NUMBER MARKING STRATEGIES IN BURAK

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- Countable verses Uncountable Nouns

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Language

Burak /búːɾák/

Alternative name

/ɲwá búːɾák/

Population

20,196
(2006 Official Census)

Location

Kaltungo Local Government,
Gombe State, Nigeria

Kleinewillinghofer (2015) classifies burak as a Bikwin-Jen language. His classification is as follows:

Bikwin-Jen

Bikwin

Burak-Loo

Burak [bʊʊrak]

Loo [shʊŋɔ]

Northon and Othaniel (2020) classifies burak as Jen language. Their classification is as follows:

Jen

Burak-Loo

Maghdi, Mak

Kyak-Moo-Leelau

Tha

Doso-Dza

1

Burak Language Committee (2008): Orthography of the Burak Language

2

Kleinewillinghöfer (2015) Classification of Burak the Bikwin-Jen Language

3

Norton & Othaniel (2020): The Jen Language Cluster: A Comparative Analysis of Wordlists

Consonants:

approximately **24** including implosives and labial velars

Word order:

SVO

Nine vowels:

/i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /o/, /ɔ/, /u/, /ʊ/

Canonical syllable stem shapes:

(C)V(V), CV(V)C

Tones:

Two level (H, L) with a downstep high tone (ꜜH)

The data used in this presentation was collected during my first fieldwork to Burak, located within the Gombe State of Nigeria, in October 2022, as well as my subsequent fieldwork conducted in Ghana from July to August 2023.

Data used in the analysis consist on 850 lexical items, recorded both in isolation and as part of a sentence frame.

The head of a noun phrase comes first, followed by modifiers such as numerals, demonstratives, quantifiers etc.

Majority of nouns in Burak can be pluralized.

Some nouns seem to be Singularia Tantum

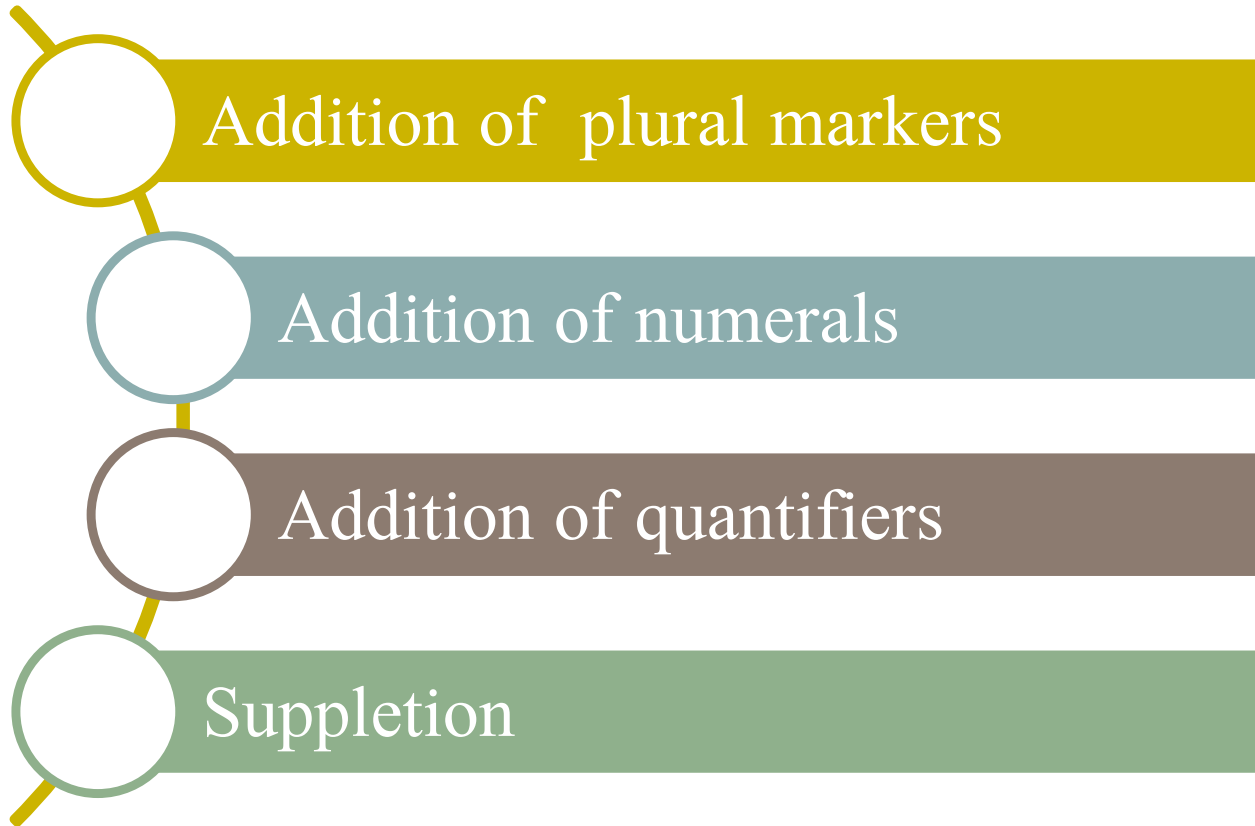No evidence of Pluralia Tantum has been found

Burak does not make a distinction between animate and inanimate nouns in terms of number marking.

The language however distinguishes between countable and uncountable nouns.

Only countable nouns can be pluralized

Burak features the following number marking strategies:

- Addition of plural markers
- Addition of numerals
- Addition of quantifiers
- Suppletion

- The standard pluralizer in Burak is *jé.*

- It functions as a plural word

      (1) ɖwá 'dog' ~ jé ɖwá 'dogs'

      (2) lùl 'person' ~ jé lùl 'people'

      (3) ɖɪ̃́t 'tree' ~ jé ɖɪ̃́t 'trees'

      (4) tál 'stone' ~ jé tál 'stones '

- The plural marker jé: has an allomorph jélá: with some nouns

  (5) líbè 'man' ~ jélá: líbè 'men'

  (6) líʃê: 'woman' ~ jélá: líʃê: 'women'

- When combined with the quantifier "kô:" it forms the expression

  "jélà: kô:" which means "some people.".

- The singular noun **jél** 'person' and its plural equivalent **jélè** 'people' are used to mark number distinction on human nouns.

- These forms, namely **jél/jélè,** are used in the compound formation of nouns, which mainly denote people's occupations and religious affiliations.

7 (a)   jél   táː   nʊ̀ŋ
           person   hit   thing
              'blacksmith'

(b)   jélè   táː   nʊ̀ŋ
           people   hit   thing
              'blacksmiths'

8 (a)   jélː   ɲwáː   vùm
           person   front   war
              'warrior'

(b)   jélè   ɲwáː   vùm
           people   front   war
              'warriors'

9 (a)   jél   káb
          person   stick
            'police man'

(b)   jélè   káb
        people   stick
          'police men'

10 (a) jél   bɛ́ɾɛ̀   lôː
        person bow   head
           'muslim'

(b)   jélè   bɛ́ɾɛ̀ː   lôː
        people bow   head
           'builders'

Only one word in the corpus has been

identified to have a suppletive plural form

jùː 'child' > ɲímâŋ 'children'

When a noun is modified by a numeral, the use of the plural marker is optional.

(11)   jé   lùl   ɾáb   or   lùl   ɾáb
       PL   person   two   person   two

       'two people'   'two people'

(12)   jé   tál   náːɾɛ   or   tál   náːɾɛ̀
       PL   stone   seven   stone   seven

       'seven stones'   'seven stones'

- Quantifiers can be used to express plurality on count nouns.

- They occur after the head noun in a noun phrase.

- Some universal quantifiers in Burak include **wéːlé** or **wéː** 'many', **fɛ́k** 'all', **kôː** 'some'.

(13)   jélàː   kôː
people   some
'some people'

(14)   jélàː   líʃêː   fɛ́k
PL   woman   all
'all women '

Unlike countable nouns, uncountable nouns in Burak are unmarked for number, unless in the case of packaging interpretation.

(15) mîn 'beer'

(16) mɛ́ː 'water'

(17) núŋèmè 'money'

- Although uncountable nouns are not usually marked for number, nouns referring to substances can be quantified when packaged.

- Liquids, whether water, oil, milk or some other product for human consumption, may be kept in containers or bottles, and thus be quantified.

- Examples of packaging interpretation of some uncountable nouns include

(18)   mîn   ɾáb

beer   two

'two bottles of beer'

(19)   mɛ́ː   kwîn

water   one

'a bottle of water'

The quantifier **wé**: 'a lot of' can be used to express quantity with uncountable nouns.

(20)   kwíntírì wéː

dust   a lot of

'a lot of dust'

(21)   ʃùwádʒwé   wéː

sand   a lot of

'a lot of sand'

- This paper has provided data on number marking strategies in Burak.

- The language distinguishes between countable and uncountable nouns.

- Countable nouns can be marked for number through suppletion, addition of plural markers, numerals, and quantifiers.

- Except in packaging interpretation, uncountable nouns usually remain unmarked for number.

- The quantifier wé: 'a lot of' can be used to express plurality on uncountable nouns.

Kleinewillinghöfer, Ulrich. 2015. Bikwin-Jen - Comparative Wordlist (Swadesh 100). https://www.blogs.uni-mainz.de/fb07-adamawa/files/2011/11/Bikwin-Jen-comparative-wordlist-100.pdf (Accessed 2023-05-08.)

Matthew S. Dryer. 2013. Coding of Nominal Plurality. In: Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.) The World Atlas of Language Structures Online. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

Norton & Othaniel. 2020. The Jen language cluster: A comparative analysis of wordlists. Language in Africa. DOI : 10.37892/2686-8946-2020-1-3-17-99. (Accessed 2023-03-09)

Zheltov, Alexander. 2020. Plurality marking in Leko and Yendang groups (Adamawa, Niger-Congo) with some reference to noun classification. Language in Africa. DOI:10.37892/2686-8946-2020-1-3-125-154. . (Accessed 2023-05-09)