

Nominal Declensions in Gur > Oti/Volta > Western

> Southeast > Mampruli (/Dagbani/Kusaal...)

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[This is not the assured results of scholarship; the reason I am trying to get on with the Comparative Dictionary is because we need a better quantity and quality of data before we can go further than we have reached so far. This is an *ad hoc* summary thrown together in response to a request from Hannes Hirzel. It is what I know about the subject without doing further specific research, but I suppose I know as much as most people.

I am presenting the system as primarily represented by Mampruli which I know best and which is also a fairly conservative language – it is more convincing (to me!) to derive the data for the other languages from something like the Mampruli system, and it also ties the immediate cluster into the less-closely-related languages better. Anyone working solely within the data of a single language, whether by limitation or conviction, would not see all of this, and would probably come up with a more-complex, less-tidy analysis which would, however, not postulate so many abstract underlying forms and processes (Geoffrey Hunt on Hanga (p.c.), Paul Schaefer on Safaliba Schaefer, Paul and Jennifer Schaefer. 2004. *Verbal and Nominal Structures in Safaliba*. in M.E. Kropp Dakubu and E.K. Osam [eds.] *Studies in the Languages of the Volta Basin 2*. Legon : University of Ghana Linguistics Department: 183-201[*Proceedings of the Annual Colloquium of the Legon-Trondheim Linguistics Project, January 2004*]). Read John Callow, 1965, *Kasem nominals - a study in analyses : JWAL II(1) : 29-36* several times, slowly, concentrating on the principle expounded, not so much the data.

This presentation fits Mampruli, and KusaalAgole (allowing for the peculiarities of its (morpho-)phonology, and apart from a few aberrations Dagbani and Hanga (/KaMara/Kantoonsi). It should also fit Talni and Nabit (data insufficient, but Talni is like Mampruli and Nabit like KLToende). Farefare, Moore and Wali have essentially-similar systems, as does Safaliba. In the Dagaari-Birifor cluster the sound-changes have muddled the system to the point where it is possible but of largely theoretical interest to link it to this system: Manessy includes them in the '*langues voltaïques sans classes*' (Manessy, Gabriel. 1968/1971. *Langues voltaïques sans classes*. A8CILA : 335-346

A8CILA. 1968/71 (Congress was 1968, proceedings published 1971) *Actes du huitième congrès international de linguistique africaine*. Abidjan : Université d'Abidjan [Annales de l'Univ. d'Abidjan, série H, fasc. hors série : 2 Vols.]).

In the following we will use the abbreviations: MP = Mampruli, DB = Dagbani, KLA = Kusaal(Agole)¹, HG=Hanga

Declensions and Classes

We are primarily concerned with suffixes to the nominals which indicate the categories Singular, Plural and Non-Count. It is largely arbitrary which singular suffix a given stem takes, but, given the singular suffix, the one used for the plural is largely predictable. This is usually referred to as ‘Noun Class System’, and the term ‘class’ had been applied either to each separate suffix, or to the pairing of a singular with a plural; in the former case the sg./pl. pairings are sometimes called ‘gender’. Given that in most of these languages there is no concord with other elements in the phrase or clause, and the pairings do not systematically correlate with any semantic categories, let alone ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, I prefer to avoid these usages and talk of ‘declensions’ as is used for similar phenomena in Latin or Greek. If you want to call them ‘classes’ or ‘genders’ that’s fine with me, just make it clear how you are using your terms.

Semantic criteria:

The idea of semantic correlation is unhelpful. Apart from a declension which contains only (but by no means all) human referents, and those referring to liquids/masses/abstracts, which are as much syntactic as semantic categories, attempts to define other declensions by semantic criteria are either very full of exceptions, or have to associate disparate definitions (‘domestic animals and long-and-thin objects’), or are so abstract as to be vacuous. What can be said is that some groups referents, for no perceivable reason, stay together in the same declension as each other as one passes from language to language, even when the form, and function in the system, of the declension changes. Also that sub-regularities develop in different languages, such as having a group of roots which in one declension name a species of tree and in another the fruit, nut or seed of the said tree.

Presentation:

There are seven nominal declensions to be considered. I will discuss each one under the formula for its pair of suffixes, or suffix. In my convention *NN refers, not to a formally-established Ur-form, but to a summary formula which will be recognised as, or as sufficiently like, the actual form in any language one is looking at. Within languages *nn is a comparable abstract or summary form representing a morpheme which may appear in different allomorphs. Thus “the suffix *-DI is represented in Dagbani by *-li

¹ NB the Kusaal orthography is in course of being changed (June 2011) data in this paper are in the old orthography

which may appear as **–ni**". I number the declensions with Roman numerals; this is an arbitrary device, but one needs some way of referring to a particular declension. The order is quasi-arbitrary: everyone starts with the persons declension and ends the core group with the liquid/mass one – the two with some semantic basis. The three which contain most count nouns follow, people differ in their order. I then put the smaller and rather irregular ‘cow, horse, snake and money’ group before the liquids (in earlier presentations the order of these two was reversed). It is also usual to list the odd or rare groups at the end: the only one of these in our languages I list as seventh.

It is a matter of taste where one draws the line between very-small classes and irregularities. Some items are regularly irregular, in many cases in the same way from language to language (but not the same as each other) – ‘guineafowl’, ‘hand’, and ‘sheep’, for instance have normal suffixation but abnormal sg./pl. pairing, ‘man’, ‘small’ and ‘money’ have a different form of the root for singular and plural (dropping or adding a consonant), ‘house’ may collapse its plural to a single syllable (*yi- + *-a > **yiya** > **ya**) and sometimes retains its suffix in compounded forms.

Stem/Suffix Boundary:

The stems onto which these forms are suffixed may end with a vowel, a nasal, or the consonants –B-, –D-, –G-, –L-, –S- (voicing non-contrastive). It is the interaction between stem-ending and suffix-beginning that makes the actual data so much more complex than the basic system I postulate here. The overall system for Mampruli can be seen in an item I omitted to add to the references and hyperlinks of ‘Gur Morphology’ – the grammar sketch prefaced to Unit III of the language-learning course pp. xxviii ff. < [TN-MP-GrammarU.DOC#Nouns](#) > (Naden, Tony. 1991/1997. *A Sketch of Basic Grammar in Mampruli*. Gbeduuri - MAMPRINT)

. Various expositions and examples of parts of the system or relevant data will be found in the other items in this folder and mentioned and hyperlinked in Gur Morphology < [TNgurMorphology.doc](#) > (Tony Naden. 2008. *Informal Thoughts on Morphology in Gur Languages*. Unpublished electronic discussion-paper)

General Observations:

- A number of the singular suffixes are most likely to be obscured by morphophonemics, so it is often more useful to look at the plurals first.
- Therefore, when collecting survey or sample data, you must get plurals where applicable.
- You can usually get the stem form by asking for the noun followed by an adjective.
- There is a widely-found rule that lengthens a stem-final vowel before a consonant-initial suffix.

- There is a tendency to drop final vowels, very common in Agole Kusaal, Talni, and the Dagaari cluster (also Buli). Sometimes the lost suffix-final vowel is echoed or metathesised to before the consonant (this is where SVMR is trying to get to < [TN-SVMRu.DOC](#) > (Naden, Tony. 2008. *Suffix vowel regression in W.O/V nominals. Part I* Forthcoming in *G.I.L. Workpapers 3*, ed. Paul A. Schaefer. Tamale : GILLBT).

The Declensions

I – *-A~O~Ø / -BA :

The *BA element for persons plural goes right down to Bantu. It may assimilate a preceding nasal to make **-m + b-**, and may be in turn cross-assimilated to the nasality to give **-m+m-**. The resulting geminate may be degeminated **-m-**.

“strangers” *SAAN- + -BA : DB **saamba** MP **saamma** KLA **saam(a)**

Following stem-final b the ‘devoicing’ rule may apply

“men” *DAB- + *-BA : MP **dɔppa** KLA **dap(pa)** *cf./ct.* DB **daba** (~**dabba**~**dɔbba**)

The singular is usually *-A in this group, but *O and zero are found.

Founder-members of the declension are ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘person’ and ‘stranger’: other basic nouns are few, but forms in this declension are common as it is a productive or widely-lexicalised way of forming agent nouns from the imperfective forms of verbs <Bayreuth paper [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Agent](#) > (Naden, Tony. 2006. *Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. in Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques 7: 87-94*). One special item which is found throughout is **ta(a)ba** “together, each-other” : the singular, presumably *ta.a, is rarely found as such, unless in compounds like (MP/DB) **nyintaa** (KLA **nintaa**) “co-wife”, **dataa** “wife’s lover”, but these are now in Decl.3 (pl. – **taas(i)**) :

“peer, equal, ‘fellow-friend’, neighbour”

MP **taraana** KLA **tiraan** HG **to** ~ **todaana** *pl. (all)* **taaba** : DB **taba**

II – *-DI / *-A :

The plural suffix *-A derives from something like *DA seen in the archaic survival in the Dagbani indefinite **sheŋa** “some, certain ones” (and, *e.g.* in Buli). Interestingly parallel to the historic development of that *D in initial position, the plural suffix has an allomorph *YA when following a stem-final vowel.

“roads” *SO- + *-A : DB/MP **sɔya** HG **soya** KLA **sueya**

After all the consonant-final stems it just forms with the consonant a final CV syllable. One can therefore fairly confidently isolate the stem by removing the final -a.

It is in the singular that the fun starts. The most obvious (post-vocalic) form of II.sg. and IV.pl./collective in Mampruli is identical, **-ri**². The corresponding pronoun, historically and in systems which still (again?) have class-concord³, is *DI. In several languages the pronoun has an allomorph **li** (DB **di** subject/possessive, **li** object : KLA **di** and **li** in free, or (idio-?)dialectal variation). The suffix is basically *-li in DB and some other languages:

“road” *SO- + *-DI : DB **solɪ** MP/HG **soori** KLA **suer(e)**

Following a nasal the *D becomes **n** and/or preceding the *D a stem-final nasal may become **n** : the cross-assimilation obscures the contrast of stem-final nasals which is visible before the vocalic plural suffix:

“lion” *GBIGM- *-DI / *-A :

MP **gbigimni** *or* **gbiginni** / **gbigima**

DB **gbuyinli** / **gbuyima**

Following an **l** a double **ll** results in Mampruli as much as in Dagbani:

² In all the languages [r] is an allophone of /d/ but speakers familiar with English have insisted in representing it orthographically.

³ See table < [TNnClas1.doc](#) > **Class Pronoun Anaphora in Some North Ghanaian Gur Languages** [Tony Naden :: (originally) Sept. 1983]– table used in teaching and seminars at various times)

“egg” *GEL- + *-DI :

DB **galli/gala** MP **gyelli/gyela** HG **jilli/jila** KLA **gel(le)/gela**

When the resulting geminates are degeminated, the singular suffix suffix looks like just *-I :

“tooth” – *ÑIN- + *-DI/*-A:

MP/HG **nyinni / nyina** KLA **nyin(e) / nyina** DB **nyini / nyina**

Following **b**, **g**, and **s** the normal morphophonology applies (may be epenthetic vocoid, **s** may be **h** in some contexts). Following another **d~r**, instead of the plain devoicing various things can happen (note that three results are possible with the same word in MP):

“baboon” *KPAD- + *-RI :

- 1) No change : DB **kparili**
- 2) Cross-assimilation : MP **kpalli**
- 3) Dissimilation (metathesis?) : MP **kparili**⁴
- 4) Devoicing and retention : HG/MP **kpatiri** KLA **kparit**

Membership has all sorts of animals (wild and domestic), body parts (single and paired) and inanimate objects, in many cases with semantically-comparable roots being found in II or IV. In DB and MP (? partially in the others) ‘tree’ stems in III refer to the tree and in II to the fruit.

III – *-GA / *-SI :

The related pronoun is *KA. *SI is very resistant to morphophonemic change (until you get to the Dagaari/Birifor area where a regional rhotacism changes *S > r thus completely confusing *-DI, *-SI and *-RI !) except that MP doesn’t seem to like **-ssi** and following a stem-final **s** uses the suffix *-a:

⁴ DB and MP are listed differently because the basic form of the suffix in DB is **-li**, but this is only found in MP following **l** and **r**,

“gecko” (and “thatching-‘needle’”) – *SEBS- + *-GA/*-SI : **sebsiga /sebsa**

The singular suffix has the ‘weak G’ which disappears after **a** (and in DB/HG **e** and **o**) and becomes a weak vocoid or semivowel after (mid-)high vowel (see stuff in ... yet another rehash – Reinterpretation in Hanga Plurals < [TNreintpU.doc](#) > **Tony Naden** (unpublished: developed over 1984-2006) **Reinterpretation in Hanga Plurals**).

Following a nasal the nasal assimilates to **ŋ** and the **g** is either retained or cross-assimilates **-ŋŋa**, with possible degemination **-ŋa**. A further complication is that there seems to be a tendency for final **-ŋV** to drop its vowel, even in languages that do not otherwise drop final vowels. As both singular and plural suffixes begin with consonants, roots in this declension never appear before a vowel so any contrast between the different nasals (**m**, **n**, and **ŋ** can all appear root-finally) is neutralised. This does not apply in KLA which metathesises or anticipates the final vowel of *-SI, but the stem-final nasal is always **-m** in these forms, which seems to be by rule rather than intrinsic.

“donkey” – *BUn- + *-GA/*-SI :

MP **buŋŋa** / **bunsi**

DB **buŋa** / **bunsi**

KLA **buŋ** / **bumis**

There are also cases in various languages where the nasal disappears altogether in the plural.

“‘black-berry’ tree (*Vitex*)” – *DARn- + -*GA/*-SI :

DB **ŋaringa** / **ŋarinsi**

MP **nyariŋga** / **nyarinsi**

KLA **aariŋ** / **aaris**

Stem-final **g** may give rise to devoicing:

“stool” (and “mahogany tree”) – *KUK- + *-GA :

MP **kukka** KLA **kok** *cf./ct.* DB **kuya** (HG **kogu**)

Stem-final **b, l, r, s** follow normal phonology with ***-GA**.

The statement for the semantics of the group is similar to that on Decl. II above. One curious anomaly is that W-O/V has two competing stems for “smoke” (***ÑO-** and **ZO-**) but both have the III.pl suffix ***-SI** which is not used for any other non-count item.

There is also a derivation which makes an instrument noun from a verb by using the imperfective stem in this declension < [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Instrument](#) (Naden, Tony. 2006. Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques 7 : 87-94)>

IV - ***-GU** / ***-RI** ~ ***-GU** / ***-A** ~ ***-RI** :

There is good reason to believe that the original value of the plural suffix of this declension was non-count, aggregate or mass. Manessy speaks of collective but this refers to an aggregate of potentially-countable items whereas some common lexemes with this suffix are ‘mist’, ‘laziness’, ‘mucus’ ; note particularly that, while bees are typically a referent where the swarm is salient and the single insect a member, in MP bee/bees is in Decl. III, while the IV.pl is the liquid/mass “honey”

MP “bee” √ **SI-** “a bee/bees” **siiya/siisi** “honey” **siiri**

Abstracts like “readiness” are also in this sub-declension. Presumably, however, those which are aggregates, plus the system-pressure towards singular-plural pairings, led to the adoption of ***-GU** as initially a ‘singulative’ and eventually to ***-GU/*-RI** as a normal singular/plural declension. Individual items may vary:

“rubbish” – ***SA-** + (***-GU/**)***-RI** : MP **sa'ari** (only) DB **sayiri** (only)
KLA **sauk** ‘a piece of rubbish’ / **sa'ad** ‘rubbish’

The original form of the suffix is problematic: it varies within and across languages between **-ri, -di, -ni, -to, -te** and maybe others. The most we can probably say at the moment is that it was an alveolar consonant different but similar to that in the II.sg. suffix. Vowels tend to vary, again within as well as across languages, at least one place (change between front-back, high-mid, mid-low). In these languages there does not seem to be a clear related pronoun, even in FR which preserves (has re-formed) a concord system. May be the MP/DB.KL **di** conceals two pronouns, II.sg. and IV.coll. (in MP it is used for abstracts but not inanimates as in DB/KL).

When the singular morphophonemics obscures the root, its form is usually clear in the plural:

MP **doo** “man, stick, dawadawa pod” >

dɔppa “men” **daari** “sticks” **doori** “dawadawas”

DB **doo/daba** **dɔyu/dari** **dɔyu/dɔri** (respectively)

In MP there is a clear rule that automatically uses *-a for the plural where the stem ends in a nasal; this is also found elsewhere but not so unequivocally. Dagbani manages to make the best of both worlds:

“skin (...)” – *GBAN- + *-GU / *-RI ~ -A :

MP/HG **gbɔŋɔ / gbana** “skin, hide, ‘throne’ (thing a chief sits on), chiefly office, leather, paper, card, letter, book ...”

DB **gbɔŋ / gbana** “skin, letter, paper ...”

gbɔŋ / gbandi “‘throne’ (thing a chief sits on), chiefly office”

KLA **gbaɔŋ / gbana** (as MP/HG)

Following a stem-final **d/r**, somehow a phonetic fellow of the suffix-initial, full or partial devoicing may occur:

“disease” – *DOOD- + *-GU/*-RI

MP **dooru / dootti**

DB **dɔro / dɔriti**

Following a stem-final **l** the suffix is usually *-A and there may be a nasalization which also occurs in verbs in similar contexts:

“leather bag” – *KOL- + -GU/*-A :

MP **kɔlug / kɔla or kɔna**

KL	kolug /	kon
DB	koligu /	kola, kolti or kolisi (!!)
HG	koligu /	kolisi

This last example leads us on to the problems of the singular *-GU. The pronoun is *KU, seen in the archaic survival in the Dagbani and Mampruli **bun' kuŋ ka ni** 'a thing which does not exist', traditional euphemism for the death of a chief ("he has become ..."). Hanga very commonly, Dagbani frequently, and other languages sporadically, show singular *-GU paired with plural *-SI. On the broader canvas this is definitely an aberration, but may justify setting up a further declension in the internal systems of the languages where this is too common to be considered an irregularity. In 'Reinterpretation' I am arguing that this is a generalising of the *-SI plural, probably helped by the similar behaviour of the 'weak G' in the two singular suffixes, leading to obfuscation. Also the tendency to drop the final **u** after the **g** has assimilated to **ŋ** (see singulars of "skin ..." in example above. General rules can probably cover the 'weak G' in both singular suffixes; the difference in the forms is due to the strong backing-and-rounding prosody earlier in the word anticipating the *-GU suffix; this is the main topic of 'SVMR'. In earlier examples see how "stick" *DA- and "dawadawa" *DO- come out the same in MP/DB with *-GU, and MP **gbəŋgu** "skin" ends up as **gbəŋ** in Dagbani. However the *G of *-GU maintains itself better after high vowels – see 'stick, dawadawa' above and:

"red" – *ZE- + *-GU : MP **zeoo/zeeri** DB **ziɛyɛu/ziɛri**
 (also in Decl.III : MP **zeaa/zeesi** DB **ziɛe/ziɛhi** HG **zee/zeesi**
 ("dawadawa pod" HG **doo/doori**)

Following *B- , *L- , *R- and *S- the *-GU and the *RI (or *-A) look pretty much like the starred forms some of these roots are useful to check on the existence and form of this declension in a language or dialect being surveyed.

"body-hair, fur, feather: single strand/mass" – KOB- + *-GU / *-RI :

MP **kəbgu/kəbri** DB **kəbigu/kəbiri** KLA **kon⁵bug/konbid**
 (HG goes to Decl.2, **kobiri/koba**, which makes it synonymous with "bone")

*L- 'skin bag' see above

⁵ vowel is nasalised

“fool” – JED- + *-GU \ *-A :

MP **gyerigu/gyera** DB **jerigu/jera** ~ **jeriti** (cf. **gbarigu/gbariti** “cripple”⁶)

“old” – *KUD- / *-GU / *-A : MP/DB/HG **-kurigu/-kura** KLA **-kudug/-kuda**

MP “puff-adder” bɔ̃sigu/bɔ̃sa ~ bɔ̃siri	DB “warning” nyimsigu/nyimsa
KLA “pot (type)” besug/besid	HG “black ant” nyesigu/nyesa

The vast majority of *-sigu nouns are gerunds and plural formations like (MP) **boosigu/boosa** “question/questions” are secondary.

After a velar stop devoicing may apply:

“(cooking-⁷)pot” *DUG- + *-GU / *-RI:

MP **dukku** / dugri KLA **duk** / **dugud**⁸ DB **duyu** / **duyiri** HG **dugu** / **dugiri**⁹

The membership of the paired declension is much as for II and III. Some variation where the same stem is in II or IV, either within one language or in different languages, I suspect to be due to the similarity of the form in the II.sg. and IV.pl (what I am calling here *-DI and *-RI but in MP both *-ri) – “rubbish” (see above) in HG is Decl. II **sagiri/saga**. As we have seen the subclass with *-RI only is non-countables. Both plural and singular suffix can be found as verbal noun markers, for derived stems ending in a velar and other derived stems respectively, see Derivation paper :
< [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Gerund](#) (Naden, Tony. 2006. (Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques 7 : 87-94) >.

⁶ MP **gbariga**

⁷ *DUG “to cook”

⁸ or **dugid**, the written vowel is probably just a representation of an epenthetic schewa with flavour from the adjacent segments.

⁹ **dugirisi** “groups of pots of different sizes”, see above

IV - *-FU / *-I

The declension I number as V is small and most members show vagaries not covered by strict regularity. However all the languages have “cow”¹⁰, “snake” and “money”¹¹ with a *-FU suffix in the singular and *-I in the plural. Other common members are “horse” (except HG which uses ‘riding-thing’ for both horse and donkey), “genet”, “millet/cereal”¹² and “guinea-worm”.

The *-FU is fairly unreactive morphophonemically. In this declension only it is the plurals which are funny. When you get down to the phonetic level there are some interesting effects (*F as well as *S may come out as [h] in various situations; with apocope of final vowel the suffixes *-SI and *-FU come out in Talni as [-h] with respectively spread and rounded lips).

There are two oddities in the plural: one is that the suffix *-I is anticipated by umlaut on a vowel in the root:

MP	“cow”	naafu /	na'a- /	nigi
	“snake”	waafu /	wa'a- /	wigi
	“coin/money”	la'afu /	la'a- /	ligidi

The notable item is “millet/cereal” where the root is just *KA- and when the *a becomes /i/ before *-I the *k may be fronted as in :

MP	“millet/cereal”	kaafu /	ka- /	kyi (DB/HG spelling chi)
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Learners and some analysts take some time to recognise the identity of **chi** and the **ka**-prefix (one type of guineacorn is often ‘red-millet’ **kazeoo** in MP) and **kaafu** if it exists.

The other oddity is that there is often an extra consonant between the root (as shown in the singular and the combining-form) and the *-I suffix, see ‘money’ above and:

¹⁰ *i.e.* general term for bovine, not female cow.

¹¹ sg. is ‘coin’, pl. is ‘money’

¹² see below : sg. is a single grain, pl. is collective for a mass of millet or for cereal crops in general.

MP	“guineaworm”	nyirifu	/	nyilli
	“adze”	leefu	/	leemi
	“genet”	peefu	/	peri ~ peemi
	“dawa-dawa seed”	zunfu	/	zunni

I have always assumed that this is stem allomorphy and not allomorphy of the suffix or an alternative suffix, but I’m not sure I could prove it. The range cannot be brought under either *-DI or *-RI and a third almost-homonymous suffix is a bit much. Sometimes the alveolar appears in the combining-form (see below ‘horse’), a third approach would be to say that the *-FU swallows a root-final consonant ... ?

There are other stem oddities in the declension:

“snake”	MP	waafu	/	wa'a-	/	wigi ~ wugi ~ wiigi
	DB	wahu	/	wayi'	/	yuri ~ wayiri ~ wɔyiri
	KL	waaf(o)	/	wa'a-	/	wiigi
“horse”	MP	yoofu	/	wuri-	/	wuri ~ yuri
	DB	wahu ~ wɔhu	/	wɔr'	/	yuri
	KL	wief(u)	/	wed-	/	widi

While about half of the members are some sort of creature (more if we include compounds with ‘horse’ (‘mantis’ in MP is ‘God’s horse’) and ‘snake’, they are creatures of very different kinds, and the rest is a rag-bag.

VI - *-M

The sixth declension is non-count, liquids and masses. There is no semantic contrast between members of this declension and the non-counts which appear in IV.pl. – founder-members here are “water”, “oil”, “fire”, “urine”, “salt”, “blood”, “milk”¹³, “pito”, “dew”, “sand” (World-English sense), “ashes”, “flour”, “medicine” (the ‘tree’ root with liquid/abstract suffix) but it also includes abstracts – MP **sonya/sooba** is

¹³ In the geographical grouping KLT-NB-FR(-TL?) there are different roots for human milk and animal milk, both are in this declension. **miliki** - canned, boxed or dried milk, is not!

“witch/witches” (irreg. decl.I), “witchcraft” is **soom**, **toom** is “bitterness”, **n-dɔ'ai** is “to bring forth”, **dɔ'am** is “birth”. This is even a productive pattern for abstracts from adjectives, detailed in ‘Derivation’ < [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Abstract](#) (Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques 7 : 87-94) >. The *-M suffix seems to resist any spectacular morphophonemic changes.

“water” MP/HG **koom** DB **kom** KLA **ku'om**

“pito” MP/HG/KLA **daam** DB **dam**

“ashes” MP **tampe'alim** HG **tampeelim** DB **tampiligim** KLA **tampeligim**

It seems that epenthetic vowels are inserted between stem and suffix in this declension, so there is not much morphophonemics. Only there is a progressive weakening to a syllabic *ɖ > nasalization of vowel > total loss as one moves south and west through the Dagaari/Birifor dialects into the extinction of the system.

Although the rubric is ‘non-count’, the pressure of the system towards singular/plural pairing means that several languages use a plural formation for senses like “three beers (please, waiter!)”, “drops or portions of water”, “types of flour”. A common suffix is *-MA < [TNnClas1u.doc#Class6pl](#) (Naden, Tony. 1981. *Class Pronoun Anaphora in Some North Ghanaian Gur Languages*. Unpublished seminar handout) >. It is not clear whether *-MA is another Gur ‘class’ (Manessy’s various reconstructions have numerous not-very-clear *-MV markers), is a local *ad hoc* strengthening of *-M, or is

*-M ± *-A .

FR on the other hand uses the *-FU suffix as a singulative giving **kɔhɔ** “a single drop, portion of water” the only logic I can see here would be that cows are the most salient member of Decl.V and are a herd beast, with *-FU as a single member. “coin/money” and “grain/cereals” would back this up, though most of the others are not things that come in aggregates,

VII – *-BU

There is only ordinary noun in this declension, and that sometimes moves into VI :

“t.z.” MP **sa'abu** HG **sogibu** KLA **sa'ab** DB **sayim**

but the forms are quite common because this is the regular ending for verbal nouns of non-extended roots (and spreading further in DB) : < [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Gerund](#) (Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques

7 : 87-94)>. There is a tendency already noticed for these gerunds to develop usage as common nouns: widely found is **diib(u)** functioning much more commonly as just “food” than as ‘act or manner of eating’ < [TN-VNderivn06u.doc#Gerund2noun](#) (Verb-to-nominal derivation in Mampruli and friends. Gur Papers/Cahiers Voltaïques 7 : 87-94)>. Like the *-M of Decl.VI the suffix seems to insert an epenthetic vowel after several of the consonant stems rather than assimilating. However roots ending in *B- may give a devoicing effect MP **n-sɔbi** “to write” **sɔppu** “writing”, and the other homorganic root-final consonant *M- may also lead to some adjustment: MP **n-wum** “to hear” **wumpu** “hearing”.

As in Decl.VI a plural may be made with *-MA to indicate several portions or types of t.z.: I have never heard a plural of **diibu** – the alternative formation of gerund-to-adjective (see above) is used MP **bundirigu** / **bundira** (lit. ‘thing-eatable/s’): also a plural adjective can be used – **disuma** “good foods”.

Extra-systemic Items

There is usually a way of making a plural of nouns which do not belong to a historic declension/class/gender. Because the most common basic-vocabulary items in this group are persons, I for a long time lumped these as Decl.I.a or I.x or I.bis. These person nouns are particularly “father” “mother” and “friend”. Though we talk of “my mothers/fathers”, ‘mothers’ being *genetrix*, her co-wives, and sisters, and her side of the family generally, and ‘fathers’ the *genitor* and his brothers and his side of the family, it might be that the terms were originally intrinsically singular as referring to the biological parents, and that in some social system a ‘friend’ was some unique relation, such as a ‘godfather’ in an initiation rite. In MP there is a disyllabic morpheme ***dima** which is suffixed or cliticised to these items to make the plural:

ba/badima “fathers” **ma/madima** “mother/s” **zo/zɔdima** “friend/s

This also functions as a free noun, more or less as plural of **daana** “person distinguished by or associated with sth.” So **Seydu dima** is “Seydu and his mates, gang, associates” and the **Tammali dima** are the people in/of Tamale.

HG is identical to M here: in DB the setup is the same but the form is **nima** ([nəma] ::

DB **ba/banima** **ma/manima** **zo/zɔnima** **Tamali nima**

In Kusaal there is a contrast, however, **dim(a)** is the “people of” form, the external plural being **nam(a)** :

KLA **saam/saamnam** **ma/manam** **zua/zuanam** Tamali **dim**

These external pluralisers are also used for items which are already plural, either ‘plural of majesty’:

“chief” – *NA- + *-A/*-BA :

MP **Naa!** “O Chief,” / **naaba** “a chief” / **nadima** “chiefs”

“senior sibling of the same sex” – *BE- + *-DI/*-A :

KLA **bier** “senior” / **bieya** “seniors” (*but more commonly*) **bieya nam**

This approach can also be used to mean “assorted collections or types of ...”, and in Hanga this sense can be obtained by adding *-si to an already plural form:

gagiri “a gourd” **gaga** “gourds (one type)”
gagasi “a number of gourds of different types”

The other class of nouns “which do not belong to a historic declension/class/gender” are loanwords. Sometimes the form of the original fits into an existing declension:

ENG “lorry” MP **loori** > pl. **loya** *cf.* **soori/sɔya**

ENG “book” MP **bukku** *cf.* **dukku**
but more often

ENG “books” MP **bugsi** > sg. **bukka** *cf.* **kugsi, kukka** “stools, stool”

It is much more common, though, just to stick **dima/nima/nam** on the end of the borrowed singular.

“trucks, carts” MP **tarɔkkudima** DB **tɔrokɔnima** KL **terokonam**

here again HG shows the generalisation of the *-si for pluralisation : **tirooko/tirookosi**