

Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation

**Noun Classes in
Lefa (ALACAM 581)**

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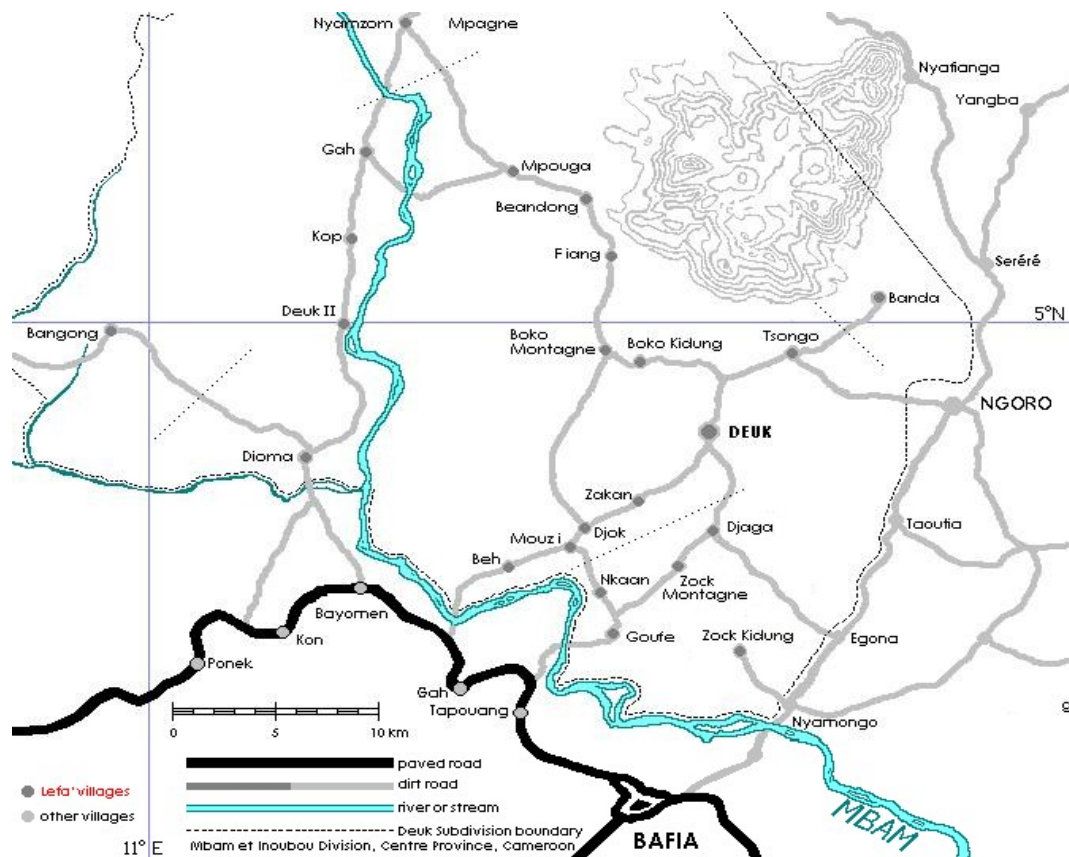
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Noun Classes in Lefa

Introduction

Lefa, code [581: lefa'] in ALCAM (Dieu and Renaud : 360) and 'lfa' in ISO 639-3 (Lewis), is a language spoken in the centre of Cameroon, which has recently been the focus of language development directed by a new language committee, CODELEFA. There has been very little linguistic research done in Lefa, and this study, along with a companion study in phonology by Sarah Daubert, is an attempt to fill some of this gap.

Lefa is spoken in the twenty-one villages of the subdivision of Deuk, Mbam et Inoubou Division, Centre Region, Cameroon. Figure 1 below shows the villages and their locations.



Fig

Most of this the subdivision is cut off from the main road by the Mbam, which does not have a bridge. Until recently the two ferries that once serviced the area (one on the road to Goufe, the other to Nyamongo) were broken. This made the only access by boat or by a long trip around by way of Ntui. Currently one of these ferries is operational, the one near Nyamongo. One part of the subdivision is on the other side of the Mbam and only separated from the main road by the Nun, which does have a bridge.

Based on the 1987 census, Ayotte, et. al (2002 : 3) estimated the population of the Lefa-speaking villages to be 9 600 in 2000¹. Using the same calculation, the current population would be 13 000. Several years ago the administration estimated the population of the subdivision to be around 15 000.

Linguistic background

Lefa is a “Narrow Bantu” language, in group A.50, related to Bafia (rikpa). Specifically, the Lefa language is classified as follows:

Niger-Congo
 Benue Congo
 Bantoid
 Southern Bantoid
 Narrow Bantu
 Northwest
 A
 Bafia (A.50)
 Lefa

Very little linguistic study has been done specifically on Lefa. That which has been done is primarily in the form of linguistic surveys performed by SIL. The most recent of these was Ayotte and Lamberty’s Intelligibility Testing of Bafia among Lefa Speakers (Ayotte and Lamberty, 2001). This was a follow-up to a rapid appraisal of the language area by Mbonge et al in 1999, and addressed the issue of comprehension of Bafia (Rikpa) by Lefa speakers. The conclusion of the testing was that while there was some inter-comprehension, this level was slightly below the threshold considered necessary to consider Lefa a dialect of Bafia. In addition, the degree of inter-comprehension varied widely among the subjects tested. This would indicate that at least some of this inter-comprehension was due to contact and learning, and not innate to all speakers of Lefa.

Much linguistic research has been completed in the Bafia subgroup of Narrow Bantu, specifically in Bafia (Rikpa) itself. Much of this work is by Guarisma, and at least one of these articles mentions Lefa and one difference in phonology with Bafia (Guarisma 2003, 309-10). In addition, Guarisma and others have conducted “dialectométrie” studies of Lefa in conjunction with other Bantu languages in the area. Finally, several MA Thesis at the University of Yaoundé have treated linguistic features of Lefa itself. These are listed in the references.

There are some dialectical differences in the Lefa-speaking region, although most have no impact on comprehension. Four of the villages, Mpagne, Nyamzom, Banda, and Bangong, have different enough dialects that they sometimes do not accept the label “Lefa” and other speakers report that they are difficult to understand. The recently formed language committee (CODELEFA) has chosen the dialect of Deuk as

¹ According to the 1987 Census Publication (Demo 87:5), between 1976-1987, Cameroon had an annual growth rate of 2.9%. For the above estimation, the authors assumed the same rate of 2.9% for the years 1987-2000, and that it applied equally across the country. As they note, there is no way to know if there was significant immigration or emigration during this period.

reference dialect, and it is this dialect that forms the basis of this study. A segmental phonology of this dialect has recently been done by Sarah Daubert, a SIL researcher. The orthography is still under study, and the spelling of examples in this document should be seen as preliminary. This is especially true for tone, where the marking reflects surface tone. The orthography generally follows the IPA, although /j/ is written ‘y’, /tʃ/ is ‘c’, /ʃ/ is ‘sh’, /ɲ/ is ‘ny’, and word-final /ʔ/ is ‘h’. Also, semi-vowels following consonants are written as the corresponding full vowel. At times the an IPA transcription of prefixes or words is given between brackets to help in the understanding of examples.

Nouns

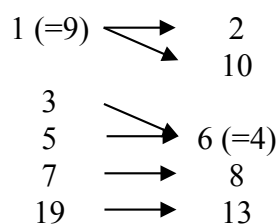
Lefa has a complete, functioning Bantu noun-class system. Two sets of classes have merged, 9 = 1 and 4 = 6. Table 1 gives a summary chart of the prefixes for each class on noun roots (consonant and vowel-initial) and for their accords.

Table 1: Summary of Prefixes

class	Noun (C/V)	Adj	Pro	Subj / Assoc
1	n- / m-	n-	g-	à
1a	ø-			
2	bə̀ - / b-	bə́ -	bə́ -	bə́
3	n- / mu-	wí -	wí -	wí
3a	ø-			
5	lí - / d-	dí -	dí -	dí
5a	y-			
6	mə̀ - / m-	mə́ -	mə́ -	mə́
6a	mi- ([mj])			
7	kí - / c- ([tʃ])	kí -	kí -	kí
8	bí - / bi- ([bj])	bí -	bí -	bí
10	ø-	yí -	yí -	yí
19	fí - / fi- ([fj])	fí -	fí -	fí
13	tí - / ti- ([tj])	tí -	tí -	tí

The major classes and their pairings are 1/2, 1/10, 3/6, 5/6, 7/8, and 19/13. There are also several subclasses. These pairings, given graphically in Table 2, are discussed below.

Table 2: Noun Class Parings



Gender I: Classes 1/2

The noun prefix for class 1 is *m-*, and the prefix for class 2 is *bə̀-*. The class 1 prefix is realized as a syllabic nasal before a consonant-initial root, and assimilates to its point of articulation. The vowel in the class 2 prefix drops before a vowel-initial root.

Only two vowel-initial roots in this class have been found². These examples are given below (with *fə̀* ‘one’ and *bíyɛ̀* ‘two’, as these show according prefixes in all classes). The second example is unusual, with *bɔ-* [bɔw] in the plural instead of the expected *b-*:

m-úŋ (bò³) / *b-úŋ* (bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘person’
m-ɛ̀ ŋ(bò) / *bɔ ɛ̀ ŋ*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘child’

All the other examples found in this category are agent nominalisations of verbs.

n-ləm (bò) / *bə̀ -ləm*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘sorcerer’
n-kà (bò) / *bə̀ kà* (bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘seller’
m-buəm (bò) / *bə̀ buəm* (bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘hunter’

A large sub-class of class 1 has no prefix, listed here as class 1a. This class includes many loan words, as well as several words starting with a nasal or a trace of one, possibly moved here from class 1 (=9) /10 (see discussion in the Gender II section below).

djiè (bò) / *bə̀ -djiè*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘mother’
sùkúlù (bò) / *bə̀ -sùkúlù*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘school’
ányɛ̀ s(bò) / *b-ányɛ̀ s*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘onion’
nɛ̀ ŋ(bò) / *bə̀ -nɛ̀ ŋ*(bə̀ -bíyɛ̀) ‘porcupine’

Gender II: Classes 1/10

This gender in Lefa is the result of a class 9 and class 1 merger.⁴ The nouns in this gender are identical in the singular and plural. Some of these have an initial nasal, while others have a voiced consonant which could be seen as the result of a previous initial nasal prefix. In the current state of the language however, this is simply a part of the root in these classes. Some nouns matching this description are now entirely 1a/2 nouns (see the Gender I section above.)

đúèŋ(bò) / *đúèŋ*(yí -bíyɛ̀) ‘mountain’
djikè (bò) / *djikè* (yí -bíyɛ̀) ‘pick axe’
nyàm (bò) / *nyàm* (yí -bíyɛ̀) ‘animal’
zàh (bò) / *zàh* (yí -bíyɛ̀) ‘chicken’
bì(bò) / *bì*(yí -bíyɛ̀) ‘dog’

² These two words are also the only vowel-initial roots in this class in Bafia (Guarisma 1973, 142).

³ *bò* is the result of a merger in class one of the prefix *n-* with *fə̀* ‘one’. See the description in the section on numbers starting on page 11 below.

⁴ There is no indication of a similar paring of 1/10 in Bafia, where class 9 exists and these nouns are normally 9/10 (Guarisma 2000, 191, 195). This is also the case for some dialects of Lefa, including, for example, that of Zok.

Gender III: Classes 3/6

The noun prefix for class 3 is *n-* for consonant-initial roots and *mu-* [mw] for vowel initial roots, and the prefix for class 6 is *mə-* for consonant-initial roots, and *m-* or *mi-* [mj] for vowel-initial roots.

In Lefa, as in Bafia, classes 4 and 6 have basically merged⁵. All accords are identical, and the only remnant of the distinction comes in vowel-initial noun roots, which take *mi-* [mj] for roots with singulars in class 3 and *m-* for those with singulars in class 5 (as seen in the section below). As all the accords are the same, this has been considered a merger, with a sub-class 6a for the *mi-* vowel-initial roots.

n̄-tuá (wí -fò) / m̄-tuá (má-bíyè) 'head',
 n̄-lám (wí -fò) / m̄-lám (má-bíyè) 'heart'
 n̄-gé ɲ(wí -fò) / m̄-gé ɲ(má-bíyè) 'spirit'
 n̄-gásəŋ (wí -fò) / m̄-gásəŋ (má-bíyè) 'fork of a tree'

The following are some examples of vowel-initial roots with plurals in *mi-* [mj] (class 6a).

mù-əm (wí -fò) / mi-əm (má-bíyè) 'mouth'
 mù-á (wí -fò) / mi-á (má-bíyè) 'calf (of leg)'

Some of the nouns in class 3 do not have a prefix. This is listed as class 3a:

kò (wí -fò / m̄-kò (má-bíyè) 'leg/foot'
 lé (wí -fò) / m̄-lé (má-bíyè) 'ear'
 dàm (wí -fò) / m̄-dàm (má-bíyè) 'species of snake'

Gender IV: Classes 5/6

The prefix of class 5 is *h̄-* before consonant-initial roots, and *ɸ-* before vowel-initial roots. The class 6 prefixes are, as discussed above, with *m-* before vowel-initial roots in this gender.

h̄-kòŋ (ɸí -fò) / m̄-kòŋ (má-bíyè) 'spear'
 h̄-dəmə (ɸí -fò) / m̄-dəmə (má-bíyè) 'tongue'
 h̄-fuəm (ɸí -fò) / m̄-fuəm (má-bíyè) 'chief'
 ɸ-í (ɸí -fò) / m-í (má-bíyè) 'eye'
 ɸ-ú (ɸí -fò) / m-ú⁶ (má-bíyè) 'fire'
 ɸ-ùm (ɸí -fò) / m-ùm (má-bíyè) 'belly'

Several nouns in this class have a prefix *y-* in the singular. This is listed as class 5a.

y-è h(dí -fò) / m-è h(má-bíyè) 'hole'
 y-əh (dí -fò) / m-əh (má-bíyè) 'egg'
 y-uíŋ (dí -fò) / m-uíŋ (má-bíyè) 'nose'

⁵ Although this merged class could equally be called 4 or 6, I have opted for 6 because the most common noun prefix and the agreement prefixes are *mə-* as expected for class 6 and not *mi-* for class 4.

⁶ Some give an unexpected plural of *mə-ɸu* for this word, but this is considered incorrect.

In the dialect of Djaga (as in Bafia) these nouns commence with the normal class 5 prefix *ɔ́i-* [ɔ́j]. Many of these are low vowel-initial roots, and Guarisma says that *ɔ́y-* is the expected prefix for these roots in Bafia (1973, 148). There has apparently been a change of [ɔ́j] to [j] in these prefixes in the Deuk dialect.

Gender V: Classes 7/8

The noun prefix for class 7 is *kí-*, and that of class 8 is *bí-*. Before a vowel-initial root, the class 7 prefix becomes *c-* [tʃ]⁷ and the class 8 *bí-* [bʃ].

kí -tə́ (kí -fò) / *bí* -tə́ (bí -bɛ́y) 'tree'
kí -dɛ́ η(kí -fò) / *bí* -ɛ́l η(bí -bɛ́y) 'village'
kí -díà (kí -fò) / *bí* -díà (bí -bɛ́y) 'clothing'
kí -sɛ́ m(kí -fò) / *bí* -sɛ́ m(bí -bɛ́y) 'door'
c-àh (kí -fò) / *bí*-àh (bí -bɛ́y) 'hand / arm'
c-ə̀zì (kí -fò) / *bí*-ə̀zì (bí -bɛ́y) 'broom'

Exceptionally, one word in class 7 with a vowel-initial root has a *sh-* [ʃ] (or *shi-*) prefix, instead of the expected *c-* [tʃ]:

shíà (kí -fò) / *bíà* (bí -bɛ́y) 'file (tool)'

This word is a borrowing from pidgin English, and some consider it having a zero prefix and give the plural in class 2 (*bə̀ -shíà*) as expected for borrowings. A tonal minimal pair borrowing *shíà* 'chair' is class 1a/2. But *shíà* 'file (tool)' is clearly class 7 in the singular for all speakers.

Gender VI: Classes 19/13

The prefix for class 19 is *fí-* and the prefix for class 13 is *tí-*. These vowels drop before a high vowel-initial root and turn to the semi-vowel [j] (written *i*) before a non-high vowel-initial root.

fí -nyì (fí -fò) / *tí* -nyì (tí -bíyɛ̀) 'bird'
fí -gə́η (fí -fò) / *tí* -gə́η (tí -bíyɛ̀) 'large cooking pot'
f-i (fí -fò) / *t-i* (tí -bíyɛ̀) 'market'
fí -óη (fí -fò) / *tí* -óη (tí -bíyɛ̀) 'hair'
fí -é (fí -fò) / *tí* -é (tí -bíyɛ̀) 'star'

Minor Pairings

Minor pairings are by definition infrequent. Currently only one minor pairing has been found, involving two words with a 7 / 2 pairing. These words do not have a prefix in the singular (unusual for class 7) and thus look more like class 1a / 2 nouns. Also, they are apparently borrowings, also frequent in gender 1a / 2⁸.

⁷ While this can be explained as a palatalization of a [kj] sequence before a vowel, this palatalization does not happen in other contexts. For example, the adjective prefix for this class is *k-* before vowels (see, for example, the description of possessive pronouns on page 10).

⁸ These words take class 7 accords in the singular in Bafia as well, although the form of 'evening' in Bafia, *conko*, can be interpreted as having a class 7 prefix. Guarisma does classify *sawa* a class 1 noun, based on its form and not accord (1973, 143). No comment is made on plurals, however.

sáwá (kí -fó) / bə́ -sá wá (bə́ -bí) ‘morning’
 sónkò (kí -fó) / bə́ -sónkò (bə́ -bí) ‘evening’

It is also interesting to note that the common word *cámən* ‘time’ is a class 7 noun (with no plural).

Another similar example is *shíà* ‘file (tool)’ discussed above, for those speakers who have its plural in class 2.

Single Class Genders

Besides the paired genders discussed above, there are several uses of classes which are not paired with a singular and plural.

There are several nouns that only occur in one class, and thus are single gender nouns. Some of these are non-countable mass nouns (since they are not compatible with numbers, the examples are given with *cəm* ‘all’). They are found in class 6, the expected class in Bantu, but also in other classes.

lé s(n-cəm) ‘rice’ – class 1
 dódh (wí -cəm) ‘honey’ – class 3
 mə-ní (mə-cəm) ‘water’ – class 6
 mə-lí (mə-cəm) ‘(powdered) milk’ – class 6
 y-ó (dí -cən) ‘sky’ – class 5
 kí -mi (kí -cəm) ‘dew’ – class 7

However, there are also countable nouns that are single gender nouns. The examples currently found are *mə-túwà* ‘car(s)’ (class 6) and *gbáh* ‘bridge(s)’ (class 10)⁹. In this case, you can get a normally plural prefix on *-fo* ‘one’:

mə-túwá mə-fó¹⁰
 C6-car C6-one
 ‘one car’

gbáh yí -fó
 bridge.C10 C10-one
 ‘one bridge’

Another use of a single gender class is that of class 5, used for verbal nouns and infinitives.

lí -dí ‘to eat’
 lí -tó ‘to speak’
 lí -lúm ‘to exit’

⁹ *gbah* in the singular is sometimes given spontaneously with class 1 accords, sometimes with class 10 (even in the same text). However, class 10 is considered “correct.”

¹⁰The following abbreviations are used in the glossed examples in this paper: 1S 1st person singular, 1P 1st person plural, 2S 2nd person singular, 2P 2nd person plural, 3S 3rd person singular, 3P 3rd person plural, AM associative marker, COMP complementizer, DEMD discourse demonstrative, DEMF far demonstrative, DEMN near demonstrative, FOC focus, LOC locative, POSS possessive, PRO pronoun, PST past, and REL relative pronoun. In addition, C followed by a number indicates noun class.

Accords

In a noun class system, it is primarily the accords in a phrase that identify the noun classes. In Lefa, there are separate accords used for subject accord, for pronouns and for adjectives. Several of these differ only by tone or only in a few classes. These are described below.

A detailed study of the uses of these according elements has not yet been done. In the discussion below, the labels of the various elements should be taken in a provisional manner. For example, it is not at all clear that the “relative pronoun” discussed below is actually a relative and not something else. It is given under this label because of the translation in French. This uncertainty in the labels does not call into question the varying nature of these elements and their value in distinguishing noun classes, which is the point of this paper.

Most of these accords have different consonants by class. The exception is between class 2 and 8, both of which have initial ‘b’: *bə* (2) and *bí* (8) and are distinguished only by the vowel. Thus, for those words that show accord where there is elision of the vowel, these two classes are identical.¹¹

The situation was apparently similar in classes 4 and 6 before the merger, where the forms expected from Proto Bantu would be *mí* (4)¹² and *mə* (6). Currently the contrast between [í] and [ə] in cases where the vowel does not drop has been neutralized in favour of [ə], giving an accord of *mə* for the merged class (4/6).

Tone on these markers is also unsure, as a tone study has not yet been done. The base tones proposed for these various elements are based on the examples given and what is expected from Proto-Bantu. In some cases the markers in examples have different surface tones from those proposed for the markers themselves, probably because of floating tones or other tonal perturbations¹³.

Subject / Associative

The associative phrase marker and the subject accord marker are identical. These markers are given by noun class below:

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
AM	à	bə	wí	ǎí	mə	kí	bí	yí	ǎí	tí

¹¹ Unlike Bafia, where class 8 retains a semi-vowel [j] in these contexts (Guarisma 2000, 195). Thus Bafia does distinguish, for example, between 1S.POSS.C2 [bəm] and 1S.POSS.C8 [bj əm] both of which are [bəm] in Lefa.

¹² A trace of this *mi-* prefix for nouns can be seen in the *mi-* [mj] prefix for vowel-initial roots with singulars in class 3, compared to the *m-* prefix for vowel-initial roots with singulars in class 5.

¹³ c.f. Guarisma’s comments about some of these markers in Bafia: “les formes qu’ils présentent sont extrêmement variées, car elles sont le résultat de ... l’influence de la structure tonal du nominal qu’ils déterminent.” (2000, 88)

The subject accord marker is a prefix on the verb that agrees with the noun class of the subject.

mə-tùwá mə-lónj níà
C6-car C6-hit house.C1
'The car(s) hit the house.'

bì yì-dóšì nyə fí-góŋ fí bíŋ
dogs.C10 C10-finish 3S.PRO C19-cooking.pot AM.C19 meat
'The dogs finished off the cooking pot of meat on her.'

fí-nyì fí-sá mí kì-tó
C19-bird C19-alight LOC C7-tree
'The bird alights in the tree.'

In cases of human subjects referenced by nouns in a class other than class 1, agreement is optionally with class 1 instead of the noun class of the noun.¹⁴

lì-fuəm dí-yúì or lì-fuəm á-yúì
C5-chief C5-come C5-chief C1-come
'The chief came.'

In cases of joined subjects of different classes, class 2 agreement is used for people, and class 8 agreement for animals and things.

lì-fuəm lì méŋ g-i bó-yúì
C7-chief and child.C1 C1-3S.POSS C2-come
'The chief and his child came.'

dam lì kì-guəm bó-yúì
snake(sp).C3 and C7-snake(sp). C8-came
'The dam snake (sp) and the kiguem snake (sp). came.'

fí-kóŋ lì kì-wò bó-kpì
C19-hoe and C7-saw C8-fall
'The hoe and the saw fell.'

This resolution is possible even in the case of two singular nouns with the same noun class, although the appropriate plural class is also possible.

fí-kóŋ lì fí-séŋ bó-kpì¹⁵ / tí-kpì
C19-hoe and C19-axe C8-fall C13-fall
'The hoe and the axe fell.'

The associative phrase also uses this same marker.

¹⁴ This type of accord is also possible for personified animals in traditional stories.

¹⁵ This example (as the others regarding gender resolution in this section) came from elicitation, and not from natural texts.

kí -tuèŋ kí bìdó ŋ
 C7-bottom AM.C7 jug.C1
 ‘the bottom of the jug’

mi-ásá mǎ kí -tə̀
 C6-branch AM.C6 C7-tree
 ‘the branches of the tree’

lì ðu ǎm dí lə̀h
 C5-hunt AM.C5 savannah.C1
 ‘the hunt of (in) the savannah’

In class 1, the associative marker is null:

muŋ djaga
 man.C1 Djaga
 ‘man from Djaga’

djiè lì -fùǎm
 mother.C1 C5-chief
 ‘mother of the chief’

This element is occasionally omitted for the subject accord as well in class 1, although in this case speakers consider it as elision (they speak of a “swallowed a”).]

Possessive Pronoun

The possessive pronoun agrees in class with the noun possessed and varies by the person of the possessor. The forms of the root of the possessive pronoun are given in the table below (first and second plural are discussed later in this section).

	sing	pl
1	ǎm	–
2	óó	–
3	íí	áá

The prefix is the pronoun prefix, given below, with the vowel dropping before the vowel-initial root. This prefix is identical to the adjective prefix (described below), except for class 1 where it is *g-* (compared to *n-*).

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
pro	g-	ǒǒ -	wí	dí -	mǎ-	kí -	ǒí -	yí -	fí -	tí -
			-							

géŋ g-ǎm
 brother.C1 C1-1S.POSS
 ‘my brother’

ǒí -tə̀ ǒ-íí
 C8-tree C8-3S.POSS
 ‘his trees’

For first and second plural, no forms of the possessive pronoun have been found¹⁶. Instead, an associative construction is used with the normal independent pronouns – *bá* 1P and *bíŋ* 2P.

lí-fuà̀m ɗí bá ɓ
C5-chief C5.AM 1P
‘our chief’

mé ɲ bíŋ
child.C1 2P
‘your (pl.) child’

In addition, an associative construction may be used for all other persons as an alternative to the simple possessive pronoun. In this construction, the associative marker is followed by the possessive pronoun with an *nk-* prefix. This prefix is not found elsewhere, and its meaning is unknown. This construction is apparently not possible for nouns in class 1, and the difference in meaning or use between it and the simple possessive pronoun is not currently known.

mà-téŋ mó nk-íí
C6-palm.tree C6.AM ?-3S.POSS
‘his palm trees’

fí-nyí fí nk-àm
C19-bird C19.AM ?-1S.POSS
‘my bird’

Adjectives / Number / Quantifier

Adjectives, certain numbers, and the quantifier all show accord with the noun, and all these accords use the adjective prefix by class, given below:

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
adj	n-	bá -	wí	ɗí -	má-	kí -	bí -	yí -	fí -	tí -
			-							

bà -ká̀tà bá -fíŋ
C2-book C2-black
‘black books’

kí -tá kí -càm
C7-tree C7-all
‘all of the tree / the entire tree’

nyàm yí -càm
animals.C10 C10-all
‘all the animals’

¹⁶ These forms do exist in Bafia, which has the same forms as Lefa in the other persons (Guarisma 2000, 181).

In class one, several of these items have a null prefix, instead of the expected *n-*. Thus, alongside *n-cəm* ‘C1-all’ and *n-fin* ‘C1-black’, you have *sa* ‘little’ (c.f. *ɓə-sa* ‘C2-little’), *dəŋ* ‘other’ (c.f. *ɓə-dəŋ* ‘C2-other’), and *ɓəə* ‘which?’ (c.f. *ɓə-ɓəə* ‘C2-which?’).

The numbers through five show agreement. Numbers above five do not, although in a compound number, the portion referring to a number from two to five does.

mə-fùəm mǎ-bíyɛ
C6-chief C6-two
‘two chiefs’

tǐ-nyì tááfò / ɓǐ-tǎ tááfò
C19-bird six C8-tree six
‘six birds’ ‘six trees’

mə-sòŋ ntɛ̃ ðì mǎ-bíyɛ
C6-tooth ten with C6-two
‘twelve teeth’

For *fò* ‘one’, the class 1 nasal prefix merges with the initial consonant of the root, giving *ɓò* ‘one’ in this class.

m-buém ɓò
C1-hunter. C1.one
‘one hunter’

It is this form that is used for counting and for ‘one’ in a compound number:

mə-sòŋ ntɛ̃ ðì ɓó
C6-tooth ten with C1.one
‘eleven teeth’

Relative Pronoun

The relative pronoun varies according to the class of the head noun. For all but class 1, this is the consonant of the adjective series followed by *ì*. In all classes it is identical to the near demonstrative, described below. The series is given in the following table:

1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
nə̀	ɓí	wí	ɗí	mí	kí	ɓí	yí	fí	tí

bəh yí yí-ngá-kà
year.C10 REL.C10 C10-pass-PST
‘the years that have passed’

n-kí kɛ̃ ŋ wí ɓó -bùŋ ɓò ɓ̃
C3-story REL.C3 C2-tell 1P
‘the story that they told us’

ɓə̀ -t̪ ɓí á-l̪ l̪ ɓúə
 C2.women REL.C2 C1-be with C2.PRO
 ‘the women who she was with’

Demonstratives

Lefa has three series of demonstratives. Two series are for items in the physical environment and are distinguished by distance – a near demonstrative and a far demonstrative. The third series is for something previously mentioned in discourse. All three series show accord with the noun class of the head noun. The near demonstrative is identical to the relative pronoun, and, as described above, can be seen as a combination of the adjective prefix and *í*, except for class 1. For all classes, the other two series can be seen as a combination of the adjective prefix and a base: far demonstrative *iní* and discourse demonstrative *iŋ*. In all cases, the vowel of the adjective prefix drops, leaving only the initial consonant:

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
adj	n̪-	ɓə́ -	wí	ɗí -	mə́-	kí -	ɓí -	yí -	fí -	tí -
Near	nə̀	ɓí	wí	ɗí	mí	kí	ɓí	yí	fí	tí
Far	n̪ní	ɓíní	wí ní	ɗíní	mí ní	kíní	ɓíní	yíní	fíní	tíní
Disc	n̪ŋ	biŋ	wíŋ	ɗiŋ	míŋ	kíŋ	ɓiŋ	yíŋ	fíŋ	tíŋ

k̪í -s̪ m k̪í
 C7-door C7.DEMN
 ‘this door’

t̪i-nyi t̪íní
 C13-bird C13.DEMF
 ‘those birds’

ɓə̀ -kùzì nyàm yíŋ mí z̪í
 3SG-pile.up C10.animals C10.DEMD LOC ground
 ‘They piled up those animals on the ground.’
 (given after sentences describing the hunting of the animals)’

Focus Marker

In Lefa there is another marker that is used in certain focus constructions.¹⁷ This is different from both the subject marker and the relative pronoun, at least in some classes. For all classes, this is the consonant of the adjective series followed by *ə*. The series is given in the following table:

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
Foc	nə̀	ɓə́	wə́	ɗə́	mə́	kə́	ɓə́	yə́	fə́	tə́

¹⁷ The specific type of focus is not clear, but this construction is consistently translated by a cleft construction in French.

In this construction, there is no subject marker when the subject is focused. Some examples of this construction are given below.

mɛ̃ ɲ nə́ yúì lə̀
 child FOC.C1 come COMP¹⁸
 ‘It’s the child who came.’

kí -tə́h kə̀ kpî lə̀
 C7-tree FOC.C7 fall COMP
 ‘It’s the tree that fell.’

c.f. kí -tə́h kí -kpî
 C7-tree C7-fall
 ‘The tree fell.’

kí -tə́h kí kí -kpî
 C7-tree C7.REL C7-fall
 ‘the tree that fell’

kí -pə́ŋ kə́ mə́-ndí bà lə̀
 C7-fufu FOC.C7 1S-eat first COMP
 ‘It’s fufu that I eat first’

This marker can be combined with any of the demonstratives (of the same class) to form a presentative marker:

dám wə́-wí (lə̀)¹⁹
 C3.snake.sp FOC.C3-DEMN.C3 COMP
 ‘Here is (“voici”) a dam snake (sp).’

tí -nyí tə́-tíni (lə̀)
 C19-bird FOC.C19-DEMF.C19 COMP
 ‘There are (“voilà”) birds.’

lí -kpí dí dəm də́-dìŋ lə̀
 c5-fall C5.AM field C5.FOC-C5.DEMD COMP
 ‘That’s clearing (felling) a field.’²⁰

Free Pronouns

In all but class 1 the free-standing pronouns in Lefa are formed regularly from the pronoun prefix and *uə* /*wə́*/. The entire series is given below.

class	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	10	19	13
Pro	nyə̀	bu é	wə́	duə́	muə́	kuə́	bu é	yuə́	fuə́	tuə́

¹⁸ *lə̀* is glossed as COMP, as it is the normal complementizer in Lefa. Its function in this construction is not understood, as is the lack of a subject agreement with subject focus.

¹⁹ *lə̀* is optional in this construction.

²⁰ This is the final phrase of a text describing this process.

ɓə̀ ɛ̀fi yuə̀ á dzə̀m
 C2-chase PRO.C10 LOC behind
 'They chased after them (= ɓɛ̀ 'dogs' C10).'

à-sú ɛ̀ kuó
 C1-return with PRO.C7
 'He went back with it (= kɛ̀guə̀m 'snake sp.' C7).'

Summary

Lefa presents a fairly standard Bantu noun class system, with a merger of classes 1 and 9, as well as classes 4 and 6. The major genders are 1/2, 1(=9)/10, 3/6(=4), 5/6(=4), 7/8, and 19/13. There are some single class nouns, including a couple of countable nouns that have only a plural class form with both singular and plural meaning.

Lefa has several items that show noun class accord. There is subject accord, with gender resolution in class 2 for people and class 8 for animals and objects. The associative marker is the same as the subject accord marker, although it is dropped in class 1. Other elements that show accord include various modifiers, relative pronouns, demonstratives, a focus marker, and free pronouns.

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