

FROM PREPOSITION TO PLURAL MARKER AND MORE:
GRAMMATICALIZATION OF KUCHE *bānà*

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While most Benue-Congo languages of West Africa retain only vestiges of a noun class system, Kuche, a language of Central Nigeria, has an extensive system similar in many ways to Bantu systems. One unusual feature of the system is the form *bān(à)*, used to pluralize, for example, kin terms such as ‘mother’ and ‘father’. Although it has been analyzed elsewhere as a noun class prefix, detailed analysis demonstrates that it is not a class prefix but rather a grammaticalized compound consisting of the class 2 pronoun *bā* plus the preposition *nà* ‘with’. Not only has this grammaticalized form come to be used as a pluralizer, it also functions as a type of comitative marker. The author shows that *nà* has also combined with agreement prefixes *a-* and *ba-* (classes 1 and 2), and has grammaticalized with multiple functions: associative marker, directional marker, focus and topic marker.

1. Introduction

Kuche is spoken by about 50,000 people in at least 17 villages northwest of Jos, Plateau State, in Northern Nigeria [Crozier and Blench 1992: 28]. The people call themselves Bache and their territory Kiche; however, the Hausa people call them Rukuba (“people of the rocks”), and that is the name by which their language is widely known. Recent editions of the *Ethnologue* [Grimes 1992] dispense with the noun class prefix and list it simply as “Che” (an alternate spelling, “Ce,” can be found in literature produced by Blench [2001], for instance).

Kuche is a Plateau language of the Benue-Congo branch of Niger-Congo. Like the Bantu languages, it features an extensive noun class system pairing singular and plural inflectional classes. This study presents evidence that a handful of plural nouns, previously analyzed as prefix plus noun stem [Bouquiaux 1967; Wilson 1996, 1997], are, in fact, syntactic plurals. That is, what has been analyzed heretofore as a class prefix is a prepositional element, and what was analyzed as the noun root is actually the singular noun form, comprising a class prefix and root. The plurals of these particular nouns are marked, not morphologically, but syntac-

tically. They closely resemble Bantu class 2a nouns both semantically and phonetically.

The similarities in the noun systems of Kuche and Bantu languages have been recognized at least since Bouquiaux [1967]. Hoffmann [1976] and Gerhardt [1983] also present extensive descriptions of Kuche's noun system, though they do not number their noun classes to match the conventions of Bantu descriptions. In an earlier analysis of Kuche nouns [Wilson 1997:4], I followed Bouquiaux's paradigm. (See Table A in the Appendix, which compares noun classes in Kuche with noun classes in Bantu).

2. Vowels, vowel harmony, and syllable structure in Kuche

Two phonological aspects of Kuche—vowel harmony and the structure of word stems—require comment before consideration in detail of plural nouns. As in many African languages, vowels in affixes agree, or harmonize, with vowels in the stem to which they attach. The harmony feature is possibly Advanced Tongue Root [\pm ATR], but until a definitive phonetic analysis is completed, I label them tense (rather than [+ATR]) and lax (rather than [-ATR]). Part of the problem is that the semi-vowels also participate in the harmony process, possibly by blocking or interfering with the spreading of the harmony feature. There is only one labiovelar semi-vowel, which is transcribed here as [w], but it is phonetically more velar and less voiced than IPA [w]; it is the tense correlate, for the lax [w] seems to be non-existent. There are two palatal semi-vowels: the tense one is transcribed [Y], the lax one [y]; the lax [y] corresponds to IPA [j] and the tense one is similar to it but less voiced and more strident. The vowels of the harmony groups are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Tense and lax vowels in Kuche

Tense		Lax	
i	u	ɪ	ʊ
		ɛ	ɔ
ɐ		a	

The tense and lax vowels are contrastive in lexical items but alternate in affixes, depending on the tenseness of the stem vowel. The mid-vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ]—which have no tense correlates—do not occur in any affixes.

Although most Kuche stems and words are consonant-initial, many words begin with a vowel, typically a prefixal element on a noun, adjective, or verb, which itself constitutes a syllable. However, most syllables are CV. Closed CVC syllables do occur: word-internally with a nasal coda, and word-finally with a wide range of consonants (where they are usually elided except when also phrase-final).

3. Noun Classes

Although linguists such as Bouquiaux [1967] and Wilson [1996, 1997] have proposed a class 2a for Kuche, similar to that found in many Bantu languages, evidence from extensive language data suggests that the apparent noun class prefix is really part of a prepositional phrase. This change in analysis, based on data collected during the summer of 2001, eliminates classes 1a and 2a, the former merged with class 1. This new analysis is reflected in Table 2 (cf. Kuche classes with Bantu in the Table A in the Appendix). Class 6, although superficially similar to the grammaticalized plural *bān-*, is a true class prefix.

Table 2. Kuche Noun Classes

Class	N/Agr Pfx	Typical Semantic Content	Example	English Gloss
1	ū/à/ā	human	<i>ūnīt</i>	'person'
2	bā	plural of 1	<i>bānīt</i>	'people'
3	ū	long and thin items	<i>ūkōt</i>	'throat/voice'
4	ỳ(N)	pl of 3 & a few cl 12 nouns	<i>ỳkōt</i>	'throats/voices'
5	kī	compact shape	<i>kīgbàāt</i>	'hillock'
6	bà(N)	liquids;	<i>bànyī</i>	'urine'
		pl of a few cl 12 nouns	<i>bàntfū</i>	'places'
7	à	artifacts; misc.	<i>àkḗpàtàk</i>	'shoe'
8	ā	pl of 5, 7, 15	<i>ākḗpàtàk</i>	'shoes'
9	ỳ	animals; misc.; verb infinitive	<i>ỳwól</i>	'goat'
10	ī	pl of 9	<i>īwól</i>	'goats'
12	kā	misc.; time expressions	<i>kātfū</i>	'place'
13	kù	pl of a few class 3 nouns	<i>kùḡgī</i>	'arrows'
15	kū	bowl-shaped; abstractions	<i>kūntfāk</i>	'spoon'

The noun class prefix harmonizes with the vowel of the noun root for tense-ness; however, the lax vowels are far more common than the tense ones, so column 2 shows the lax prefixes only.

The prefix for common nouns of class 1 is *ū-*; the prefix for men's personal names, as well as borrowed titles (*àdīrēktò* 'director', *àmīsēs* 'Mrs.') is low-tone *à-*; the prefix for women's personal names is mid-tone *ā-*. Most noun concord

elements are segmentally identical to the noun prefixes; tones vary depending on the tense/aspect of the verb. There are a few irregular nouns whose semantics and agreement pattern suggest one class, but whose noun prefix suggests another. Consequently, I classify nouns according to their semantic category and agreement pattern so that the irregularity is only in the form of the noun prefix. Consider the examples in (1) and (2), in which the noun has a prefix *ɪ-*, but whose semantics and agreement pattern suggest a noun of either class 2 or class 6, respectively.¹

- (1) *ɪ-ŋmín-ɪ bāà-blò.*
 2-child-DEF 2-go
 ‘The children went.’
- (2) *ú-tū ū-hí ɪ-mà bā-nìŋjì bè-ʃit-ì, à-ŋú gārā.*
 2S-if 2S-find 6-water 6-that 6-black-DEF then-2S.IND pass.
 ‘If you find the black water, pass by.’

Agreement with class 1 nouns varies. Adjectives (and cardinal numbers) that modify class 1 nouns take the nominal prefix *u-*, while verbs and demonstrative, interrogative, and possessive qualifiers take the “pronominal” concord prefix *a-* [see Hoffmann 1976: 36-37]. Thus, contrasts such as the one depicted in (3) are noted: every word in the sentence has a class 1 prefix, but that prefix is *u-* for the noun and adjective and *a-* for the demonstrative and the verb.

- (3) *ū-tù ā-wāī à-ʃī ū-hás.*
 1-chief 1-this 1-be 1-new
 ‘This chief is a new one.’

Forms of all the independent pronouns and relative pronouns are not as easily predicted from the noun prefix, but there is still a fairly consistent pattern. First and second person pronouns and concord elements, as well as those for third person human, are discussed in section 4 below.

¹ Abbreviations used in glossing the transcriptions are as follows:

Numbers refer to noun classes, as in table 2, either noun prefixes or concord prefixes.

Names of people are indicated as NAME and names of places are indicated as PLACE.

ASSOC	associative	IND	independ. pronoun	1S/1P	1st pers. singular/plural
COMP	complementizer	P or PL	plural	2S/2P	2nd pers. singular/plural
DEF	definite suffix	PFV	perfective aspect	3HS	3rd pers. human singular
DO	direct object	PREP	preposition	3HP	3rd pers. human plural
FOC	focus	PROG	present participle	3IO	3rd pers. human sing. dative
HAB	habitual	S	singular	3DO	3rd pers. human sing. direct object
INF	infinitive prefix	TOP	topic		

3. The ostensible Class 2a

In Kuche some nouns referring to humans form their plurals differently than other class 1 nouns. Earlier descriptions of Kuche (see Wilson [1996: 16] and Bouquiaux [1967: 147]) analyzed these nouns as belonging in classes labeled 1a/2a, citing examples such as those for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ in (a) and (b) of Table 3, where the singular form was considered unanalyzable, while the plural form was analyzed as having a prefix *bān-* attached to the singular noun stem. This prefix differs from the class 6 prefix in that it is always mid-tone (the class 6 noun prefix is low) and in that the /n/ is not optional—it always appears in these plural nouns, but it only appears in a few nouns of class 6.

Table 3. “Irregular” nouns of ostensible classes 1a/2a

a.	<i>īyē</i>	‘mother’	<i>bānīyē</i>	‘mothers’
b.	<i>āfī</i>	‘father’	<i>bānāfī</i>	‘fathers’
c.	<i>àfī-yàāŋ</i>	‘husband’	<i>bānāfī-yàāŋ</i>	‘husbands’
d.	<i>àfī-àgō</i>	‘grandfather’	<i>bānāfī-àgō</i>	‘grandfathers’
e.	<i>īyē-āgō</i>	‘grandmother’	<i>bānīyē-āgō</i>	‘grandmothers’

Note that the word for ‘wife’ is not included among the nouns in Table 3. There is not a unique word for ‘wife’; rather, the same word refers to both ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ (*ūwā* singular, *īmbā* plural). Apart from these kinship terms, no other common nouns are known to form their plurals by prefixing *bān-* to the entire singular form. However, personal names may form plurals, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. *ū-dé à-rūkū* a man’s name
 bān’ ū-dé à-rūkū ‘Ude Aruku and people like him’
- b. *ūyó* name of a personified rabbit
 bānūyó ‘Uyho and his wife’ [interpretation from context of story]

Even though this “plural prefix” was limited to such a narrow range of nouns, this analysis had much to recommend it. First of all, it seemed reasonable to consider the *bān-* plurals to be a subclass of class 2 because the form is very like the class 2 prefix *bā-*, even commanding class 2 concord prefixes on verbs and modifiers (see example 9). Consider also that the forms are parallel to Bantu class 1a/2a nouns (see Table A comparing Bantu and Kuche class prefixes and semantic content in the appendix). Furthermore, the semantics of the nouns to which this process most frequently applies overlaps a great deal with Bantu nouns that are typically classified as 1a/2a; Doke [1927:197] lists common class 1a/2a nouns as kinship terms, personal names, words borrowed from European languages, and personified animals.

However, as a larger corpus of language data has become available, four shortcomings in this analysis have become evident. First, the terms for ‘father’ and ‘mother’ given in Table 3 above refer strictly to the parents of the speaker. In order to refer to some other mother and father, the speaker must specify ‘your mother/father’ or ‘his/her/their mother/father’; a difference in the initial vowel contributes to the differentiation between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person terms. That is, the singular form has a prefix, one that alternates on the basis of meaning.

Second, native speakers do not consider *bān* a prefix at all, but a separate word, which they often write with a final vowel (*bānà* or *bānù* or *bānì*). In normal speech, the final vowel assimilates to the vowel of the next syllable if the following word begins with a consonant, or it is elided if the following word begins with a vowel (the more frequent situation). Its similarity to a noun prefix is apparent to analysts of the language, but not necessarily to native speakers of the language.

Third, although *bān*’ occurs with great frequency before personal names, before ‘mother’ and ‘father’, and before compound nouns built on ‘mother’ and ‘father’, there is actually no restriction on the nouns that may occur after *ban*’. Furthermore, when *bān*’ collocates with other nouns, the new form may have more than just plural meaning. In such cases, it functions more like part of a prepositional phrase.

Fourth, there is a corresponding singular prepositional construction that forms a pair with the *bān*’ construction. More specifically, some functions of *bān*’ (or, in its non-elided form, *bānà/bānù/bānì*) correspond to a singular construction employing a morphologically analogous word *ānà/ānù/ānì*. The plural *bānà/bānù/bānì* is used as one pluralizing strategy, in a topicalizing construction, as a comitative construction, in an existential construction, and as a possessive construction. The singular *ānà/ānù/ānì* is used only as a possessive construction. Of course, it is to be expected that the singular form would have no function that corresponds to a pluralizing strategy, but the lack of corresponding singular comitative, topicalizing, and existential constructions suggests that there may be two homophonous forms: one (*bānà/bānù/bānì*) that forms a pair with *ānà/ānù/ānì* and another (also *bānà/bānù/bānì*) that has a unique morphological analysis.

These four observations suggest that the construction under consideration is not a case of morphological affixation; that is, there are no nouns constituting classes 1a/2a. Rather, its collocation with certain nouns of class 1, where its salient semantic feature is plurality, has resulted in “frozen” plural forms. In other cases, the evidence suggests that *bān*’, though distinct from ordinary, morphologically simple prepositions in Kuche, still functions like a syntactic construction and may have several different grammatical functions, of which pluralization is only one.

4. Mother/father paradigms

During early research on Kuche, I assumed the pluralizing strategy to be the primary use of *bān*’, probably because of its similarity to the Bantu noun class 2a prefix. Besides that, in response to word form elicitation, informants gave the forms in (a) and (b) of Table 3 above for ‘mother/mothers’ and ‘father/ fathers’.

However, those plural forms only mean ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’ in a roundabout way: a more literal rendering would be ‘people like our father and including our father’.² The phrase seems to be similar in meaning and usage to the Hausa construction *su audu* ‘Audu & his associates’; in English it might be parallel to *guys like Billy or Billy and them*. The English pronoun *them* and the third person pronoun *su* in the Hausa phrase have no anaphoric reference: the speaker has no intention of being specific, but he shares enough experience with the listener that he can leave him to imagine who *them* might refer to. Meeussen (1975:4) appears to have been the first to note this kind of construction, which he labeled “totalization”, as relatively common in African languages.

This kind of plural construction is also used, as noted above, with personal names, illustrated in context in (5). When she translated the sentence in (5), my informant emphasized to me, “It is not just Ude Aruku, it is him and people like him. Not him alone.”

- (5) *kū-nī-tā-wō* *bānō ū-dé* *à-rōkū*
 1P-PFV-HAB-hear **PL** 1-NAME 1-NAME
 ‘We used to hear of ones (people) like Ude Aruku.’

The semantics of such a plural differs from the more typical concept of plural; that is *bān’ūdé* does not mean ‘more than one Ude’, as if the man had been cloned, or even as if the term referred to more than one man named Ude. It means one man, Ude, plus a group of people associated with him in some way. Meeussen [1975:4] remarks that African languages are unique among the world’s languages in the way they reflect a preference for “a predominantly group approach.”

The semantics of “pluralizing” a personal name have been extended to “pluralization” of ‘mother’ and ‘father’, as illustrated by the example in (6). Although an individual has only one biological father, the plural form of ‘father’ suggests that, in *Kuche* culture, other male kin are perceived as “like father”; hence, the plural form might be more literally understood as “father and people with like characteristics”.

- (6) *òò, tūt* *ì-wōŋ-ì* *nā tūt* *kū-nà-wōŋ* *nà bān’ ā-tū*.
 yes, like INF-hear-DEF that 1P.IND 1P-PFV-hear of **PL** 1-father
 ‘Yes, we heard it like that from our fathers.’

Since the forms for ‘mother/mothers’ are far more complex than the forms for ‘father/fathers’, they will be considered first. Table 4 (next page) provides a list of the forms for ‘mother/mothers’.

² For a morpheme-by-morpheme analysis, see section 6.

Table 4. Paradigm for 'mother'

'my mother'	1.	<i>īyē</i>			
'(our) mother'	2.	<i>īyē (āmót)</i>	'(our) mothers'	7.	<i>bānì īyē (bāmót-ì)</i>
'your mother'	3.	<i>ūvìrìk-ì</i>			
'(your [pl]) mother'	4.	<i>ūvìrì (āmín-ī)</i>	'your [pl] mothers'	8.	<i>bānù ūvìrìk-ì</i>
'his/her mother'	5.	<i>āyímēḡ-ì</i>			
'(their) mother'	6.	<i>āyímē (āmá-ī)</i>	'their mothers'	9.	<i>bānà āyímèḡ-ì</i>

The *-ì/-ì* suffix in forms 3, 5, 8, and 9 of Table 4 is a definite marker, usually translated ‘the’, as in *kūhū/kūhūì* ‘mat/the mat’. It attaches only to the default interpretation of each form and is optional, except for form #1, where it never occurs. “Default” in this case means singular mother for singular possessor and plural mother for plural possessor—that is, the default meaning of 3rd person singular ‘mother’ is ‘his mother’, and the default meaning of 3rd person plural ‘mothers’ is ‘their mothers’. The personal pronouns in parentheses (forms 2, 4, 6, and 7) may be dispensed with if the meaning is clear from context or if ambiguity can be tolerated.

The final /k/ in forms 3 and 8 and the final /ŋ/ in forms 5 and 9 are not pronounced word-finally—they only appear here in forms that include the definite suffix.

There is no semantic or grammatical difference between *bānì*, *bānà* and *bānù*; it is a phonological alternation. The example in (7) shows how the speaker hesitates when he comes upon a man’s name that starts with /ū/ instead of the far more common /à/.

- (7) *ù-tá-wō bānā . . . bānū ū-dé kì ī-bā ì-ŋkūŋʷ-ì*
 2S-HAB-hear 2.with 2.with 1-NAME PREP 10-matter 9-war-DEF
 ‘You always hear of people like. . . people like Ude in the matters of war.’

The transcription in (7), which follows the informal transcription written by a native speaker, is morphologically accurate, but does not represent spoken speech accurately. A more precise phonetic transcription would eliminate the word-final vowel of *bānā* and *bānū* because it is elided when the next word is vowel-initial.³ When the vowel is elided, its low tone may also be lost (note that not all phonological processes involving tone have been fully analyzed as yet). The tones in the paradigm are marked as the morphology requires, but tone marking in the examples is faithful to the data, even if it cannot be explained.

The singular terms in Table 4 select class 1 concord elements, the plural terms class 2, as shown in (8) and (9).

- (8) *ōvīrīk-ì à-fī kī-ŋē kī-kò kī-mū-ì*
 your.mother-DEF 1-be PROG-come 5-house 5-my-DEF
 ‘Is your mother coming to my house?’
- (9) *bān’ īYē bā-mót-ī bā-fī bā-vánā.*
 PL mother 2-our-DEF 2-be 2-sister
 ‘Our mothers are sisters.’

³ The final vowel is not always elided, though, because this construction has application in contexts where it precedes words that are consonant-initial. In those contexts, the vowel of *bānì/bānà/bānù* still assimilates to the vowel of the next syllable, but it does not elide.

One feature of Table 4 is not as easy to explain: Why there are three different initial vowels in the paradigm for ‘mother’. Of all the kinship terms in my data, only the terms for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ have these distinct initial vowels based on the grammatical person of the “possessor”. I interpret these initial vowels as prefixes, that is, *ī-*, *ū-*, *ā-*. Since no other noun stems in the language are vowel-initial, it is reasonable to assume that the stems for ‘mother’ are consonant-initial: *ɣē* ‘my mother’, *ɔ̀r̀ɪ̀k* ‘your mother’, *ɣ́ɪmēŋ* ‘his/her mother’. Thus, the “possessive” aspect of the relationship in these words appears to be signaled both by the alternation in prefix and the alternation in stem form. Alternation of the prefix is not typical of genitive constructions in Kuche, as shown by the possessive forms for ‘wife’ in (10) and ‘hat’ in (11). In this case, a possessive pronoun following the noun requires agreement with the noun.

- (10) a. *ūwā ē-mù* ‘my wife’
 b. *ūwā ā-m̀* ‘your wife’
 c. *ūwā ā-mā* ‘his wife’
- (11) a. *kīŋgbɔk kī-m̀* ‘my hat’
 b. *kīŋgbɔk kī-m̀* ‘your hat’
 c. *kīŋgbɔk kī-mā* ‘his hat’

The three vowel prefixes noted for ‘mother’ are, inexplicably, nearly identical to the singular verb agreement prefixes for marking person. First, second, and third person singular agreement prefixes are, respectively, *iN-*, *u-*, and (for humans) *a-*, as illustrated in examples (12) and (13). Although the first person prefix for ‘my mother’ lacks the nasal consonant, the set of prefixes is otherwise identical to the verb agreement prefixes. While it is not clear why words for parents (and not others) would be marked in a similar manner as verbs, the patterns are comparable.

- (12) *wà ā-ŋ īn-sók kū-hú-ī īm-bī-wàsàŋ-á.*
 3HS.Ind 3HS-say 1S-take 15-mat-DEF 1S-should-wash-3IO
 ‘She told me to take the mat and wash it for her.’
- (13) *kūí, kúū-wō bā-tà ò-ŋ k̀-nyē ì-bín-ī-ŋā. . .*
 well, 1PL-hear 3HP-say 2S-be PROG-come INF-greet-1SDO-even
 ‘Well, we heard that you were coming to greet me. . .’

The term for ‘father’ (Table 5) alternates between an *ā-* prefix and an *ū-* prefix, still echoing the verb agreement prefixes. Only first person ‘my father’ is not like a first person verb, having, instead, the same prefix as the third person ‘his/her father’. The singular forms, like those for ‘mother’, can be analyzed as prefix plus root. However, unlike the case of ‘mother’, the noun stem is the same throughout the paradigm.

Table 5. Paradigm of terms for ‘father’

a.	(my) father	<i>āfī</i> (<i>ēmə̀</i>)			
b.	(our) father	<i>āfī</i> (<i>āmó̀t</i>)	g.	(our) fathers	<i>bānà āfī</i> (<i>bāmó̀t-ì</i>)
c.	(your) father	<i>ūfī</i> (<i>āmí</i>)			
d.	(your [pl]) father	<i>ūfī</i> (<i>āmín-ī</i>)	h.	(your [pl]) fathers	<i>bānù ūfī</i> (<i>bāmín-ì</i>)
e.	(his/her) father	<i>āfī</i> (<i>āmā-ī</i>)			
f.	(their) father	<i>āfī</i> (<i>āmá-ī</i>)	i.	(their) fathers	<i>bānà āfī</i> (<i>bāmá-ī</i>)

Since the Kuche noun system tolerates irregularity in noun prefixes (as discussed in section 2 above), there is no reason to classify the singular terms for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ (and compounds based on them) as anything other than class 1 nouns. It remains to be demonstrated that *bānì/bānà/bānù* is a separate word; native speaker intuition notwithstanding, the arguments thus far only show that the plural morpheme precedes a singular prefix rather than preceding an unanalyzable singular noun.

One reason to consider the plural morpheme a separate word in this instance is a semantic one: *plural* is not a concept that easily attaches to unique entities like personal names. Besides personal names, only ‘father’ and ‘mother’ and compounds incorporating them rely on *bānì/bānà/bānù* as a pluralizing strategy.⁴ This suggests that the Bache people consider ‘mother’ and ‘father’ to be unique entities but that there are others in kinship relations who are like them. Hence, for example, to refer to more than one male relative of father’s or preceding generation, the Bache say *bān’ āfī* ‘father and people like him’.

There is evidence from the texts that speakers keep the concept of plurality separate from the concept of ‘father’, as one might expect if the concepts are embodied in separate words. Consider the brief exchange between a Storyteller and Listener in (14).

(14) Storyteller: *bā-nì-hīlè mīnìṅì kà bānā ā-fī*
3HP-PFV-return like.that PREP 2.PREP 1-father

ū-nī ā-nìṅṅī nī ín-tēfí
1-person 1-that that 1S-tell

‘It happened like that to people **like** our father,
the person I’m talking about.’

⁴ Other kinship terms form their plurals more regularly, though the noun stem varies depending on the grammatical person of the “owner” (see table B in the Appendix).

Listener: *ā-ḥī* *ū-tá*
 1-father 1-who
 ‘Which father?’

Storyteller: *ā-ḥī* *ū-déŋʸ-ì*
 1-father 1-NAME-DEF
 ‘Father Ude’

Notice that the Listener does not say “Which person?” in response to the Storyteller’s last comment “the person (singular) that I’m talking about.” Nor does she say “Which fathers?” as if *bānā āḥī*—the group of people all associated with ‘father’—were an integral unit (i.e., a plural word). She focuses on the singular ‘father’ *āḥī*, more consistent with extracting a word from a phrase than with extracting a morpheme from a word.

Furthermore, there is evidence that *bānā* has functions other than pluralizing a few class 1 nouns. For instance, it may occur before nouns that are not class 1—indeed, before nouns that are not even singular, as in (15) and (16). It is clearly not a pluralizing strategy here because class 8 is already a plural class: *ā-ntʃíí* ‘roads’; the singular is class 15 *kū-tʃíí* ‘road’.

(15) *à-bā-yɪ* *bānā ā-ntʃííŋʸ-ì*
 then-3HP-know BANA 8-road-DEF
 ‘So that they would know about the roads.’

(16) *bānā ā-ntʃíí bā-nì-ŋì* *bà-tàāt*
 BANA 8-road 2-PFV-be 2-three
 ‘There were three routes.’ [Lit. concerning roads, they were three]

These examples indicate not only that *bān*’ is a separate word, but also that it has functions beyond just marking plurality; many of those functions suggest that it is prepositional. Though constructions like (15) and (16)—where *bānā* functions like a preposition—are not as common as constructions like (4)-(9)—where *bānā* functions like a plural morpheme—they are not rare.

Unlike most Kuche prepositions, though, *bānā* is not morphologically simple; it can be analyzed as *bā + nā*. *nā* (and its phonologically conditioned variants *nù* and *nì*) is identified as the preposition ‘with’. The source of the form *bā* is unclear: it is doubtless some form of class 2 marker, but it could be analyzed either as the class 2 independent pronoun *bā* or a class 2 concord prefix *bā-*. I propose an analysis incorporating both sources: the class 2 prefix in the one construction where there is a corresponding singular prefix, the pronoun in the constructions where there is no singular counterpart. As a preposition with some type of associative function, translated loosely as “of”, it forms a pair with the singular word *ā-nā* (and phonologically conditioned variants *ānù* and *ānì*). In comitative, existential, and pluralizing constructions, it is analyzed as the class 2 (i.e., human plural) indepen-

dent pronoun bound to the preposition *nà*. Section 6 gives examples of *bā + nà* as a compound word while section 7 gives examples of *ā-nà/bā-nà* as a singular/plural preposition.

6. *bān'* as a compound word: pronoun + preposition

The data presented so far have shown that *bān'* has some nominal-like characteristics. For instance, its form suggests a prefix resembling class 2 concord elements and it commands class 2 concord on verbs and modifiers (see (9)). However, *bān'* also has many characteristics of a preposition. For example, the phonological interaction with the following word—the vowel assimilation or elision, a process that seems to be similar to English contraction, such as that in *isn't*—is typical of Kuche prepositions.

Table 6 provides a comparative list of *nà/nù/nì* and the other two morphologically simple prepositions of Kuche, *bà/bù/bì* ‘to, at, from’ and *kà/kù/kì* ‘in, at’. The meanings of all three of these prepositions are broader than indicated by the glosses, but these are common meanings illustrated in the example sentences. Note that the vowel of *bà/bù/bì* completely elides under the influence of the vowel of the following noun prefix, while the vowel of *kà/kù/kì* is preserved, perhaps because of the difference in tone between it and the initial vowel of following noun. When the following noun begins with a consonant, as with *nà/nù/nì*, the vowel is preserved.

Table 6. Kuche Prepositions

<i>bì/bù/bà</i>	‘to, at, from’	<i>ū-zànà</i>	<i>b-ì-láí</i>	<i>í-sá á-ní-dū-ú</i>	
		1-his.friend	from -9-Beromland	it-be 3HS-PFV-tell-3HS	
				‘It was his friend from Berom territory who told him?’	
<i>kì/kù/kà</i>	‘in, at’	<i>à-bā-nà-ŋī</i>	<i>kù ū-mbà ànà ū-dé</i>		
		then-3HP-PFV-do	in 3-time of	1-NAME	
				‘and they did it (the war) during the time of Ude’	
<i>nù/nù/nà</i>	‘with’	<i>ā-tá-nā</i>	<i>íŋ-ŋyé</i>	<i>nì kī-zànà</i>	<i>ín-sā-ŋyé</i>
		3HS-say-that	1S-come	with 5-friendship	1S-NEG-come
		<i>nù</i>	<i>kù-lŋī</i>		
		with	15-anger		
					‘he says, “I have come with friendship not with anger”’

The form *bā-nā* is composed of two parts: *bā-*, identical to the class 2 (plural human) independent pronoun and, as noted previously, commanding class 2 (human plural) concord prefixes on verbs and modifiers, and *-nā*, identical to *nà/nù/nì* ‘with’. Hence, a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss of *bā-nā* would be

‘those-with’. Semantically, it has lost the association with “humanness” in cases like (15) and (16) above; instead, it indicates only plurality.

Because of its broad range of meaning, *nì/nù/nà* cannot always be idiomatically translated into English as ‘with’. The sentences in (17)-(19) illustrate some of its uses. Its range of use includes several functions that Heine et. al. [1993] predict for the evolution of a comitative marker: temporal marker [51] as in example (17); manner marker [50] as in example (18); and verbal possession marker [52] as in example (19).

(17) *tút-ī bā-yī nā kú-nā-tí nà gbēŋgbēŋ-ì. . .*
 1PLInd-DEF 2-REL that 1PL-PFV-do with long ago
 ‘We who did it long ago. . .’

(18) *ā-tá nā íp-nyé nì kī-zàná ìn-sā-nyè nù kù.lū.*
 3HS-say that 1S-come with 5-friend 1S-NEG-come with 15-anger
 ‘He said, “I have come in friendship,⁵ not in anger.”’

(19) *īn-fī nà ā-tākārādā ā-tāát.*
 1S-be with 8-book 8-three
 ‘I have three books.’

Some uses are not as easy to classify, such as that in (20), which can be considered a type of instrumental use (cf. Heine et al. 1993: 49).

(20) *à-mí ín-tfó nù kù-tfêê. . . ànī īn-hīlī īn-yā-dūrì*
 then-1S.IND 1S-write with 15-Kuche. . .and.then 1S-return 1S-also turn

nù kù-nāsārāŋ^y-ì, nù kù-kpīsèk.
 with 15-English, with 15-Hausa.

‘I will write in [using] Kuche. . .and then I will translate [it] into [using] English and Hausa.’

Whatever its history may be, the simple preposition *nà* does not currently have a comitative function in Kuche expressing a relationship involving HUMAN ‘with’ HUMAN. For that, speakers use either the preposition *bì/bù/bà* or the complex preposition *bānà*, as in (21) and (22).

(21) *ū-vīn ū-tfāāp ā-tá-làtī bē è-yímèŋ-ì.*
 1-child 1-little 3HS-HAB-sleep LOC 1-her.mother-DEF
 ‘The baby sleeps **with** her mother.’

⁵ Class 5 prefix *kī-* marks many abstracts. For instance *ūzàná* is ‘friend’, *bāzàná* is ‘friends’, and *kizàná* is ‘friendship’.

(22) *kū-líí kū-sò, tút-ì bā-yī nā kū-nì-tì ì-tóó kē-dìsì*
 1P-get.up 1P-sit, 1P.IND 2-which that 1P-ASP-do INF-work 12-teach

à-mákarántáŋ-ì bā-nā wú-ì nā ā-fī ì-tóó ì-dīrīŋì,
 7-school-DEF PL-with 3HS.IND-DEF that 3HS-do INF-work INF-turn,

à-kū-zīrī kū-sò kū-pātāk ā-tù...
 then-1P-go.down 1P-sit 1P-put.together 8-head

‘We will sit down, we who are teachers **with** her who translates, and we will put our heads together...’

The comitative function is not the only function that *bā-nā* has. Another is its use as a kind of topic marker, a function identified by Heine et al. [1993] as evolving from comitative markers. In *Kuche*, it may indicate “on the subject of N” or “concerning N”, as illustrated previously in (15)-(16), repeated here in (23)-(24). It may occur as a complement of certain mental activity verbs, such as ‘know’ in (23), or it may occur in sentence-initial position (24), where it controls verb and modifier agreement. This is a highly marked construction, since *Kuche*’s rigid word order seldom allows the fronting of any element.

(23) *à-bā-yī bānā ā-ntfííŋ^y-ì*
 then-3HP-know PL-TOP 8-road-DEF
 ‘So that they would know about the roads.’

(24) *bānā ā-ntfíí bā-nì-fī bà-tàāt*
 PL-TOP 8-road 2-PFV-be 2-three
 ‘There were three routes.’ [Lit. concerning roads, they were three]

Although at first it appears that the speaker in (23) and (24) selects the plural preposition because the object is plural, the discussion in section 5 suggests that this is not the case. It should be noted that, in all the examples up to this point (see (4) through (9) especially), the plural preposition is used even when the object is singular—or, I should say, especially when the object is singular. In most of the examples in sections 4 and 5, *bān*’ is used as a pluralizing strategy; that is, the plurality of the pronoun in the compound word has the direct result of making a plural noun out of its singular object. In fact, *bā-nā* can be followed by either singular or plural nouns. The plural *bā-* of the compound *bā-nā* does not agree with its object; it is a pronoun whose reference is vague.

A related discourse function seems to be that of focus marker, as illustrated in (25), in which ‘sister’ and ‘brother’ are emphasized in comparison to ‘father’ and ‘mother’. Note that the words for ‘sister’ and ‘brother’ are already plural in form (see Table B in Appendix), hence, use of *bānā* does not have the pluralizing function that it has for ‘father’ and ‘mother’.

- (25) *ā-hūk bā-nī bā-māá nā bē-nì-kūsù ŋē bā-n' ā-ŋī*
 3HS-find 2-person 2-3S.POSS that 3HS-PFV-die even PL-with 1-father

bā-n' à-yīmà ŋī bā-nà bā-vānàŋ-ì bā-nà
 PL-with 1-mother even PL-FOC 2-his/her.sister-DEF PL-FOC

bà-zīyāŋ-ì bā-ŋē.
 2-his/her.brother-DEF 3HPL-be.there

'She found her own people who had died, even her fathers and mothers, (and) even her sisters and brothers, there were.'

In sum, *bānà* can be analyzed as a compound word derived from pronominal *bā* plus preposition *nā* 'with'. This origin is still transparent in its comitative function '[those] together with', as in (22). From this, it appears to have acquired discourse functions, grammaticalizing either as a kind of topic marker or as a kind of focus marker. In none of these cases does it appear to have a singular counterpart.

7. *bānà* as agreement marker + preposition

There is another Kuche word whose form is indistinguishable from the compound *bā-nà* discussed in section 6: it is the preposition *nà* marked for number agreement. Even though it is semantically similar and formally identical to the compound *bā-nà*, it is distinct in two respects: it always follows an overt, plural noun phrase and it has a corresponding singular form.

Although the concept of singular/plural prepositions is unusual, it should be noted that agreement in Kuche is ubiquitous. As the examples in (26)-(27) attest, *nà* takes a plural or singular agreement marking according to the number of the antecedent noun. In (26), for example, *nà* agrees with the noun *bà-nī* 'people',⁶ while in (27) it agrees with *à-yō* 'group'. In this form, it has acquired a general "associative" function, no longer being limited to the sense of 'with'.

- (26) *à-ā-wūtā k^w-òk kà bā-nī bā-nà è-zèlì. . .*
 then-3HS-extend 15-arm PREP 2-person PL-ASSOC 7-east
 'Then he pointed towards the people of the East.'

- (27) *tò, à-yō ā-nà à-dòs kàgò á-gára*
 well, 7-group S-ASSOC 1-NAME NAME 7-pass
 'Well, Ados Kago's group passed.'

⁶ The citation form of 'person' is *ō-nīt* and of 'people' *bā-nīt*; not *bà-nī* as in (26). The elision of a word final consonant is common in Kuche. The tone of the first syllable appears to be influenced by the preceding low tone of *kà*.

Although the agreement prefixes in (26) and (27) appear to be copies of the class 2 and class 7 noun class prefixes, respectively, in fact they are not; the example in (28) illustrates agreement in which the singular class 3 noun *ū-mbà* takes the same agreement marker as the class 7 noun. There are, in fact, only two agreement prefixes for this construction found in the data, agreeing only in number with the noun. The plural prefix is modeled on the class 2 concord prefix (which just happens to be identical to the class 2 independent pronoun) and the singular prefix is modeled on the class 1 concord prefix (which is phonetically identical to the class 7 concord prefix).

- (28) *à-bā-nà-fī kù ū-mbà à-nà ū-dé*
 then-3HPL-PFV-do in 3-time S-ASSOC 1-NAME
 ‘and they did it [the war] during the time of Ude’

In addition to its associative function, this AGR+*nà* construction also has a directional function similar to what Heine et al. refer to as an allative function. In this case, the direction may be either from, as in (29), or to, as in (30), the location indicated. Note, again, the agreement in number, plural in (29), singular in (30).

- (29) *bá-fī bā-nā ā-sāk-ì*
 3HPL-be **PL-DIR** PLACE-DEF
 ‘they were from Assak.’

- (30) *ī-ù ì-yī bā-fī kì-pē bā-fī kì-yū kū-tfílí ā-nà*
 it-if it-mean 3HP-be PROG-come 3HP-be PROG-follow 15-road **S-DIR**
kà-kék, à-ā-tò
 12-PLACE, then-3HS-see

‘If it so happened that they were coming following the Kakkek road, then he would see.’

8. Conclusion

What initially appeared in *Kuche* to be a simple morphological plural prefix for the kin terms like ‘mother’ and ‘father’ and for personal names has been shown to have derived from a syntactic construction, a compound word composed of *ba* (class 2 pronoun) + *nà* ‘with’ followed by a singular noun. Although plurality is, perhaps, the most salient feature of this form, it also has a complementary sense of group, Meeussen’s “totalization”; it functions as well as a comitative marker, a focus marker, and a topic marker.

In addition to this compound form, there is a formally identical inflected form derived from an agreement prefix marking number, *bā* - or *ā*-, plural and singular,

respectively, + *nà*. This construction, too, has grammaticalized in various ways, as an associative marker and as a directional marker.

The distinction between the compound and inflected forms clarifies a confusing asymmetry: the singular form, i.e., *ānà*, always agrees with an antecedent noun phrase, plurals rarely do. Those plurals that require agreement are the inflected counterparts of the singular form; those that do not have derived from the compound form.

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APPENDIX

The information in table A is adapted from Guthrie [1971: 144], Welmers [1973: 165-167], Denny & Creider [1986: 219], Maho [1999: 61], and (for Kuche) Wilson [1997].

It may be observed that some “cognates” are less than ideally matched forms, most notably the forms for classes 5, 7, and 8. Comparison of Kuche forms to established Bantu classes is based as much on the semantic content of noun classes as form. Until future researchers refine the historical reconstruction of this portion of the language family, I will leave these forms as they are represented here. I have made a couple of changes to this analysis since Wilson 1997. Most importantly, the prefix *kù-* was left unnumbered in that paper because it was not clear which Bantu class it was analogous to—now it is numbered 13.

Table A. A Comparison of Kuche and Bantu Noun Prefixes

Kuche	Class	Proto-Bantu	Nkutšu	LoNkundo	Semantic Description
ú-/â-/ā-	1	mù-	u-	bɔ-	humans
∅	1a	∅		∅	kinship terms
bā-	2	βâ-	wa-	ba-	plural of 1
bān-	2a	βâ-/βɔ̃-		baa-	plural of 1a
ū-	3	mù-	u-	bo-	trees/plants; extended (& mass)
ì(N)-	4	mì-	(w)i-	be-	plural of 3
kī	5	fi-	di-	li-	misc., paired items
bâ(N)-	6	mà-	wa-~ma-	ba-	plural of 5; liquids
à-	7	kì-	ε-~ì-	e	misc. artifacts
ā-	8	βì-	di-	bi-	plural of 7
ì-	9	nì-	n-	N-	animals (& misc)
ī-	10	fi-nì	n-	N-	plural of 9 & 11
	11	lù-	lu-	lo-	long, thin objects
kā-	12	kà-			diminutives
kù-	13	tù-	tu-	to-	plural of 12
	14	βù-			abstract
kū-	15	kù-		o-	infinitives

Table B. Singular/Plural of Three Human Relationship Terms

Person & number of “possessor”	Brother	Sister	Friend
1. my	<i>ūzùòt</i>	<i>ūvándūt</i>	<i>ūzǐ</i>
our		<i>ūvándūt (āmót-ì)</i>	
2. your	<i>ūzǐn-ì or ūzìn</i>	<i>ūvánìŋʸ-ì</i>	<i>ūzìnǐ</i>
your[pl]		<i>ūvánì (àmín-ì)</i>	
3. her/his	<i>ūzìyà (àmā-ì)</i>	<i>ūvánāŋʸ-ì</i>	<i>ūzānā</i>
their		<i>ūvánà (āmá-ì)</i>	
1. my	<i>bāzùòt-ì</i>	<i>bāvándùt</i>	
our	<i>bāzùòt-ì or bāzùòt bāmót-ì</i>	<i>bāvándùt (bāmót-ì)</i>	
2. your	<i>bāzǐn-ì</i>	<i>bāvànìŋʸ-ì</i>	
your [pl]	<i>bāzǐn-ì or bāzìn bāmín-ì</i>	<i>bāvání (bāmín-ì)</i>	
3. his/her	<i>bāzìyáŋ-ì</i>	<i>bāvànāŋʸ-ì</i>	
their	<i>bāzìyā (bāmá-ì)</i>	<i>bāvànà (bāmá-ì)</i>	<i>bāzànà</i>

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