A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon

Voll, R.M.; Voll R.M.

CHAPTER 4

The noun class system

Mundabli has a fully-fledged agreement system, almost like a Bantu language. However, in some regards the Mundabli system differs considerably from a typical Bantu-like noun class system. In a Bantu-like noun class system, agreement is usually marked both on modifiers within the noun phrase and on the verb. Typically, noun classes are also overtly marked by prefixes (and/or suffixes) on the noun itself. Example (16) (taken from Corbett (1991: 43), ultimate source Welmers (1973: 171)) shows agreement marking in Swahili, a typical Bantu language. In example (16) the prefix **ki-** marks agreement or noun class, respectively, on the nominal modifiers, on the verb and on the noun itself.

(16) *ki*kapu *ki*kubwa *ki*moja *ki*lianguka
basket big one fell
'One large basket fell.'

In Mundabli, the agreement system is fully intact. Agreement is marked by segmental or, for Gender 9/10,[1] tonal prefixes. However, agreement in Mundabli is restricted to noun modifiers. The verb does not agree with its subject or object. Whereas this is not unusual for a Bantoid language, what is more unusual is the lack of noun class marking on the noun itself. Noun classes in Mundabli are in most cases covert, i.e. they are not detectable from the shape of the noun alone. Whereas most Yemne-Kimbi languages have a somewhat reduced nominal morphology and have lost overt noun class marking for some

[1] Singular-plural class pairings are referred to as "genders", see §4.2 for details.

noun classes[2] (Good et al. 2011), Mundabli and Mufu are the varieties whose overt noun class marking shows the highest degree of formal attrition.

The remainder of this chapter contains a section on previous treatments of Yemne-Kimbi noun class systems (§4.1) and an overview of the Mundabli noun class system (§4.2). It further contains descriptions of noun classes and noun class pairings (§4.3), a section on the noun class assignment of borrowed nouns (§4.4) and a section on the secondary classification or 'derivational' use of noun classes (§4.5). The last section contains a discussion of the current analysis of the noun class system and a comparison with an alternative purely language-internal analysis based on agreement classes (§4.6).

4.1 Previous treatments of Yemne-Kimbi noun class systems

The noun class systems of Yemne-Kimbi languages were first described in Hombert (1980), which is a description of the noun class systems of some languages belonging to a putative grouping which Hombert referred to as the "Beboid" languages (see §1.1.5 for details). His conspectus contains data from Buu, another Ji-variety (see §1.1.5 for clarification but none from Mundabli (or Mufu). A more recent overview of noun class systems of the Yemne-Kimbi languages, which includes a section on the Mundabli noun class system is provided in Good et al. (2011). Both Hombert (1980) and Good et al. (2011) adopt a comparative approach, analyzing the noun class systems in a way which focusses on possible relations with the reconstructed Proto-Bantu system and with noun class systems of other Bantoid languages. Analysis and numbering of noun classes in the current work differ in certain respects, such as e.g. the absence of a plural Class 4, from those in Good et al. (2011). Differences are pointed out in the relevant sections.

Aside from these more general works, there are two more recent works which also treat their noun class systems, one on the Ji-variety Buu (Ngako Yonga 2013) and one on Mungbam, a dialect cluster including the varieties Abar, Biya, Missong, Munken and Ngun (Lovegren 2013). Ngako Yonga (2013) describes the phonology and the noun class system of Buu, which she also compares with the noun class system of Mundabli, as described in Good et al. (2011). Lovegren (2013) is a multi-dialectal grammar of Mungbam. It contains a detailed description and analysis of the noun class system(s) of the Mungbam varieties and skillfully relates them to the reconstructed Proto-Bantu system and to noun class systems of related languages.

[2]Buu, another Ji variety, has retained most noun class prefixes, but they are dropped when the noun is modified by a possessive pronoun or a demonstrative (Ngako Yonga 2013: 111). Similar processes have been reported for Aghem (Ring, Hyman 1979: 27) and Ajumbu (Yemne-Kimbi, Good et al. 2011: 138). Whereas in Mundabli nominal prefixes sometimes alternate with zero, a clear correlation with the presence of noun modifiers, as in Buu is not discernible.

4.2 Overview of the noun class system

The aim of this section is to give an overview of the noun class system. The current description of the noun class system differs in some respects from descriptions in earlier publications, such as Good et al. 2011. A discussion of the current analysis and a comparison with a purely morphological noun class system can be found in §4.6.

Following Bantuist tradition (see e.g., Maho 1999 and Katamba 2003), the current analysis of the noun class system is based on agreement classes and numeral distinctions, however, class labels diverge from the traditional system in some cases. All nouns which have the same number value (singular, plural or uncountable) and show the same agreement patterns are assigned to a common noun class. Groups of nouns with identical agreement but different number values are split up into classes which are uniform regarding the number values of their members, i.e. all singular nouns are in one class and all plural nouns are in another, even if they trigger the same agreement patterns. In general, odd numbers represent singular classes and even numbers represent plural classes (classes of uncountable nouns are exempt from this rule).

Regarding noun class labels, when two or more classes show the same agreement but are distinguished based on their number values, their labels contain the same number, first plain, then accompanied by the lower case letters **a** and **b**. Thus, in the current system there is e.g., a singular Class 7, a plural Class 7a and an uncountable Class 7b (see Table 4.1). Only in the case of Class 6, which contains liquids and triggers the same agreement as Class 18, is the label Class 6 preferred over Class 18a because of its historical connection with Proto-Bantu Class 6a (see §4.3.7 for details). As in earlier publications, noun class labels are reminiscent of the Proto-Bantu noun classes to which they relate. As commonly done among Bantuists, I refer to singular-plural pairings of noun classes, such as e.g., Class 1 and Class 2 or Class 3 and Class 10 as "genders". In this system, a noun class may be part of two genders at the same time, such as singular Class 3, which pairs with plural Class 7a and plural Class 10 (see Table 4.1).

The current description treats the category 'number' as basically derivational (which is common practice among Bantuists). Section 4.6 relates the current analysis to an alternative analysis in which number is treated as inflectional category.

Table 4.1 lists all noun classes together with their nominal prefixes and pronouns[3] in order to give an overview of the current analysis of the noun class system. The low tone symbol in the prefix slot for Class 9 does not exactly represent a low tone prefix, but is meant to symbolise that there is a systematic

[3]Pronouns were chosen over agreement prefixes because pronouns show the greatest differentiation of noun classes. Agreement prefixes (both consonantal and syllabic) always neutralise the distinction between at least two classes, see Chapter 5 for details.

tonal opposition between Class 9 (singular) and Class 10 (plural) nouns with the tone patterns of Class 9 (singular) nouns tending to be lower than those of the corresponding Class 10 (plural) nouns.

singular noun class	noun class prefix	pronoun	plural noun class	noun class prefix	pronoun
1	–	**wù**	2	**Ø-, bə̀-**	**bə̋**
3	–	**wū**	7a	–	**kī**
3	–	**wū**	10	–	**yī**
7	**Ø-, kī-**	**kī**	8	**Ø-, bī-**	**bī**
9	**`-**	**yì**	10	–	**yī**
19	**Ø-, fì-**	**fī**	18	**Ø-, mù(N)-**	**mū**
6	–	**mū**			
8a	–	**bī**			
3a	–	**wū**			
7b	–	**kī**			
9a	–	**yì**			
10a	–	**yī**			

Table 4.1: Noun classes with corresponding nominal prefixes and pronouns

In Table 4.1, the noun classes are arranged in singular-plural pairings or genders with singular and unpaired classes on the left and plural classes on the right. Class 3 and Class 10 occur twice in the table because each of them is part of two singular-plural pairings. Unpaired classes or single genders are found below the dashed line. Each of the unpaired classes has agreement patterns found in one of the paired classes as well. The subdivision of nouns into noun classes as found in Table **??** as well as noun class labels in the current system differ slightly from those in earlier publications, such as e.g. Good et al. (2011). Motivations for the current classification and differences with earlier analyses are discussed in the relevant sections, see §4.3.1-§4.3.9.

Table 4.2 contains examples of nouns of all noun classes, exemplifying the shape of the noun and the presence vs. absence of a noun class prefix. The most common case is that noun class marking is completely covert, i.e. the noun does not bear a prefix and the noun class cannot be inferred from the shape of the noun itself, but is only detectable through agreement marking on noun modifiers.

singular noun class	noun class prefix	example	plural noun class	noun class prefix	example
1	–	**ŋkŏŋ** ‘chief’	2	**Ø-**, **bə̀-**	**ŋkŏŋ** ∼**bə̀ŋkŏŋ** ‘chief’
3	–	**yə́n** ‘tooth’	7a	–	**yə́n** ‘teeth’
3	–	**gbɔ̀** ‘house’	10	–	**dzɔ̀** ‘houses’
7	**Ø-**, **kī-**	**bɔ̀** ‘bag’	8	**Ø-**, **bī-**	**bɔ̀** ‘bags’
9	**`-**	**ywɔ̌ŋ** ‘snake’	10	–	**ywɔ̋ŋ** ‘snakes’
19	**Ø-**, **fī-**	**ntsī** ‘louse’	18	**Ø-**, **mù(N)-**	**ntsī** ‘lice’
6	–	**ŋgī** ‘water’			
8a	–	**ntsɔ̀** ‘medicine’			
3a	–	**bū** ‘hunger’			
7b	–	**kwù̱** ‘fog’, ‘mist’			
9a	–	**yū̱** ‘vapour’			
10a	–	**ntsɔ̀** ‘medicine’			

Table 4.2: Examples of noun classes showing noun class marking on the noun or lack thereof

4.3 Noun class pairings (‘genders’) and unpaired classes (‘single genders’)

Most nouns can be assigned to singular-plural pairings of noun classes, in the following referred to as ‘(paired) genders’. A smaller number of nouns form unpaired noun classes or ‘single genders’. Figure 4.1 shows all attested pairings of noun classes[4] and all unpaired classes. Singular classes (left) and plural classes (right) are connected with lines, each line representing a paired gender. Unpaired classes or ‘single genders’ are found in the lower half of the table. They are not assigned a number value (singular or plural).

As Figure 4.1 shows, there is a near one-to-one correspondence between singular and plural classes. Only Class 3 and Class 10 are connected to more than one other class. Class 3 nouns may take their plural form either in Class 7a or in Class 10 and Class 10 nouns may take their singular form either in Class

[4]Some of the noun classes are given different labels than in earlier publications, as e.g. Good et al. (2011). The noun class labels used here are discussed for each gender separately in §4.3.1-§4.3.9.

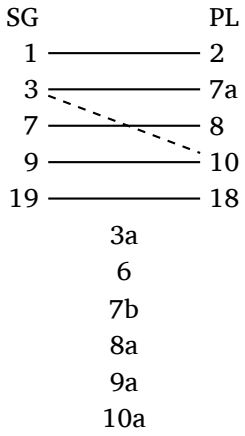

Figure 4.1: Singular-plural noun class pairings

9 or in Class 3. The dashed line connecting Class 3 with Class 10 in Figure 4.1 symbolises an exceptional gender which is made up of a small number of nouns. Only nine nouns are attested whose singular form triggers Class 3 agreement and whose plural form triggers Class 10 agreement. The number of Gender 3/7a nouns, on the one hand, and Gender 9/10 nouns on the other is much bigger than this (cf. Table 4.3). Gender 3/10 is also remarkable for another reason. Some Gender 3/10 nouns are subject to stem-initial consonant mutation, which suggests a historical connection with Proto-Bantu Gender 3/4, see §4.3.6 for details.

paired gender	number of nouns	percentage of total	unpaired gender	number of nouns	percentage of total
1/2	131	25	6	16	3
3/7a	62	12	8a	19	4
3/10	9	2	9a	9	2
7/8	128	25	7b	5	1
9/10	90	17	3a	13	2
19/18	34 (non-derived)	7	10a	2	0

Table 4.3: Relative frequency of singular-plural noun class pairings

The quantity of lexical items within each gender is shown in Table 4.3. Paired genders are listed in the first column, and single genders in the fourth column. Each of these columns is followed by a column with the number of nouns they contain and a column with their percentage of the total number of nouns in the subsequent columns.

Gender 1/2 and Gender 7/8 are the most common genders. They contain almost the same amount of lexical items. They are followed by Gender 9/10 and Gender 3/7a in the given order. Gender 19/18 contains 34 non-derived members, but the amount of lexical items within this gender is flexible because it also contains diminutives derived from nouns of the other noun classes. Of the paired genders, the irregular Gender 3/10 is by far the smallest. Unpaired genders generally contain fewer members than paired genders. The only exception to this rule is Gender 3/10 which, with only nine nouns, contains fewer nouns than some of the single genders. The single gender with the largest amount of lexical items is Gender 8a (with 19 nouns) which contains terms for uncountable substances and abstract (deverbal) nouns. It is closely followed by Gender 6 which contains mainly liquids. The smallest single gender is Gender 10a with only two nouns. Special sections are devoted to Gender 6 (§4.3.7) and Gender 8a (§4.3.8) because of their large frequency and their prominent role with regard to the history of the Mundabli noun class system. The remaining single genders are subsumed in §4.3.9. Finally, §4.3.1-§4.3.9 describe noun class marking and labels and discuss the history of the synchronic noun classes.

4.3.1 Gender 1/2

Gender 1/2 is the most common gender, closely followed by Gender 7/8. Most nouns referring to humans belong to this gender, but Gender 1/2 also contains numerous non-human nouns. The majority of loanwords are assigned to Gender 1/2.[5] Table 4.4 contains a selection of Gender 1/2 nouns.

Class 1	gloss	Class 2	gloss
mfɔ̀	‘slave’	**mfɔ̀**	‘slaves’
ŋkŏŋ	‘chief’	**ŋkŏŋ**	‘chief(s)’
tʃ̀ìndə	‘assistant of the chief’	**tʃ̀ìndə**	‘assistants of the chief’
bɛ̀	‘traditional cup’	**bɛ̀**	‘traditional cups’
kā́kā́	‘taro’	**kā́kā́**	‘taros’
mbɔ̀ŋ	‘cow’	**mbɔ̀ŋ**	‘cows’
mɔ̀	‘person’	**mbɛ̀**	‘people’
wān	‘child’	**ɲwɔ́m**	‘children’
kpé	‘woman’	**kpé∼tʃé**	‘women’

Table 4.4: Singular-plural pairings of Gender 1/2 nouns

The ratio of nouns with vs. nouns without stem alternations in Table 4.4 is not representative. In reality, the great majority of Gender 1/2 nouns have identical stem forms in Class 1 (singular) and Class 2 (plural) and only a handful of nouns show irregular stem alternation.

[5] Interestingly, a considerable amount of loanwords are also assigned to Gender 7/8. See §4.4 for more on the noun class assignment of loanwords.

Class 1 (singular) nouns do not take a prefix. Although around a third of the Gender 1/2 nouns (like e.g., **ŋkŏŋ** 'chief', **mbɔ̀ŋ** 'cow', **ŋkɔ̀m** 'hoe') start in a nasal, there are no morphological arguments for treating the nasal as a prefix in the synchronic system. It is present in the singular (Class 1) and the plural form (Class 2) and is not replaced by the Class 2 (plural) prefix **bà-**, e.g. in **bà-ŋkŏŋ** 'chiefs' or by the diminutive Class 19 prefix **fì-**, e.g. in **fì-mbɔ̀ŋ** 'a little cow' (Class 19). Although a nominal prefix exists which can be used with most if not all Class 2 nouns (including irregular stem forms, such as **ɲwʊ́m** 'children'), this prefix is not often used. Class 2 (plural) nouns more commonly take the form of bare stems. What exactly conditions the presence vs. absence of the Class 2 prefix is not quite clear. The only Class 2 nouns which commonly take a prefix in my data are the nouns **bà-nǐ́** 'mothers', **bà-tǐ** 'fathers' and **bà-ŋkŏŋ** 'chiefs', see e.g. example (17) and nouns which refer to nationalities or ethnic groups such as **bà-nàsɛ̄** 'white people', cf. example (18)

(17) bà-ŋkŏŋ bǒ tʃú (yɛ̄) bā gɒ̄
CL2-CL1/2.chief also come(b) COMP IMPERS divide(a)

'The chiefs, too, came to divided [the land].'

(18) bà-nàsɛ̄ b-ɔ́ ʃɪ́ŋ ʧǐ́n mɪ̄ ánáá
CL2-CL1/2.white_person CL2-DET fill_up(b) there in like_that

'Whites are packed in it, like that.'

In combination with names and deictic noun stems, such as **bà-nǐ́** 'mothers' and **bà-tǐ** 'fathers' etc. the Class 2 prefix can function as an associative marker, as e.g. in **bà-Nyùŋfù ā Mán** 'Nyùŋfù ā Mán and his associates', see e.g. example (23). The interrogative pronoun **ndɛ̀** 'who' can also take a Class 2 prefix when it clearly refers to a group of people, as in (19). This could also be an instance of associative semantics.

(19) wò̩ bà-ndɛ̀
wash(b).IPFV CL2-who

'Who are [those who are] washing?'[6]

4.3.2 Gender 3/7a

Gender 3/7a contains body parts and tools but also various other things such as **yɪ̄ŋ** 'egg/s', **kpʊ́** 'week/s' or **ɲū** 'field', which can hardly be subsumed under a common term. With 62 attested nouns,[7] Gender 3/7a is the fourth most common gender (directly following Gender 9/10). Gender 3/7a nouns are not marked by segmental or tonal prefixes (see Table 4.5).

[6]This phrase is commonly used to warn people when approaching a stream where people are bathing naked.

[7]Compared with this, the nine nouns attested for the Gender 3/10 form an exception. See §4.3.6 for more on the exceptional Gender 3/10.

Class 3	gloss	Class 7a	gloss
tʃə̋m	'axe'	**tʃə̋m**	'axes'
yɪ̄ŋ	'egg'	**yɪ̄ŋ**	'eggs'
bì	'fish' (SG)	**bì**	'fish' (PL)
wə́ŋ	'nose'	**wə́ŋ**	'noses'
kpɔ́	'week'	**kpɔ́**	'weeks'

Table 4.5: Singular-plural pairings of Gender 3/7a nouns, examples of identical singular and plural forms

While most Gender 3/7a nouns are identical in Class 3 (singular) and Class 7a (plural) (see Table 4.5), my database contains 9 nouns which exhibit stem alternations including ablaut and consonant alternations, sometimes in combination with tonal changes. As Table 4.6 shows, stem alternations in Gender 3/7a nouns are not as systematic as the initial consonant mutation displayed by some Gender 3/10 nouns (see §4.3.6).

Class 3	gloss	Class 7a	gloss
ɲū	'field'	**ɲwɛ́**	'fields'
tʃyē	'stone'	**tɛ́**	'stones'
fɔ̄	'head'	**fá**	'heads'
byɛ̀	'foot'	**byɛ̀**	'feet'
wɪ̀n	'feather'	**gwɛ̀n**	'feathers'
wɔ̀ŋ	'spear'	**gɔ̀ŋ**	'spears'
fù	'raffia stem'	**fɔ̀**	'raffia stems'
ɲű	'knee'	**ɲwɛ́**	'knees'
dấn	'rhizome'	**dwɔ́ŋ**	'rhizomes'

Table 4.6: Irregular singular-plural stem alternation in Gender 3/7a nouns

The plural class in this noun class pairing is named 7a due to its formal resemblance with singular Class 7. Nouns of these two classes trigger the same agreement patterns and lack nominal prefixes. Thus, the label 7a is chosen for language-internal reasons and is not meant to imply that this class is historically derived from Proto Bantu Class 7. It is likely that Mundabli Class 7a may be cognate with Proto Bantu Class 13. The reader is referred to the discussion in Lovegren (2013: 137-141) for a detailed discussion of the issue for parallel phenomena in Mungbam languages.

4.3.3 Gender 7/8

Gender 7/8 contains inanimates and numerous other things, such as body parts, (mainly small) animals, fruit, nuts and vegetables, among others. Around

one quarter of all loanwords are also assigned to Gender 7/8 (see §4.4 for more on the gender assignment of loanwords).

Gender 7/8 contains nearly the same amount of lexical items as Gender 1/2. Together, these two form the most common genders with around 130 members each. Nouns in Gender 7/8 generally do not take noun class prefixes (see below for exceptions). Their tonal pattern is the same in the singular (Class 7) and in the plural (Class 8), see Table 4.7.

Class 7	gloss	Class 8	gloss
kū	'bone'	**kū**	'bones'
də̌	'machete'	**də̌**	'machetes'
tɔ̂	'horn'	**tɔ̂**	'horns'
kɛ́	'leg'	**kɛ́**	'legs'
bɔ̀	'bag'	**bɔ̀**	'bags'
fō	'hat', 'cap'	**fō**	'hats', 'caps'
kɔ́m	'horse'	**kɔ́m**	'horses'
tə̄ŋ	'ram' (male sheep)	**tə̄ŋ**	'rams'
tákpàm	'bean, sp.', 'stick bean'	**tákpàm**	'beans, sp.', 'stick beans'
gɔ̄ŋláŋ	'dragonfly'	**gɔ̄ŋláŋ**	'dragonflies'

Table 4.7: Singular-plural pairings of Gender 7/8 nouns, examples of identical singular and plural forms

While nouns are generally identical in the singular and the plural (Class 7 and Class 8), my data contain seven Gender 7/8 nouns which involve singular-plural stem alternations. The attested cases are shown in Table 4.8.

Class 7	gloss	Class 8	gloss
ɲwə̀n	'bird'	**ɲwɔ̀m**	'birds'
tʃə́ŋ	'ear'	**tʃə́m**	'ears'
nɨ́ŋ	'thing'	**ɲdʒɔ́m**	'things'
ndzɪ̄ŋ	'house fly'	**ndzə̄m**	'house flies'
swōm	'palm nut'	**ʃwōm**	'palm nuts'
mfŭŋ	'coco yam'	**mfɛ̆n**	'coco yams'
dzɛ́	'mouth'	**dzɔ́**	'mouths'

Table 4.8: Singular-plural pairings of Gender 7/8 nouns, examples of irregular stem alternation

Some of these irregular Gender 7/8 nouns end in a velar nasal (**ŋ**) in Class 7 (singular), but not in Class 8 (plural), while some end in a bilabial nasal (**m**) in Class 8, but not in Class 7. This may be due to the assimilatory effect of former Class 7 and 8 suffixes or of agreement prefixes starting in velar (Class 7) and bilabial stops (Class 8), respectively. For the rest, Gender 7/8 stem alternation does not seem very systematic.

Only two Gender 7/8 nouns with prefixes are attested: **bí-lúŋ** 'suffering' (20) and **bì-tsə̄m** 'boma snakes' (21). These forms co-exist with the prefix-less forms **lúŋ** and **tsə̄m** which can have the same (plural) meaning.

(20) wù fyá bì-lùŋ ɲwɔ́m b-ɔ́ lā
CL1 give(b).IPFV CL8-CL7/8.suffering CL2.children CL2-DET DAT
ā̋ mò̩mò̩, gɛ̄ ɲwɔ́m nī́ kə̀ wù ká
ADVLZ very_much while CL2.children CL1.mother without CL1 HAB
tʃyé bɔ̀
know(c) FRUST

'She made them suffer, not knowing that they were her siblings.'

(21) bì-tsə̄m b-ɔ́ ā̋ mɨ́ ŋgɔ̄
CL8-CL7/8.boma_snake CL8-DET still 1SG.PP upon

'The big snakes are also on me.'[8]

The interrogative pronoun **mān** 'what' can also (optionally) take a Class 7 prefix, rendering **kì-mān** 'what' (22). It is unclear what determines the presence vs. absence of a prefix in this case.

(22) dɨ̌ kì-mān nọ̄ [à yē kɛ̄ dzɔ̄ŋ k-ɔ́ kī́ ī́
be(b) CL7-what SUBORD 2SG start(a) return(c) again CL7-REL CL7 LOC
t-ā́n mɪ̄]
PROX-here in

'What is it that you are starting again in here?'

Regarding the historical origin of Class 7 and 8, it is likely that they are cognate with the Proto-Bantu singular-plural class pairing 7/8. The sporadic noun class prefixes attested in Mundabli Gender 7/8 nouns, **kì-** and **bì-** strongly resemble the prefixes reconstructed for Proto-Bantu Gender 7/8 ***kì** and ***βị̀** (Maho 1999: 51) and the concords are also consistent with this. The semantic content of the Mundabli and Proto-Bantu Gender 7/8 also coincide, at least to a certain extent.

4.3.4 Gender 9/10

Gender 9/10 is the third most frequent gender with 90 nouns. It contains animals and insects, but also various other things, such as body parts (**ʃyă** 'ankle', **tsăn** 'arm', **dzə̄m** 'back', **sĕn** 'calf of leg') and other things which cannot be easily subsumed under a common term. Very few loanwords are found in this gender (see §4.4 for more on the gender assignment of loanwords). Finally,

[8]The word **bìtsə̄m** refers to a special, big type of snake, commonly referred to as 'mboma' in Cameroon.

Gender 9/10 also contains deverbal nouns (other than infinitives), such as **nàm** 'work'(n) (plural **nə̀m**) and **kpī** 'death' (plural **kpɪ̄**).

Gender 9 (singular) and Gender 10 (plural) nouns are, with a few exceptions, segmentally identical but they involve systematic tonal alternations. The tone of a Class 9 (singular) noun is generally lower than that of a Class 10 (plural) noun, as can be seen in Table 4.9.

Class 9	gloss	Class 10	gloss
bɔ̀m	'antelope'	**bɔ̀̌m**	'antelopes'
dzwàn	'disease'	**dzwə̀n**	'diseases'
tsə̌	'baboon'	**tsə̋**	'baboons'
sɔ̌ŋ	'basket, sp.'	**sɔ̋ŋ**	'baskets, sp.'
sām	'heart'	**sām**	'hearts'
tsō	'toilet'	**tsō**	'toilets'
ʃɪ̄	'chicken'	**ʃɪ̂**	'chickens'
tsə̌n	'arm'	**tsə̀n**	'arms'

Table 4.9: Singular-plural pairings of Gender 9/10 nouns showing tonal stem alternation

Most Gender 9/10 nouns bear one of the three tone patterns found above the dashed line in Table 4.9. The tone patterns low (L), mid (M) and low-high rising (LH) in Class 9 (singular) nouns correspond to a mid-low falling tone (ML), a mid tone (M) and a superhigh tone (S) in Class 10 (plural) nouns. For a detailed discussion of tonal alternations in Gender 9/10 nouns, see §3.2.1.4.

In addition to these regular tonal alternations, Table 4.9 contains two examples of irregular tonal alternations below the dashed line. Each of the two irregular tonal stem alternations is only found in two nouns: **tsə̌n** 'arm' and **tsə̌ŋ** 'palm kernel' have a low-high rising tone in Class 9 (singular) and a mid-low falling tone in Class 10 (plural), and **ʃɪ̄** 'chicken' and **dʒɪ̄** 'road' have a mid tone in Class 9 (singular) and a mid-low falling tone in Class 10 (plural). 'road' also involves a segmental stem change (**dʒɪ̄/dzɛ̂** 'road'/'roads'). So far, I have no explanation for these irregular tone patterns. However, it is worth noting that the tone patterns of the singular (CL9) and plural (CL10) forms of these nouns, i.e. M and LH for Class 9 (singular) nouns and ML for Class 10 (plural) nouns are all common in this Gender.

4.3.5 Gender 19/18

Gender 19/18 contains, most conspicuously, derived diminutives which are characterized by Class 19/18 nominal prefixes (see also §4.5.2 on diminutive derivation). However, Gender 19/18 also contains a number of nouns which are lexically specified as Gender 19/18 nouns and do not have diminutive semantics. These underived Gender 19/18 nouns form a rather random array of things, including e.g., **ŋmgbū** 'vein' (CL19), **ŋkə̌ŋ** 'oath' (CL19), **fɛ̂n** 'billy goat'

(CL19), **ntsɨŋ** 'bead' (CL19), etc. Underived Gender 19/18 nouns do not take nominal prefixes. They are segmentally and tonally identical in the singular (Class 19) and in the plural (Class 18). Examples are given in Table 4.10.

Class 19	gloss	Class 18	gloss
ŋmgbə̀	'wether'	**ŋmgbə̀**	'wethers'
ɲǎŋ	'bush fowl'	**ɲǎŋ**	'bush fowls'
ŋkǎn	'oath'	**ŋkǎn**	'oaths'
fɛ̂n	'billy goat'	**fɛ̂n**	'billy goats'
ntsī	'louse'	**ntsī**	'lice'
ɲʃúŋ	'necklace'	**ɲʃúŋ**	'necklaces'
ntấm	'fruit'	**ntấm**	'fruits'

Table 4.10: Singular-plural pairings of underived Class 19/18 nouns (without prefix)

Nominal prefixes for Class 19/18 are productively used to derive diminutive forms of nouns which are lexically specified as belonging to any noun class pairing, including Gender 19/18 itself, as in **mwǐn** 'cat' (Class 19) vs. **fì-mwǐn** 'little cat' (Class 19). Examples of derived Gender 19/18 nouns are given in Table 4.11. In addition to the derived nouns and their translations, Table 4.11 contains the lexical classes of the source nouns. In cases where singular and plural stems differ, the noun class marker is prefixed to the number-specific stem form (see Table 4.11). Diminutive derivation is discussed in more detail in §4.5.2.

Class 19	gloss	lexical noun class	Class 18	gloss	lexical noun class
fì-ntsī	'little louse'	19	**mù-ntsī**	'little lice'	18
fì-mɔ̀	'little man'	1	**mù-mbɛ̀**	'little men'	2
fì-gbɔ̌	'little house'	3	**mù-dzɔ̌**	'little houses'	10
fì-dʒǐ	'little dog'	9	**mù-dʒǐ́**	'little dogs'	10
fì-ŋkǔŋ	'little chief'	3	**mù-ŋkǔŋ**	'little chiefs'	10

Table 4.11: Singular-plural pairings of derived Gender 19/18 nouns (with prefix)

Mundabli Class 19 is formally similar to Proto-Bantu (henceforth PB) Class 19 (***pi̧-**) (Maho 1999: 51) and indeed, Class 19 is one of the "most oft-occurring diminutive classes" in Bantu (Maho 1999: 88). The label 18 for the plural Class corresponding to singular Class 19 was chosen based on the formal similarity of the derivational Class 18 prefix to the prefix of Proto-Bantu Class 18 (*mù-). However, it is not meant to imply that the two are cognate. In earlier works on comparable issues in related languages, this has been dealt

with by assigning names other than Class 18 to this class. While Hombert (1980: 92) refers to this class as 26, it is labelled 12 in Hyman's description of Noni (Hyman 1981: 15), but renamed Class 18a in Hyman (1980: 186). Hyman states clearly that "[...] it is identical in form to PB *mu-" but he does "not mean to suggest that the two are cognate in any way" (Hyman 1980: 187). I chose to call it Class 18 rather than 18a because the label 18a would imply that there is another class 18 in Mundabli, which there is not (although the spatial deictic meaning **in** may be related to the PB locative class 18, see §10.4). Instead, the use of lower case letters following the noun class number is reserved for cases in which two noun classes have identical agreement but differ with respect to their number value.

4.3.6 The exceptional Gender 3/10

With only nine nouns, Gender 3/10 is by far the smallest paired gender. Gender 3/10 nouns do not take nominal prefixes. Of the nine attested Gender 3/10 nouns, four have identical singular and plural forms. The remaining five exhibit a peculiar kind of stem-initial consonant alternation.[9] In these five nouns, the stem-initial consonant alternates between a labiovelar stop (**kp**, **gb**) in Class 3 (singular) nouns and an alveolar affricate (**ts**, **dz**) in Class 10 (plural) nouns (see Table 4.12).

Class 3	gloss	Class 10	gloss
kpɛ̀	'pot'	**tsɛ̀**	'pots'
gbɔ̀	'house'	**dzɔ̀**	'houses'
gbɪ̀	'rope'	**dzɪ̀**	'ropes'
gbɪ̀ŋ	'root'	**dzɪ̀ŋ**	'roots'
kpān	'tree, firewood, drum'	**tswān**	'trees, etc.'

Table 4.12: Singular-plural pairings of Class 3/10 nouns, examples showing initial consonant mutation

In four cases, the alternation is completely regular with **kp** alternating with **ts** and **gb** with **dz**. However, in the case of **kpān** 'tree', the affricate in the Class 10 (plural) stem **tswān** 'trees' is followed by a labial which is absent from the singular (Class 3) form. Gender 3/10 initial consonant mutation is described in more detail in §3.3.2.

Of the other four nouns which make up this gender, three are identical in singular (Class 3) and plural (Class 10), and one, namely **ndɔ̀n** 'branch', involves ablaut and a tone change but no consonant mutation (see Table 4.13). This is the only stem attested in this gender which also involves a tonal

[9] See Kießling (2010b) for a description and analysis of comparable processes in some other Yemne-Kimbi languages (which he refers to as Beboid languages) and other Southern Bantoid languages.

singular-plural opposition reminiscent of the tonal opposition typical of Gender 9/10 nouns.

Class 3	gloss	Class 10	gloss
ndɔ̀n	'branch'	**ndàn**	'branches'
ŋkwīn	'mountain'	**ŋkwīn**	'mountains'
ŋgàŋ	'hill'	**ŋgàŋ**	'hills'
ɲʃù	'palm tree, sp.'	**ɲʃù**	'palm trees, sp.'

Table 4.13: Singular-plural pairings of Class 3/10 nouns, examples without consonant mutation

In opposition to earlier treatments (e.g., Good et al. (2011)), the current analysis does not use the plural Class 4. What was formerly referred to as Gender 3/4 is renamed Gender 3/10 in the current analysis, even if this might conceal the historical origin of Gender 3/10. The plural forms of nouns lexically assigned to Class 3 and Class 9 trigger the same agreement and therefore form a single noun class synchronically. In fact, the initial consonant mutation encountered in Gender 3/10 nouns probably reflects the existence of former Class 3 and 4 prefixes with a rounded and an unrounded vowel.[10] However, in the current state of the language, Class 4 has merged with Class 10.

Of all the languages exhibiting comparable stem alternations, Mundabli seems to be the only one in which all alternating nouns start in a labiovelar stop in the singular (Class 3). At least two other Yemne-Kimbi languages, Koshin and Fang, also have a noun class pairing 3/4 which involves stem-initial consonant mutation with a plain labial consonant in Class 3 nouns and a plain palatal consonant in Class 4 nouns (cf. Good et al. 2011). However, the Mundabli cognates of those nouns which belong to Gender 3/4 in these languages and which show stem-initial consonant mutation but do not start in a labiovelar stop, such as **wí** 'eye' (Koshin, Class 3) and **dʒí**[11] 'eyes' (Koshin, Class 4), **wín** 'leaf, tooth' (Koshin, Class 3) and **dʒín** 'leaves', 'teeth' (Koshin, Class 4) (cf. Good et al. 2011: 144, Hombert 1980: 89 and Kießling 2010b: 25) fall into Mundabli Gender 3/7a which does not involve any stem changes. For a detailed discussion of stem-initial consonant mutation in Ring and Yemne-Kimbi languages, see Kießling (2010b).

4.3.7 Single Gender 6

Class 6 is not part of a singular-plural pairing. It forms a so-called 'single gender' consisting of only one class, unspecified for number. Class 6 contains mainly liquids and a few other non-countables, such as **ɲím̋** 'smoke', **mbwín**

[10] The Proto-Bantu prefixes for Class 3 and Class 4 are *mù- and *mì-, respectively (Maho 1999: 51).

[11] The original <j> in the Koshin examples has been replaced by [dʒ] here.

'flour' and **ŋkáŋ** 'salt'. My data contains the twelve[12] Class 6 nouns listed in Table 4.14.

Class 6	gloss
ŋgī	'water'
ŋkà	'corn beer'
mbí́	'palm wine'
myḗ	'oil'
ŋkīŋ	'palm kernel oil'
ɲtʃwá	'porridge'
ndzɛ̄	'urine'
mfṍm	'blood'
ndām	'tears'
ɲḯ́m	'smoke'
mbwḯ́n	'flour'
ŋkáŋ	'salt'

Table 4.14: Class 6 nouns

As Table 4.14 shows, all attested Class 6 nouns start with a nasal. Although the nasal is interpreted here as noun class prefix, it cannot be tested whether the nasal is a prefix or part of the stem because the noun only occurs in Class 6. Thus, there is no alternation in which an initial prefix would possibly get dropped. When the diminutive is derived by adding the Class 19 prefix, the nasal is not dropped.

Although plural Class 18 and unpaired Class 6 trigger the same agreement patterns, they are given different labels. Following the chosen conventions, I could have consequently labelled this class "18a". However, I decided to use the label "Class 6" in order to stay closer to common Bantoid conventions of noun class labelling. In fact, the liquid class, referred to as Class 6 here, is more commonly labelled 6a in the Bantoid literature. It can supposedly be traced back to the Proto-Benue-Congo liquid/mass class *ma- (PBC Class 6a) which has merged with the PBC class *a- in Narrow Bantu (Hyman 1980: 180). I do not include the lower case letter 'a' in the label in order to keep closer to the adopted conventions. However, I do not doubt that historically, Mundabli Class 6 is related to Proto-Benue-Congo liquid/mass class *ma- (commonly referred to as Class 6a, see e.g. Hyman 1980), rather than Proto-Bantu Class 6 (*mà-) (Maho 1999: 51). What is commonly referred to as Class 6 by Bantoid scholars, i.e. a reflexes of the PBS *a- class, is not attested in Mundabli.

[12]The low number of Class 6 nouns may be due to the nature of data collection which did not involve intense discussion of liquids other than water, beer and palm wine.

4.3.8 Single Gender 8a

Class 8a contains mass nouns, such as **tsà** 'mud' and **bwúl** 'dust', nouns denoting abstract concepts, such as **dàm** 'dream' and **tsʊ́** 'witchcraft', and deverbal manner nouns, such as **dʒʉ́** 'shortness', **dʒīŋ** 'length' and **dzʊ́ŋ** 'beauty'. With nineteen attested members, of the unpaired classes Gender 8a contains the largest amount of lexical items. Table 4.15 contains some examples of Gender 8a nouns.

Class 8a	gloss
ɲām	'fufu'
dʒīŋ	'length'
dē∼dəl	'weight'
lī	'power'
ɲɔ̀	'language'
tsà	'mud'
mà	'clay'
dàm	'dream'
dʒɔ̀	'bridge'
bwúl	'dust'
dzʊ́ŋ	'beauty'
gʉ́	'fatness'
dʒʉ́	'shortness'
tsʊ́	'witchcraft'
dzʊ́	'dew'

Table 4.15: Class 8a nouns

As Table 4.15 shows, Class 8a nouns do not take prefixes. As the name suggests, Class 8a nouns and Class 8 nouns trigger the same agreement patterns. Neither of the two shows noun class marking on the noun. In order to be consistent, I refer to this Class as "Class 8a" because it differs from Class 8 only regarding its number value. Alternatively, this class could have been labelled "Class 14" because it seems to be related to Proto-Bantu Class 14 (and PBC Class *bu- (Wolf 1971)). Many abstract nouns, such as **lī** 'power' and **tsʊ́** 'witchcraft' are found in Mundabli Class 8a, just like in PB Class 14 (Maho 1999: 77). But even a few concrete nouns are found in this class. Among them is the noun **dʒɔ̀** 'bridge' which is also part of PB Class 14. The formal resemblance between Mundabli Class 14 (**bī-**) and PB Class 14 (***βù-**) is also strong enough to support a connection between the two. However, note that Mundabli Class 8a triggers the agreement prefix **bi-**, just like Class 8, rather than **bu-** or something similar.[13]

[13]Good et al. (2011) show that unpaired Class 8a = 14 and plural Class 8 have identical agreement in some Yemne-Kimbi languagages, but not in others.

4.3.9 Unpaired noun classes (single genders) other than Class 6 and 8a

There are a few other nouns which show no singular-plural distinction but whose agreement pattern is not that of Class 6 or Class 8a. They can be divided into small groups of nouns which trigger the same agreement patterns. All of them share their agreement patterns with those of a certain singular or plural class. However, due to their not having a singular-plural opposition, they are analyzed as distinct noun classes which form distinct single genders. Tables 4.16-4.19 contain comprehensive inventories of all remaining unpaired genders: Gender 3a, Gender 7b, Gender 9a and Gender 10a. Following the adopted conventions, the labels for these unpaired are composed of the number describing the singular/plural class with identical agreement plus the minor case letter 'a', or 'b' if 'a' is already taken.

Class 3a	gloss
bū	'hunger'
bwē	'sky'
wē	'sun'
gbḗ	'wind'
fū	'beans, sp.'
dɔ̄	'beans, sp', 'rice'
tswān	'bitter leaf'
bʊ́ŋ	'ash'
dʒɔ̀m	'honey'
dzɨ̀ŋ	'saliva'

Table 4.16: Single gender 3a, comprehensive list

Class 7b	gloss
gbə̀m	'God'
fǭ	'hair'
tɔ́	'cliff', 'rocks'
gbɛ̀	'pus'
kwṵ	'fog', 'mist'

Table 4.17: Single gender 7b, comprehensive list

4.4 Noun class assignment of borrowed nouns

Apart from a few exceptions like **tā́kèdā** 'book' and **tā́sā** 'enameled bowl', this treatment of loanwords is restricted to loans from English, Cameroon Pid-

Class 9a	gloss
dzɔ̀	'ground', 'soil'
yĭ	'sweat'
ʃyă	'fat', 'grease'
dzɪ̄ŋ	'rain', 'thunder'
yū̱	'vapour'
yə̋m	'music', 'song'

Table 4.18: Single gender 9a, comprehensive list

Class 10a	gloss
dzɔ̄	'ribs'
ntsɔ̄	'medicine'

Table 4.19: Single gender 10a, comprehensive list

gin and French. The number of French loanwords is restricted because the official language in the Northwest province is English. I sporadically include loanwords from other source languages when I am aware of them. However, in the light of my very limited knowledge of the other possible source languages, the origins of loanwords indicated in this section are based on my intuitions and should be taken with a grain of salt. To further complicate the issue, it is not easy in most cases to tell whether a loan is adopted from English or from Cameroon Pidgin or from another local language which has itself borrowed the word from English or Pidgin (or possibly from another local language which has borrowed it earlier, and so on). The same holds, of course, for loans from the other source languages. Table 4.20 contains selected examples of nominal loanwords from English and Pidgin and a few nominal loans from other source languages. English and Pidgin are given as alternative sources because it is (at this stage) impossible to tell them apart. The source languages listed in Table 4.20 should be taken as educated guesses and may sometimes represent the ultimate sources of words borrowed into Mundabli indirectly via other languages.

As Table 4.20 shows, borrowed nouns are assigned to three noun class pairings. While most loanwords (around three quarters of them) are assigned to Gender 1/2, a relatively large number of nouns (around one quarter) are assigned to Gender 7/8. Only very few loanwords are assigned to Gender 9/10. The number of loans in Gender 9/10 is so small (only 2, of which one (**yə̌**) may not be a loan) that I regard them as exceptions. Nevertheless, Gender 9/10 loans should be borne in mind during future investigations on loanwords in Mundabli.

example	gloss	gender	origin	source language
kɔ̂∼kɔ̂p	'cup'	1/2	*cup*	English/Pidgin
tā́kèdā	'book', 'school', 'sheet of paper' (old-fashioned word)	1/2	*takàrda* 'sheet of paper'	Hausa (<Tuareg<Latin <Greek)
skûl ∼ʃùkúrù ∼sùkúlù	*school*	1/2	'school'	English/Pidgin
dʒàkâ	'donkey'	1/2	*jàkā* 'female donkey'	Hausa
bɔ́tɨ̀	'bottle'	1/2	*bottle*	English/Pidgin
ʃɔ́gà	'sugar'	1/2	*sugar*	English/Pidgin
gâŋ	'gown'	1/2	*gown*	English/Pidgin
mɔ́tù ∼mɔ́ntù	'car'	1/2	*moto*	Pidgin
tábà	'tobacco'	1/2	*tābà*	Hausa
tā́sā	'enameled bowl'	1/2	*tāsà*	Hausa
nāsɛ̄	'white person'	1/2	*nàsārа* 'Christian, white person'	Hausa (orig. Arabic)
lítà	'bottle'	1/2	*liter* '1 liter bottle'	Pidgin
tɛ́bɨ̀	'table'	7/8	*table*	English/Pidgin
dzíŋ	'corrugated iron sheet'	7/8	*zinc* 'corrugated iron sheet'	English/Pidgin
kǔŋàm	'pig, pork'	7/8	*kunyam*	Pidgin (regional variety)
nănà	'pineapple'	7/8	*ananas*	French
yɔ̆ (PL **yɔ̄**)	'year'	9/10	*year*	English/Pidgin (?)
sàbɨ́lì	'laundry soap'	9/10	*sàbulǜ∼sàbulì*	Hausa (orig. Arabic)

Table 4.20: Selected nominal loans

As nouns of most noun classes in Mundabli (may) lack noun class prefixes, there is no particular class of prefix-less nouns which might attract the equally prefix-less loanwords as may happen "if a language has a [single] class in which nouns are devoid of overt class marker[s]" (Grinevald and Seifart 2004: 253). However, borrowed nouns are assigned to Gender 1/2 and Gender 7/8 which (like most other genders) generally lack overt noun class marking. It is possible that the nouns were borrowed during different periods and that the distribution of loans across two noun class pairings reflects a synchronic change in the noun class system. In other Bantoid languages borrowed nouns are also commonly assigned to the pairing 1/2[14] (e.g., Bafut (Tamanji 2009: 25) and Mankon (Leroy 1977: 81)), "just like all over the Bantu area" (Maho 1999: 54). Thus, the assignment of borrowed nouns to Gender 1/2 may have been the older strategy and loans may have been assigned to the pairing 7/8 more recently based on evidence from other constructions.[15] Gender 7/8 is the default gender synchronically. Another possibility is that Mundabli has been in contact with a language using a different strategy for the noun class assignment of loanwords and has adopted the strategy of that other language. However, I am not aware of any language in the wider area in which loanwords are assigned to Gender 7/8. Whatever the exact scenario may have looked like, the assignment of borrowed nouns to Gender 7/8 may have been introduced only recently. More research is needed to clearly determine the motivations behind the assignment of borrowed nouns to specific genders and the implications of the assignment of borrowed nouns to two different genders.

4.5 'Derivational' use of noun classes

Some noun class prefixes can be used 'derivationally', i.e. they can change the meaning of a noun. This meaning change goes along with a change of agreement patterns, as e.g. in **mɔ̀ w-ɔ̄** 'the man' (CL1) vs. **fì-mɔ̀ f-ɔ́** 'the little man' (CL19), unless the noun which forms the base of derivation already belongs to the derivational noun class, as e.g. in **mwɨ̌n f-ɔ́** 'the cat' (CL19) vs. **fì-mwɨ̌n f-ɔ́** 'the little cat' (CL19).

4.5.1 Associative plural with the Class 2 prefix (bə̀-)

The Class 2 prefix **bə̀-** is most commonly used with names and deictic expressions like 'father', 'mother' and 'chief' to express the "associative plural". As Daniel and Moravcsik (2011) define it, "[a]ssociative plural constructions

[14] In fact it is usually 1a/2. Bantuists use the label 1a for nouns which show the same agreement as Class 1 nouns but which do not take a noun class prefix. However, Class 1 nouns in Mundabli generally do not bear prefixes, so I do not distinguish between Class 1 and 1a.

[15] A Class 7 pronoun occurs as the default subject when no agent is involved. When resolving "gender conflict", i.e. a conflict in the choice of agreement which arises when two nouns are conjoined which are assigned to different noun class pairings, Class 8 is the plural class chosen to represent two non-human nouns of different genders.

consist of a noun X (typically of human reference, usually a person's name or a kin term) and some other material, most often an affix, a clitic, or a word. The meaning of the construction is 'X and other people associated with X'.". Example (23) shows the associative use of the Class 2 prefix in Mundabli. The Class 2 prefix in (23) is attached to the name **ɲùŋfù-ā-Mán**[16] with the resulting associative noun **bà-ɲùŋfù-ā-Mán** meaning "Nyungfu-a-Man and his associates".

(23) kə́ bà-ɲùŋfù-ā(n)-mán tʃú kóŋ kwó, tʃú kóŋ
COND CL2-N.-COM-M. come(b) hunt(c) enter(c) come(b) hunt(c)
kwó tʃű sɔ̀ bőŋmù mɨ̄ ā mbɛ̄ bə̄-dʒwē b-ɔ́
enter(c) come(b) first B. 1SG COM CL2.people CL2-many CL2-DET

'When Nyungfu-a-Man and his associates caught up, Bungmu and all those many people were the first ones to catch up with me.'

Associative plural constructions with relational nouns are shown in example (24).

(24) *then* ấká ɲwám bì-lùŋ bɔ̌, bő kấn b-ɔ́
then like CL2.children CL8a-suffering also CL2.PVB lack(b) CL2-REL
bà-tǐ ā bà-nǐ bɔ̌ āmɨ̀ mbɛ̄ dzwân
CL2-father COM CL2-mother 3PL.POSS and CL2.people CL10.illness
āmɨ̀ mbɛ̄ bì-lùŋ
and CL2.people CL8a-suffering

'[...] and also, for example, children who are suffering, who do not have parents, and sick people, and suffering people.'

More research is needed to determine the exact character and meaning of associative plural constructions in Mundabli.

4.5.2 Diminutive derivation with the Class 19/18 prefixes fì- and mùN-

The diminutive of a noun is derived by adding the Class 19 prefix **fì-** for singular nouns or the Class 18 prefix **mù(N)-** for plural nouns to the stem, as shown in (25)-(26). The same applies to inherent Gender 19/18 nouns, as e.g. in (26), which lack a noun class prefix (see §4.3.5) and do not have a diminutive meaning.

[16]The name **ɲùŋfù-ā-Mán** is composed of the name of the man himself, **ɲùŋfù**, and the name of his mother, **mán**. It means "Nyungfu with Man". The name **bőŋmù** literally means "pick-take". It is probably a nickname.

(25) kə́ wù kpə̄ ʃī gū w-ɔ́ tʃɔ́ŋ,
COND CL1 light(a) go_down(a) CL3/7a.fire CL3-DET CL1/2.fireplace
nǐ wū tɛ́n bǐ ʃì
3POSS.mother CL1;3SG.POSS drip(c) exit(b) go_down(a)
fì-ŋgī sɛ́
CL19-CL6.water CL3/7a.attic

'When she lit the fire in the fire place, her mother let a little bit of water drop down from the attic.'

(26) wù kwɛ̄ ʃú ā mù-dántʃɛ́n
CL1 return_from_bush(c) come(b) COM CL18-CL19/18.berry
mūŋ-dʒwē
CL18-many

'She came home with lots of little Dantshen berries.'

Segmental prefixes of other noun classes are dropped when the diminutive is derived, as in (27) where the diminutive of a Class 2 noun is formed by adding the Class 18 prefix **mù(N)-** to the bare stem. Example (27) also shows that the derived noun triggers Class 19/18 agreement, just like an inherent Class 19/18 noun.

(27) a. **bə̀-ŋkŏŋ b-ɔ́** 'those chiefs'

b. **mù-ŋkŏŋ m-ɔ́** 'those little chiefs'

In cases of singular-plural stem alternations (such as attested in the exceptional gender 3/10), the number-specific stem forms the base for affixation[17], as in (28).

(28) a. **fì-gbɔ̄** 'little house'

b. **mù-dzɔ̄** 'little houses'

c. **fì-dʒǐ** 'little goat'

d. **mù-dʒǐ́** 'little goats'

The diminutive can be used in a derogatory way, e.g. when calling someone **fì-mɔ̀** 'little man', instead of **mɔ̀** 'man', thus belittling and ridiculing a person. **fì-dʒǐ** 'little dog' can also be used to refer to a person in this way.

[17]The use of number-specific stems as the base for the diminutive is an argument for the existence of number as a grammatical category in Mundabli. As Maho (1999: 3) mentions in a footnote, "[n]ot all people agree that Bantu noun class pairings mark a singular-plural distinction"

4.5.3 Use of Gender 7/8 pronouns for derogatory reference

Gender 7/8 pronouns are commonly used for derogatory reference,[18] as e.g. in (29).

(29) bī ā wʉ́ wɔ̄ ɲɔ̄ nḯ
CL8 NEG hear(b).IPFV NEG CL8a.talk CL1/2.mother

'They are not listening to their mother's advice.'

In (29) a Class 8 pronoun is used to refer to modern girls, who are considered stupid because they destroy their lives rather than listen to their mothers' advice. The use of the Class 8 pronoun expresses a dismissive attitude.

4.6 Discussion of the current analysis of the noun class system

This section compares the current analysis, which distinguishes noun classes based - among other factors - on numeral distinctions, with a noun class system based on agreement only. Basing noun classes not only on agreement but also on number distinctions and on singular-plural noun class pairings may be confusing for anyone not familiar with this practice. As common in the Bantuist tradition, I split up agreement classes into groups of nouns with the same number value. Agreement Class **k(i)-**, for example, is split up into Class 7, which contains only singular nouns, Class 7a, which contains only plural nouns, and Class 7b, which contains uncountables, see Table 4.21 (based on Table 4.1). Table 4.22 compares the system used in the current publication with a pure agreement system, using a language-internal numbering system.

[18] Gender 7/8 also sporadically serves for augmentative derivation. However, this derivation process is not very productive and further research is required.

noun class	pronoun	noun class	pronoun
1	**wù**	2	**bɔ́**
3	**wū**	7a	**kī**
7	**kī**	8	**bī**
9	**yì**	10	**yī**
19	**fī**	18	**mū**
6	**mū**		
8a	**bī**		
3a	**wū**		
7b	**kī**		
9a	**yì**		
10a	**yī**		

Table 4.21: Noun classes, current system

agreement class	pronoun	singular-plural class pairings
AGR1	**wù**	singular nouns > plural in AGR2; uncountables (only infinitives)
AGR2	**bɔ́**	plural nouns > singular in AGR1
AGR3	**wū**	singular nouns > plural in AGR4 or (a small group) in AGR7; uncountables
AGR4	**kī**	singular nouns > plural in AGR5; plural nouns > singular in AGR3
AGR5	**bī**	plural nouns > singular in AGR4; uncountables
AGR6	**yì**	singular nouns > plural in AGR7; uncountables
AGR7	**yī**	plural nouns > singular in AGR6 or (a small group) in AGR3; uncountables
AGR8	**fī**	singular nouns (incl. SG diminutives) > plural in AGR9
AGR9	**mū**	plural nouns (incl. PL diminutives) > singular in AGR8; uncountables (liquids)

Table 4.22: Agreement classes