

KAAKYE NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

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Abstract

The paper describes the noun class system of Kaakye (Kwa, Niger Congo language) spoken in Ghana. Departing from an earlier description that distinguishes the classes based on a single-set notion of noun classes, I adopt the paired singular-plural set notion. This criterion provides a more suitable account for Kaakye noun class system. The classification revealed a clearer semantic basis for at least two of the noun classes. It also showed that the language is sensitive to animacy distinction. A closer look at the concordial agreement properties of the nouns in noun phrases shows that with some restrictions, nouns agree with numerals and a few adjectives within the noun phrase. Evidence is also provided to show that the noun class system is undergoing decay. This paper contributes to our understanding of noun classification systems of Kwa languages and augments what we know about the Kaakye language.

Keywords: Kaakye, Guan languages, Kwa, noun class, animacy, semantic motivation

Résumé

Cet article décrit le système de classe nominale de Kaakye (langue Kwa, Niger-Congo) parlée au Ghana. Partant d'une description antérieure qui distingue les classes d'une seule optique, j'adopte la notion de paires singulier-pluriel. Ce critère offre un compte rendu plus approprié du système de classes nominales Kaakye. La classification a révélé une base sémantique plus claire pour au moins deux des classes nominales. Elle a également montré que la langue est sensible à la distinction d'animacité. Une analyse plus approfondie des propriétés d'accord des noms dans les syntagmes nominaux montre qu'avec certaines restrictions, les noms s'accordent avec les nombres et quelques adjectifs au sein du syntagme nominal. Des résultats sont également fournis pour montrer que le système de classe nominale est en train de se détériorer. Cet article contribue à notre compréhension du système de classification nominale des langues Kwa et met en évidence nos connaissances sur la langue Kaakye.

Mots-clés : Kaakye, Langues Guan, Kwa, classe nominale, animacité, motivation, sémantique.

1. Introduction

The noun class system is attested in a wide range of Niger-Congo languages, and there are several cross-linguistic studies (Welmers, 1973; Dixon, 1986, Denny & Creider, 1986; Corbett, 1991; Aikhenvald, 2000; Good, 2012; Güldemann & Fiedler, 2019; among others) and numerous descriptive studies on individual African languages (Manessy, 1987; Snider, 1988; Hansford, 1990; Osam, 1993; Schuh, 1995; Maho, 1999; Korboe 2001, Bodomo & Marfo, 2006; Essegbey, 2009; Watkins, 2010; Agbetsoamedo, 2014; Broohm, 2017). Cross-linguistic studies show that the languages in the world differ in the number of noun classes they have, how much semantic transparency there is to noun class assignment, where and how noun class gets expressed, and whether it is possible to change the class of a given noun (Aikhenvald, 2000).

This paper describes Kaakye¹ noun class system, and examines the semantic basis for its classification. Kaakye is a North Guan Tano language belonging to the Kwa-sub group of the Niger-Congo family (Snider 1989, Williamson and Blench 2000, Eberhard et al 2022). Kaakye is predominantly spoken in the Krachi West District and some towns in the Krachi East District of the Oti Region of Ghana. It has two main dialects, namely Le-ka Kaakye and Oti-ka Kaakye (Adonae 2005). The data in this paper is from the Le-ka dialect and was collected during a 7-week field trip to the Kaakye speaking community in 2015. The analysis is based on elicited recordings of five hundred and fifty-six nouns from the SIL Comparative African Wordlist (Snider and Roberts 2004). My language consultants, who were also staff members of the Ghana Institute of Language and Literacy Translation (GILLBT), Kaakye project, assisted with data verification and

interpretation.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly discusses the structure of Kaakye simple nouns. Section 3 presents some definitions of noun class system and some criteria for noun classification. Section 4 examines previous work done on Kaakye noun class system. Section 5 discusses the classificatory approach adopted in this study. Section 6 describes the features of the noun class system of Kaakye and the semantic basis of the noun classes. Section 7 looks at the concordial agreement properties when they occur in the noun phrase. Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. The Structure of Kaakye Simple Nouns

Structurally, simple nouns in Kaakye consist of a nominal prefix and a stem. The nominal prefixes are of three kinds; namely vowels (V), nasals (N) and a consonant and a vowel (CV). Out of the nine vowels in Kaakye, only 5 (a, o, ɔ, i, ɪ) are used for the vowel prefix type. The majority of the nouns have vowel prefixes. These vowels, except /a/ (which is neutral), agree with the [ATR] status of the initial vowel of the stem. The vowel prefixes /o-/ and /ɔ-/ are used for singular nouns; /a-/ is used for singular and plural nouns and /i-/ is used for plural nouns. The nasal prefixes are homorganic with the consonant they precede. Thus, they agree with the initial consonant of the noun stem in terms of place of articulation. The CV involves the voiceless velar stop /k/ and a vowel. I shall refer to this as the kV type. The kV prefix type (*ku-*, *kv-*, *ko-*, *kɔ-*, *ke-*, *kɛ-*, *ki-*, *kɪ-*)² occurs only on singular noun stems. It has varied forms depending on the [ATR] value of the initial vowel in the stem. Besides these nominal prefixes, there are several nouns without prefixes such as *bunja* ‘catfish’ *bwate* ‘chicken’, *dikpa* ‘fire’ *forv* ‘antelope’, *gyande* ‘onion’ and *lasa* ‘shrimp’.

¹ Interestingly, this term has many alternatives such as Krachi, Kraachi, Kaakye, Krache and Krakye; but based on the oral tradition account regarding the origin of the name Kaakye (see Abunya 2018), the term Kaakye is used in the restrictive sense to mean the native speakers of the language and the language itself in this study.

² It is worth mentioning that the kV prefix type *-ka* does not exist in Kaakye even though it occurs in other Guan languages such as Gonja (Snider 1989, and pc. with a Gonja native speaker confirmed this fact) and Chumburung (Hansford 1990 and Snider 1989).

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3. Definition and Criteria for Noun Categorization

Dixon (1986:105) distinguishes noun classes from noun classifiers and defines noun classes as:

Constituting an obligatory grammatical system, where each noun chooses one from a small number of possibilities. Ways of marking noun class include a prefix to the noun and usually also to other constituents in the noun phrase, or in the sentence, that show concord with it.

Dixon (1986:106) further provides three criteria for characterising noun classes:

- a. *Size*: involves the number of noun classes found in the language which is usually between 2 and 20.
- b. *Realization*: each noun of a language must be contained in a class
- c. *Scope*: the noun class markers are expected to occur within the noun itself and other words within the noun phrases of a sentence.

In another typological study, Aikhenvald (2000:19) posits a semantic basis of noun classes by stating that:

Noun classes and genders are grammaticalized agreement systems which correlate at least in part with certain semantic characteristics (particularly in the domain of human and animate referents). They are sometimes called concordial classes; they include grammaticalized 'gender' systems of the Indo-European type. They are realized outside the noun itself, usually on modifiers which most often include adjectives, but may also include modifiers from closed classes (demonstratives, interrogatives, possessives, etc). They can also be realized outside the noun phrase, i.e. be marked on the predicate, or even on adverbs. Some languages have a special smallish set of noun classes/genders restricted to closed classes of modifiers (demonstratives, and others) along with a different set which appears on modifiers from other classes.

According to her, noun class assignments are chiefly governed by three principles which include:

a. Semantic assignment principle: concerns the meaning inferred from the class of the nouns. This semantic basis usually includes animacy, humanness and sex, and sometimes, shape and size.

b. Morphological assignment principle: deals with the correlation between derivational affixes and noun classes.

c. Phonological assignment principle: concerns the connection between phonological features and noun classes.

(Aikhenvald 2000: 22-25)

She further adds that a language may combine these principles in noun class assignment but there will always be some semantic basis to the grouping of nouns. In Aikhenvald's (2000: 22) words,

No system of noun classes is completely devoid of semantic motivation. If a language has non-semantic principles of noun class assignment, the assignment principles will be mixed, since there is always a 'core' where semantics operates. This 'core' includes humans in some languages and animates in others.

The idea that the organization of nouns is not arbitrary but has a legitimate semantic basis for their categorization is also supported by some scholars such as Contini-Morava (1997), Denny and Creider (1986) and Corbet (2006). Contini-Morava (1997: 599), for instance, states that "...understanding the basis for grouping nouns together as members of a class hints at a system of cognitive or cultural classification underlying the system of linguistic classification".

In the description of African languages, Schuh (1995:128) identifies two different senses of the term noun class. In the first sense, it refers to "a single set of morphological concords which may show up as affixes on noun stems, affixes on modifiers, and pronominal referents to nouns." In the second sense, it refers to "a paired set of [morphological] concords where one member of the pair is a singular referent and the other member is a plural corresponding to that singular". The

first sense is used in most works on Bantu languages and West Atlantic languages such as Wolof and Fula. The second sense is usually applied in works on the Gur languages (Naden 1989, Bodomo 1997) and Central-Togo languages including, Avatime, and Tutrugbu (Ford 1975, 1988).

Another criterion that has been used in noun classification is concordial agreement. This criterion requires a system of morphological concord between a nominal and a verb. This is also not sufficient for noun classification in Kaakye as the language does not have a rich concordial system. The only nominal agreement one can find as far as my data is concerned is the agreement between numerals and adjectives. Even these two identified concordial agreements, as it is shown in sections 7.1 and 7.2, are relatively low and restricted in their occurrences. The representativeness of the data was ensured through a combination of elicitation from native speakers, collection of natural speech data, and cross-checking with multiple speakers. This comprehensive approach confirms that the lack of a rich concordial system is not a limitation of the dataset but a genuine feature of Kaakye grammar. Therefore, concordial agreement is not a suitable criterion for noun classification in this study.

In this study, I use the term noun class in the second sense (singular-plural pairing set notion) in the classification and description of Kaakye noun class system since it provides a more suitable account of the nature of its noun class system.

4. Previous classification on Kaakye nouns

Korboe's (2001) noun classification was based on the individual singular and plural affixes that characterize the number systems in Kaakye (sense 1). Based on this criterion, he grouped Kaakye nouns into 11 classes as shown in (1).

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|---------------|
| (1) | Class 1: ki-/kɪ- | Class 7: -nyi |
| | Class 2: ke-/kɛ- | Class 8: N- |
| | Class 3: ku-/kʊ- | Class 9: a- |

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Class 4: ko-/kɔ- | Class 10: i-/ɪ- |
| Class 5: o-/ɔ- | Class 11: -awie |
| Class 6: Ø- | |

Nine (9) of the classes are marked by prefixes and two (2) by suffixes. In his discussion of the classes, he examined the semantic correlation of the nouns in each class. He concluded that all the noun classes he identified, except of the classes with suffixes (i.e., 7 and 11), have no semantic basis.

A closer look at the nouns in the prefixed noun classes (as discussed in section 6), however, shows that those classes are not completely devoid of regular semantic coherence, as Korboe (2001) seems to report. As the data suggests, Kaakye belongs to the group of languages that has quite a complex prefixed system where that several singular prefixes can take particular plural prefixes. More so, there are instances where identical singular prefixes take different plural prefixes. Consequently, classifying the nouns based on the individual morphological affixes does not clearly portray the inherent classes and the semantic basis underlying their classification.

This paper seeks to address these limitations by re-examining Kaakye noun classification with a focus on uncovering the underlying semantic regularities that Korboe's morphological approach may have overlooked. By integrating both morphological and semantic criteria, this study aims to present a more holistic understanding of the Kaakye noun class system. This is essential not only for refining the theoretical understanding of Kaakye noun classification but also for contributing to broader typological studies on noun classification systems in Niger-Congo languages.

5 Classificatory Approach

As mentioned in section 3, I use the term noun class to refer to a singular-plural pair set notion. The singular-plural pairing approach was first adopted for the Guan language group by Manessy (1987) and also by Snider (1988) in his

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reconstruction of the noun class system of Proto-Guan. It has also been adopted in other Kwa languages such as Tuwuli (Harley 2005), Logba (Dovlo 2008), Tutrugbu (Essegbey 2009), Avatime (Watkins 2010), and Selee (Agbetsoamedo 2014) all belonging to Central Togo language group.

For instance, based on the singular/ plural pairings, Snider (1988) reconstructs the noun class prefixes according to the schema in Figure 1 below³.

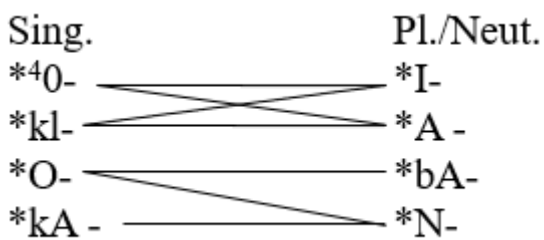


Figure 1: Noun class prefixes of Proto-Guan⁴ (Snider 1988:138)

The classification of the nouns in this study was based on 556 nouns which were selected from the elicited Kaakye wordlist. The derived forms of nouns like nominalization, compounds, and diminutives are excluded from the data of nouns used for the classification. This approach was adopted to ensure that the classification reflects the core lexical properties of nouns in the Kaakye language, as underived nouns are the primary lexical items from which derived forms are generated. Excluding derived forms such as nominalizations, compounds, and diminutives reduces potential variability introduced by morphological processes and allows for a clearer focus on the inherent features of the noun class system. This approach ensures a systematic analysis of the fundamental noun classification patterns in Kaakye, providing insights into the unaltered structural and semantic organization of

the language.

Nouns in Korboe's Class 7 and 11, are therefore, not included in the noun classification. The noun classification in this work, therefore, takes into account the singular and plural inflections on underived nouns⁵. The total number of underived nouns used is 556 nouns. These nouns were later grouped according to the singular/plural pairings of prefixes.

After the classification, the various classes were then noted and described using the following semantic domains: HUMAN, ANIMAL, INANIMATE, BODY PARTS, ENVIRONMENTAL or PHYSICAL FEATURES, ARTEFACT, SIZE, and SHAPE⁶. I afterwards classified the nouns into the classes and labelled them as 1, 2, 3, and so forth. A class was sub-classified into A, B, C, etc. in cases where within a class domain, there are several different singular prefixes associated with a particular plural prefix. The sub-classification is, therefore, based on the morphology of the prefixes which offers clearer morphological distinction⁷.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the various noun classes and note the semantic correlation of the nouns in the classes.

6. The current study: Kaakye noun class system

I identified six noun classes based on the singular/plural pairings of prefixes as shown in Table 1 and provide their semantic features. Each noun class is either singular or plural with the exception of classes 4, 5 and 6, which function as both singular and plural.

³ The abbreviations used in the paper are as follows: 1=first person; 2=second person; 3=third person; +ATR=Advanced tongue root; -ATR=Un-Advanced tongue root, CL=Class; CONJ=Conjunction; COP=Copula, DEM=Demonstrative; DET=Determiner; FUT=Future; PERF=Perfect; PL=Plural; SG Singular; PST=Past

⁴ The lines connecting the singular prefixes with the plural/neutral suffixes shows which singular prefixes pair

with which plural prefixes

⁵ Despite this, the classification of derived nouns could be taken up in future research.

⁶ Mostly, the domains in Snider and Roberts (2004) comparative wordlist.

⁷ This kind of sub-classification has been applied in the study of Tuwuli, a Kwa-GTM language, spoken in Ghana.

Table 1: Proposed Kaakye Noun Class System

Class	Number /556	Singular	Plural	Semantic features
1 A	58	o-/ɔ-	a-	Almost all are animate nouns. Majority are humans and animals. A few inanimate nouns mostly loanwords denoting plant products Mostly body parts, birds, insects and plants.
B	47	Ø-		
C	105	kV-		
Total	210			
2 A	66	o-/ɔ-	i-/ɪ-	All are non-human nouns. Majority are inanimate nouns and a few (4) are animals.
B	3	kV-		
C	1	Ø-		
Total	70			
3 A	58	kV-	N-	Majority are domestic tools, collective nouns and cover terms. A few are human nouns denoting stages of life, small-sized animals and insects, and body parts.
B	3	o-/ɔ-		
C	1	a-		
D	1	Ø-		
Total	63			
4 A	28		a-	Plurale tantum: Many are mass nouns and liquid/fluid/semi-liquids. Some are abstract nouns and a few are paired body parts and human nouns.
B	11		ɪ-	
C	24		N-	
Total	63			
5 A	6	o-/ɔ-		Singularia tantum: very few nouns. Some are environmental features and health related terms.
B	7	kV-		
Total	13			
6	55	Ø-	Ø-	Miscellaneous, all inclusive; Abstract nouns, borrowed nouns

6.1 Class 1: Noun Class 1 has three subclasses: A, B and C. These subclasses are in the same class because they share similar animate features.

Class 1A nouns are morphologically marked both

in the singular and the plural forms. It contains nouns which take *ò-/ɔ-* prefix in the singular and *à-* prefix in the plural as shown in (2-4).

- (2) *ò-sì* ‘father’ *à-sì* ‘fathers’
 ò-yèté ‘younger brother’ *à-yèté* ‘younger brothers’
 ò-nyì ‘mother’ *à-nyì* ‘mothers’
- (3) *ò-sà* ‘in-law’ *à-sà* ‘in-laws’
 ò-kùrí ‘husband’ *à-kùrí* ‘husbands’
 ò-kyífuṅṣe ‘fiancee’ *à-kyífuṅṣe* ‘fiances’
 ò-kòfúwò ‘bride’ *à-kòfúwò* ‘brides’
 ò-ké ‘wife’ *à-kè* ‘wives’

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Class 1A is a semantically based class. It describes words referring to human beings such as kinship terms in (2) above, marriage relation words in (3),

(4)	ò-dàmpú	‘friend’	à-dàmpú	‘friends’
	ò-fúò	‘stranger’	à-fúò	‘strangers’
	ò-yú	‘thief’	à-yú	‘thieves’

The abstract noun ò-kiré /à-kiré ‘soul/souls’ is also found in this class. Most abstract nouns are generally found in Class 6 and some are found in Class 5. The inclusion of ò-kiré ‘soul’ among concrete nouns suggests that the Kaakyees conceptualize ò-kiré ‘soul’ as a concrete entity. Interestingly, kù-fúnúh ‘corpse’ is not in this category. The classification of the noun ò-kiré ‘the soul’ as animate, but not kù-fúnúh ‘corpse’, might be motivated by the relatively greater importance the people place on the soul. The soul plays a crucial role in the lives of humans since it forms an integral part of humans and without it the human body is irrelevant.

Out of the 58 nouns in Class 1A, 54 are humans. All other classes except Class 2 also contain a few human nouns which have another semantic basis for inclusion. Four animals:

(5)	ò-kpàh-pú	‘a hunter’	à-kpàh-pú	‘hunters’
	ò-kù-pú	‘a fighter’	à-kù-pú	‘fighters’
	ó-gyírì-pú	‘a blacksmith’	á-gyírì-pú	‘blacksmiths’
	ò-dùò-pú	‘a farmer’	à-dùò-pú	‘farmers’
	ò-pírà-pú	‘a traitor’	à-pírà-pú	‘traitors’

One other piece of evidence is seen in the Kaakye pronominal system. The distinction is made in the third person singular subject. Kaakye uses the

and extended and social relation words as seen in (4) below.

‘hippopotamus’, ò-nìni ‘python’, ò-dèkìrékè ‘chameleon’ and ò-kúróh ‘mudfish’ are also in this category. The classification of these animate nouns remains unexplained. Nonetheless, this class qualifies as a human class because a high majority of the nouns are humans.

Synchronically, there are aspects of Kaakye grammar that support the fact that Class 1A is a human class. One proof is seen in the formation of agentive nouns. In the formation of Kaakye agentive singular nouns from verbs, the prefixes ò-/ò- and the suffix -pú/-pú ‘the one who’ are attached to the verb stem. The derived words are pluralized with the Class 1A plural prefix a-. Words derived from such a process are usually words that indicate professions as demonstrated in the following:

Class 1A singular prefixes ò-/ò- for animate (human and animal) nouns and ì-/ì- for inanimate nouns as shown in (6) and (7) below.

(6)	a.	Ò-kùràpú	wú	kè-ḡésé	kè-kìnyí	wú.
		CL1A.SG-widow	DET	FUT-smoke	CL4.SG-fish	DET
		‘The widow will smoke the fish.’				
	b.	Ò- kè-ḡésé		kè-kìnyí		wú.
		3SG.SUBJ-FUT-smoke		CL4.SG-fish		DET
		‘She will smoke the fish.’				

(7)	a.	o-putu	wú	bv	ó-lòh	tó.
		CL2A.SG-ladle	DET	COP-be	CL2A-house	inside

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(10) a.	ki-déndénkyùwá	‘bladder’	à-déndénkyùwá	‘bladders’
	kè-nèbí	‘lip’	à-nèbí	‘lips’
	kè-kèsá	‘bone’	à-kèsá	‘bones’
	kò-nòkúú	‘chin’	à-nòkúú	‘chins’
	kù-mú	‘head’	à-mú	‘heads’
	kù-fùfùrú	‘lung’	á-fùfùrú	‘lungs’
	kì-báńbáń	‘wing’	à-báńbáń	‘wings’
b.	ki-dépèj	‘hawk’	à-dépèj	‘hawks’
	kì-bwì	‘louse’	à-bwì	‘lice’
	ku-kwegyi	‘bee’	a-kwegyi	‘bees’
	ki-kpireki	‘vulture’	a-kpireki	‘vulture’
	ki-tipinasi	‘frog’	a-tipinasi	‘frogs’
	ki-tikyira	‘toad’	a-tikyira	‘toads’
	ki-kyiripenpen	‘bat’	a-kyiripenpen	‘bats’

The remaining 26 nouns in this class are plants and plant parts, as well as environmental features, as shown in (11).

(11)	ki-kyikpégyí	‘star’	à-kyikpégyí	‘stars’
	kí-lití	‘stump’	à-lití	‘stumps’
	kì-bí	‘mountain’	à-bí	‘mountains’
	kì-fitá	‘leaf’	à-fitá	‘leaves’
	kí-kpùj	‘eggplant’	á-kpùj	‘eggplants’
	kì-máńtà	‘pit’	à-máńtà	‘pits’
	kù-bù	‘stone’	à-bù	‘stones’
	kù-fùrì	‘flower’	à-fùrì	‘flowers’
	kù-fùribó	‘cave’	à-fùribó	‘caves’
	kù-pù	‘forest’	á-pù	‘forests’

As example (12) below shows, this class also has few human nouns. The reason why these nouns, though human nouns, are not classified under the typical human class (Class 1A) is that they relate

to concepts of human identity or condition, specifically focusing on states of vulnerability, dependency, disability or a transition from one state to another.

(12) a.	kì-gyàbùò	‘cripple’	à-gyàbùò	‘cripples’
b.	kù-fúnúj	‘corpse’	à-fúnúj	‘corpses’
c.	kù-mòńgyí	‘orphan’	à-mòńgyí	‘orphans’
d.	kì-nyà	‘slave’	à-nyà	‘slaves’
e.	kè-nàńagyí	‘ancestor’	à-nàńagyí	‘ancestors’

All the human nouns appear to have some significant conditions that restrict a person’s ability to function physically, mentally, socially or culturally. Socially, orphans (12c) are considered as a burden to families because they have no

parents to care for them leading to emotional or social dependency. Slaves (12d) have no absolute control over their lives since they are subjected to their masters’ authority, leading to a lack of autonomy. Ancestors (12e) are spirits and they are

as such separated from the living. Example 12b (corpse) for instance, refers to a state after death, characterized by the complete cessation of physical movement.

There are some words such as *ò-nyísí-bwè-pú* ‘blind person’ *ò-nyékyè-pú* ‘mad person’ *kèmù-wià* ‘deaf person’ that one might expect to be

included in this class, but which do not seem to be here because these words are derived nouns and are consequently not included in the data.

Loanwords from Akan as illustrated in (13) denoting plant products were also found in this class.

(13) Akan Loanwords

bùróyó	‘maize’	à-bùróyó	‘maize’
bùròdíyé	‘plantain’	à-bùròdíyé	‘plantains’
bùrófùré	‘pawpaw’	à-bùrófùré	‘pawpaws’
gyándè	‘onion’	à-gyándé	‘onions’
mánkénì	‘cocoyam’	à-mánkénì	‘cocoyams’

The assignment of loanwords into specific noun classes has been discussed in several linguistic studies (Heine 1982, Katamba 2003). This phenomenon often emerges from the need for a systematic way to integrate loanwords into existing grammatical structures without disrupting the language’s morpho-syntactic coherence. In his study of African languages, Heine (1982) explains that loanwords are often assigned to a “default” noun class, which serves as a catch-all for items that do not fit into native semantic or phonological categories. For example, in many Bantu languages, class 9/10 (inanimate or irregular objects) often serves as the default for integrating foreign vocabulary. In discussing the noun class system of Swahili, Katamba (2003) notes that Arabic and English loanwords are frequently placed in classes 9/10 or 5/6, which can handle a wide range of phonological and semantic

categories. This practice simplifies the agreement patterns required for these words. In Kaakye, loanwords are found in Class 1B and Class 6 (miscellaneous class). The loanwords found in the Class 6 aligns with the pattern in Bantu and Swahili since it is a default class. Interestingly, Kaakye patterns differently in the assignment of loanwords to a predominantly animate class.⁹

6.2 Class 2: Most nouns belonging to this class take the vowel prefixes *o-/ɔ-*, few of them take \emptyset - and 3 take kV types (*ke-*, *ku-/kv-*, *ki-*) in the singular, and *i-/i-* in the plural. Out of the 556 nouns, 70 belong to this class. Class 3 has the clearest semantic coherence. It contains a large number of inanimate nouns relating to plants and plant parts, parts of a house, environmental features and few body parts as exemplified below:

(14) ò-bú	‘room’	ì-bú	‘rooms’
ò-dèṅ	‘desert’	ì-dèṅ	‘deserts’
ò-dùṅ	‘heart’	ì-dùṅ	‘hearts’
ò-yú	‘tree’	ì-yú	‘trees’
ò-kírìṅ	‘shin’	ì-kírìṅ	‘shins’
ò-bòṅ	‘river/stream’	ì-bòṅ	‘rivers’
ò-bírímù	‘cassava’	ì-bírímù	‘cassavas’

⁹ Semantically, the loanwords are not animate nouns but rather inanimate nouns mostly associated with plant products. Possibly, the assignment of these loanwords to Class 1B is due to their perceived cultural or social

importance. Probably, the same reason could account for the assignment of three inanimate nouns found in this class. Further research is needed to offer insightful explanations for this.

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ò-fóri	‘moon’	ì-fóri	‘moons’
kè-wíí	‘comb’	ì-wíí	‘combs’
kù-gyò	‘yam’	ì-gyò	‘yams’
kò-tùè	‘injection’	ì-tùè	‘injections’
kyàrí	‘rattle’	ì-kyàrí	‘rattles’

Also included are four animal nouns, as shown in (15) below.

(15)	ò-fùfùrí	‘lion’	ì-fùfùrí	‘lions’
	ò-pùróṅ	‘palm rat’	ì-pùróṅ	‘palm rats’
	ò-kòtó	‘crab’	ì-kòtó	‘crabs’
	ò-kwàré	‘eagle’	ì-kwàré	‘eagles’

One observation about the animal nouns which fall in this class is that they include words for personified animals as they are found in folktales. Thus, in Kaakye folk stories, human features are attributed to these set of animals.

Apart from Class 1A, which has the majority of the human nouns, few human nouns ranging from 4-5 are at least found in all the other classes except this class. Although 4 animals occur in this class, no human noun is found in this class. Interestingly,

no inanimate nouns are also found in Class 1A. This could suggest that cognitively, the language makes human/non-human distinctions which are also evident in Kaakye grammar.

The fact that this class is inanimate class is substantiated by the Kaakye pronominal system. In this system, the plural prefix in Class 2 is used for both third-person singular and plural pronouns as demonstrated in (16 and 17) below.

- (16) a. kò-tùnú wú ké-fwì
CL3.SG-mat DET FUT-lost
‘The mat will get lost.’
- b. ì-ké-fwì
3SG.SUB-FUT-lost
‘It will get lost.’
- (17) a. ñ-tùnú wú ké-fwì
CL3.PL-mat DET FUT-lost
‘The mats will get lost’
- b. ì-ké-fwì
3SG.SUB-FUT-lost
‘They will get lost.’

There is one noun *o-kisii* ‘lesser god’, that one might not expect to be included in this class, but which is. In Kaakye, the inclusion of *o-kisii* ‘lesser god’ in a noun class that predominantly contains inanimate nouns is a fascinating linguistic phenomenon. While this classification might initially seem strange, similar patterns in other Niger-Congo languages provide insight into

potential explanations rooted in cultural, and semantic factors. In many Bantu languages, noun classification systems exhibit semantic groupings where natural objects and spiritual entities coexist. For instance, in Swahili (Bantu, Niger-congo), the *m-/mi-* class includes inanimate nouns such as *mti* ‘tree’ and *mwiko* ‘spoon’, but also abstract or spiritual terms like *miungu* ‘gods’ (Contini-

Morava, 2000). This grouping reflects a worldview where spiritual entities, though conceptually animate, are often linked to natural or environmental domains. Also, in Dagbani (Gur, Niger-Congo), noun classes often group environmental features, plants, and spiritual concepts. For instance, terms like *tɪŋa* ‘land’ and *zuli* ‘roots’ align with certain spiritual nouns like Naawuni ‘God’ (Bodomo, 1997). This classification likely reflects a cultural worldview where spirituality and nature are deeply interconnected. Again, in a closely related language such as Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo), words for natural features like *dua* ‘tree’ and *nsuo* ‘water’ align with abstract entities such as *obosom* ‘deity’ (Osam, 1993). This grouping often reflects cultural ideologies that see deities as custodians of natural resources, such as forests or rivers.

Similarly, *o-kisii* in Kaakye might reflect a cultural connection between the divine and nature, positioning this lesser god within a category primarily associated with environmental and material objects. This underscores a commonality across Niger-Congo languages, where spiritual concepts are linguistically treated as extensions of the natural world.

6.3 Class 3: Nouns belonging to Class 3 have several singular prefixes including vowels and the four kVs types distributed in accordance with the ATR harmony requirements, as shown in examples (18-20). Out of the 556 nouns, 63 nouns belong to this class. Semantically, majority are domestic tools, as in (18), collective nouns and collective terms as in (19).

(18)	kò-nòfùrúbwì	‘gun’	n̄-nòfùrúbwì	‘guns’
	kì-bàké	‘paddle’	m̄-bàké	‘paddles’
	kì-pàṅ	‘cutlass’	m̄-pàṅ	‘cutlasses’
	kè-tèkpìrá	‘hoe’	n̄-tèkpìrá	‘hoes’
	kè-tiyá	‘big hoe’	n̄-tiyá	‘big hoes’
	kè-dàrìwá-gyí	‘fishhook’	n̄-dàrìwá-gyí	‘fishhooks’
	kè-bèní	‘needle’	m̄-bèní	‘needles’
	kè-bìrí	‘whistle’	m̄-bìrí	‘whistles’
	kè-rí	‘funeral’	n̄-lí	‘funerals’
(19)	kò-bwì	‘animal’	m̄-bwì	‘animals’
	kì-pé	‘herd (cattle/sheep)’	m̄-pé	‘herds’
	kò-sùrá	‘bundle’	n̄-sùrá	‘bundles’
	kè-kínyí	‘fish’	ṅ-kínyí ¹⁰	‘fishes’
	kò-bùgyí	‘bird’	m̄-bùgyí	‘birds’
	kù-nú	‘meat’	n̄-nú	‘meats’

Nouns in this class also include some human nouns, as illustrated in (20).

(20)	kè-kyísé	‘girl’	ṅ-kyísé	‘girls’
	kè-nyùnsé	‘boy’	n̄-nyùnsé	‘boys’
	kè-gyìfòrí	‘child’	n̄-gyìfòrí	‘children’
	kì-gyìfòrí	‘baby’	ṅ-gyìfòrí	‘babies’
	kì-yàfòrí	‘young man’	ṅ-yàfòrí	‘young men’

¹⁰ It worth mentioning that the homorganic nasal assimilation for the velar nasal, labiodental nasal and the palatal nasal is pronounced in utterance, it is not written in the orthography.

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ké-bitègyí ‘young woman’ n̄-bitègyí ‘young women’

Although the nouns in (20) refer to humans, they are not in the typical human class. Characteristically, these words denote stages of the human life cycle and this may explain their perceived status as a collective noun. One would expect to see *ɔ-birise* ‘old person’ to be included in this class, but it is not. *ɔ-birise*¹¹ ‘old person’ belongs to class 1A. The exclusion of *ɔ-birise* ‘old person’ aligns with several studies on noun classes in Niger-Congo languages, where noun classification systems often reflect a nuanced semantic categorization of the world, including distinctions in age, social roles, and other cultural factors.

In many Niger-Congo languages, noun classes are not strictly based on biological stages of life but are shaped by cultural perceptions and social identities. For example, in languages like Bantu and other Niger-Congo languages, age and social status are often significant factors in the categorization of nouns. Corbett (1991) notes that noun class systems in many African languages include not only biological distinctions (such as gender and number) but also semantic categories related to social roles, animacy, and abstract

concepts. This highlights that the distinction between different age groups, such as children, adults, and the elderly, is often embedded in the language in ways that are socially significant.

In a study of Bantu languages, such as those discussed by Nurse (2008), it is shown that nouns related to life stages often fall into different noun classes based on the sociocultural roles attached to those stages. For example, terms for young children might belong to one class, while those for adults and elders might belong to entirely different classes, reflecting their distinct social roles. The separation of *ɔ-birise* ‘old person’ from other life cycle terms could thus be understood within this framework, where elders are seen not merely as older adults but as occupying a unique social category that is linguistically distinguished.

It was also observed that these human nouns also appear in predicate nominal construction with some regularity in Kaakye grammar. I have observed that these nouns are sometimes used as modifiers to express adjectival quality denoting ‘human propensity’ (Dixon 2004:18), as seen in (21).

- (21) Ama gyì kèbitègyí
 Ama COP.be young woman’
 ‘Ama is a young woman.’

Also included in this class are small sized animals and insects and body parts, as demonstrated in (22).

- (22) kò-nó ‘mouth/beak’ n̄-nó ‘mouths/beaks’
 kó-tùṅtùṅ ‘mosquito’ n̄-tùṅtùṅ ‘mosquitoes’
 kò-wá ‘snail’ n̄-wá ‘snails’
 kè-kirémá ‘rib’ ṅ-kirémá ‘ribs’

6.4 Class 4: This class is pluralia tantum. It consists of nouns which exhibit the same form in the singular and plural. They usually begin with the plural prefixes *a-*, *i-/t-* and a homorganic nasal.

A possible explanation is that such nouns are uncountable. Semantically, as illustrated in (23-25) many are mass nouns and liquid or fluid. Some are abstract nouns and few are paired body parts

¹¹ The plural form is *a-birise* ‘old people’.

or items, one animal: *a-nyiba* ‘hyena’ and one human noun; *a-lamba* ‘twin’. The human noun *alamba* ‘twin’ belongs to this class because twins are a pair.

(23)	ì-fě	‘bush’
	ì-mwè	‘rice’
	ì-pù	‘soup’
	ì-sèbí	‘faeces’
	ì-mé	‘nasal-mucus’
	ì-nààsí	‘dirt’
	ì-pù	‘buttocks’
(24)	m-bùrí	‘urine’
	m-múgyà	‘blood’
	m-bòṅ	‘brain’
	ṅ-fò	‘fat/oil’
	ṅ-fòrí	‘salt’

ṅ-fùù	‘fur’
ṅ-kyú	‘water’
ṅ-nyèsì	‘smoke’
ṅ-sò	‘ash’
ṅ-yèkyú	‘tears’
ṅ-té	‘drink/wine’
(25) à-fùù	‘wind’
à-gyìbí	‘food’
à-gyókùrí	‘mushy food’
à-bùbwí	‘gill’
à-dènkpèrì	‘storm’
à-wùrí	‘cloud’
à-sikíré	‘sugar’
à-nyìbá	‘hyena’
á-kùṅ	‘hunchback’

Osam (1993: 95), discussing Akan noun class system, refers to such class of nouns as the ‘frozen plurals nouns.’ In Akan, however, the group of nouns that falls under this category are mostly body parts and agricultural produce. According to Osam (1993:95), a possible explanation for these groups of nouns having plural prefixes stems from the fact that “body parts are naturally paired and agricultural produce come in large numbers”. In

Kaakyè’s case, the nouns in the plural tantum class are mostly uncountable nouns. The differences in the category of nouns of these two languages show clearly that language speakers conceptualize things differently.

6.5 Class 5: This class is a singularia tantum class. It only appears in singular forms with *o-/ɔ-* singular prefixes as displayed in (26).

(26)	a.	ò-kwè	‘honey’
		ò-fékyù	‘fever’
		ò-gyà	‘pain’
		ò-kyòwí	‘sun’
		ò-pù	‘sea’
		ò-gyúyè	‘dust’

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b.	kò-yùrì	‘body/self’
	kè-tìrikè	‘kingfisher’
	kì-brèkí	‘diarrhoea’
	kì-kyèhkpá	‘harmattan’
	kù-bóbì	‘darkness’
	kò-yúdá	‘curse’
	kò-bwé	‘venom’

The class predominantly contains liquids, uncountable, abstract, or non-pluralizable nouns, including natural substances (e.g., ò-gyà ‘pain’, ò-gyúyé ‘dust’) and items related to health, the weather, and the environment (ò-kyòwí ‘sun’, kò-yùrì ‘body/self’, kètìrikè ‘kingfisher’). It is worthy to note that this kind of classification, which isolates singular and uncountable nouns in a dedicated class, is not unique to Kaakye. Similar systems are observed in other African languages with noun class systems, where the grammatical treatment of nouns is often linked to both their inherent qualities and their interaction with the environment or human experience. For example, in Swahili, certain singular nouns in class 9 (e.g., *maji* ‘water’, *hewa* ‘air’) are treated as singularia tantum because they cannot be pluralized without changing their meaning or becoming contextually irrelevant (Cotton, 1989). This parallels the Kaakye system in that both classes distinguish uncountable or abstract concepts like ò-kwè ‘honey’ and ò-pv ‘sea’ from those that can have multiple forms.

Akan also classifies abstract and natural entities in specific classes that handle uncountable or mass nouns. Class 4 in Akan, which includes mass terms like *dua* ‘tree’ or *nsuo* ‘water’, shares similarities with Kaakye’s treatment of natural substances such as ò-pv ‘sea’ and ò-kyòwí ‘sun’ (Christaller, 1875). The classification based on uncountability or inability to pluralize forms an important link between these languages,

emphasizing the connection between grammatical structure and conceptual categories related to nature and physical phenomena.

An interesting feature of Kaakye’s classification is the inclusion of ò-kyòwí ‘sun’ as a singularia tantum, which, although not abstract, is categorized because it lacks a plural form. This decision is intriguing and may be driven by its conceptualization within the linguistic community. While the sun is clearly a physical entity, it is often treated as a singular, indivisible force in many African belief systems. This is comparable to similar classifications in Bantu languages like Swahili, where nouns like *jua* ‘sun’ are also treated as singularia tantum due to their inherent indivisibility (Bodomo, 1997).

6.6 Class 6: Nouns in Class 6 are morphologically unmarked in both singular and plural forms. Thus, they do not have prefixes in the singular or plural as shown in (26). The absence of these prefixes suggests that the language is losing its noun class prefixes. While historical data¹² specifically for this language may not be readily available, the unmarked singular and plural forms observed in this class of nouns suggest a diachronic trend of morphological simplification, which aligns with patterns of noun class erosion seen in related languages. This phenomenon has been documented in other African languages, particularly in the Bantu language family. Bendor-Samuel (1992) and Guthrie (1967) show that in

¹² Although diachronic evidence is not immediately available for this language, further historical analysis, including examination of older texts, comparative data from related languages, or additional fieldwork, could help confirm whether this trend is indeed part of a broader

historical process in the language. I suggest that future studies focus on such empirical data to investigate whether this morphological simplification is a long-term historical trend or a more recent development.

languages like Swahili and Zulu, some noun classes have undergone significant morphological reduction, including the loss of noun class prefixes. Similarly, languages undergoing simplification may gradually lose these prefixes, leading to forms like the unmarked singular and plural observed here.

(27)	bòkyú	‘dews’	bòkyú	‘dews’
	dìkpá	‘fire’	dìkpá	‘fires’
	kùntú ¹³	‘blanket’	kùntú	‘blankets’
	lámàṅ	‘crowd’	lámàṅ	‘crowds’
	sùmíè ¹⁴	‘pillow’	sùmíè	‘pillows’
	sùsù	‘sky’	sùsù	‘skies’
	tùkùgyí	‘omen’	tùkùgyí	‘omens’
	Wùrúbwàrí	‘God’	Wùrúbwàrí	‘God’
	yábìrá	‘millet’	yábìrá	‘millets’

One word in this class which caught my attention is the noun *Wùrúbwàrí* ‘God (supreme being)’. It is not clear at this point why *Wùrúbwàrí* ‘God’ (relating to supernatural being is in this class). However, as the data in (27) demonstrates, majority of the nouns that have lost their prefixes

are non-human animate nouns. It was also observed in Class 1B that few human nouns have lost their singular prefixes.

This suggests that human nouns are less susceptible to class loss as opposed to non-human nouns. This observation as well as the animate and inanimate distinctions in Class 1 and Class 2, support the notion that animacy is part of the semantic basis of classifying nouns across languages (Denny and Creider 1986, Maho 1999, Aikhenvald 2000). Aikhenvald (2000: 271) considers animacy, together with physical properties and function, as the semantic parameters used in noun categorization. In a comparative study of Bantu noun classes, Maho (1999: 64) remarks:

Some [regular semantic tendencies] recur in many, most and even occasionally all Bantu languages [...]

Semantically, this class could be described as the miscellaneous class since it contains diverse nouns including mass nouns, abstract nouns, countable nouns, collective nouns, fluids, natural elements, loan words, body parts, animals, and human nouns.

One such tendency concerns the distinction between animates and inanimates. Typically, animate classes are class 1 which in all Bantu languages contains nouns denoting human beings, while class 1a, where it exists, contains nouns denoting certain kinship terms, personified animals (when used in fables and tales) and various other nouns. Class 9 is most often the class where we find nouns denoting animals. Class 7 seems to be a typical thing-class, containing mostly inanimate objects, such as tools, instruments, utensils and other things. Other oft-occurring semantic regularities concern abstract nouns mostly found in class 14, but also in class 3.

7 Noun Class agreement properties

The Kaakye noun class system has some concordial agreement, where class prefixes of nouns agree with their modifiers. NP modifiers in Kaakye usually follow head nouns as illustrated in (28) below. Figure 3 shows the ordering of noun modifier. The head noun determines the

¹³ This is an Akan loan word

¹⁴ This is a loan word from Akan

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concord/agreement within the NP.

NP → N (ADJ) (NUM) (DEM) (DET) (QUAN)

Figure 2: Ordering of Kaakye NP modifiers

(28)	a-nyini	a-tuntun	asa	wv	mpo	ε-ba
	CL1A.PL-man	PL-short	three	DET	even	PST-come
	'Even the three short men came.'					(Korboe 2002:80-82)

Even though Kaakye has a relatively rich noun class system (Snider 1988)¹⁵, the same cannot be said about its concordial system. The only agreement system identified so far relates to number and adjective modifiers. The next section discusses the noun class agreement system in Kaakye grammar.

7.1 Head nouns and number agreement

Each Kaakye numeral form consists of a numeral prefix and a root. Cardinal numbers from one to nine as shown in (29) take the prefixes *ɔ-*, *a-*, and *ku-*. The prefix *ɔ-* occurs only on *ɔ-kùṅkú* 'one', *a-* occurs on numbers two to seven and number 9, and *kù-kwé* 'eight' takes a *ku-* prefix.

(29)	ɔ-kùṅkú	'one'	à-síè	'six'
	à-nyò	'two'	à-sùńó	'seven'
	à-sá	'three'	kù-kwé	'eight'
	à-ná	'four'	à-kpùńó	'nine'
	à-nùṅ	'five'		

In Kaakye, it is only the *a-* prefixed cardinal numerals that take part in noun-number agreement. Thus, when the *a-* prefixed numerals modify nouns, the numeral prefixes agree with the plural noun class prefixes. The example in (30)

illustrates an agreement of the numeral *àsá* 'three' and *àná* 'four' with Class 1A (30), Class 1C (31), and Class 2 (32). Note that there is agreement only on plural nouns and the agreement is restricted to Classes 1 and 2.

(30)	a.	ɔ-kè	→	à-kè	à-sá
		CL1A.SG-wife		CL1A.PL-wife	CL1A.PL-three
		'A wife'		'Three wives'	
	b.	Ø-fùrú	→	à-fùrú	à-ná
		CL1B.SG-antelope		CL1B.PL-antelope	CL1B.PL-four
		'An antelope'		'Four antelopes'	
(31)	a.	Kì-gyèrá	→	à-gyèrá	à-sá
		CL1C.SG-basket		CL1.PL-basket	CL1C.PL-three
		'A basket'		'Three baskets'	
	b.	Kì-bí	→	à-bí	à-ná
		CL1C.SG-mountain		CL1C.PL-mountain	CL1C.PL-four
		'A mountain'		'Four mountains'	
(32)	a.	ò-dùṅ	→	ì-dùṅ	ì-sa
		CL2.SG-tail		CL2.PL-tail	CL2.PL-three
		'A tail'		'Three tails'	

¹⁵ Snider (1988: 138) makes this claim for the northern Guang languages in contrast to the southern ones.

b. ò-fùfùrí → ì-fùfùrí ì-ná
 CL2.SG-tiger CL2.PL-tiger CL2.PL-four
 ‘A tiger’ ‘Four tigers’

(33) a. à-sí à-nyò b. à-sí à-nyò
 C1.PL-father CL1.PL-two C1.PL-father CL1.PL-two
 ‘Two fathers.’ ‘Two fathers’

It can also be observed that in this agreement, it is the noun’s plural prefix that triggers the agreement. In other words, the numeral prefix conforms to the concord set of its head noun. In (32), the plural prefix, *i-/i-* triggers the concord. *À-sá* ‘three’ and *à-ná* ‘four’ becomes *ì-sá* and *i-na*, respectively. The numeral prefix *a-* takes the

plural class marker *i-/i-*. In (30) and (33), the plural prefix *a-* triggers the agreement.

In addition to Classes 1, 2, and 3, there is concord when numerals modify nouns related to time concepts such as *kè-kè* ‘day’, *ò-kiré*, ‘week’, *òfòrí* ‘month’, and *kòsù* ‘year’. This is demonstrated by (34-37).

(34) ò-fòrí → ì-fòrí ì-síè
 CL3.SG-month CL3.PL CL3.PL-six
 ‘A month’ ‘Six months.’

(35) ò-kiré → ì-kiré ì-sá
 CL3.SG-month CL3.PL CL3.PL-three
 ‘A week’ ‘Three weeks’

(36) m̀è-gyìrí nì wú nté ó-kà-wà
 1SG.SUBJ.PROG-say DEM DET then 3SG.SUBJ-PERF-reach
 ì-ké ì-sá ànyìsí kípè é-bà
 CL4.PL-day CL4.PL-three eyes red PST-come
 ‘(As) I am saying this, he has had three days and he was desperate.’

(37) ì-ké-gyì Monkrae ì-sú ì-nùj̀ b̀èè
 1SG.SUBJ-FUT- be Monkrae CL4.PL-year CL4.PL-five or
 ì-sú ì-sùnó.
 CL4.PL-year CL4.PL-seven
 ‘I will stay at Monkrae for five years or six years.’

As already explained and just like any other noun in Class 3, the plural class prefix *n-* of the time concept nouns in examples (33 and 34) triggers the agreement on the numeral. Apart from *ò-kiré* ‘week’ and *òfòrí* ‘month’ which also belong to Class 3, the others *kè-kè* ‘day’ and *kòsù* ‘year’ in

(36 and 37) are Class 4 nouns. As far as my data is concerned, they are the only nouns in Class 4 that show number agreement. Generally, there is no agreement on Class 4 nouns as featured in example (38).

(38) a. Kè-gyìfòrí → ì-gyìfòrí à-sá
 CL4.SG-child CL4.PL-child three
 ‘A child’ ‘Three children’
 b. Kè-kirémà → ì-kirémà à-kp̀ùnó
 CL4.SG-rib CL4.PL-rib nine
 ‘A rib’ ‘Nine ribs’

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c.	Kò-ló	→	ń-ló	à-ná
	CL4.SG-waterpot		CL4.PL-water pot	four
	‘A water pot’		‘Four water pots’	

The nouns in (39a and b) belong to Class 4 but number agreement is not acceptable. Examples (40a and b) are acceptable.

(39)	a.	* ń-gyifòrì	ń-sá
		CL4.PL-child	CL4.PL-three
		‘Three children’	
	b.	*m-pùtú	ń-nyò
		CL4.PL-ladle	CL4.PL-two
		‘Two ladles’	
(40)	a.	ń-gyifòrì	à-sá
		CL4.PL-child	three
		‘Three children’	
	b.	m-pùtú	à-nyó
		CL4.PL-ladle	two
		‘Two ladles’	

The lack of noun-numeral concord in the other Class 4 nouns is an indication that the concord system is decaying.

7.2 Head nouns and adjective agreement

Two main types of adjectives are identified in Kaakye: derived and underived. The latter has few cases which adjectives include:

(i) adjectives derived from nouns by reduplication process (e.g. *ńkyú*)

‘water’ becomes *ńkyúńkyú* ‘watery’

(ii) adjectives derived from verbs by the suffixation of *sé*; as in *gyò* ‘to

rot’ becomes *gyò-sé* ‘rotten’

(iii) adjectives derived through

The underived adjectives are featured in (41). Morphologically, some of the underived adjectives are overtly marked in the singular and

compounding; for example, *àfùtá* ‘leaf’ and *bùbùé* ‘fresh’ becomes *àfùtábùbùé* ‘green’

(iv) nouns used as adjectives such as *kèbitégyí* ‘young woman’.

plural form while others are covertly marked.

Structurally, adjectives in Kaakye, like most Kwa languages, follow the nouns they modify.

	Singular		Plural	
(41)	a.	ò-lélé ‘big/fat’	à-lélé	‘big/fat’
	b.	ò-yírì ‘slow’	à-yírì	‘slow’
	c.	ò-pùpùè ‘new’	ò-pùpùè	‘new’
	d.	ò-fùfùrí ‘white’	i-fufuri	‘white’
	e.	ò-bìbì ‘black’	o-bibi	‘black’
	f.	kè-tùṅ ‘short’	kè-tùṅ	‘short’
	g.	kì-tè ‘bitter’	kì-te	‘bitter’
	h.	kì-gyùngyù ‘small’	ń-gyungyùn	‘small’
	i.	kùkòrí ‘crooked’	kùkòrí	‘crooked’
	j.	ì-sàà ‘fast’	ì-sàà	‘fast’

k. lèŋ ‘energetic/strong’ lèŋ ‘energetic/strong’
(Abunya 2014:10)

Kaakye adjectives do not agree with the class of nouns they modify, rather they agree with nouns in terms of number.¹⁶ Thus, irrespective of the class of the noun, when an adjective modifies a

singular noun, the adjective takes the form of a singular prefix and when the noun is plural, the adjective takes its plural prefix form as demonstrated in (42- 43) below.

- | | | | | | | |
|------|----|--|---------------------------|----|--|---------------|
| (42) | a. | Kú-tùŋtùŋ
CL4.SG-gourd
‘A big gourd’ | lèlè ¹⁷
big | b. | Ŋ-tùŋtùŋ
CL4.PL-gourd
‘Big gourd’ | á-lèlè
big |
| (43) | a. | í-bòyí ké-gyìngyìn
CL5-sin CL4.SG-small
‘A small sin’ | | b. | í-bòyí ñ-gyìngyìn
CL5-sin CL4PL-small
‘Small sins’ | |
| (44) | a. | Kè-kinyí ké-gyìngyìn
CL4.SG-fish SG-small
‘A small fish’ | | b. | ñ-kinyi ñ-gyìngyìn
CL4.PL-fish PL-small
‘Small fishes’ | |
| (45) | a. | Ø-pòkyénì kè-tùŋtùŋ
CL1b.SG-cow CL4.SG-short
‘A short cow’ | | b. | à-pòkyénì ñ-tùŋtùŋ
CL1b.PL-cow CL4.PL-short
‘Short cows’ | |

Interestingly, this kind of number agreement is only restricted to few adjectives such as big (42),

small (43 and 44) short, as illustrated in (45) above. There is no agreement in (46 and 47).

- | | | | | |
|------|----|--|----|--|
| (46) | a. | ò-yù swìswì
CL2.SG-tree tall
‘Tall tree’ | b. | ì-yù swìswì
CL2.PL-tree tall
‘Tall trees’ |
| (47) | a. | ò-fè fùfùrí
CL2SG.-rope white
‘White rope’ | b. | ì-fè fùfùrí
CL2.PL-rope white
‘White rope’ |

The fact that this agreement is attested suggests that the language might have had noun-adjective agreement system, but as the synchronic data shows this system has reduced tremendously. What we find is just a residue of it. This also supports the claim that the noun class system is generally decaying.

8 Conclusion

This paper has examined the noun class system in Kaakye, providing new insights into its structure and semantic underpinnings. By adopting a paired

singular-plural set framework, it challenges the notion of complete semantic incoherence in the classification system, as proposed by Korboe (2001), and instead highlights a clearer semantic basis for at least two of the classes. The analysis also revealed that Kaakye makes two key distinctions: animate/inanimate and human/nonhuman. In addition to the noun classification, the paper observed that the concord system in Kaakye has undergone significant reduction, with only remnants of the original noun class agreement systems, such as noun-numeral

¹⁶ A similar pattern of agreement is attested in Akan (Osam 1993).

¹⁷ According to one of my language consultants, the

inflection of *ɔ-* on *lele* ‘big’ is optional. According to him, the *ɔ-* prefix is dropped in fast utterance.

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and noun-adjective agreement, still in use. The erosion of noun class prefixes points to the ongoing decay of the noun class system, a process that may have broader social and historical implications.

This study contributes to the understanding of how noun class systems evolve, particularly in languages facing morphological simplification. The findings call for further research into the historical development of Kaakye and other related languages to better understand the causes of the loss of noun class prefixes and the broader implications of such changes. Additionally, comparative studies with other languages undergoing similar changes could yield more comprehensive insights into the processes of language decay and revitalization.

Given the ongoing loss of the noun class system, language preservation efforts may need to focus on revitalizing and maintaining traditional grammatical structures through education, language documentation, and community engagement.

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