
A NOTE ON THE VOWELS OF BACHAMA

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Bachama is one of the Bata dialects, spoken by some 50,000 people in the Adamawa area of Nigeria, and in the adjacent territory of the Cameroons Republic. Like Hausa, it is classified as Chadic. Very little has been written on the language, but several scholars making preliminary studies have spoken of difficulty with the vowels. I found this too, particularly with two unrounded back to central vowels, transcribed here *u* for the close and *ø* for the half-close quality. I would hear the same word one day with one quality and the next day with the other, and doubted the accuracy of my perception until I found that indeed both qualities are regularly used in certain items, but not in all, according to the grammar of the 'piece'. I am illustrating this characteristic of Bachama here with examples of short verbal sentences, showing the different sorts of concord found.

1. *nda ðim ko:mboto*, -\ _ _ - - He sank the canie.
2. *nda ðyem ko:mbye:*, -\ _ _ - - He sank the canoes.

In 1 there is concord between the singular form of the verb *ðim* and the singular form of the noun object, *ko:mboto*; and in 2 between the plural forms *ðyem* and *ko:mbye:*, the differences between the two verb forms including different vowels. Both singular and plural forms are palatalized, this feature being emphasized in the plural form by the letter *y* in the transcription. There is a similar singular/plural concord between verb and object in the Aessive aspect forms, e.g.

3. *nda ðima: ko:mboto*, - - \ _ _ - - He went and sank the canoe.
4. *nda ðyama: ko:mbye:*, - - \ _ _ - - He went and sank the canoes.

A second type of concord is found between the subject and the verb, as in the following.

5. *ko:mboto a ðimo*, _ _ - - - - The canoe sank.
6. *ko:mbye: a ðyemo*, _ _ - - - - The canoes sank.
7. *nda zumo*, _ _ - - He ate.
8. *ta: zomo*, _ _ - - They ate.

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9. *ɲga 'uso*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ She cooked.
 10. *ta: 'oso*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ They cooked.

These examples have short vowels in the verb stems, but there are similar features with long vowels, e.g.

11. *nda hi:wo*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He prayed.
 12. *ta: hye:wo*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ They prayed.
 13. *nda tu:lo*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He chewed.
 14. *ta: t:lo*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ They chewed.

So far no verbs have been found with long *-u*. Verbs with a long vowel when the syllable is open, have a short vowel when it is closed, e.g.

15. *nda pi:ro*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He thatched.
 16. *nda pir vane*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He thatched the hut.
 17. *nda pyer vonye*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He thatched the huts.

Sentences 16 and 17 show concords of the first type, with the singular and plural forms of the noun object.

In addition to the two types of concord illustrated above, there are pairs of sentences with differences in the verb stem vowels of the sort associated with the singular/plural terms in the category of number, but where there are no concords with other elements in the sentence. E.g.

18. *nda mbura diye*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He went and put out the fire.
 19. *nda mbara diye*, $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ $\overset{-}{-}$ He went and beat out the fire.

Sentence 19 draws attention to the number of acts performed in extinguishing the fire, while sentence 18 does not. The other items in the sentences are the same for both. Here are examples where the relation of the singular or plural verb form is with the situation, and not with any other item in the sentence.

DISCUSSION

Dunstan:

Is there a one-to-one correspondence between the vowels of each pair of concord sets?

Goodman:

Might the phenomenon described correlate with separateness versus unity of the action rather than with singularity versus plurality of the object or subject.

Carnochan:

ad Dunstan: No, there is not a one-to-one correspondence. We have *-o/o* in 9 and 10, but there is also *-u/-o* in *nda tuwo* he wept; *ta: tʰwo*, they wept; and *-u/-o* in *nda puwo*; *ta: powo*, they bent down. The concord is not just a matter of vowel relationship, but requires other features of the syllable as a whole to be taken into account.

ad Goodman: The evidence offered by the last pair of examples points in the direction suggested by Mr. Goodman, and all the other examples could be treated in this way, which would be by reference to the situation. It nevertheless remains that a large number of examples show concords of the types mentioned, and in a formal analysis, one would wish to draw attention to them where possible.