

Idũ plural verbs

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SYMBOLS

C	any consonant
N	any nasal (n ~ ŋ)
R	r or ɾ
S	s or ʃ
V	any vowel

1. Introduction

A feature of the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria whose present distribution is somewhat unclear is the ‘plural’ or ‘pluractional’ verb. Verbs have at least two morphologically distinct forms, one of which can be derived from the other by more or less transparent processes, except in rare cases of suppletion. Plural verbs occur in all four language phyla of Africa (Brooks 1991) although the way they are described varies from author to author, often making data hard to compare. They are a common feature both of East Benue-Congo languages and neighbouring Chadic languages. For Chadic, Newman (1990) has described the operation of both nominal and verbal plurality, and Blench (in press) a detailed study of Mwaghavul. Within East Benue-Congo, plural verbs have been described principally from the Plateau and Cross River families. The first description of plural verbs may be Bouquiaux’ (1970) account of Berom. Izere has been the subject of at least two partial accounts (Wolff & Meyer-Bahlburg 1979; Gerhardt 1984), McKinney (1979) characterised Jju and Aron (1996/7) has described plurality in verbs in Obolo, a Cross River language.

The correct understanding and marking of plural verbs has important implications for the teaching of reading and writing. Unless readers can clearly decode the system, confusions will open up as the exact meaning of individual sentences. To date, almost nothing has been written about plural verbs in the central Plateau languages. This paper is intended to set out a preliminary dataset for Idū, a Koro cluster language spoken in some thirteen villages southwest of Jos. The Idū language was known in the older literature as Lungu, and in more recent material as Duhn̄ya and similar formulations. The name of the language is Idū́, one person is Udū́ and the people are Adū́. Idū has a particularly rich and complex set of plural verbs and the analysis sketches the underlying morphological processes leading to the highly diverse surface forms.

Idū probably has nine phonemic vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
Close High	i		u
Close high-mid	[ɪ]		[ʊ]
Close-Mid	e		o
Open-Mid	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

These are arranged in \pm ATR vowel harmony sets. However, the high-mid vowels /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are disappearing and are heard most clearly in older speakers. Younger and more urbanised speakers have effectively switched to a seven-vowel system. Long vowels, nasalised vowels and long nasalised vowels are recorded for the seven vowels.

Idū consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alve-olar	Post-alveolar	Retro-flex	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			c j	k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n				ŋ		
Tap			r		ɽ				
Trill			r						
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ			x		h
							ɣ		
Affricate	pf bv		ts dz						
Approximant						y		w	ɥ
Lateral			[l]						
Approximant									

Idū has three level tones, and glide tones that arise from sequences of level tones. The basic conventions are as follows;

High	ˈ
Mid	Unmarked
Low	ˋ
Rising	ˊ
Falling	ˋˊ

Tones are marked on each vowel; any vowel in the data without a tone is presumed to be mid.

2. Data

Idū is apparently unusual in this region in that plural verbs are almost entirely associated with iterative behaviour and not with plural subjects and objects. Each verb has a base form associated with the incomplete aspect. The form marked as ‘plural’ is then applied to ‘continue to do something’ or ‘to do something multiple times’. This is distinguished from the habitual, which is ‘to do something on a regular basis’. Idū is also remarkable for the nearly complete sets of forms which exist for individual verbs. Many verbs have no morphological extensions but those which do are consistent. This is very dissimilar to other languages in the region, such as Izere and Berom, where the plural verbs are much more fragmentary and the meanings are much less consistent.

Table 1 shows the Idū plural verbs so far recorded, with the plural and habitual.

Table 1. Idū plural verbs

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to be sick	yôŋ	yoĩ	yíyoĩ
to bite	shaar	shaŋ	shíshòŋ
to boil	rùna	rùrúwa	rírùna
to bore hole	rír	ríta	rírír
to build	dzin	dzina	dzídzin
to buy	goy	gòòì	gígòòì
to call (to someone)	yisa	yísúwa	yíyisa
to carry on back	kama	kamuwà	kíkama
to carry on head	tsã	tsãrã	tsítsãrã
to carve	tsê	tsêrã	tsítsêrã
to catch	dzûr	dzui	dzídzui
to check	yèpa	yèwa	yíyèwa
to chew	tãĩ	none	títãĩ
to choose	tsũ	tsusa	tsítsua
to climb	fũ	fùrúwe	fífùrã
to close	fôm	fífôm	fífômã
to come	ba	kèwá	kíkèwa
to come out (of room)	dzekà	dzèiwà	dzídzèi
to continue (to do s.t.)	kòrè	kòrúwa	kíkòrè
to cook	pfur	pfutu	pfípfurã
to cook tubers in water	shàpa	shàpúwa	shíshàpa
to cough	kòsha [gòò]	kòshúwe	kíkòsha
to count	vàre	vàrúwà	vívàre
to cover	tsime	tsima	tsítsime
to cross	gâr	gái	gígâr
to cut once	gber	gbei	gbígber
to cut with knife	zãrè	zãr	zígãr
to dance	zer	azer	zizer
to die	kpe	kpei	kpíkpei

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to dig (earth etc.)	sim	simà	sísima
to drink once	hwa	hweḡa	hwíhwa
to farm	kaù	kapi	kíkàpā
to fetch an appropriate amount	ḡoi	ḡóiwa	shíshòḡ
to fetch in quantity	xepa	xépúwa	xíxepa
to go out	dze	dzèi	dzídzei
to jump	terḡa	téḡaḡa	tèḡéeshà
to kneel down	tàràḡu	táḡàḡu	táḡéḡu
to lock	gbaj	gbāi	gbígban
to manufacture iron object (as blacksmith)	nāk	nái	nénakā
to pluck fruit	puur	pupa	pípuur
to pull	gbiir	gbīḡā	gbígbiir
to quench, put out light	ḡim	ḡíwe	ḡíḡi
to receive	yéi	yésa	yíyèsa
to roast	vum	vùmi	vívum
to run	tī	tīna	títina
to sip	vùpa	vùwa	vívùwa
to tear	vaar	vapa	vívapa
to wash s.t.	sor	sota	sísotā

3. Analysis

3.1 Multiple action plurals

Explaining the morphology of Idū verbal plurals is a challenge. While a number of processes can be identified, their application in individual cases is highly variable. Apart from the actual segments, tone and nasalisation also vary.

The single most common process is the addition of a final –wV, in most cases –wa. Final –we is separated out in Table 2.

Table 2. Final -wV in Idū plural verbs

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to come	ba	kèwá
to come out (of room)	dzekà	dzèiwà
to carry on back	kama	kamuwà
to continue (to do s.t.)	kòḡe	kòḡúwa
to boil	ḡuna	ḡùḡúwa
to fetch an appropriate amount	ḡoi	ḡóiwa
to cook tubers in water	shàpa	shàpúwa
to count	vàre	vàrúwà
to sip	vùpa	vùwa
to fetch in quantity	xepa	xépúwa
to check	yèpa	yèwa
to call (to someone)	yisa	yísúwa
final -we		
to climb	fū	fūrúwe
to cough	kòsha [gǝǝ]	kòshúwe
to quench, put out light	ḡim	ḡíwe

In some words, such as ‘to sip’, the final CV syllable of the root is deleted. This seems to inconsistent, however. For example;

to cook tubers in water	shàpa	shàpúwa
to fetch in quantity	xepa	xépúwa

but;

to sip	vùpa	vùwa
to check	yèpa	yèwa

It seems likely that –pa or –pV was originally a plural suffix which began to be treated as part of the root, when the original non-extended root fell out of use. These examples suggest the existence of a –pV extension.

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to pluck fruit	puur	pupa	pípuur
to tear	vaar	vapa	vívapa
to farm	kaù	kapi	kíkàpà

It seems likely that –wa has an allomorph –a, where the stem does (or did?) end in a consonant. If so, the following would then be examples of the same process (Table 3).

Table 3. A possible -a allomorph of -wV

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to build	dzin	dzina
to pull	gblir	gbĩṛǎ ?
to bore hole	ṛir	ṛita
to dig (earth etc.)	sìm	sìma
to run	tĩ	tĩna
to cover	tsime	tsima

Another likely extension is –i (Table 4). In many cases the final syllable or segment of the base form is deleted. The tone of the –i extension is highly variable, suggested it has no underlying tone. The verb ‘to fetch’ has an atypical ‘orphan’ –i as the final segment of the base form, so this may have originally been an extension now fossilised.

Table 4. Realisations of an –i extension

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to go out	dze	dzèi
to catch	dzũr	dzui
to cross	gâr	gái
to lock	gbaŋ	gbãĩ
to cut once	gbɛr	gbɛi
to be sick	yôŋ	yoi
to die	kpe	kpei
to manufacture iron object	nāk	nai
to roast	vum	vumi
to fetch an appropriate amount	ʃoi	ʃóiwa

Another problematic extension is ṛ/rǎ. At least three verbs exhibit this extension, while fũ has a probable allomorph. However, in three other cases, –r in the base form becomes –tV in the extended form. It could be that there was originally a morphophonemic rule r→t where the stem ends in –r. Where the stem ends in a vowel, –ṛa is added, with rightwards spreading of the nasalisation from the stem vowel. Table 5 sets out the examples from the current dataset.

Table 5. A possible -RV extension and a -tV allomorph

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to climb	fū	fūrūwe	fífurā
to pull	gbīir	gbīrā	gbígbiir
to carry on head	tsā	tsārā	tsītsārā
to carve	tsē	tsērā	tsītsērā
-tV			
to cook	pfur	pfutu	pfīpfurā
to bore hole	ɽir	ɽita	ɽíɽir
to wash s.t.	sor	sota	sísotā

Another possible case is –SV. Three verbs add this extension to the root (Table 6). Three other verbs already have an –SV extension incorporated in the root and add another extension to form the plural. However, it seems probable that these were the original extensions which have become fossilised and a new extension added to form the plural. Similar processes of affix renewal are regularly recorded for noun-class markers.

Table 6. A possible -SV plural extension

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to drink once	hwa	hweɟa
to choose	tsū	tsusa
to receive	yéí	yésa
to cough	kòsha	kòshúwe
to jump	terɟā	térɟāɟā
to call (to someone)	yisa	yísúwa

Idū also seems to have a –Na extension (Table 7). In two cases this is realised as an infix, or as an –ŋ extension without a final vowel. In the case of ‘to build’ this can be analysed either as an –a extension (cf. Table 3) or as a -Na extension with nasal assimilation. In the case of ‘to boil’ the –na syllable in the base form is likely to be an unproductive incorporated plural extension, especially as external cognates of this word are lu/ru and similar.

Table 7. A possible -Na plural extension

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to build	dzin	dzina
to bite	shaar	shaŋ
to kneel down	táràɽu	tánàɽu
to jump	terɟā	térɟāɟā
to run	tĩ	tīna
to boil	ɽuna	ɽùɽúwa

Apart from the forms listed in the tables, where multiple attestations suggest the existence of a particular extension, there are a number of single cases, without any clear historical source. There is just one clear case of suppletion;

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to come	ba	kèwá	kíkèwa

and one case of a prefix instead of a suffix.

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to dance	zer	azer	zízer

This is a possible allomorph of the –a extension (Table 3).

The verb ‘to cut’ is the only verb to delete a syllable in the plural. The likely explanation is that this was originally a –we extension (Table 2) and that the forms have become reversed.

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to cut with knife	ʒaɾe	ʒaɾ	ʒíʒaɾ

Finally, only one verb demonstrates vowel-doubling;

Gloss	Base form	pl.
to buy	goi	gòòì

3.2 Habituals

Idū habituals exhibit a more regular derivational process than multiple action. The great majority are formed by prefixing the stem with the initial root consonant plus í-. Three exceptions to this have so far been recorded;

to manufacture iron object (as blacksmith)	nāk	nénakā
to kneel down	táràɾu	tánéɾu
to jump	terjā	tènjéeshà

However, the choice of stem to be extended is somewhat opaque. In some verbs, the base form or root is extended, in other cases it is the multiple action root. Some examples where the habitual innovates are also recorded. Thus;

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
Root extended			
to build	dzin	dzina	dzídzin
to cross	gâr	gàyí	gígâr
Plural extended			
to come	ba	kèwá	kíkèwa
to go out	dze	dzèi	dzídzei
Neither			
to quench, put out light	ɾîm	ɾíwe	ɾíɾî
to bite	shaar	shaɳ	shíshòɳ

In two cases, the plural form also reduplicates the first segment of the root. In the case of ‘to close’ the plural has the appearance of a typical habitual, and the habitual adds an unexpected –a, which however, takes the falling tone which characterises the root.

Gloss	Base form	pl.	Habitual
to close	fɔ̃m	fífɔ̃m	fífɔ̃mâ
to boil	ɾùna	ɾùɾúwa	ɾíɾùna

The habitual of ‘to boil’ illustrates another characteristic of habituals, their tendency to conserve the tone of the base form. Thus;

Gloss	Base form	Habitual
to build	dzin	dzídzin
to cross	gâr	gígâr
to lock	gbaŋ	gbígbaŋ
to cut once	gber	gbígber
to pull	gbîir	gbígbiir
to drink once	hwa	hwíhwa

In contrast to plurals, the tone of the root often changes.

4. Conclusions

For a Niger-Congo language, Idū verbal plurals demonstrate a remarkable morphological variety. The system is more complete than for any Plateau language yet investigated, but this only emphasises its diversity. As with Izere and Berom, the underlying model must be a small repertoire of extensions, a series of rules of morphophonemic alternations, and constant fossilisation and renewal of productive extensions. These processes take place at different rates and are realised in a variety of surface forms because of speakers' competing analyses of individual lexical items. Another possible explanation is lexical borrowing. It is known this takes place between Izere and Berom verbs; Idū may well have borrowed from other, undocumented Koro cluster languages. A more in-depth investigation of verbal plurals is crucial to developing our understanding of morphological processes in the group as a whole.

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