

MADA PRONOUNS

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N.B. THE PRESENT PRINTOUT IS IN MADA ORTHOGRAPHY, NOT IPA

Roger Blench
Mallam Dendo
8, Guest Road
Cambridge CB1 2AL
United Kingdom
Voice/ Fax. 0044-(0)1223-560687
Mobile worldwide (00-44)-(0)7967-696804
E-mail R.Blench@odi.org.uk
<http://www.rogerblench.info/RBOP.htm>

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE MADA LANGUAGE: LOCATION, ORIGIN AND CLASSIFICATION	1
1.1 Location and Name	1
1.2 THE SOUND SYSTEM OF MADA AND ITS ORTHOGRAPHY	1
1.2.1 Phonology	1
1.2.2 Orthographic conventions	2
1.3 Pronominal systems	3
2. PRONOUN SETS	3
2.1 General	3
2.2 Unbound pronouns	3
2.2.1 Direct speech	3
REFERENCES	7

TABLES

Table 1. Mada subject pronouns	4
Table 2. Mada subject pronoun paradigm	4
Table 3. Mada pronouns re-ordered	4
Table 4. Mada present tense subject pronouns.....	4
Table 5. Tones on Mada polysyllabic verb-stems.....	5
Table 6. Mada uncompleted past paradigm: monosyllabic stem	5
Table 7. Mada uncompleted past paradigm: polysyllabic stem	5
Table 8. Mada verb-stem paradigm ‘come’	6
Table 9. Tones on Mada polysyllabic verb-stems.....	6
Table 10. Mada imperfective verb-stem paradigm ‘was coming’.....	6
Table 11. Mada reflexive pronouns	7
Table 12. Mada reflexive pronoun paradigm	7

1. The Mada language: location, origin and classification

1.1 Location and Name

The Mada people live primarily in the region between Anjida and Akwanga on and around the road leading from Fadan Karshe to Akwanga in Plateau State, Central Nigeria. Their numbers are hard to estimate but probably now exceed 50,000.

Mada has been classified as part of the Plateau language group (Greenberg 1963) and Williamson (1971), Hansford *et al.* (1976), Gerhardt (1989) and Crozier and Blench (1992) have followed this view. Mada was put together with Ninzam, Ayu, Che, Ninkyop and some other languages as part of Plateau IV. More recently, this group has been christened ‘Ninzic’ in the light of the numerous languages with a –nin- element in their ethnonym.

The principal modern work on the Mada language is Price (1989)¹. This work covers the phonology and orthography of Mada spoken in Rija, a village central to Mada country and the dialect chosen for New Testament translation. Mada has an extensive dialect network and there is quite a high level of variation from village to village. Price (1989) gives a valuable comparative wordlist in different dialects, which shows that at least some of them have markedly different phonology from Rija Mada and probably have been influenced by Eggon.

1.2 The Sound System of Mada and its Orthography

1.2.1 Phonology

Rija Mada has twenty consonant phonemes:

	Labial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Velar	Labio-velar
Plosives vls	p		t	k	kp
vd	b		d	g	gb
Fricatives vls		f	s		
vd		v	z		
Affricates vls			ts		
vd			dz		
Nasals	m		n	ŋ	
Laterals			l		
Vibrants			r		
Approximants vls					ʌ
Approximants vd			y		w

There are eight vowel phonemes:

¹ Gerhardt (1983:112 ff.) includes some notes on the phonology and noun-class systems of two Mada dialects, but these have been comprehensively superseded by Price (1989).

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Close-Mid	e	ə	o
Open-Mid	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

but five corresponding nasalised vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
Close	ĩ		ũ
Open-Mid	ẽ		õ
Open		ã	

In the original orthography of 1985, the symbol ñ was adopted to mark nasalisation following a vowel, but this has been simplified to n. Thus ã is written ‘an’.

Mada has three level tones and a rising and falling tone. The orthography marks tones as follows:

high tone is unmarked

/˘/ mid tone is shown by a macron

/˙/ for a low tone

/˘˘/ for a falling tone

/˘˘˘/ for the rising tone.

Although appropriate for an orthography this is confusing to external readers and the following substitution has been made in this paper.

// for a high tone

// mid tone is unmarked

1.2.2 Orthographic conventions

The Mada alphabet is near-phonemic and is made up of thirty-four letters. These are arranged as follows:

a, b, c, e, ɛ, ə, d, f, g, gb, h, hw, i, j, k, kp, l, m, n, ng, ny, o, ɔ, p, r, s, sh, t, u, v, w, y, z, zh.

These correspond to the IPA symbols used in the phonology via the following conventions;

ng	ŋ	
c	tsʸ	
j	dzʸ	
sh	sʸ	
ny	ŋʸ	
h	ʌ	before o ɔ u
hw	ʌ	elsewhere

1.3 Pronominal systems

Although pronominal systems are the subject of a large number of studies worldwide, African pronominal systems remain weakly described. The most important collection of papers on this topic is (Wiesemann). Although reference is made to the pronoun systems of Plateau languages in various grammar sketches (e.g. Gerhardt xx; Follingstad xx; Nettle xx) there is every reason to think these are less than complete. A feature of the pronominal systems of Plateau languages is the incorporation of tense/aspect into the marker itself. This occurs in Tarok, in Berom and in Gbari, a Nupoid language that has been heavily influenced by Plateau (Blench, unpublished fieldnotes).

Mada, however, has additional features that make its pronominal system typologically more unusual still. Compared with neighbouring languages to which it is related, such as Ninzo, Mada has reduced its morphology in a rather extreme fashion. The entire system of nominal affixes has been eroded, leaving pluralisation to be marked by tone on the noun-stem. Whatever verbal extensions Mada may once have had have also disappeared, leaving no evident morphological trace. If the verb stems had any underlying tone they seem to have ceded it to the TAM system; in other words, although verbs have tones in isolation, these do not enable prediction of the tones in context of a clause or sentence. Finally, Mada has an unusual number system that classes the first person singular pronoun with the plural pronouns.

In the light of these typologically unusual features it seems worthwhile displaying the Mada pronominal system in some detail, giving complete paradigms where these are necessary to support the argument. The historical explanation for this system is somewhat harder to arrive, partly because the descriptive materials on neighbouring languages are also very weak.

2. Pronoun sets

2.1 General

Every pronoun can be defined according to the following features;

Bound	Unbound
Tense-marked	Tenseless
Subject	Object, dative
Direct	Reported

There seem to be no pronouns strictly marked for conditionality. Reflexivity is marked by an unchanging element preceding the pronoun and is not marked morphologically on the pronoun itself.

2.2 Unbound pronouns

2.2.1 Direct speech

2.2.1.1 Subject Pronouns: intransitive

Mada subject pronouns in intransitive constructions are;

Table 1. Mada subject pronouns

1s	ŋgə	1p	tə
2s	wə	2p	gyə
3s (persons)	gu	3p	bó
3s (objects)	yə	3p	yə

The existence of a neuter pronoun in the third person seems to be rather unusual in the context of Plateau languages.

Mada recognises a completed and uncompleted past. The completed past has no inserted TAM and thus can represent the simplest verbal paradigm (Table 2).

Table 2. Mada subject pronoun paradigm

1s	ŋgə	cár	I wrote
2s	wə	cǎr	You wrote
3s (persons)	gu	cǎr	He wrote
3s (objects)	yə	cǎr	It wrote
1p	tə	cár	We wrote
2p	gyə	cǎr	You wrote
3p (persons)	bó	cár	They wrote
3p (objects)	yə	cǎr	It (pl.) wrote

Table 3 shows the pronouns re-ordered to reflect this pattern.

Table 3. Mada pronouns re-ordered

2s	wə	1s	ŋgə
2p	gyə	1p	tə
3s	gu	3p	bó

This grouping then occurs in all combinations of subject pronoun and TAMs. To mark tense/aspect, Mada inserts particles between the pronoun and verb. Table 4 shows a typical present tense marked by the auxiliary **là**;

Table 4. Mada present tense subject pronouns

	pron.	am	writing
2s	wə	là	cǎr
3s	gu	là	cǎr
2p	gyə	là	cǎr

1s	ŋgə	là	cár
1p	tə	là	cár
3p	bó	là	cár

The same stem-tone changes are paralleled on poly-syllabic verbs. For example, the verb **debə**, ‘to give way’ has the following paradigm (Table 5);

Table 5. Tones on Mada polysyllabic verb-stems

	pron.	am	giving way
2s	wə	là	dèbè
3s	gu	là	dèbè
2p	gyə	là	dèbè

1s	ŋgə	là	débè
1p	tə	là	débè
3p	bé	là	débè

The ordering of the pronouns is the same, but a low-high opposition replaces the rising-high of monosyllabic stems. This resembles the imperfective contrasts found in the irregular verbs ‘come’ and ‘go’ (Table 10) although the connection between these two sets is less than transparent.

Mada can express future action in two ways, either;

ŋgə	lə	cár
I	will	write

or;

ŋgə	lə	sè	cár
I	will	be	write

In both cases, the tone-pattern on the verb follows the pronominal pattern outlined above and the TAM is invariant.

However, in the case of the uncompleted past and the conditional, the auxiliaries undergo tone-changes that reflect the verb-stem tone-changes. Table 6 shows the paradigm for the uncompleted past;

Table 6. Mada uncompleted past paradigm: monosyllabic stem

	pron.	was	writing
2s	wə	sè	cǎr
3s	gu	sè	cǎr
2p	gyə	sè	cǎr

1s	ŋgə	sə	cár
1p	tə	sə	cár
3p	bé	sə	cár

In the case of a polysyllabic stem, comparable changes occur on the second syllable of the verb-stem (Table 7);

Table 7. Mada uncompleted past paradigm: polysyllabic stem

	pron.	was	escaping
2s	wə	sè	gbojùn
3s	gu	sè	gbojùn
2p	gyə	sè	gbojùn

1s	ŋgə	sə	gbojún
1p	tə	sə	gbojún
3p	bé	sə	gbojún

The conditional, which inserts the auxiliary **də** between pronoun and verb, follows the same pattern of mimicking the verb-stem tones. Thus;

ŋgə	də	cár
I	if	write
wə	də	cár
You	if	write

Mada appears to encompass at least one pair of ‘irregular’ verbs where the tone-pattern is somewhat different although it still confirms to underlying assignment of number. These are the verbs ‘come’ and ‘go’. Table 8 shows the verb-stem tones for the present tense for ‘to come’;

Table 8. Mada verb-stem paradigm ‘come’

	pron.	am	coming
2s	wə	là	nyě
3s	gu	là	nyə
2p	gyə	là	nyě
1s	ŋgə	là	nyé
1p	tə	là	nyé
3p	bé	là	nyé

These are evidently very similar to the paradigm in Table 4 except for the 3s. In the case of polysyllabic verb-stems, these very nearly mimic the monosyllabic paradigm except that the 3s is no longer irregular. For example, the verb **gbojun**, ‘to escape’ has the following paradigm (Table 9);

Table 9. Tones on Mada polysyllabic verb-stems

	pron.	am	escaping
2s	wə	là	gbójǔn
3s	gu	là	gbójǔn
2p	gyə	là	gbójǔn
1s	ŋgə	là	gbójún
1p	tə	là	gbójún
3p	bé	là	gbójún

The uncompleted past is more distinctive however, compared with Table 6. The distinctive tone-changes in the auxiliary **sə** have been neutralised and the tone-oppositions marked on the verb-stem become a simple high-low opposition (Table 10);

Table 10. Mada imperfective verb-stem paradigm ‘was coming’

	pron.	was	coming
2s	wə	sə	nyə
3s	gu	sə	nyə
2p	gyə	sə	nyə
1s	ŋgə	sə	nyé
1p	tə	sə	nyé
3p	bé	sə	nyé

The same changes apply to the verb **ywe** ‘to go’ but no other monosyllabic verbs of this type have yet been identified.

2.2.1.2 Reflexive Pronouns: transitive

Reflexivity in Mada is regarded as intransitive as far as the pronoun set goes. Mada has a set of sentence-final pronouns mapped against the subject pronoun set to indicate ‘doing something to oneself’. These are shown in Table 11;

Table 11. Mada reflexive pronouns

kómù	myself
káywe	yourself
káywó	him/her/itself
káywè	ourselves
gyə káywè	yourselves
bó káywè	theirselves

Table 12. Mada reflexive pronoun paradigm

kómù	ngə nan ki me kómù	I did this thing to myself
káywe	wə nan ki me káywe	You...yourself
káywó	gu nan ki me káywó	He...him/her/itself
káywè	tə nan ki me káywè	We...ourselves
gyə káywè	gyə nan ki me gyə káywè	You...yourselves
bó káywè	bə nan ki me bó káywè	They...theirselves

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