

NOUN CLASSIFICATION IN LOWER CROSS

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This paper reports a study of evidence for noun classification in the Lower Cross languages. The evidence available ranges from slight vestiges of classification in some languages of the group, to a completely functional noun class and concord system in one of the languages (Usakade). As such, the group reflects the proto-Lower Cross system in various stages of decay. The system of Usakade is examined in detail and related to the vestiges seen in the other languages. Suggestions are made as to the nature of the proto-Lower Cross noun class system.

Cette étude présente l'évidence de la classification nominale dans les langues Lower Cross. L'évidence disponible s'étend des simples vestiges en quelques langues du groupe à un système fonctionnel dans une des langues (Usakade). Comme ça, le groupe reflète le système du proto-Lower Cross dans des différentes phases de déclin. Le système de l'Usakade est examiné en détail et des rapports entre ceci et les vestiges trouvés ailleurs dans le groupe. Quelques suggestions à propos le système de proto-Lower Cross sont avancées.

0. INTRODUCTION

The existence of noun classification as a morphological characteristic of Niger-Congo generally, and Benue-Congo in particular, has been long recognized and much discussed.¹ As a small group within Benue-Congo, however, the Lower Cross languages² have for the most part escaped attention. Westermann and Bryan (1952) include some discussion of the Efik-Ibibio cluster in their section on non-class languages; De Wolf (1971) lists several members of the group as languages that have ceased to be class languages. and Welmers (1973:191) suggests, 'a noun class system lurking in the background,' of Efik. At the same time, though, he suggests (p. 189) that vestiges of noun classification in languages such as Efik have often been overlooked. The most recent references to noun classification in Lower Cross are found in Faraclas (forthcoming), who examines evidence for noun class systems throughout Cross River. The present work is based primarily on new data, and offers a more indepth examination of the situation as it exists in Lower Cross. Lower Cross is of particular interest in this regard, as it presents, to a certain extent, a microcosm of noun classification in Benue-Congo in general.

1. AN OVERVIEW

As the best known of Lower Cross languages, Efik is often taken to be typical of the entire group. With regard to noun classification, Efik shows nothing more than vestiges; apparent or former

prefixes on all but a few nouns, some of which show singular/plural alternations, and remnants of concord in a small set of adjectives. This is also approximately what obtains in those Lower Cross languages most closely related to Efik: Anaan, Eket, and Ibibio. However, that Efik is not typical of the entire group is seen by examining, on one hand, Obolo which, while showing the same type of evidence, does so to a much lesser degree, and on the other hand, Oro, which has maintained to a greater extent vestiges of a former noun class system. These are the Lower Cross languages which have received the most attention in the literature concerning noun classification. Of more interest here, however, is Usakade³, which until now has remained virtually unknown and unstudied, and has a completely functional noun classification and concord system.

2. NOUN CLASSIFICATION IN USAKADE

2.1 USAKADE AND LOWER CROSS

Despite being considerably different from other Lower Cross languages in terms of noun classification, there can be no question that Usakade is indeed part of that group. Evidence of sound correspondences and from lexicostatistic analysis confirms this. In addition, oral tradition of Usakade points to a common origin with other Lower Cross groups. This evidence is treated in detail elsewhere (Connell, 1986), and need not be presented here. The aim of this paper is to describe the noun class system of Usakade and its relation to the rest of Lower Cross. A complete reconstruction of the proto-Lower Cross system is not attempted here; however a number of suggestions in that regard are given in the concluding paragraphs.

2.2 PHONEMIC INVENTORY OF USAKADE

Preliminary analysis shows the following set of phonemes to exist in Usakade. Consonant phonemes are based primarily on contrasts in stem initial position.

Consonants: /m,n,p,ŋ,b,t,d,k,kp,β,f,s,tʃ,j,w/

Vowels: /i,e,ε,a,ɔ,o,u/

The contrasts /e/ - /ε/ and /o/ - /ɔ/ are neutralized in prefixal position, i.e., they do not distinguish noun classes.

Like other Lower Cross languages, the tone system of Usakade is essentially one of two levels, high and low, but also has falling, rising and downstepped tones. As with other Cross River languages, tone does not play a role in the system of noun classification.

2.3 CLASSES AND GENDERS

The noun class system of Usakade is described with reference to that of proto-Benue-Congo (PBC) as presented by De Wolf (1971) rather than, as is often done, with that of proto Bantu. Classes and genders are identified by using the nominal prefixes as labels, rather than numbers. This is done to see more clearly the relationship to PBC; it is also practical in this case since concord prefixes are invariably identical to the nominal prefix.

The term 'class' refers to a set of nouns all of which bear the same prefix and are either singular or plural. 'Gender' refers to a set of nouns all of which bear the same pair of alternating singular and plural prefixes. Nouns which do not demonstrate alternating prefixes for singular and plural forms have, in the past, often been referred to as belonging to a 'single class'. This term is dropped here, to avoid confusion with 'singular class'; the term 'neutral class' is used in its stead.

2.3.1 Class markers

The following prefixes are associated with the noun classes of Usakade. These are presented in descending order of frequency of occurrence.

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>	<u>Neutral</u>
u-	N-	N-
o-	i-	u-
e-	a-	o-
i-	e-	e-
	o-	a-
		i-

2.3.2 Genders

The singular and plural classes combine to give a total of nine genders. Of these, four show a clear relationship to PBC genders, in terms of both the phonetic shape of the prefix and the content of the gender.

<u>Usakade</u>	<u>PBC</u>
o/e	*u/*ba
e/a	*bi/*a
o/i	*i/*i
u/a	*ku/*a

Each of the Usakade prefixes can be regarded as a plausible phonetic development of the corresponding reconstructed PBC form, except the o of o/i, which is not considered to be a reflex of *i. The relationship between these two genders is explored in §§2.4.3, 3.6.

Other genders in Usakade are u/N, i/N, e/N, u/i, and i/o. In these cases there is insufficient evidence to establish direct correspondences with PBC genders; however relevant comments are given in discussing the content of each gender.

2.4 CONTENT

A basic vocabulary list containing 250 nouns was used for the analysis. In presenting the content of each gender, the number of nouns said to be found in a given gender is a portion of this total. Correspondences with PBC reconstructions (from De Wolf, 1971) are given where they are known, if the PBC item is of the corresponding gender.

2.4.1 o/e (PBC *ù/*ba)

<u>Usakade</u>		<u>PBC</u>	
ǝ-wóm/ε-	'person'	* -lume	'man'
ó-ínì/e	'man'	* -nina	'woman'
ó-íṙwân/é-βáni	'woman'	* -ṙṙwan/*-bana	'child'
ǝ-jén/ε-	'child'		
ǝ-kókíḃk/ε-	'native doctor'	* -bok	'native doctor'

This is the 'personal' or 'human' gender found generally in Benue-Congo. It contains only, but not all, personal nouns, some having shifted to other classes. (PBC *-kwomo 'chief', for example, is Usakade ù-mwô/a-, retaining prefixes which are, superficially, closer to the original PBC.)

An interesting semantic shift is hypothesized here, that ó-ínì may be a reflex of PBC *-nina (i.e., 'man' < 'woman') and ó-íṙwân/é-βáni a reflex of PBC *-ṙṙwan/*-bana (i.e. 'woman' < 'child'). It may be possible to argue that óíṙwân/éβáni have come from PBC *u-kwaṣi/*bawazi, as De Wolf has postulated for Kohumono gwa/ba 'woman'. In Usakade however, the resemblance to PBC 'child' is too striking to pass by without comment, especially when considered in the singular/plural combination. A similar etymology is possible for the Kohumono pair. A third and more conventional accounting is discussed in §2.4.12. (7 items)

2.4.2 e/a (PBC *li/*a)

<u>Usakade</u>		<u>PBC</u>
ǝ-ném/a-	'tongue'	*-lemi
é-kép/a-	'navel'	*-kwop
é-jín/a-	'name'	*-zina
è-bà/a-	'bag'	
ǝ-fiém/a-	'crocodile'	

This gender shows an obvious correspondence to PBC *li/*a. Not only are the prefixes common Cross River reflexes of *li/*a, there is also great similarity in content. Nouns of other PBC genders have also found their way into this one, such as éfók 'snake' and ékém 'bat' from the animal gender. (25 items)

2.4.3 o/i (PBC *ì/*í)

<u>Usakade</u>		<u>PBC</u>
ó-wá/i-	'dog'	*-bwua
ó-nín/i	'elephant'	*-ni
ǝ-bók/i	'monkey'	*-bogu
ǝ-tfén/i-	'guest'/'stranger'	
ó-núk/i	'rope'	
ó-dùṙ/i-	'root'	

This gender corresponds to what is often referred to as the 'animal' gender in Benue-Congo languages. Most, but not all, nouns for animals in Usakade are contained in this pairing. But what sets it apart from the 'animal' gender as it typically occurs

is that the majority of nouns refer to non-animal items. This fact, in addition to the above mention that *o* is not a reflex of **i*, indicates that this gender in Usakade is the result of a merger of classes. Further evidence for this conclusion is presented below. This gender is the second largest found in Usakade. (50 items)

2.4.4 u/a (PBC **ku/*a*)

<u>Usakade</u>		<u>PBC</u>
ú-tóŋ/a-	'ear'	*tuŋi
ú-kó/a-	'leg'	*-kudu
ú-bók/a-	'arm'	*boko
ù'dùà/a-	'market'	

This gender contains items from a number of PBC genders, but as indicated, it shows its greatest resemblance to **ku/*a*. (11 items)

The preceding four genders all show sufficient evidence to assume a relationship with a particular PBC gender. In those to follow, there is some evidence to make correlations with PBC, but nowhere is this evidence strong enough to assume with confidence that the gender does correspond to a particular PBC gender.

2.4.5 u/N

ú-βò/m-bò	'head'	ú-tʃén/n-	'egg'
ú-díp/n-	'belly'	ú-kú/ŋ-	'tortoise'
ù-tikà/n-	'bow'		

This is the largest gender in Usakade, containing more than 20% of all nouns examined. Its contents are apparently drawn from a number of PBC genders, eg., **li/*a*, **u/*ti*, and **ku/*i*, and are quite miscellaneous in nature. (56 items)

2.4.6 u/i and e/N

u/i

ú-fàŋ/i	'leaf'
ú-nònbàkára/i-	'duck'
ú-nónúù/i	'guinea fowl'

e/N

é-tì/n-	'tree'
é-nòn/ní-nòn	'bird'
é-núgukò/n-	'knee'

u/i is possibly a reflex of PBC **ku/*ki*, although no matching items have been found yet. (only 3 items)

A comparison of the plural of 'bird' (e/N) with 'duck' and 'guinea fowl' suggests that this item has shifted from u/i, with the former plural prefix becoming fused to the new prefix. (3 items)

2.4.7 i/N

í-só/n-	'face'	í-βâ/m-ba	'feather'
í-bàkó/m-	'shoe'	ì-fó/m-	'witch'

Although not contained in this gender, there is evidence that *í-bá* 'skin', was formerly (cf. 'bark' in Table 3.2), suggesting a connection between this gender and PBC **ki/*bi* (cf. PBC **-kpa*, 'skin'). (4 items)

2.7.8 i/o

<i>í-naí/o-</i>	'sheep'
<i>í-náp/o-</i>	'dream'
<i>í-dáŋà/o-</i>	'curse'
<i>í-jánà/o-</i>	'perspiration'

2.4.9 Neutral classes

Numerous nouns in Usakade belong to no gender (i.e., do not alternate singular and plural prefixes). These include non-count nouns such as those for liquids, abstracts, and qualities, and also nouns for items which are typically referred to in a collective or mass sense, even though the object may be countable (e.g., *m-bansà* 'groundnuts' or *ŋ-kúndì* 'beans').

Evidence to draw correlations between the neutral classes of Usakade and the single classes established by De Wolf for PBC is weak at best, though PBC **í* (verbal nouns) is probably entirely contained in Usakade N, and *o* may correlate with PBC **ka*. Unlike PBC **ma ~ *na*, there is no class marker in Usakade which serves only to indicate a neutral class. A total of 70 nouns belong to the neutral classes.

2.4.10 Content of neutral classes

N:	<i>ń-tóŋ</i>	'ashes'	<i>ń-dí-dòŋ</i>	'smoothness'
	<i>m-bó</i>	'food'	<i>m-bí-bòn</i>	'fatness';

This class correlates with PBC **í*, in that it contains verbal nouns (including infinitives, see §3.4). Content is much wider and more miscellaneous than that assumed for **í*. It is the largest neutral class in Usakade.

o:	<i>ó-βá</i>	'clay'	<i>ó-kàj</i>	'forest'
	<i>ó-bùn</i>	'dust'	<i>ò-káŋ</i>	'famine'

Both *ó-βá* and *ó-bùn* are possible reflexes PBC **ka-bubu*, indicating a correlation with that class.

a:	<i>á-ró</i>	'saliva'	<i>à-jóŋ</i>	'sky'
	<i>a-kia</i>	'roofing grass'	<i>á-súŋúkáŋ</i>	'smoke'
u:	<i>ú-jì</i>	'blood'	<i>ú-káŋ</i>	'fire'
	<i>ú-nùŋ</i>	'salt'	<i>ú-sán</i>	'sand'
i:	<i>í-θók</i>	'medicine'	<i>í-mòm</i>	'laughter'
	<i>í-kío</i>	'music'	<i>í-sòŋ</i>	'ground'
e:	<i>é-móŋ</i>	'water'	<i>è-bíŋŋ</i>	'hunger'
	<i>é-ŋkò</i>	'plantain'		

2.4.11 Classification of loanwords

A small number of loanwords can be found in the list of nouns examined. There is nothing systematic, however, with regard to how these are classified. That is, they do not all fall into the

same class/gender, nor do they all accept prefixes in the same fashion. Two examples are \acute{o} - $d\acute{e}n\acute{u}k\acute{o}/i$ - 'animal', which is found in the gender one would expect, and \acute{e} - $\eta k\acute{o}$ 'plantain' which is in a neutral class (also expected?) but seems to have fused an earlier prefix (η).

2.4.12 Preprefixation in Usakade

A few instances in the language can be found of nouns which seem to bear two prefixes. Noted above in §2.4.6 was $\acute{e}n\acute{o}n/n\acute{i}n\acute{o}n$ 'bird', where at least the plural form seems to have shifted classes and maintained its former prefix. Also, in §2.4.10, \acute{e} - $\eta k\acute{o}$ 'plantain', which seems to have adopted a new prefix when borrowed into the language.

A more conventional explanation for \acute{e} - $\beta\acute{a}n\acute{i}$ 'women' (see §2.4.1) is used in terms of preprefixation, or prefix renewal. From this perspective, \acute{e} - $\beta\acute{a}n\acute{i}$ is seen as a reflex of PBC * ba - $nina$ 'women' with the original prefix having become fused to the stem. This would, however, leave us without a plausible etymology for the singular form \acute{o} - $i\eta w\acute{a}n$, if we want to see the two as a related pair. (Note that \acute{o} - $i\eta w\acute{a}n$ as well as \acute{o} - $i\acute{n}\acute{i}/\acute{e}$ - $i\acute{n}\acute{i}$, 'man'/'men' also demonstrate prefix renewal.) It would also oblige us to accept that the current plural prefix for most human nouns is a reflex of the earlier, but still extant, ba -, a curious situation (* $b > \beta$ regularly in Usakade). There is, however, a small set of nouns (not all in the original list of 250), all human, which pluralize with $e\beta a$ -. These appear to be recent derivations, perhaps through analogy.

$\acute{e}\beta\acute{a}k\acute{p}\acute{a}$ 'ancestors'. 'Ancestors' are never referred to in the singular, hence, no singular form. $\acute{a}k\acute{p}\acute{a}$ means 'first'; with $e\beta a$ - as a plural marker for human nouns, $\acute{e}\beta\acute{a}k\acute{p}\acute{a}$ can be interpreted as 'first people'.

$\acute{e}\beta\acute{o}y\acute{e}n$ 'children'. Found in one village only of Usakade. Elsewhere the plural is as shown in §2.4.1.

\acute{o} - $\beta\acute{u}k\acute{o}/\acute{e}\beta\acute{u}k\acute{o}$ 'person'/'people' from the bush. 'Bush' is $uk\acute{o}$. Here the combined prefix is clearly functioning in a regular fashion.

Three other forms were found but were difficult to elicit, as they are rarely used. (That is, my informants had difficulty in finding an appropriate context.) These are:

\acute{e} - $t\acute{e}/\acute{e}\beta\acute{a}t\acute{e}$	'father' (but $\acute{a}t\acute{e}$ also exists as a plural)
\acute{e} - $k\acute{a}/\acute{e}\beta\acute{e}k\acute{a}$	'mother' (but $\acute{a}k\acute{a}$ also exists as a plural)
\acute{m} - $m\acute{a}/e\beta\acute{e}m\acute{a}$	'mother' (but not necessarily one's biological mother).

2.5 CONCORD IN USAKADE

The concord system of Usakade is largely uninteresting due to its regularity, i.e., the concord prefix is identical, segmentally and tonally, to the nominal prefix. This is true of all classes.

Concord is operable with the following categories: pronouns (demonstrative, relative, and possessive), verbs, adjectives and numerals (2 to 9). The uniformity of its operation allows examples to be drawn largely from one gender.

(a) verbal:

(i)	ó-wá	ó-dí	(ii)	í-wá	í-dí
	NP-dog	CP-came ⁴		NP-dogs	CP-came

(b) demonstratives:

(i)	ó-wá	ó-ké	(ii)	í-wá	í-ké
	NP-dog	CP-that		NP-dogs	CP-that

(c) relative:

(i)	ó-wá	ó-nò	ó-ká-dì-nè	(ii)	í-wá	í-nò	í-ká-dì-nè
	NP-dog	CP-who	CP-came		NP-dogs	CP-who	CP-came

(d) possessive:

(i)	ó-wá	ó-sè	(ii)	í-wá	í-sè
	NP-dog	CP-3PS Poss		NP-dogs	CP-3PS Poss

(e) adjectives:

(i)	ó-βiê	óvà	(ii)	í-βiê	í-wà
	CP short	NP-dog		CP short	NP-dog

(f) numerals:

(i)	ó-wá	tjèn	(ii)	í-wá	í-bá
	NP-dog	one		NP-dogs	CP-two
but (iii)	è-kòmò	tjèn	(iv)	à-kòmò	à-bà
	NP-drum	one		NP-drums	CP-two

3. THE DECLINE OF NOUN CLASSIFICATION IN LOWER CROSS

The existence of a functional noun class system in one of the contemporary Lower Cross languages shows clearly that proto Lower Cross must also have had such a system. Knowledge of the Usakade system may also permit the discovery of a greater number of vestiges of the PLC system as they exist in other Lower Cross languages, which in turn may provide insight into the processes involved in the degeneration of a noun class system.

3.1 A RANGE OF RETENTIONS

As indicated in §1, a range of retentions of the former noun class system can be found in the languages descended from proto Lower Cross.

Orò has singular/plural alternations for a small number of nouns which provide evidence for several genders. Obolo, on the other hand has lost virtually all singular/plural prefix alternations on nouns, and indeed, a small but significant proportion of nouns have lost prefixes altogether (in some dialects; see §3.8, below).

In between these two (also geographically) are Anaang, Efik, Eket, and Ibibio (=Central Lower Cross), all of which reflect the earlier situation in a similar fashion, having maintained a small set of nouns with alternating prefixes and some evidence of concord. (Two other Lower Cross languages, Ibeno and Okòbò remain unexamined from the point of view of noun classification.)

3.2 RETENTIONS IN ỌRỌ

Although Ọrọ has been described as having a noun class system (Kuperus, 1978), and in spite of evidence for several genders, it is clear that this system is by no means functional. Only a small proportion of nouns (about 10% of a 'basic' vocabulary list containing about 275 nouns) maintains a singular/plural prefix alternation. A wider search would undoubtedly turn up more, but it is unlikely that the percentage would increase; it might in fact decrease. Table 3.2 presents Ọrọ nouns maintaining alternating prefixes, grouped according to 'gender' and in comparison with Usakade. (It is arguable whether these pairings should be referred to as 'genders', as the term may imply the system is functional.)

	<u>Ọrọ</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Usakade</u>	
u/N	'-búkù	head	'-βì	(u/N)
	'-kíp níkì	eye	'-síp áṣèṅ	(u/N)
	'-kíp níkì	belly	'-díp	(u/N)
	'-bàrà	blood	'-yí	(u, neutral class, not cognate)
	'-fàṅ	leaf	'-fàṅ	(u/i)
	'-sím	tail	'-sùm	(u/N)
	'-nà	animal	'-dèṅé	(o/i)(borrowed)
	'-núṅò	bird	'-únṅn	(e/N)
	'-bá	finger- nail	'-bàná	(u/N)
	'-dùk	horn	'-fè	(o/i)(not cognate)
	'-téké	stone	'-tjá	(u/N)
	'-lù	bad odor	-	
	'-tâṅ	young girl	-	
	'-láp	young man	-	
u/o	'-t'óṅ	ear	'-t'óṅ	(u/a)
	'-b'ók	arm	'-β'ók	(u/a)
	'-kú	leg	'-kó	(u/a)
o/i	'-lì'ṅ	root	'-dùṅ	(o/i)
	'-f'ón	slave	'-β'únàṅ	(o/i)(not cognate)
o/e	'-ṅwí	person	'-ínì	(o/e)('man')
	'-j'ó	child	'-j'én	(o/e)
o/N	'-j'óké	brother	'-kpá	(o/i)(not cognate)
i/N	'-kp'ó étù	bark	'-b'ók étù	(i, neutral class)
	'-tâṅ	feather	'-βâ	(i/N)
a/N	'-fàṅ	path	'-fàṅ	(u/N)

Table 3.2 Ọrọ nouns retaining singular/plural prefix alternations and demonstrating evidence of genders, as compared to Usakade

Correspondences with Usakade are relatively straightforward. The 'personal gender' o/e is found to exist, although personal nouns are also found elsewhere (as in Usakade). Remnants of the 'animal' gender o/i are also present, though no animal nouns have maintained the alternation. The two items in this pairing are also found in Usakade o/i. Usakade u/a has corresponding u/o in Oro, with all Oro items here matching Usakade. Finally, Oro u/N, corresponds to Usakade strongly in content, and also in that it is the largest of genders.

Oro also shows evidence of neutral class nouns. Pluralization in this language is regularly done with the morpheme imà. A set of nouns, however, does not form plurals with this morpheme or through alternating prefixes, and these nouns are those that are typically found in single classes, e.g., mass nouns, liquids, etc. These can be considered (former) neutral class nouns in Oro. Comparison again can be made with Usakade, but in this case the similarities are not as strong as those seen above. Generally, the content is not as broad as in Usakade (e.g., nouns such as 'groundnuts' and 'beans' are not included. See §2.4.9). In both languages N forms the largest single class, although in Oro this class contains a considerably higher proportion of neutral nouns than in Usakade (50% vs. 20%). Despite this, only 2 items are shared, ñ-tóŋ 'ashes', and ñ-sùŋ 'snuff'. The other neutral classes in Oro, i-, u-, e, o, a-, each contain two items, and none bears a strong resemblance to Usakade. Examples are: í-té 'saliva, é-káŋ 'fire', ú-tín 'sun', and á-dà 'oil'.

3.3 RETENTIONS IN CENTRAL LOWER CROSS

The Central subgroup languages are, as stated, all fairly similar with regard to what noun class vestiges exist. The few nouns that have retained a singular/plural distinction are for the most part personal nouns, and with few exceptions the plural prefix is N-. For Ibibio, a total of 18 nouns are listed in Kaufmann (1985) as having prefix alternations (see Table 3.3). This total represents less than 2% of nouns listed in Kaufmann. In Efik, Anaang and Eket, many of the same nouns are included.

(áwó) á-déèn/i-	'man'	à-dúkpó/N-	'corpse'
(awo)ŋwân/i-bààn	'woman'	ì-kpàt/N-	'foot'
à-kpáràwà/N-	'young woman'	ì-díp/N-	'belly'
à-bóíkpa/ú-	'young woman'	í-só/N-	'face'
á-bɔɔŋ/N-, i-	'chief'	í-wúùd/N-	'head'
à-dídém/N-	'king'	ì-sìṁ/N-	'tail'
à-kúkú/N-	'clan chief'	í-kpɔŋ/N-	'cocoyam'
á-tâ/N-	'expert specialist'	á-kók/N-	'branch'
á-bià/N-	'expert, specialist'	á-fâŋ/N-	'leaf'

Table 3.3 Nouns in Ibibio retaining prefix alternations.

Other than the N- pluralizing prefix, two other prefixes can be seen, i- and u-. It is possible that i- has evolved from e- as the plural marker for human nouns, and is a stage before the appearance of N-. The occurrence of u- is curious, in that it does not appear elsewhere in Lower Cross as a plural prefix, and also in that it undergoes a tonal change. This is perhaps explainable in the context of a change from N- to u- or as a harmony effect with the following vowel. The a- singular prefix on personal nouns is found in most Ibibio dialects and in Eket and Anaang; other Ibibio dialects and Efik have ɔ-, as is found in Oro and Usakade. This is in all likelihood the older form.

Only the personal nouns found in Table 3.3 occur with any regularity as plurals. Of the others, *ń-wúùd* is exceedingly rare, occurring in the name of a type of snake, *ń-kpɔŋ* is also rare and *ń-díp* occurs only in compounds. The last item, *á-fâŋ*, refers to a specific type of leaf; *ń-fâŋ* is a general term rather than a true plural.

3.4 VERBAL NOUNS

Verbal nouns, particularly infinitives, also show evidence of noun classification. De Wolf (1971) has reconstructed PBC *i, a single (neutral) class, for these nouns. Although two different processes are at work synchronically in Lower Cross for infinitive formation, evidence for PLC *i is strong.

As presented in Table 3.4, Lower Cross infinitives are analysed as having two prefixes. This differs from the analyses of others, such as Mukarovsky (1968), who considers Efik 'ndi-' to be cognate with Jarawa ri-. This analysis is rejected, since the nasal is clearly syllabic and obviously corresponds to i- in Oro and Obolo; furthermore, the second prefix is (becoming) optional in Obolo infinitives (e.g., *í-lép* 'to buy', Faraclas, 1984), as well as in Anaang, and is also optional in other verbal nouns in Lower Cross.

	<u>'to buy'</u>	<u>'to hold'</u>
Efik	ń-dí-dép	ń-dí-mòm
Ibibio	á-dí-dép	á-dí-mám
Oro	í-dí-lí	í-dí-mùòò
Obolo	í-lé-lép	-
Usakade	ń-né-néi	ń-mó-mòm

Table 3.4 Infinitive formation in Lower Cross

Both Usakade and Obolo demonstrate a reduplication process in infinitive formation, for the inner prefix, compared to -di- elsewhere. These two forms of prefix are believed ultimately to be related, although the exact nature of such a relationship is not yet known. Evidence for this is found in other verbal nouns, where various degrees of change from one form to the other seem to exist. Examples are taken from Ibibio and Usakade.

Ibibio:	(a)	à-kì-kòŋ	'a type of woodpecker', from kòŋ
	(b)	ń-dí-día	'food'. from dia. 'eat'

	(c)	à-dì-bènè, m̄-bì-bènè, ì-bì-bènè, ì-bènè	'wall' (dialectal or sub- dialectal variants), from bèdè 'lean against'
Usakade:	(a)	m̄-bí-bòn	'bigness', 'fatness'
	(b)	n̄-tí-tàrà	'wideness'
	(c)	m̄-fí-feí	'hotness'
	(d)	m̄-fí-f̀n	'beautiful'

Admittedly there are a number of possible explanations for the different inner prefixes in Lower Cross verbal nouns. The suggestion offered here is that a nominalizing prefix (PLC *-di) has undergone various degrees of assimilation (processes of consonant and vowel harmony) to the verb root. This process is more or less complete in the infinitives of Obolo and Usakade, partially complete in the qualitative nouns of Usakade shown in Table 3.4, and those of Ibibio, but has not affected the infinitives of Efik, Ibibio, and Orɔ. A second hypothesis would involve cognate objects (see, for example, Faraclas and Williamson, 1984), but this would not allow us to find a relationship between the two types of infinitive formation seen synchronically in Lower Cross.

3.5 CONCORD IN LOWER CROSS

The nature of concord in Usakade was discussed in §2.5, above. Elsewhere in Lower Cross, concord has virtually disappeared. In most Lower Cross languages (except Oboblo?), a small set of adjectives has alternating prefixes for singular and plural, although the prefixes bear no relation to the noun in question. Invariably the plural prefix is either N- or (rarely) i- or e-.

Examples:

Ibibio:	á-búbít éwà	'black dog'
	m̄-búbít èwà	'black dogs'
Orɔ:	ì-dí'k ábà	'bad dog'
	n̄-dí'k ábà	'bad dogs'
	ɔ̄-kpónó á-bà	'big dog'
	è-kpónó ábà	'big dogs'
(cf. Anaṅ:	m̄-kpón éwà	'big dogs')

Interestingly, it is generally the same adjectives in the various languages that have maintained this alternation. A semantic basis for inclusion in this set is not apparent, and Faraclas (forthcoming) has suggested a grammatical reason (verbal derivation). An alternative suggestion, by way of Welmers (1971:6) is that the adjective prefix is being assigned to the entire noun phrase. It is characteristic of these adjectives that they all precede the noun (which is not always the case in Lower Cross, and adjectives following the noun never pluralize).

The only other evidence for concord found generally in Lower Cross is between the subject pronoun prefix and the verb prefix, where it can be seen in third person forms and sometimes second person forms, as is illustrated in Table 3.5. Throughout Lower Cross, however, verbs bear a prefix determined by person and number.

	<u>Obolo</u>	<u>Eket</u>	<u>Ibibio</u>	<u>Usakade</u>
1PS	è-mì ñ-lép	à-mì ñ-deí	à-mì ñ-dép	à-mì ñ-neí
2PS	ò-wò ó-lép	à-fè à-deí	à-fò à-dép	à-fò à-neí
3PS	ò-mò ó-lép	à-ṣé á-deí	à-ṣé á-dép	ó-mò ó-neí
1PP	è-jì é-lép	à-jìt í-deí	ṅ-ṣìn í-dép	á-ṣìn ì-neí
2PP	è-ṣì é-lép	à-ṣìn í-deí	ṅ-dùfò è-dép	ám-bùfò è-neí
3PP	è-má é-lép	é-mò é-deí	á-mmò é-dép	é-mmò é-neí

Table 3.5. Subject/verb concord, shown with the verb 'buy'

Efik has vowel harmony in the second and third person singular between the root vowel and prefix. This is not typical of Lower Cross though it is matched by some dialects of Ibibio. Vowel harmony does exist throughout Lower Cross, though it takes different forms in the various languages. The development of vowel harmony in Lower Cross (at least with regard to prefixes) is likely intimately connected to the decline of the class/concord system and is an area for future study.

3.6 FORMER LOWER CROSS CLASSES AND GENDERS

Despite the absence of true noun classes in most of Lower Cross, it is still possible to glean some information concerning former classes and genders in Lower Cross by examining the regular correspondences that exist among prefixes of cognate forms.

In considering the o/i ('animal') gender in Usakade, for example, it can be ascertained that this is a merger of different classes. This notion is first suggested by the fact that the singular prefix, o-, is not a likely reflex of PBC *i, and that the majority of nouns contained in the gender are non-animal nouns. To support this hypothesis, we find that throughout the other Lower Cross languages the contents of this Usakade gender bear one of two prefixes; e- for animal nouns (typical of Cross River) and a- (or o-) for inanimates. Examples from Ibibio are compared to Usakade.

<u>Ibibio</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Usakade</u>
é-dṣ̃ṣ̃	'sheep'	ó-dṣ̃ṣ̃/i-
é-nāṣ̃	'cow'	ó-nāṣ̃/i-
é-nīn	'elephant'	ó-nīn/i-
à-kpókóró	'table'	ò-kpókóró/i-
à-fṣ̃ṣ̃	'cloth'	ò-fṣ̃ṣ̃/i-
à-kúk	'money'	ò-kúk/i-

It is clear from this data that Usakade o/i is indeed a merger of at least two singular classes. Proto-Lower Cross quite likely had *e/*i (animals) and *o/*i which merged in Usakade. In other cases, where Usakade and the rest of Lower Cross generally share the same prefix, it can be assumed that there has been no change in the class of these nouns since PLC. For example, 'arm', 'leg' and 'ear' share u- as a singular prefix (cf. Table 3.2).

An extensive and careful study of variation in nominal prefixes throughout Lower Cross, combined with the evidence of the existing noun class system of Usakade, would allow for the most reasonable reconstruction of the noun class system of proto-Lower Cross. Such an examination is beyond the scope of this work, which has been intended primarily to be an examination of the current situation in Lower Cross. Based on this data, however, it is possible to offer some comments on the proto-Lower Cross system.

3.7 NOUN CLASSIFICATION IN PROTO LOWER CROSS

The evidence examined above suggests that of the six canonical genders proposed by De Wolf (1971:52) for proto Benue-Congo, at least four were maintained in proto Lower Cross. These are:

PBC:	*u/*ba	*li/*a	*i/*i	*ku/*a
PLC:	*o/*e	*e/*a	*e/*i	*u/*a

If a gender *o/*i existed in PLC, as argued above, it is perhaps a result of a pre-Lower Cross merger of elements of PBC *ku/*i, *bu/*i and *u/*ti. Certainly other PLC genders existed, but at the present stage of research it is difficult to establish their nature. The prefix i- exists throughout Lower Cross, though most prominently in the Central group and least so in Usakade. It was certainly a single class marker in PLC for verbal nouns (3.4) and perhaps also a singular class marker. The proliferation of N- as a pluralizing prefix throughout Lower Cross indicates its earlier presence in PLC; the gender u/N, largest in both Usakade and Oro must surely have existed in the parent language.

3.8 THE N- PREFIX IN LOWER CROSS

It is apparent that as the noun class system of Lower Cross collapsed, plural markers tended to merge to N. This is indicated by the proliferation of N- in Usakade and the fact that it is virtually the only plural prefix found elsewhere in Lower Cross. Two other factors suggest that this is a tendency of disappearing class prefixes generally, and not simply of plural forms. Faraclas (forthcoming) has reported the loss of prefixes on some nouns in western dialects of Obolo; in other Obolo dialects the same nouns bear a nasal prefix. In addition to this, many nouns in Ibibio show dialectal variation between i- and N-; in these, the N- prefix may be interpreted as a later development. An alternative would be to suggest that certain nouns in certain dialects retained the plural form rather than the singular. This is seen as the less likely of the two possibilities, although it is certainly true of some nouns. (cf. Ibibio *m̀-bàrá* 'fingernail' vs. Usakade *ù-bàná/m-*).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has presented evidence for noun classification in Lower Cross, evidence which ranges from the barest of vestiges (Obolo) to a functioning noun class/concord system (Usakade). It is clear, therefore, that proto-Lower Cross must have had a functional noun class system and some probable characteristics of this system have been suggested.

With regard to the degeneration of the proto system, the most striking characteristic is the proliferation of N- as a plural prefix and perhaps as a later, optional last stage before the disappearance of nominal prefixes entirely. It also seems apparent that singular classes maintain their identity longer than plural ones. This is likely due to a striving for one uniform plural morpheme. As has been noted elsewhere, [human] nouns tend to maintain longest the distinction between singular and plural prefixes.

Concerning Faraclas's suggestions about the primacy of concord over class, there is little in the Lower Cross data to support the notion that concord systems persist after the disappearance of class systems. Indeed, the fact that the concord prefix is invariably the same as the nominal prefix, whereas elsewhere in Benue-Congo languages this is not always the case (De Wolf, 1971), suggests levelling in the direction of the noun prefix. We might therefore assign primacy to class, rather than concord. There is some evidence, however, to support the idea of prosodic processing for these systems (§3.5).

Finally, the question of vowel harmony with regard to prefixes was touched on, but not explored. Vowel harmony in Lower Cross is not of the cross-height type typically found in West African languages and its nature is likely closely intertwined with the decline of the noun classification system.

NOTES

¹I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. C. E. Motina, my main informant from Usakade, and to Okon Essien, Kay Williamson, Philip Noss and Nick Faraclas for comments on an earlier version. Throughout the paper transcriptions used are broadly phonemic as a standard orthography does not exist for all of the Lower Cross languages. Tone marks are: ' high, ' low, ^ falling, ˇ rising. Downstepped tones are unmarked.

²The nine languages recognized (at the time of writing) as being comprised in Lower Cross are: Anaaŋ, Efik, Eket, Ibeno, Ibibio, Obolo, ƆkƆbƆ, ƆrƆ, and Usakade. A tentative subgrouping has been offered (excluding Usakade which had not yet come to my attention) in Connell 1984, 1985. A revised subclassification, including a number of newly uncovered Lower Cross languages is in progress.

³Usakade is the name of a people, their territory and language, located in the south-western corner of Cameroon. The official name, Isangele has turned up rarely in the literature (e.g. Forde & Jones, 1952:89). Geographically the region is contiguous with the rest of the Lower Cross speaking area, but separated by the Cross River and the Akpayafe.

⁴Abbreviations are NP = nominal prefix, CP = concord prefix, 3PS Poss = third person singular possessive. Elsewhere 1PS = first person singular, etc.

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