THE PLURAL IN GRAMMAR AND IN DISCOURSE

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1. Introduction

Like the other languages of the Ubangian family Sango has a prefix for marking plurality. In form it is exactly like the one in the language that produced Sango. Its function, on the other hand, may be different in some respects. A comparative study with these related languages, however, is not the purpose of this paper. Its purpose is to describe the meaning and use of this prefix both in synchronic and diachronic perspectives more thoroughly than has hitherto been done.

The morpheme has been identified by Europeans as marking plurality. This is the reason it has been called the plural prefix. Although its position is different from that of the French and English suffixes, we expatriates have always understood Sango’s morpheme to have the same function as our own, and we have used it, I dare say, in the same way. That is, assuming that objects (or phenomena), with certain exceptions, obviously occurred as single entities (countable with ‘one’) or more than one entity (countable with ‘two’ or more), we have used our own semiotic schema in expressing ourselves in Sango: obvious plurality required something to mark that reality. For that Sango’s a- was available.

The matter is much more complicated than that, and only the study of the actual use of the prefix in discourse, as the title of this paper suggests, reveals this complexity. Even being a ‘native speaker’ of the language, as we see below, is not sufficient for being fully informed about this part of the language. Certainly I became aware that the use of the prefix needed more study only while reading transcriptions of recent tape-recordings of Sango. At first I thought that there was a randomness or arbitrariness in its use, a consequence, I thought, of the rapid changes that the language was undergoing in Bangui. But there is an optionality about its use that gives the impression of arbitrariness (see section 3 below).

2. Corpora Used in this Study

The observations that follow are based on two corpora. While comparable in size, they differ in that one is older and mostly rural, therefore representing Sango in its pidgin stage and the other is more recent and urban and, to some degree, creolized (i.e., from speakers whose native language is Sango). Correlative to these facts is that while the latter corpus comes from the speech of children, the former comes from adults. The first is the data excerpted from tape-recordings made by myself in 1962 and from copies of radio broadcasts made in that year or earlier (used in the writing of a grammar in 1962-1963 [Samarin 1967a]; the second is the data
excerpted from more recent tape-recordings obtained in Bangui in 1988, 1991, and 1992. As important as the study of urban and rural differences undoubtedly is in understanding what happens to pidgins through time, the present work does not undertake it. Finally, because observations are made below about different categories of nouns, we must recognize that lexical items in discourse are always an effect of topic of discourse. The number of types of ‘personalities’ in the earlier corpus (N = 36), for example, which is greater than that of the recent one (N = 19), is certainly due to the fact that radio broadcasters were talking about ministres, docteurs, députés, and so forth. Similarly, there are more different kinship terms (N = 14) in the recent corpus than the earlier one (N = 7), because in these texts children are talking about matters that were important to them.

Because figures are given below regarding types and tokens, the reader must understand that we have arbitrarily limited ourselves in this study to the pluralization of nouns (with a few exceptions noted below). What have been ignored are the occurrences of the prefix with preposed attributives, the only ones that can take the prefix: e.g., ãmbéni zò or ãmbéni àzò or even mbéni àzò ‘some people’ (as opposed to mbéni zò ‘someone’). Preposed attributives can also be pluralized without a following noun: e.g., ãmbéni àga ‘some (people) came;’ âkété nì ànè (small DET SUBJ.be-heavy) ‘the small ones are heavy.’ (Number agreement, just illustrated, is a somewhat recent innovation in urban Sango, but it will not be discussed here. See Samarin, in press.)

3. Uses of the Prefix

What everyone writing about Sango has failed to observe is that the use of the prefix is optional on the part of a speaker. This is, of course, quite different from the obligations faced, for example, by a person speaking English. When an acupuncturist, a native speaker of Russian, tells me at the end of the session as I lie on my abdomen, I need to take out the needle, she is misinforming me, and because of that is making a mistake. This is a statement of fact, conveyed by the English language; it is not, however, a grammatical mistake. Being a linguist, recognizing that in many respects her English was still pidginized, and knowing that there were several needles on my back, none of which she had yet removed, I knew that she meant needles. (If I had not made this interpretation of the utterance, I would have wondered, "WHAT needle?") This would not have been the case in Sango—and possibly in other Ubangian languages.

In Sango one is not obliged by the facts (by reality, that is) to use â-: one has a choice; its use is optional. But is this optionality random in the absolute sense—beyond any control of the speaker? If the answer is yes, do we find that different speakers and different groups of speakers differ in the percentages of the possible uses of the prefix?

Although I have not yet studied my 150,000-word corpus of tape-recorded contemporary Sango with these preceding questions in mind—understandably a major undertaking in itself—I cannot believe that there are no constraints whatsoever. I prefer to hypothesize that semantic factors, pragmatic factors, and syntactic factors contribute to the presence of the prefix in discourse. The following is one way that hypothesis can be developed.

Let it be said that the prefix may not be so much a marker of plurality as a MARKED marker of plurality. In other words, for some speakers a simple noun is an unmarked instance of either a real singular or a real plural and placing the prefix to the noun MARKS or INSISTS ON
plurality. This seems to be the case in (1a, 2a, 3a) below. (One might have considered Fr.
Calloc’h to have been near the truth of the matter in 1991 [note 2] were it not for the fact that
he ignored the prefix altogether.) In the second grammatical sketch of Sango (Tisserant 1950:9)
The prefix is limited to "nom de personnes" (illustrated with the word zò ‘person) and inanimate
objects are categorically ruled out in the statement that "Les noms de choses ne varient pas quant
au nombre" (1950:9). Nothing is said about animals.

Three uses of the prefix are described below: to mark plurality (3.1), association (3.2),
and deference (3.3). It is primarily context and to some extent the kinds of nouns that are
pluralized that make the particular meaning relevant. What unites them seems to be the notion
‘more of the same kind (or species, etc.).’ Briefly, it can be said that plurality, identified
narrowly, characterizes more than one object identified by a certain name: e.g., mbò ‘dog’ vs.
ámbò. For us ‘dogs’ might be conceived generically; for speakers of Sango, as an aggregate of
‘dog’ + ‘dog’ + ‘dog,’ etc. ‘Association’ becomes salient when ‘objects’ are grouped under a
higher taxonomy. ‘Deference’ follows from the fact that the second person plural pronoun álà
is used in addressing or, as the homophonous third person plural pronoun, referring to
individuals (the so-called T/V phenomenon in literature on this subject, vousvoiement in French;

What follows is an improvement over what was said in my grammar (1967a:135-137;
1970:72-73) and lessons (1967b:143-144). It also differs in some respects from that proposed
by Diki-Kidiri (1977:59-62). Since the latter author is a Central African himself and since our
understanding of the plural prefix differs substantially (while agreeing in some respects), his
description should be summarized here. (The summarization necessarily and inevitably involves
interpretation on my part.)

Nouns, according to Diki-Kidiri, are opposed semantically, on the one hand, with respect
to number (singular and plural, the latter of which "additionne les éléments particuliers" [p.
61]), and on the other hand, by the ‘symbolic’ and ‘collective.’ By ‘symbolic’ he means the
following (p. 61; italics in original): "désigner un seul élément (singulier) pris comme symbole
ou représentant de toute une classe d’éléments semblables (pluriel);" "il ne marque ni le singulier
ni le pluriel mais les deux en même temps" [p. 61n]; by ‘collective’ "un ensemble d’éléments
dénombrables sans considérer chaque élément en particulier. . ." Numerability figures in this
opposition, but nothing is said about animacy. Two morphemes are established: zero (0) and á-.
Zero, whose occurrence is assumed wherever the prefix does not occur, marks the following (the
examples are his, altered graphemically, translated from the French, and presented in this
manner by myself):

1. Generic: lò báà i tòn gàà nà zò apè (3S.PRN see 1P.PRN as person not) ‘he
doesn’t consider us human beings’ ["des hommes"]
2. Singular: zò ni àga bírì (as opposed to ázò ni) (person DET SUBJ.come
yesterday) ‘the person (in question) came yesterday’
3. Plural: (in certain cases [when another word carries meaning of plural])
(á)zò àga mìngì (person/people come many) ‘many people came’
4. Symbolic: zò àga bírì ‘someone/some people came yesterday’ ("il est venu du
monde hier")
The prefix, on the other hand, has these meanings:

1. Plural: No specific example
2. Collective: azò aga biri ‘(some) people ["des gens"] came yesterday’

This analysis, while presenting a novel perspective in the study of Sango up to the date of its publication (1977), is not satisfying. The reasons are the following. (1) It does not raise the issue of animacy. (2) It seems to be based on the noun zò in Sango. (3) It is linked to the use of definite vs. non-definite (i.e., presence or not of ní, identified as an anaphoric "marque du défini" [p. 68]). Unfortunately, the last point is not argued at all. Moreover, one example that he gives as ungrammatical ("n’a pas de sens et ne se dit pas") can, in my opinion, be used in an appropriate context.

Here follows my own analysis.

3.1. Plural

As a marker of plurality, the prefix has a meaning somewhat or in some cases different from what that usually found in English. Its focus seems to be an aggregate or collective of individual objects more than on the fact that the NUMBER is more than one. In Sango, moreover, it is used primarily with animate nouns, but use with inanimate objects appears to be more common than it was thirty-some years ago.

Similarities between the role of plural in Sango and in other languages will certainly be found. For instance, one can cite plurality in Japanese.

3.1.1. Two corpora compared with respect to animacy vs. inanimacy

From the corpus of 1962, consisting of 636 tokens (Samarin 1967a:259), 475 were analyzed with respect to animacy (but not with respect to use in a corpus, for which see below). It was found that 88 percent of the pluralized nouns are animate creatures and only 12 percent are inanimate objects or some other kind of phenomenon. (All percentages in this paper are rounded. See table 1 for a display of the frequencies of occurrence by categories.) The most numerous category among the animates is ‘Generic,’ which is comprised of five nouns, the most frequent of which is zò ‘person.’ (The categories are not rigorously established. For example, kòli means either ‘man,’ ‘husband,’ or, in a noun phrase, ‘male;’ wàli means ‘woman, wife, female;’ mèrengé means ‘child’ (by comparison to adolescent and adult), or ‘young offspring.’

Two facts of the sociolinguistic distribution of the data should be noted. (1) In the category of ‘Personalities,’ which includes titles, functions, roles, and such, all but one are found in letters written (mostly to me) in Sango by persons for the most part literate only in Sango and influenced to one degree or other by American Protestant missionaries and in radio broadcasts. Professional broadcasters would have been educated in French, of course, their Sango being influenced by a Catholic variety of Sango. (2) Of the 55 tokens of inanimate nouns
64 percent are from radio broadcasts. Of the 36 types only 12 are French loans. (The significance of this figure, as compared with what follows, will be discussed below.)

From the more recent corpus, consisting of 1,031 tokens of the use of the prefix, 579 were analyzed. Table 2 displays the frequencies of occurrence by categories.

(Table 2 about here)

For reasons given above about the 'artificiality' or text-dependent nature of lexicalization, comparisons between the two corpora in the types of nouns pluralized are not made here. Significant, however, is the fact that the use of the prefix with inanimate nouns has risen by 22 percent: 34 vs. 12 percent. This confirms my own impression of the spread of pluralization to inanimate nouns, based on a speaking knowledge of the language since 1952.

3.1.2. Pluralized nouns in contemporary discourse

The change just noted in the use of the plural prefix with inanimate nouns is probably due to the influence of the French language. The matter is taken up below. Here we pause to consider what other changes have taken place and what these changes correlate with. That is, is a person living in Bangui more likely to say of 'houses' (or *maisons*) àdà instead of àdà? Or are there other constraining factors?

Here follow contrastive examples of sentences in which the presence or absence of the plural prefix seems to be significant in single discourses with respect to MARKED vs. UNMARKED.7

In (1a, 1b) a 23-year-old male (M23) seems to be making a contrast between sòda in a generic sense and the consumption of soft drinks from different bottles or on different occasions (L1A2).8 I would suggest that (1b) is marked because the idea of iterative or habitual drinking of one type of soft drink or another is being emphasized:

(1a)  sàmbà tí mbi gi sòdaà (beer of 1s.prn. only soda) 'my "beer" is nothing but soft drinks'
(1b)  mbi nyo gi àsòdaà (1s.prn. only sodas) '[People see me and say that I'm a small child and] I drink just soft drinks'

In (2a) a girl brags about what her husband buys for her and the other responds with incredulity (2b) (L1B1). The nouns with the prefix in (2a) signal that the speaker is referring either to many objects of this kind (i.e., a real plural) or is using two pluralized nouns to mean 'et cetera' (see below):

(2a)  kóli-mbi àkè vò nà mbi ázàvaà, àwaàks, àsi yá tí dà tí mbi (man of 1S.PRN SUBJ-buy PREP 1S.PRN [names of cloth or clothes in some foreign language], fill belly of house of 1s.prn.) 'my husband buys me Javat, Wax, etc. [spelling is uncertain] which fill my house'
In the following examples from an improvised argument on the part of a young man (A) who plays the role of husband and young woman (B) the wife, there is no difference in meaning, because both of them are talking about the wife’s belongings in general. The noun is used following these utterances once by each interlocutor, again in the unmarked form. (Placing a spouse’s belongings in front of the house is a sign to the other spouse and the neighbors and relatives that the marriage is being dissolved.) The first occurrence of the prefix in (3a) is marked if the utterance is understood as underlining the entirety of her belongings:

(3a) **B:** àkè mbì la mbì sigì à [= nà] ákungba-mbì apè! (subj.mrk. 1s.pron. topicalizer 1s.pron. appear prep. goods of 1s.pron. no) ‘It’s not me who will take my things outdoors!’

(3b) **A:** mò mu kungba ti mò, mò gwè! (2s.pron. take goods of 2s.pron., 2s.pron. go) ‘take your things and get out of here!’

(3c) **B:** mò mu kungba-mbì, zìà nà gígí (2s.prn. take goods of ls.pron., place prep. outside) ‘you take my things and put them outside’

In the case of an eight-year-old boy whose speech was recorded at Nzoro, a large rural village inhabited by speakers of Pana in the northwest corner of the country, the word *méléngé* (= *méréngé*) ‘child’ occurs early in the discourse; only later does one realize that there are several: *améléngé ni àkpe* (children det. subj.mrk. flee) ‘the children ran away’ (S20A6). The markedness of the pluralized noun, while not salient, can be argued on the grounds that the speaker has edited his speech to MARK the plurality.

### 3.2. Associative

The associative role of the prefix is to mark, as was noted in the Introduction, ‘more of the same kind.’

When (a) a personal name occurs with the prefix, the meaning of the construction is ‘So-and-so and those with him (or her);’ once translated by a Central African assistant into French as ‘et sa suite.’ (No examples occurred in the corpus.) However, in view of the fact that the prefix can also be used deferentially (see 3.3) only context will determine which meaning is applicable when only one noun occurs, as one sees below.

When (b) the noun is not personal, the meaning is much more likely to be ‘more of the same kind,’ ‘stuff like that,’ ‘etc.,’ and so on. Example (4) illustrates this use as well as that of variation in this use by one speaker:

(4) *yaka ti i àkè míngi, yaka ti kòbè àkè míngi. álà hìngà — café àèkè, cacao àèkè, nzo àèkè, káráko àèkè, sindì àèkè. mbi língbi ti tènè mbi dìkò àwùńzi apè. ángùná, ágòzò, nyè, kwé èkè (possibly èkè) (garden of 1P.PRN SUBJ-BE many, garden of food is many, 2P.PRN know, café is,
cocoa is, corn is, peanut is, sesame is, *ls.prn* able of say, I count subj-finish not. manioc greens, maniocs, what, all is) ‘we have a lot of [kinds of] gardens, food gardens are many. You know already: there’s coffee, there’s cacao, there’s corn, there’s peanuts, there’s sesame. I can’t count them all. Manioc greens, gozo, whatever, there’s everything.’ (R9b, 1962)

(5) ṣòò ṣamu ngò, átəwə̀, nyè kírkə̀r (= kírí kírí) , ṣòpíkə̀ à (= nà) lége (people take drum, kettles, PL-what disordered, strike PREP road) ‘[after the victory of the country’s basketball team] people took drums, kettles, any kind of thing! and beat on them as they went along the road’ (C902) (M16)

(6) lá àkwètì àwè sò, i sàrà àpòpót o, àsàlatà o, nà ányè o, tìù, nà áfòndò kwé (sun dies finished thus, we make porridges, salads, and PL-what PRT all [French tout], and bananas all) ‘[for the evening meals of Ramadan] after the sun has set, we made porridges, salads, and all kinds of things, and also bananas’ (H607) (F11)

In examples (4-6) one will notice that certain words also appear to be used to underline plurality: viz., nyè ‘whatever,’ kwé ‘all,’ and the sentence-final particle o. Since these appeared adventitiously in selecting examples, their occurrence, and that of other words of this type, will have to be studied.

3.3. Deference, Politeness, or Respect

Different from the associative use of the prefix with personal names is its use with both names and kinship terms to mark deference and respect in third-person reference. (Words used in the plural form in direct address have not yet been observed.)

3.3.1. With kinship terms

Also found in studying the transcriptions of tape-recordings of extemporaneous speech obtained from children in Bangui in 1988 and 1991 was the fact that kin terms like bàba ‘father,’ màma ‘mother,’ and yàya ‘elder sibling,’ all of whom would be expected to receive álà, as noted above, are prefixed for deference: thus, ñàyà (Samarin 1994). In some cases, of course, it is difficult to determine whether or not the referent is plural (unmarked) or singular (marked for deference). Sometimes, for example, a Central African assistant has translated abàba as parents in French, which could mean ‘relatives’ as well as ‘parents.’ There are, however, enough examples of pluralized kinship terms to leave no doubt about its use as described here. (The French loan famille is more commonly used for ‘relative’ and with the plural prefix, ‘relatives.’)

It is recognized, of course, that in some instances the referents of abàba and ámbàma are ambiguous in the texts for one reason or another. Here is one example (7):
The meaning is problematic in this text when a 15-year-old girl of Yakoma ethnicity discusses marriage. In the first clause, did she intend to say ‘After the girl agreed [to get married]’? Given the collocation ‘all the women,’ this is not likely. But why is māma in the singular and ābāba in the plural? If the latter refers to male relatives of some category, why are the female relatives not mentioned in the same phrase—unless the girl had none. I find this unlikely, for some of the ābāba, understood as male kin, would have been married. The following example (8), a 13-year-old boy of mixed ethnicity, is less problematic.

And there is no problem at all with yaya ‘elder sibling’ in the following (3) from a 15-year-old girl of mixed ethnicity:

Four things have to be noted about the use of pluralized kinship terms to signal deference.

- First, it is new. Not only do we have no evidence that it occurred before the decade of the 1980s, we also see that it appears to occur only among the young speakers of Sango. The speech of persons in their 20s or 30s is, as far as we now know, not characterized by this type of deference, but no study of this age group has yet been undertaken with this topic in mind.
- Second, it is urban. Tape-recordings from two rural areas do not reveal it.
- Third, it appears to be an innovation, not a calque on something that occurs in a Ubangian language. No evidence has yet been found to suggest a substratal influence.
- Fourth, it is not yet a clearly developed pattern; i.e., it is still quite variable.

At this time we can only speculate on the origin of pluralized deference with nouns. One imagines that the pluralized kinship term was created analogously on the basis of the plurality of the pronoun ălă: ‘If I say ălă in speaking to or of father [i.e., when a pronoun is used], then it must be ābāba [when a noun is used].’
3.3.2. With personal names

Possibly on the analogy of pluralized kinship terms there has arisen the use of pluralized personal names for deference, respect, or politeness. In a number of examples, as in (11), there is certainly no idea of association: the speaker is recounting a narrative in which only she and three other named companions are involved.

(10) i gò (=gwè) ti lu kā́ko (= kārāko), i nà á-Djīda. á-Djīda nà (= ní) àmu lor (=loro) nà yá ti péé (= pére). keke àkpo Djīda n (= ní) (1P.PRN go of plant peanut, 1P.PRN PREP PL-Djīda. PL-Djīda DET SUBJ-take running PREP belly of grass. tree SUBJ-stab Djīda DET) ‘we went to plant peanuts, me and Djīda. Djīda set off in a run into the bush. A stick stuck Djīda’ (C610) (M9)

(11) i lāa i bingbi nà ndo-lò, nà á-Zoro nà á-Georgine nà á-Maya, i bingbi nà ndo-lò (1P.PRN FOC 1P.PRN gather PREP top of 3S.PRN, and PL-Zoro and PL-Georgine and PL-Maya, 1P.PRN gather PREP top of 3S.PRN) ‘[her sister said] it was us, we piled on top of her, Zoro and Georgine and Maya, we piled on top of her’ (C133) (F14)

4. Implications of the Findings

In addition to having seen that there is much more to learn about the use of á- than we have publicly recognized, we learn from this study the following.

1. The use of the prefix is changing in Bangui, partly in response, probably, to substratal influence, but certainly under the influence of Sango-French bilingualism. There may also be innovation independent of language contact.

2. In spite of what has been said about the putative existence of constraints on the use of the prefix, one should consider that because Sango is experiencing change, there will be a certain amount of unaccountability.

3. The study of the prefix cannot be done by reliance on ‘native intuition,’ that recourse to individual competence which was so popular during the 1960s when the hegemony of ‘transformational-generative grammar’ was being established in North America. A Central African speaker of Sango, no matter how sophisticated in linguistics, can no more explain the use in general of the prefix than a speaker of English can explain the use of the. Furthermore, although one would learn SOMETHING by interviewing a number of subjects about whether in a particular case they would say this or that, this procedure would not arrive at the real truth, because truth lies in the dynamics of interactive (or at least, contextualized) discourse. Central Africans, of course, would contribute in interpreting discourse. But even with them one will find variability, I am sure, depending on how much they have been influenced already by their knowledge and use of French (or indirectly from people with this kind of knowledge) and by having been exposed to Christian literature produced by expatriates.
Notes

1. The word ‘produced’ is used a general way. The Ngbandi-Sango-Yakoma-Dendi dialect cluster did not, of course, actually ‘produce’ Sango in the way that characterizes most origins of linguistic diversity. In this case the language emerged out of contact between the inhabitants of the Upper Ubangi River and the colonial forces that began to arrive in 1887. (On the history of the origins of Sango see Samarin …) In speaking of pidgins and creoles the antecedents have been called lexifier languages. Although we can speak of the Ngbandi language as Sango’s lexifier, it contributed more than just words and morphemes.

2. But the first grammatical notes ignore the morpheme altogether. Indeed, it is said "Dans cette langue, il n’y a pas de nombre proprement dit. Les noms représentent la totalité du genre des êtres ou des objets qu’ils dénomment sans idée d’unité ni de pluralité" (Calloc’h 1911:3).

3. The first corpus—in the form of tape-recordings, transcriptions, and slips of paper as part of a ‘data base’—is already in the archives of W. J. Samarin at the Robarts Research Library of the University of Toronto and the second will eventually be deposited there. The completed grammar was produced by the photo-offset process in a limited edition and distributed in 1963 to a number of Africanists and university libraries where there were centers of African studies.

4. In the Sango examples the differences in vowel qualities represented by the letters e and o are suppressed and tone is marked in the traditional scholarly manner. Abbreviations used in the parenthesized literal glosses are the following: 1.s PRN, first person singular pronoun; SUBJ, subject marker à- on the verb; DET, anaphoric determiner; PREP, preposition nà with various meanings; PRT sentence-final particle o; TOP, topicalizer làá; - (hyphen between nouns and between a verb and noun), when the preposition tì ‘of’ is reduced to a high tone on a lengthened preceding vowel, this is represented with a hyphen between the two words in the noun phrase, as in example (2b).

5. The lessons were produced after four months of field work in the Central African Republic in 1966, during which time I collected more recordings of extemporaneous speech. Some of the latter were improvised conversations, such as the one in Lesson Eight; unfortunately they are not identified as such. Other conversations were scripted for me. None of the ones used in the lessons was my own. Everything, moreover, was checked with my assistant during 1966-1967, Julien Nam-kpea, a young pastor whose ethnic language is Gbaya.

6. Diki-Kidiri is also wrong in saying that *nzoni àzò làá "ne se dit pas, le marqueur á- (comme le marqueur zéro) ne pouvant pas avoir d’action régressive, n’engloberait pas nzoni" (1977:61). Radio broadcasters already by 1962 were saying the following: mbënî âkèkètè (= kêté kêté) yàmà ‘some very small animals’ (i.e., bacteria), mbën âkpingba zò ‘some mature persons,’ and pèdèrè âmàzìì (< Fr. magie) ‘nice magic tricks.’
7. One is obliged to ask whether or not it is possible for a prefixed noun to be both an unmarked plural. I think so, but I have not made an exhaustive study of my transcriptions with this matter in mind.

8. The texts are identified in the following way: e.g., L, initial of the name of the person who obtained the recording; 1, the number of the cassette; A, the first side of the cassette; 2, the second text on that side. The radio broadcasts are identified as in Samarin 1967a: R, radio; 9b, text number. In a few cases, such as in example (6), the identification is simply H’s 607th text. The high number of texts is due in part to the fact that many of them were very brief, being obtained from young children.

9. It seems to me that the sentence-final particle o was once used by itself for marking ‘et cetera,’ but I do not have evidence at the moment. Nothing was said in my grammar (1967) of this use.

10. It has been pointed out to me that in Amharic titles are pluralized by a speaker when he or she is trying to curry favor with an interlocutor.

11. Other possible meanings of baba and mama, like maternal uncle and aunt, and other phrases with these nouns are not necessary to the present discussion. No study has yet been made of variation in the meanings of kinship terms. Bangui being a multiethnic city, one would expect a great deal of variation.

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