun	Qualified	Gloss
shɔ̀ɔ́r	shɔ̀ɔ̀r mǐn	my pot
bwātōkɔ̄	bwātōkɔ̄ mǐn	my buttock
nābìyǎŋ	nābìyàŋ mǐn	my children
wòtɔ́m	wòtɔ̀m mǐn	my women

There are a few exceptions to these general rules above. Some examples are given in Table 22:

Table 22. Yebu non-concordial possessives

Noun	Qualified	Gloss
lɔ̌	lɔ̀ɔ̄ mɔ̌	my house
but also;		
lɔ̌	lɔ̀ɔ̀ mǐ	my house
tɔ̌	tɔ̀ɔ̀ mǎ	my knife
tǐ	tìì mɛ̌	my tree
bwɛ̌	bwɛ̀l mɛ́	my child
wòrɛ́	wòrɛ̀ mɛ́	my woman

The other possessive adjectives show similar irregularities with respect to vowel-length and stem tone, especially for the singular pronouns. To abbreviate the description, the tables below present a uniform set of nouns with different final vowels and the corresponding possessive adjectives.

Table 23 shows the second person singular possessives, which are identical to the first person exception that the tone is mid, not rising.

Table 23. Yebu second person singular possessives

Noun	Possessive	Gloss
nā	nāā mā	your leg
wùlə́	wùlə́ mə̄	your shadow
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ́ mɛ̄	your shoe
nūŋī	nūŋī mī	your eye
lɔ̌	lɔ́ɔ́ mɔ̄	your house
shɔ̀ɔ́r	shɔ́ɔ́r mīn	your pot

By contrast, the tone is not static in third person singular possessives, but are extremely varied, although they show the same pattern of vowel concord. Table 24 illustrates the different patterns corresponding to the final vowel of the noun. It remains to be tested, how far the alterations in the tone of the possessive are linked to the tone in the head noun.

Table 24. Yebu third person singular possessives

Noun	Possessive	Gloss
nā	nāān shā	his leg
wùlə́	wùlə́n shə́	his shadow
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ́n shɛ́	his shoe
nūŋī	nùŋīn shî	his eye
lɔ̌	lɔ́ɔ́ shɔ́	his house
shɔ̀ɔ́r	shɔ́ɔ́r shĭn	his pot

Plural possessives in Yebu show an intriguing pattern whereby tone of the possessive is identical for a-, and i- and for ə, ɛ, ɔ(ɔ). This pattern is repeated for all the plural possessives (Table 25, Table 26, Table 27).

Table 25 gives examples of the first person plural possessive, *niyə*.

Table 25. Yebu first person plural possessives

Noun	Possessive	Gloss
nā	nāā nīyə̄	our leg
wùlə́	wùlə́ nīyə́	our shadow/soul
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ́ nīyə́	our shoe
nūŋī	nūŋī nīyə̄	our eye
lɔ̌	lɔ̄ɔ̄ nìyə́	our house
shɔ̀ɔ́r	shɔ́ɔ́r nìyə́	our pot

Table 26 gives examples of the first person plural possessive, *kimə*.

Table 26. Yebu second person plural possessives

Noun	Possessive	Gloss
nā	nāān kīmə̄	your leg
wùlə́	wùlə́n kìmə́	your shadow
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ́n kìmə́	your shoe
nūŋī	nūŋīn kīmə̄	your eye
lɔ̌	lɔ̄ɔ̄ kìmə́	your house
shɔ̀ɔ́r	shɔ́ɔ́r kìmə́	your pot

Table 27 gives examples of the first person plural possessive, *shiyə*.

Table 27. Yebu third person plural possessives

Noun	Possessive	Gloss
nā	nāān shīyɔ̄	their leg
wùlɔ́	wùlɔ́n shìyɔ́	their shadow
tàmìyɛ́	tàmìyɛ́n shìyɔ́	their shoe
nūŋī	nūŋīn shīyɔ̄	their eye
lɔ̆	lɔ̄ɔ̄ shìyɔ́	their house
shɔ́ɔ́r	shɔ́ɔ́r shìyɔ́	their pot

4.4 Locatives

Yebu has a small set of locatives, as shown in Table 28;

Table 28. Yebu locatives

Gloss	Yebu
above, up	dǐ
behind	bwɔ̄rɔ̄
below, under	dìdù
beside	kōrɔ̄
far	tɔ̀ɔ̀njín
here	fĭndɛ̄
in front	kākā
inside	múrshî
left	kàŋ mìyá
near	dǒm
outside	tāmɛ̄
right	kǎŋ yílīn
there	fĭrī
very close	dòmdóm

4.5 Numerals

The pattern of numerals 1-100 is presented in **Table 29**. The most striking feature of the system is the variation in the conjoining particle in numerals 11-15.

Table 29. Yebu numerals

Numeral	Gloss	Yebu
1	one	diin
2	two	yɔrɔb
3	three	kunuŋ
4	four	naa
5	five	fwaad
6	six	kuun (yidikuun)
7	seven	birr (yidibirr)
8	eight	narɪb
9	nine	tuurkub
10	ten	kɔb
11	eleven	kɔb shere diin
12	twelve	kɔb shɪtɪ yɔrɔb
13	thirteen	kɔb shɪtɪn kunuŋ
14	fourteen	kɔb sɪɪn naa
15	fifteen	kɔb shɪtɪn fwaad
16	sixteen	kɔb shɪtɪ yidikuun
17	seventeen	kɔb shɪtɪ yidibirr
18	eighteen	kɔb shɪtɪ narɪb
19	nineteen	kɔb shɪtɪ tuurkub

Numeral	Gloss	Yebu
20	twenty	wɛnɛ yɔrɔb
30	thirty	wɛnɛn kunung
40	forty	wɛnɛn naa
50	fifty	wɛnɛn fwaad
60	sixty	wɛnɛ yidikuun
70	seventy	wɛnɛ yidibirr
80	eighty	wɛnɛ narɪb
90	ninety	wɛnɛ tuurkub
100	one hundred	kʊbɪ (wɔn, bwattɪyɛ) diin

5. Conclusions

The grammar of Yebu is virtually undescribed, apart from a short section in Jungraithmayr (1968). Although Yebu is clearly part of the Tula-Waja group, unlike other languages in the group it has lost almost all of its noun morphology and has developed an unusual system of verbal tense/aspect. The paper describes this system in an initial approximation. There is clearly, however, considerable variation in verb tone which may be a property of individual verbs. Clearly, more testing with other verbs is required. In addition, the system of possessive adjectives is marked by extensive allomorphy, which reflects the tonal differences found in the pronominal paradigm.

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