

NOUN CLASSES AND CONCORD IN QIḶMA*

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1. QlḶma

Data on QlḶma was first published in Koelle's Polyglotta Africana in 1854. Koelle's informant was a woman who had had six children at QlḶma before being sold into slavery. At the time of serving as Koelle's informant, she was again married.

In the classification which precedes the data published in the Polyglotta, Koelle correctly identifies five languages, including QlḶma, as belonging together (his group VB (1-5)). The others are the Ughelli dialect of Urhobo (Kelly 1968), the Ekpheli dialect of Yekhee (Etsakp) (Laver 1969), Ḷdo (Bini) (Elugbe 1976) and Ihewe (obviously Ihievbe (Sebe), but so far not formally identified). Koelle's VB languages are taken from the stock later called Ḷdo (Elugbe 1973) and now the Ḷdoid languages (Elugbe, personal communication).

Following Koelle's publication, Thomas (1910) noted the occurrence of IV- and ghV- prefixes in QlḶma (which he seems to have confused with GhotuḶ).

Westermann (1926) again refers to these prefixes, suggesting that they were probably related to the li and ki of other class languages. It is unfortunate that Koelle gave no plural forms in the data published on the Ḷdoid languages. It is probable that Westermann's subsequent observations would have led to an earlier investigation of QlḶma.

QlḶma is situated in the hilly country to the North/Northwest of the Bendel State of Nigeria. It lies some three kilometres to the South of the Igarra-ḶkpḶ road, and is about three kilometres from ḶkpḶ itself.

I gathered at ḶkpḶ, and later at GhotuḶ (OtuḶ) and Ikao (the two other places close to QlḶma beyond the hills), that the QlḶma form a closed society to which outsiders are not admitted. It was said that QlḶma women did not marry

*The data for this paper was collected by B. O. Elugbe on three short visits to QlḶma at the end of 1977 and the beginning of 1978. The analysis and presentation were worked out jointly by B. O. Elugbe and K. Schubert. This explains the change from the first person singular to the first person plural at the end of the introduction.

outsiders and their men also married only within Ọlọma.

Concerning the linguistic relationship between Ọlọma and neighbouring languages, the informants in Ọlọma claimed mutual intelligibility between themselves and the Ọkpe and the Idesa section of Ghotuq. They also said that they understood a bit of Eesan and a lot of Ọjiramhi and Sonorika (Embalhe), both Ọkpasheri dialects.

The Ọkpe, however, denied any claim to mutual intelligibility between their language and Ọlọma. My own experience, as a speaker of Ghotuq, was that I clearly recognized individual items - which are surprisingly close to Ghotuq - but that I got lost when these were strung together in normal, fluent speech. Be that as it may, it is obvious that the Ọlọma are rather isolated and are not particularly well-liked by their neighbours.

My informants were Chief John Idiabekhai, the Ọgwa of Ọlọma, and some elders. He said he was born in 1910 and that, apart from a period of seven years spent in Ibadan, he had lived all his life in Ọlọma. I do not know the names of the elders who were with him and with whom he sometimes conferred on the correctness of the information he was giving me.

In eliciting data from the Ọgwa of Ọlọma, I encountered a number of problems. It developed for example that the only language we had in common was Yoruba, with which they were obviously more familiar than I. In addition, I could not make the best use of the short time I had for eliciting data because the Ọgwa of Ọlọma is an elderly gentleman who tires easily and is sometimes (along with his elders) in doubt as to what exactly is the correct singular/plural noun- or concord-prefix.

2. The vowel system

The vowels of Ọlọma are i, e, ɛ, a, o, o and u. Each of them becomes nasalised after a nasal consonant. There is no vowel harmony, at least in nouns: prefix vowels combine freely with stem vowels. For example:¹

1 Transcription is generally of a broad phonetic level. Strange characters and diacritics are avoided as much as possible. The following conventions should be noted:

(1)	gh5-bf	pl.	é-bf	leaf
	6-gbh5		f-gbh5	wizard
	6-bf		é-bf	mat
	6-tù		é-tù	antelope
	6-zè		f-zè	axe
	5-fl		é-fl	rat
	16-nwè		f-nwè	breast

These examples show that pluralization takes place by prefix alternation², and that there is no harmony between prefix and stem vowels. However, where a plural vowel prefix has to be chosen, the choice between i and é suggests a splitting of the vowels into two subgroups:

(2)	<u>a</u>	<u>b</u>
	i	u
	e	o
		a

There is harmony only to the extent that once a singular vowel prefix is from set a, its plural counterpart must also be from set a; if it is from set b, its plural counterpart must also be from set b.

Since prefix vowels are synchronically not controlled by stem vowels, it would appear that there is a kind of prefix internal harmony, independent of the stem.

3. Pluralization

Unfortunately, a purely synchronic classification of Qlqma nouns gains nothing from this apparent case of stem-independent vowel harmony. Consider

- (3):
- a) The h-series (th, dh, etc.) represent a lenis (i.e. shorter) set of consonants except that
 - i. kh and gh are realized as velar fricatives in some peoples' speech
 - ii. sh and zh are voiceless and voiced palato-alveolar central fricatives respectively. xh may be breathy-voiced or plainly voiced.
 - b) ny represents a voiced palatal nasal
ny represents a voiced labialized velar nasal
 - c) vh represents a voiced bi-labial central approximant
 - d) l represents a tapped (i.e. short/lenis) alveolar lateral approximant. Its non-lenis counterpart does not occur and some speakers use an alveolar central approximant in place of l.
 - e) ʋ and ɰ represent breathy-voiced counterparts of v and ɰ respectively. Note especially the contrasts t : th and d : dh. The lenis alveolar stops are a little longer than the typical taps, and are more easily identified as shorter forms of their non-lenis counterparts.

2 Note that the tone of the prefix is invariable for any given noun and therefore takes no part in the assignment of the noun to a class.

(3)	gh5-k3	pl. ɛ-k3	ear
	gh5-b3	ɛ-b3	arm
	gh5-k3	ɛ-k3	canoe
	ɩɛ-w3ghɩ	ɛ-w3ghɩ	thigh
	ɩɛ-r3ã	ɛ-r3ã	nail (finger, toe)

The examples in (3) show not only that there are more than i and e plural prefixes, but also that we need more than phonological information to know the particular noun class pairing (gender) to which a noun belongs. Unless the plural forms of 'ear', 'arm' and 'canoe' are clearly indicated, there is nothing in the prefix to tell us what plural to expect. The same is true for 'thigh' and 'nail'. It is necessary to make this point because there has been a tendency, where pluralization by prefix alternation has been observed in the ɛoid languages, to seek purely phonological explanations of the rules governing such singular/plural alternation (cf. Kelly 1969, Elugbe 1973, Elimelech 1976). But each of these writers has been forced to say that some of the observed alternations defied any phonological explanation. In particular, it has been found that 'a few parts of the body' will take a plural prefix a- where, purely on the grounds of phonological patterning, a different vowel would have been predicted.

4. Noun class and concord

Among the cases of noun class vestiges that have been described among the ɛoid languages, only the case of Dɛɛɛna (Elugbe 1976) has anything to compare with that of Qɩɩna. Even after taking vowel harmony into account, there are still no less than 13 noun class genders in Dɛɛɛna.

The case of Qɩɩna represents a significant difference from the Dɛɛɛna noun class system in two ways which make it even more interesting from the comparative point of view: it has consonant plus vowel prefixes and it has concord. Dɛɛɛna lacks any CV- prefixes and has singular/plural subject concord markers which have only the same shape no matter what noun they are marking.

The examples in (1) and (3) above show clearly that there are consonant plus vowel prefixes in Qɩɩna. That there is concord is seen in (4):

(4) a. i.	ō-kphō, pl. f-kphō	river
ii.	ō-kphō ō-nō	this river
iii.	f-kphō f-nō	these rivers
b. i.	ō-gbhō, pl. f-gbhō	wizard
ii.	ō-gbhō ā-nō	this wizard
iii.	f-gbhō f-nō	these wizards
c. i.	ā-rē, pl. lō-rē	house
ii.	ā-rē ā-nō	this house
iii.	lō-rē lē-nō	these houses
d. i.	lē-kō, pl. ā-kō	tooth
ii.	lē-kō lō-nō	this tooth
iii.	ā-kō ā-nō	these teeth
e. i.	lē-cā, pl. ā-cā	egg
ii.	lē-cā lō-nō	this egg
iii.	ā-cā f-nō	these eggs

In this construction the head nouns govern the choice of prefix in the demonstrative. We are here dealing with a clear case of concord. Furthermore, the examples under (4a)ii and (4d-e)iii show that the concord prefixes are neither necessarily identical with, nor even predictable from, the nominal prefixes. Both 'river' and 'wizard' and 'tooth' and 'egg' would have been allocated to the same 'o-/i-' or 'lō-/rō-' gender if only their nominal prefixes were to be taken into account. Their allocation to four different genders is due to the fact that they attract different concordial elements in the singular or the plural. Hence, for every noun in Qlqma, it is necessary to specify (for its proper classification) both its prefixes (sg. and pl.) and its concord prefixes (sg. and pl.). A class pairing in Qlqma, therefore, is any permissible singular/plural combination of noun prefixes and concord prefixes.

The examples in (4) have been deliberately restricted to the demonstrative concord. The truth is that there is only the same concord element for a particular noun in all constructions. In (5), the noun 'dog' is used in different constructions and the concord elements are seen to be constant:

(5) ghā-wā pl. lō-wā	dog
ghā-wā ghō-nhī	that dog
lō-wā lē-nhī	those dogs
ghā-wā ghō-mē	my dog
lō-wā lē-mē	my dogs
ghā-wā ghō ō-kpīšā	the dog of the king
lō-wā lē ō-kpīšā	the dogs of the king
ghā-wā ghō dē	the dog bought
lō-wā lē dē	the dogs bought

The concord prefixes³ so far identified in Qlqna are

(6)	sg	o	lo	gho
	pl	e	le	ghe
	sg/pl	a		

The relatively low number of concord prefixes contrasts with the rather high number of (synchronically unpredictable) noun prefixes. In other words, although there is a large number of noun prefixes (see (7) below), either there are now very few concord elements or the phonological shapes of the concord elements have been reduced to basically seven. Either way, the conclusion is that the concord system is much more reduced than the noun prefix system.

We will give below examples of all the noun prefixes (sg. and pl.) so far encountered in Qlqna.

(7)	1.	o-xɪ	pl. f-	grave
	2.	o-lɪnhɪ	f-	corpse
	3.	o-rɪ	ɛ-	rat
	4.	o-bɪ	ɛ-	mat
	5.	ɛ-nɪ	f-	elephant
	6.	lɛ-nwɛ	f-	breast
	7.	lɛ-cə	ɛ-	egg
	8.	lɛ-rɔ̀hə	ɛ-	nail (finger, toe)
	9.	ghɪ-xɪlɪf	f-	goat
	10.	ghɛ-cə	f-	fly
	11.	ghɛ-gbə	ɛ-	stone
	12.	ghɛ-kpəgə	ɛ-	elbow
	13.	ghɛ-bɪ	ɛ-	leaf; book
	14.	ghɔ̀-kɪ	f-	rubbish, dirt
	15.	ghɛ-bɔ̀	ɛ-	arm
	16.	ghɛ-zhɛ	ghɪ-	bow (weapon)
	17.	ghɛ-gbɔ̀hə	ghɛ-	laughter
	18.	ghɛ-vɛ	lɛ-	neck
	19.	ghɛ-çɛ	lɛ-	pot
	20.	ghɛ-hɛ	lɛ-	cough
	21.	ghɛ-mɛ	lɛ-	salt
	22.	ghɪ-kpɪ	lɛ-	python
	23.	ɛ-mɛ	lɛ-	water
	24.	ɛ-vɔ̀lɪf	lɛ-	oil
	25.	ghɛ-mɛ		ashes
	26.	lɛ-vbɪ		kolanut
	27.	ghɪ-dɛ		chin
	28.	f-thə		father
	29.	ɛ-gbɪ		body
	30.	ɛ-chɪ		devil
		etc.		

3 (6) is remarkable as it shows the emerging regularization of an o : ɛ contrast to signal the singular : plural concord distinction. When added to the fact that the class pairing with the most numerous membership, (1/2) (cf. Appendix), is characterized by o : ɛ singular : plural concord elements and by u/o : i/ɛ singular : plural noun prefixes, it becomes clear that development here is in the direction of the most common Boid singular : plural pairs u : i and o : ɛ (cf. Elugbe 1973; Elimelech 1976).

The plural noun prefixes in these examples are:

(8)	i	lu	ghi
	e	lo	ghe
	a		

If we leave out the case of numbers 7 and 15 in (7) for the moment, we find that in cases where the plural vowel is i, the vowel of the singular prefix is i, e, o or u; where the plural vowel is e, the singular vowel is e, a or o, i.e. the choice between i and e as plural vowels is predictable from the singular vowel. Likewise for the plural vowels u and o: if the plural prefix vowel is u, the singular prefix vowels are i, e or u (no examples available for o); and if the plural prefix vowel is o, the singular prefix vowels are a or o (no examples available for e). These observations further support our claim about a prefix-internal harmony, independent of the stem (cf. p.3).

Looking at the plurals only it will not be possible to make a similar statement about the plural prefix vowel a because there is no other prefix vowel to match it with. From the singular prefixes, however, we see that a 'harmonizing' pair a and o exists (cf. (7) 18, 19). Considering the overall system it would appear logical to assume an analogous pairing of e and a alongside the u/o and i/e pairings.

All this suggests that the plural prefixes can be reduced to four while the singular prefixes are reduced to nine:

(9)	i.	plural prefixes		
		I (i, e)	IU (lu, lo)	ghI (ghi, ghe)
		A (a, o)		
	ii.	singular prefixes		
		U (u, o)		ghU (ghu, gho)
		I (i, e)	II (li, le)	ghI (ghi, ghe)
		A (a, o)	IA (la, lo)	ghA (gha, ghe)
		o		

The singular prefix vowel o is obviously the odd vowel out as it does not match with any other vowel. Although it generally pairs with u in the harmony systems found among the Edoïd languages, the case for pairing o with u in Olopa is so strong that o must remain isolated (see the listing of concord classes below).

5. Qlqma concord classes

As pointed out earlier, a complete specification of a noun in Qlqma must include not only its singular and plural noun prefixes but also its singular and plural concord prefixes. In the lists that follow, therefore, we give, for each class, a number. The number is then subnumbered according to the kinds of alternants involved in the noun prefixes of that class. For example, class 1 is U-o; it pairs with class 2 I-e. Under class 1 we have

- 1 (a) u-o and
(b) o-o,

that is to say that we have in class 1 nouns whose singular prefix is u or o, but both taking an o concord prefix. In class 2 we have

- 2 (a) i-e and
(b) e-e

This means that we have here nouns whose plural prefix is i or e while their concord prefix is invariably e. In short, the hyphen is preceded by the noun prefix and followed by the concord prefix.

(10) List of concord classes

No.	Label	Realization	Number function
1.	U-o	a) u-o b) o-o	sg. of 2
2.	I-e	a) i-e b) e-e	pl. of 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15
3.	A-o	a) e-o b) a-o	sg. of 2
4.	A-e	a) (e-e) ⁴ b) a-e	pl. of 15
5.	o-o	o-o	sg. of 2
6.	o-a	o-a	sg. of 2
7.	U-a	a) u-a b) o-a	sg. of 2
8.	A-a	a) (e-a) b) a-a	sg. of 2, 13. pl. of 9, 15
9.	ghU-gho	a) ghU-gho b) ghO-gho	sg. of 2, 8, 12, 13
10.	ghA-gho	a) ghE-gha b) ghA-gha	sg. of 2, 13
11.	ghI-gho	a) ghI-gho b) ghE-gho	sg. of 2, 13
12.	ghI-ghc	a) ghI-ghc b) ghE-ghc	pl. of 9

⁴ Brackets enclose unattested forms.

No.	Label	Realization	Number function
13.	IU-1c	a) Iu-1c b) Iu-1c	pl. of 8, 9, 10, 11, 14
14.	IA-1a	a) Ia-1a b) (Ia-1a)	sg. of 2, 13, 16
15.	II-1a	a) (II-1a) b) Ia-1a	sg. of 2, 4, 8
16.	I-1c	a) I-1c b) (e-1c)	pl. of 14

Appendix

The following wordlists are arranged according to the attested class pairings, e.g. (1/2), and harmony sets within the prefix vowels, i.e. a vs. b. (Refer back to the List of Classes, (10).)

The heading a(1/2) then means that the first item, for example, should read

ǂ-zè sg., f-zè pl., with an ǂ- sg. and an f- pl. concord prefix.

On the hyphen preceding each noun stem we indicate the (unpredictable) prefix tone.

Within each sublist the items are arranged alphabetically according to the English glosses.

a(1/2)

ǂ-zè	axe	ǂ-nhĩnhè	needle
ǂ-kpè	bed	ǂ-ǂò	nose
ǂ-vùá	bone	ǂ-thòtò	penis
ǂ-gò	buttocks	ǂ-lùnhù	pestle
ǂ-kò	calabash	ǂ-ghòní	ram
ǂ-váǂé	cloth	ǂ-thùnhámhĩ	snail
ǂ-nhĩghĩ	coal	ǂ-tòkpè	sore
ǂ-tòkhù	door	ǂ-kǂé	spear
ǂ-tòǂá	finger	ǂ-thùnhù	tail
ǂ-thò	fruit	ǂ-gòá	thorn
ǂ-ǂĩ	grave	ǂ-kòǂá	toe
ǂ-òò	he-goat	ǂ-nyá	vein
ǂ-bòǂĩ	knife	ǂ-wéĩ	wall
ǂ-khùnhù	medicine	ǂ-hùnhĩ	work
ǂ-kǂó	monkey	ǂ-nhònhĩ	worm
ǂ-nù	mouth	ǂ-kpè	year

b(1/2)

ǂ-rùgò	anus	ǂ-xphá	hill
ǂ-nhĩ	arrow	ǂ-ghònhĩ	hook
ǂ-nhĩnhè	beans	ǂ-xphámhĩ	horn
ǂ-pǂá	cutlass	ǂ-khòlù	hut
ǂ-vámhĩ	fern	ǂ-fá	intestine
ǂ-è	fear	ǂ-khòlámù	lip

ɛkpháìè	lizard	ɛtáàbò	spider
ɛdòbòdòbò	orange	ɛlámhí	tongue
ɛrɛ	rat	ɛshá	tree
ɛkhùè	soap		

a(3/2)

ɛsɛ	cat
ɛnɛ	elephant
ɛhùènhí	monkey

b(3/2)

ɛìghènhè	alligator	ɛvà	gun
ɛnhà	animal	ɛkpà	kite
ɛtù	antelope	ɛbì	mat
ɛgà	chair	ɛwò	shirt
ɛnwámhí	crocodile	ɛshà	squirrel
ɛdòbòdòbò	fan	ɛghòshà	vagina
ɛkákà	fever		

(5/2)

ɛlìfágbà	beard	ɛdòhídòhè	parrot
ɛnhòlòkí	chameleon	ɛkphò	river
ɛnhùnhù	cotton	ɛkù	rubbish heap
ɛtòtù	dust	ɛshòlì	shin
ɛkí	fence	ɛghònhù	vulture
ɛkbò	fowl	ɛgbè	waist
ɛthènhí	heel	ɛvbinhà	yan

(6/2)

ɛlámhí	corpse	ɛyì	thief
ɛkpháì	king, qba.	ɛgbhò	wizard
ɛghònhà	slave		

a(7/2)

ɛvbíhí	daughter
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b(7/2)

ɛsòè	hunter
ɛwàshà	lazy man

b(8/2)

ɛkà	basket
ɛbù	doctor
ɛkpàhè	elder, old person
ɛhí	friend (always with poss. pron.)
ɛhòshònhà	in-law
ɛshí	man
ɛrà	stranger
ɛhènhí	wife, woman

a(9/2)

ɛkù	dirt, rubbish
ɛtù	louse
ɛlòghí	rope

b(9/2)

ɛhò	ear
ɛzè	grey hair
ɛhù	hair
ɛbì	leaf; book

a(10/2)

ɛshíshí	ant
ɛlònhù	bush
ɛcè	fly

b(10/2)

ɛthòthònhí	butterfly
ɛkpàgè	elbow
ɛwèlámhí	fish
ɛshíhè	mortar
ɛhù	termite

a(11/2)

ɛaɪɪ	goat
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b(11/2)

ɛgbã	stone
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-a(14/2)

ɛni	name
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b(15/2)

ɛnyãmhɪ	frog (in general)
ɛrãã	nail

a(14/3)

ɛbi	darkness
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b(15/4)

ɛwù	case
pl. ɛwùxù	
ɛcã	egg
ɛlù	hole
ɛwãghɪ	thigh

b(9/8)

ɛbã	arm
ɛshɪnbã	leg

b(15/8)

ɛkã	tooth
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a(9/12)

ɛzãbã	bow (weapon)
ɛdɪ	oil palm

b(9/12)

ɛgbɪã	laughter
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a(8/13)

ɛvbɪɪ	oil
pl. ɛvbɪã	

b(8/13)

ɛzã	blood
ɛfã	house
ɛmã	water

a(9/13)

ɛxi	moon
ɛmã	salt

b(9/13)

ɛkã	cance
ɛhbã	cough

a(10/13)

ɛahi	bag
ɛhù	cap, hat
ɛzãhã	fire
ɛvã	neck
ɛshã	pepper
ɛkpi	scorpion
ɛshi	skin
ɛgùã	stomach

b(10/13)

ɛwã	dog
ɛcã	pot

a(11/13)

ɛkpi	python
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a(14/16)

ɛnwã	breast
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Unclassified nouns

Nouns in this list have been left unclassified because they either do not fit into any of the previous pairings or seem to be cases of misunderstandings in elicitation. Or they may form part of genuine single class genders, a possibility that has not been further pursued.

lã-fũmhũ	war
lã-mã	chest
lã-tãmhɪ	flesh
lã-vbɪ	kola
ẽ-gbɪ	body
ẽ-shũ	devil
ghã-lã	road
ghɪ-khãã	play (n.)
ghã-kã	day
ɪ-thã	father
ghɪ-mã	ashes

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