

EGGON NOMINAL INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY

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Abstract

The paper examined nominal inflectional morphology in Eggon with a view to providing insight into the formatives involved in the formation of nominals. Affixation (prefixation) and reduplication were discovered to play major roles in the inflectional morphology of nominals in Eggon. Suppletion was also found to be productive in the formation of few non-pronominals as well as pronominals in Eggon. The analysis carried out were based on the weak lexicalist hypothesis while bare phrase structure was used for the diagrammatic sketch of the internal structure of nominals. Class markers attested were accounted for as vestiges of noun-class marking features of the language at a point in history based on the fact that they are just two and they only affect two categories of nouns (human and place names) quite unlike the way the phenomenon works in the known noun-class languages. Finally, functional categories (plural markers, noun-class markers) as well as featural affixes play a significant role in the head-complement relationship within the derived nominals.

Key words: nominal morphology, Eggon, prefixation, reduplication

1.0 Introduction

Eggon words, like words in other human languages, are formed through various morphological processes that bring together various morphemes, formatives and root

morphemes alike, in the formation of new words from the existing ones. While this is so, words from various categories have features, and sometimes processes that distinguish them one from another. Also, little is known about Eggon morphology and much more the morphological behaviour of nominals in the language.

The Eggon language is spoken by a large number of people in Nassarawa State in Central Nigeria (Seibert, 2011). According to Blench (2006), Eggon is conventionally divided into twenty-five mutual intelligible dialects and a twenty-sixth Madantara (Alogani) said to be unintelligible without special learning. The most recent estimation of the speaker's population in the 2010 ethnologue.com is 211, 000 (Salami, 2012). Genetically, Eggon is classified as an Atlantic-Congo language, which is a sub-member of the Niger-Kordofanian language family (Aristar and Aristar, 2011, Paul, 2009 among others). Typologically, the language was reported to be essentially isolating based on the result of morpheme-word ratio of some sample sentences (Salami, 2012).

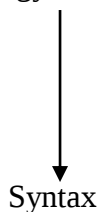
Nominal inflectional morphology in the context of this study is used to refer to inflectional morphology that handles how formatives are attached to nouns to express grammatical functions such as number, class and person without changing the meaning of the stem. The paper is organized in this way: Section 1 presents the statement of problem, objective of the study and research questions. Section 2 discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Here we adopt Pulleyblank & Akinlabi's (1988) version of the weak lexicalist hypothesis (WLH) for the derivation of plural nouns and Chomsky's (1995) bare phrase structure for the diagrammatic sketch of nominals so derived. Section 3 presents the methodology of the research. In section 4, we discuss inflectional morphology under the sub-headings of number, classes and person. Section 5 gives the conclusion to the work.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The weak lexicalist hypothesis (WLH) accepts that some words are syntactically derived while others are not (Adeniyi, 2007: 36). The morphology and syntax constitute semi-independent components, where principles of the morphology govern categories of level X^0 . No ordering is imposed between the components hence, apart from the standard situation whereby morphology provides input for syntax; it is also possible for syntax to derive a word-level category. We adopt the model below following Pulleyblank and Akinlabi (1988).

I.

Morphology 1&2



Syntax

Pulleyblank and Akinlabi (1988)

To illustrate the interaction between syntax and morphology, we consider the clause in II below:

II.

marɛ l 'a kpɔ utmu a k`ogumu

people DET AGR do work PREP hospital

'The people work in hospital.'

where the subject noun *m`arɛ* 'people' is derived by prefixing the plural marker *mo-* to *arɛ* 'person' after which *-o* of the plural marker is deleted.

III.

Singular	Compounding	V/del	Output	Gloss
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Form

arɛ	mo-arɛ	mɔarɛ	marɛ	'people'
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person

In III above, morphology 1 can therefore be said to be at work in the formation of *marɛ* 'people'. The word having been derived enters into the syntax of the language by taking the determiner *lɔ* 'the' to serve as subject of the basic clause: *marɛ lɔ kpɔ utmu a kogumu* which, though a syntactic constituent, serves as the input to morphology 2 to derive the word

ma(rɛ)lakputmuakogumu ‘medical practitioner’. The same thing is true of the derivation of endocentric compound where syntactic relation plays an important role in the possible morphological output derivable from a syntactic constituent. For instance, in the sentences (IV a-b) below:

IV.

a. manyamolo a yɛ́ gu’
in-law maleDET AGR come ASP

‘The father in-law has come.’

b. atato a bga ibíàklà
hunter AGR kill animalbush

‘The hunter killed a bush animal.’

The underlined nouns have the following structure respectively.

V.

a. [Nmànyà] [Nanmo] [Nm`anya`nmo] ‘father-in-law’
in-law male

b. [Nibi] [Naklà] [ibi aklà] ‘bush animal’
animal bush

The inflectional morphology of nouns in Eggon will be delved into in this paper using the weak lexicalist hypothesis as it elegantly accounts for inflection and even derivation of morphologically complex words in any human language.

The bare phrase structure of generative syntax will be employed in the analysis of morphologically complex nouns with Headedness Principle playing a vital role in the determination of the projection involved. The model assumes that ‘a category that does not project any further is a maximal projection XP, and one that is not a projection at all is a minimal projection $X^{\min}$; any other is an $X^I \dots$ ’ (Chomsky 1995:242). The model, following

Taiwo (2008), is employed in the diagrammatic sketch of the structures of morphologically – complex nouns.

3.0 Methodology

This research work is based on Àbùgòshan (àbùgòʃã)² dialect of Eggon. Most of the data used in the research were generated direct from two main informants who were both native speakers of the dialects in question while a few others were drawn from written records. The accuracy of the data generated was also confirmed with more elderly speakers of Eggon who were resident in the speech community all through their life.

The data used in the research were recorded manually using phonetic symbols. This was because there had not been a widely accepted standard orthography for the language and also because of the need to ensure accuracy of pronunciation of the words involved even by non-native linguists that come across them in the work.

4.0 Eggonnominal inflectional morphology

Number, class and person constitute important aspects of Eggon nominal inflectional morphology as the three types of noun (Non-pronominal nouns, pronominals and numbers) in Salami (2012), following Awobuluyi (2008), are inflected for such grammatical functions.

4.1 Number

Nouns in Eggon are cited in either singular or plural form. The singular form of nouns constitutes the base form from which the plural form is derived. Each type of nouns has its peculiar way through which it inflects for plural number.

Non-pronominal nouns: These are nouns that name persons, places, animals, things etc. They are neither pronouns nor number words. According to Awobuluyi 1978: 12, non pronominals have the following as their identifying characteristics.

- i. They function as subjects and objects.
- ii. They occur with a wide variety of quantifiers.

iii. Low tone monosyllabic verbs change their tone to mid-tone before subject.

iv. A high tone syllable occurs between them and verbs when they function as subjects.

While i. and ii of the above identified characteristics is true of Eggon, iii and iv are not and this shows that they are aspects of parametric choices available to languages of the world.

Examples of non-pronominal nouns in Eggon include:

VI.

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| a) mǎfɛ | ‘hair’ |
| b) abugɔ | ‘hand’ |
| c) ɔdɛga | ‘leg’ |
| d) òkù | ‘room’ |
| e) akpa’ | ‘book’ |
| f) èbmé | ‘goat’ |
| g) aǰé | ‘woman’ |
| h) ɛxũɔ | ‘knife’ |

In forming plurals of this type of nouns in Eggon, the major morphological processes usually employed are prefixation and reduplication with suppletion employed as a minor process.

4.1.1 Prefixation and plural formation in non- pronominals

According to Salami (2012:49), there are three patterns of prefixation in Eggon noun plural formation. These are:

- i. {mo-} marking plural and human noun class
- ii. {èk^w ɔ-} also marking plural and probably places of abode, and
- iii. Mid-tone and high tone (´) that replace the low tone of some vowel-initial nouns.

This third instance corresponds to what Akinlabi (2008) describes as featural affixes which, according to Akinlabi (1996), cited in Akinlabi (2008) the commonly found cases are tonal.

Examples of nouns showing the use of prefixes and the stages involved in their formation are shown below:

- i. {mo-} marking plural and human noun class

VII

	Singular Form	Prefixation	v/del / - V	Output (Plural)	Gloss
a.	àtátó	mo + atató	moàtátó	matatò	‘hunters’
	hunter	p/m hunter			
b.	àìwε	mo + àìwε	moàìwε	màìwε	‘children’
	child	pl/m child			
c.	àf́ébla	mo + af́ébla	moàf́ébla	màf́ébla	‘wives’
	wife	pl/m wife			
d.	amakpa	mo + amakpa	moamakpa	momakpa	‘Hausa’
	Hausa (sg)	pl/m Hausa			
e.	àìwεf́ε	mo + àìwεf́ε	moàìwεf́ε	maiwεf́ε	‘girls’
	child female	pl/m child female			

That V₁ is deleted at morpheme boundary (+) when two vowels to occur contiguously to each other is an indication that the language does not allow two vowels to occur at morpheme boundary though such is permissible within a single morpheme.

ii { èk^wɔ- }- marking plural and places of abode

VIII

	Singular Form	Prefixation	VCV del / # -	Output	Gloss
a.	ibúlàhuleji	èk ^w ɔ + ibúlàhuleji	èk ^w ɔ + ðlàhuleji ²	èk ^w ɔlàhuleji	‘towns’
b.	ibúmakpàlgò	èk ^w ɔ + ibúmakpàlgò	èk ^w ɔ + ðmakpalgò	èk ^w ɔmàkpalgó	‘resturants’

Though nouns having this plural pattern are very few, these few examples reveal {ibú-} and {èk^wɔ-} to be in complementary distribution as {ibú-} always occurs with singular nouns whose meanings suggest ‘places of abode while {èk^wɔ-} occurs with plural nouns suggesting

same. These two allomorphs are good examples of replacive inflections which are used to replace one another in various syntactic environments.

iii. Mid tone and High tone (´) that replace low tone of some vowel- initial nouns.

IX.

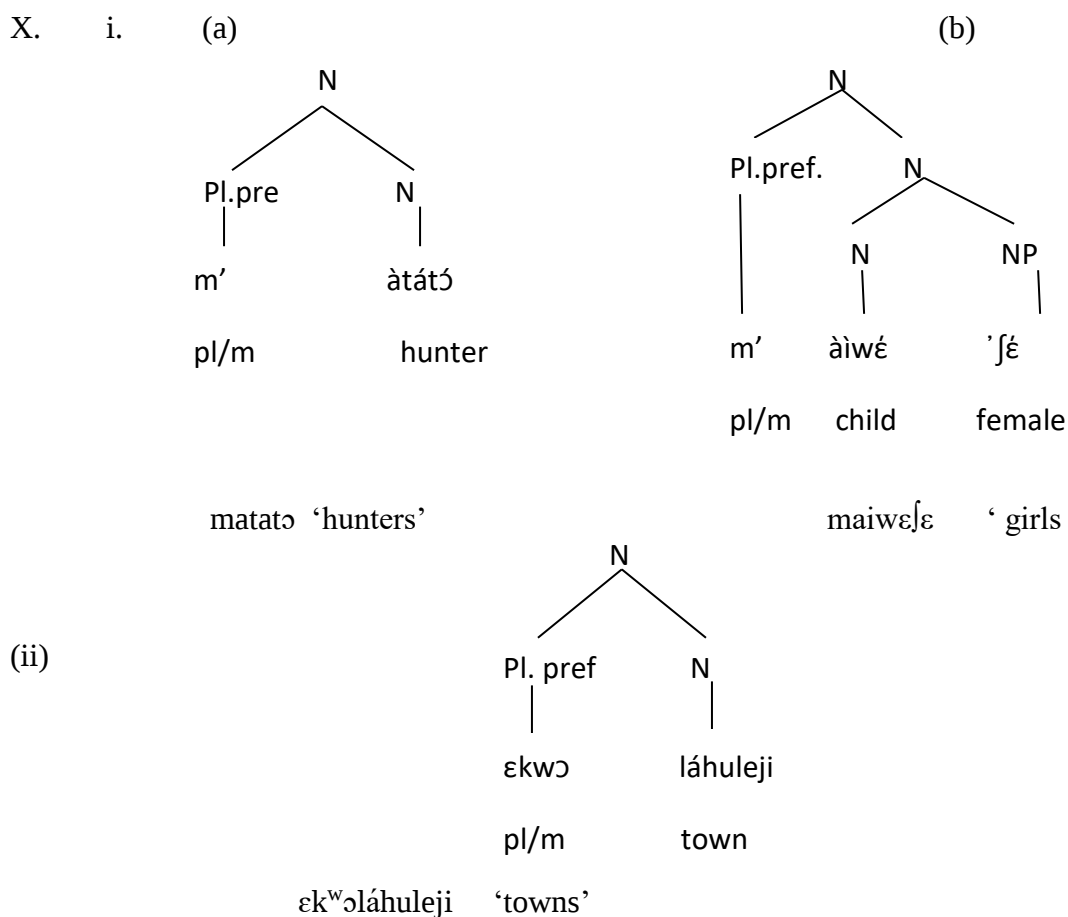
	Singular	Output	Gloss
a.	ìkpí rat	ìkpí	‘rats’
b.	ènjimà horse	enjimà	‘horses’
c.	ìzǐ mosquito	izǐ	‘mosquitoes’
d.	ìgbí leopard	igbi	‘leopards’
e.	ìpù pot	ípù	‘pots’
f.	àgbò banana	ágbò	‘bananas/plantains’

The processes involved in the formation of plural of nouns in (iii) above are:

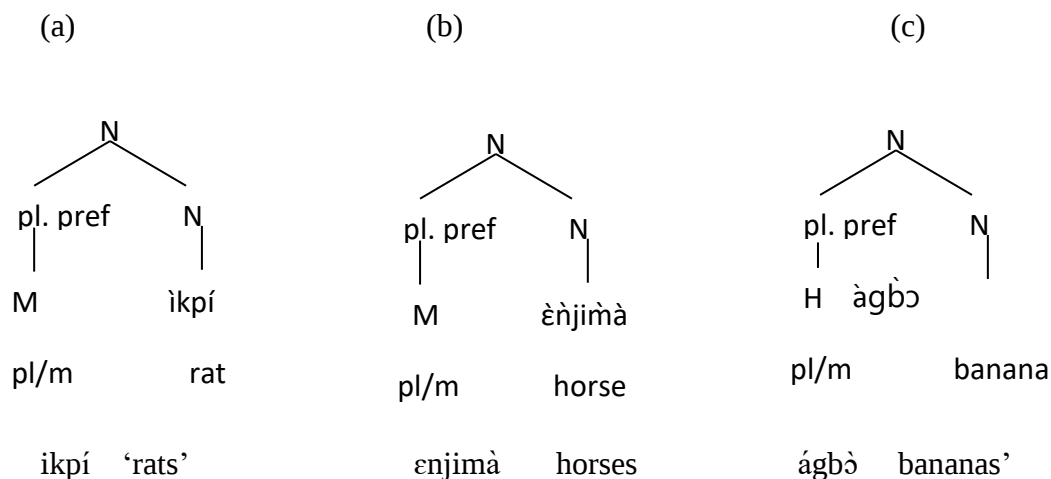
- i. insertion of the relevant tonal affix, mid or high at prefixal position,
- ii. deletion of the tone of the root morpheme and;
- iii. Replacement of the deleted tone with the inserted mid or high tone in that order.

While this is so, the fact that there is no clear grammatical rule determining which tone, mid or high, should go with which noun is a pointer to the tendency of having the singular and plural form of nouns in iii' stored complete in the lexicon.

Below are diagrammatic sketches showing the structure of some of the nouns given in (i-iii) above.



(iii)



Our analysis in i –iii above reveals *mo-* (short form [m -]), *ekwɔ-* and mid or high tone attached at the prefixal position of words as plural prefixes in Eggon with the nouns *àtɔtɔ* “hunter”, *àìwě* “child”, *ibulahuleji* “town”, *ìkpí* “rat”, *ènjimà* “horse” and *àgbò* “banana” as the heads in the structures. Also, the form ‘*lahuleji*’ ‘town’ in the noun head in ii above is the output of deletion of *ibu-* from the full form in order to accommodate the new prefix {*ekwɔ-*} to be attached to it.

Finally, of all the nouns whose plurals are formed through tone changes, none belongs categorically to human noun class.

4.1.2 Reduplication and Plural formation in Eggon

According to Taiwo (2009), reduplication is a morphological operation which has been analyzed as a species of affixation of a prosodic template to a stem, followed by copying of that stem and its associate to the template. Borselow and McCarthy (1984: 25) cited in Katamba (1993: 180) define reduplication as “a special case of ordinary affixational morphology, where the affixes are phonologically underspecified, receiving their full phonetic expression by copying adjacent segments. The process, Taiwo (2009) notes, is

essentially that of the affixation of a morpheme template (in the shape of a CV – skeleton) to a stem. The simplest type is a simple copying of an entire root. In more complex cases, reduplication is only partial and this may be attached as a prefix or a suffix.

Reduplication is a very productive process in the formation of plurals of nouns in Eggon and the language utilizes partial reduplication in that role as the following examples show.

XI.

Partial Reduplication and Plural Formation

Singular Form	Plural Form	Gloss
a. òkù	okoku	‘rooms’
b. ejí	ejeji	‘eyes’
c. ìbí àklà lit. animal bush	ìbíbí àklà	‘bush animals’
d. aʒi	aʒáʒi	‘doors’
e. ɛʃkó	ɛʃɛʃkó	‘names’
f. angbálá	angbángbalá	‘boats’
g. engbolo palm fruit’	engbongbolo	‘ripe bunches of
h. ak ‘pú	akók`pú	‘bones’
i. kpádeǵá	kpákpádeǵá	‘shoes’
j. akpá	kpákpá	‘books’

From the examples of plural nouns given above, we hypothesize that two rules are involved in the derivation of the plural forms. First, a reduplication rule that copies the initial (V) C (V) – skeleton of the stem and prefixes it to the stem applies. This is then followed by anticipatory vowel assimilation rule that applies optionally within the stem to derive some surface forms. The application of the rules is illustrated below using some of the nouns given above.

XII.

Singular	Reduplication Rule Application	V-assimilation Rule	Output	Gloss
òkù room	òk – òkù	N/A	òkòkù	‘rooms’
epí feather	ep – epí	N/A	epepí	‘feathers’
ɛ́kó name	ɛ́ - ɛ́kó	N / A	ɛ́ɛ́kó	‘names’
angbálá boat	angb-angbálá	N / A	angbángbálá	‘boats’
ɛngbolo ripe bunch of palm fruit	ɛngb – ɛngbolo	ɛngb – ongbolo	ɛngbongbolo	‘ripe bunches of palm fruit’

From the above, it is observed that plural formation through reduplication is achieved following these rules:

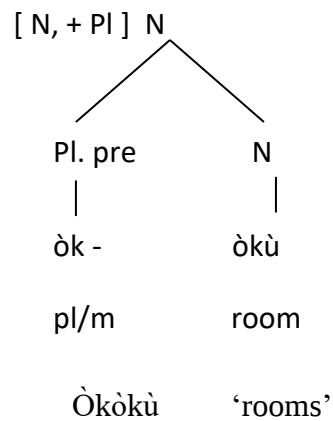
- (i) Copy the initial three segments in nouns with VNC- initial and initial two segments elsewhere.

(ii) Attach the copied segments word-initially.

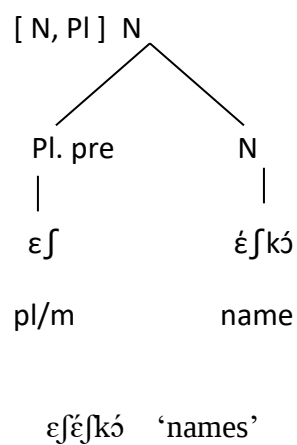
These plural examples are diagrammatically represented below:

XIII.

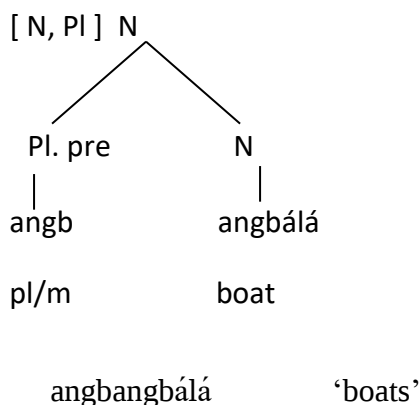
(a)



(b)



(c)



4.1.3 Plural Formation in Pronominals

Awobuluyi (2008) states that pronominals differ from nouns in that while nouns refer to objects, things and even concepts in the world, pronominals rather than referring to those objects, things and concepts as nouns do, refer to the nouns themselves. Salami (2012) identifies four classes of pronouns in Eggon. These are personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns varied across 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person in the singular and plural forms; and indefinite pronouns as the table below shows.

Table 1*Pronouns in Eggon*

			Personal Pronouns		Possessive Pronouns	Reflexive Pronouns	Indefinite Pronouns
	Independent Form	Subject	Direct Object (DO)	Indirect Object (IO)			
1 st Person Singular	amε	mε /mi	mε	Ani	mε	làfíímè	
2 nd Person Singular	(a)wõ	wõ	wɔ	diyã	bu	làfíígu	
3 rd Person Singular	ànyà	ànyà	(à)nyà	dìya	bɣa ewula	làfííya	ekplegĩ, ekplaga ³ erikĩ, èríyambõ
1 st Person Plural	agi	gi	edzi	Digi	bi / gi	làfíígi	
2 nd Person Plural	amo	amo	gímí	Dimo	ebmi	làfíímo	
3 rd Person Plural	amɔ	mɔ	mɔ	Dimo	mɔ	làfíímo	

From the table above, it is obvious that replative inflection is common to both long and short pronouns in Eggon and the inflection is employed in the role of showing number and person. For instance, in the following sentences, the subject forms of the pronoun have different forms for singular and plural.

XIV.

A (i) mɛ ka wɔ̃ itʃku

I see you (sg) market

i.e 'I saw you in the market.'

(ii) gi ka wɔ̃ itʃku

We see you (sg) market

i.e 'We saw you in the market.'

B (i) wɔ̃ bg (a) `ɛbmé

You (sg) kill goat

i.e 'You killed a goat.'

(ii) mo bga èbmé

You(pl) kill goat

i.e 'You killed a goat.'

C (i) anya a bga èbmé

He/she AGR kill goat

'He/She killed a goat.'

(ii) mɔ bg(a) èbméèjĩ

They kill goat four

'They killed four goats.'

The subject pronouns in the sentences in A (ii) – C (ii) are the plural forms of those in A (i) – C (i). In essence, the subject pronouns inflect for number. It is also an established fact that the subject pronoun forms in (A) are used for first persons, those in (B) for second persons and the one in (C) for the third persons.

This then confirms that pronominals unlike the non-pronominal nouns are also inflected for persons in addition to inflecting for numbers. The two grammatical functions are, however, integrated into the replative inflection used in each context.

4.1.4 Plurality in Number Words in Eggon

Number words are also made plural using suppletion and featural affixes in the process. For instance, we have the following number words with their singular and plural form indicated as below:

S/N	Singular Form	Plural Form	Gloss
a.	ɔk'pó	ɛk'pó	Tens
b.	èndèga	endega	Hundreds

4.2 Noun Classes

While the claim remains that Eggon has noun class system (Blench 2006), the data available to us do not confirm having many noun class markers in the language. The few available ones regularly feature with some classes of nouns in the plural form. These include:

- i) mo- prefixed to human noun to indicate plurality
 - ii) èK^wɔ- peculiar to few place words in the plural form.
- See (7 a-e) and (8 a-b) above for their use in that role.

4.3 Person

As mentioned under pronominal, person indication is only found to be relevant in the use of pronominals. The language as clearly shown utilises 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person singular and plural respectively as shown in table 1. However, the data available to us did not show it as relevant to the grammatical use of non-pronominal nouns.

5.0 Conclusion

In this paper, effort has been made to examine nominal inflectional morphology of Eggon with number, classes and persons attested in the inflection of the language. Plurality was accounted for to be inflected on non-pronominal nouns in the singular form using prefixation and reduplication as morphological processes while suppletion is productively employed in the formation of plurals of number words and perhaps pronominal as shown above. However, more research efforts will be needed to account for the rules that guide speakers' choice of either a mid tone or high tone in marking plurality on some nouns. The few forms of words in this category may well be argued to have been base-generated in the lexicon. They are therefore not to be seen as aberrant as there are few instances like these cross-linguistically. Also, two class markers were identified which play the dual role of marking noun class and plurality. These two class markers are not enough to make us believe Eggon to be a noun-class language at least synchronically. These class markers may well then be argued to be vestiges of the noun-class system exhibited by the language at a point in history as noted by Blench (2006). Finally, person was accounted for as being a feature of pronominal in the language.

END NOTES

1. The account here does not include nominal compounds and this may well be a subject of further research.
2. The dialect is spoken in Lafia and its environs in Nasarawa State, Nigeria
3. They are grouped under 3rd person singular because they exhibit the same syntactic behaviour as 3rd person singular pronouns: they both take agreement markers while other persons' pronouns (1st and 2nd) do not.

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