# CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF PLURALIZATION OF NOUNS IN ENGLISH AND GOKANA LANGUAGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *No two languages are the same all over the world. Every language has what makes it different from another. This paper compares two languages – English and Gokana. The latter is a Niger-Congo language while the former is an Indo-European language. The aim was to specifically investigate how pluralization of nouns are formed in both languages. It was observed that while English uses suffixes to mark plurality, Gokana uses prefixes (which involve qualifiers, numerals, reduplication, quantifiers and determiners). Similarly, it was also revealed that while English uses regular and irregular form to mark plurality, Gokana employs different strategies (that cannot be considered regular or irregular) to mark plurality. Again, while pluralization of foreign nouns varies in English, pluralization of foreign nouns in Gokana cannot be accounted for since there is no evidence of foreign nouns in Gokana. The paper considers the implication of the study for the English language teaching and learning especially in a second language setting.*

**KEYWORDS:** Contrastive analysis, noun pluralization, implications.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of word formation, known as morphology, plays a fundamental role in understanding how languages function and convey meaning (Katamba, 1993). A central aspect of this is pluralization, the method in which languages express more than one entity. In English, a widely spoken Indo-European language, plurality is typically marked by adding regular suffixes like -s, or -es, although irregular form also exists (Quirk et al, 1985). In contrast, Gokana, a Niger-Congo language spoken in southern Nigeria, demonstrates different morphological strategies for indicating plural forms, many of which diverge from the English system (Hyman,1985, Williamson & Blench, 2000).

Understanding the structural differences between these two languages provides insight into their grammatical systems and supports application in language learning, bilingual education; and translation. Contrastive analysis – a method of comparing linguistic features across languages – offers a useful framework for identifying points of convergence (Lado, 1957, James, 1980).

This article explores and compares how noun pluralization is realized in English and Gokana. By highlighting both the sheared and distinct morphological features of the two languages. The study aims to contribute to cross – linguistic research and provide practical insights for educators, linguists, and leaners who engage with either language.

Gokana is one of the indigenous languages spoken in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The Gokana people live in some seventeen villages situated within the south – south geo – political zone of Nigeria in the Cross-River Basin of southern Nigeria. The villages where Gokana is spoken are: Bodo, Bomu, Deken, Barako, Biara, Baranyowa Dere, Lewe, Mogho, Kegbara Dere, Deeyor, Giokoo, Nweol, Gbe, Nwebiara, Kpor and Yeghe (Isaac, 2013). Gokana is spoken by approximately 330,500 people according to the result of March 2006 census released by the National Population Commission and given a 12-year statistical projection (Joshua, Ejele & Isaac, 2019, p. 191).

According to Isaac (2013), 'Gokana is the first language and mother tongue of the people of Gokana. It is the major means of communication in the locality. It is the dominant language used in every social setting in the area. It is also the language used for village politics. The language is used for all formal village gatherings. It is the language of the home'. Fubara (2025, p. 5) posits that 'there are not many non – native speakers of the language, and the language is not used outside its native environment except by the native speakers in the diaspora'.

Apart from the broader classification of Gokana as part of Niger- Congo languages, Gokana has been sub – classified into another Nigerian language group. For example, Ikoro (1996) had classified all the language spoken in the Ogoni axis of Rivers State, Nigeria (which Gokana is one of them) as *KEGBOID*. According to him, *Kegboid* is an acronym for Kana, Eleme, Gokana, and Baa; the – 'oid' suffix evinces that the languages are related. However, Vobnu (2001) faulted the label – kegboid and asserted that it denies the people their political and ethnic identity. Vobnu therefore, came up with a new label for the language group above, which he called *Ogonoid*. This label was adopted by Williamson (2004) and was further used by Bond (2006). According to Bond, the term kegboid minimizes the prestige of *Tee* (a language spoken in the Ogoni axis) since it is not reflected in the acronym. Secondly, it obscures the fact that there are possible other languages yet to be discovered and described. Based on the above argument, this paper therefore, adopts Ogonoid instead of Kegboid with the view that Ogonoid

does not deviate grammatically from the root word – Ogoni.  Gokana is therefore an Ogonoid language.


## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on contrastive analysis.  Contrastive analysis entails a detailed investigation of pairs of languages to ascertain their structural differences and similarities. Fisiak (1981, p. 2) contends that 'the main focus of contrastive studies is the problem of how a universal category X, realized in language A as Y, is rendered in language B as Z, and what may be possible consequences of this for a field application'. Suffice it to that contrastive analysis has pedagogical importance, considering its ability to show clearly the differences and similarities that exist in the languages.

 Lado (1957) argues that 'through contrastive analysis, we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulties in learning and those that will not by systematically comparing the structures of L1 and L2, and observed changes can be equated to the differences in L1 and L2 and their respective cultures'. Lado further stated that when elements of the two languages are similar, learning will be easy because of possible transfer. When they are difficult, learning will be difficult due to negative transfer or interference from the native language. He believes that by comparing the learner's native language and the target language, teachers can predict which areas will cause problems and design teaching materials to address them.

The relevance of contrastive analysis to this study is dependent on its synchronic exploration of the formation of pluralization of nouns in English and Gokana. Adopting C.A becomes necessary following the intrinsic dissimilarities between any two languages. This theory serves as a valuable tool to compare Gokana and English shedding light on both the parallels and dissimilarities in their plural formation.

**What is Pluralization**?

Pluralization is the process of transforming a word from its singular form (one) to its plural form (more than one). Corbett (2000, p. 10) posits that pluralization is 'the grammatical realization of the number category that signals a quantity greater than one. It may be overtly marked or inferred through syntactic or contextual clues '. This definition recognizes that pluralization signals a quantity that is greater than one. Again, Bauer (2003, p. 25) maintains that pluralization is 'a process of inflection whereby a language marks a distinction in number, usually contrasting singular with plural, often through morphological means '. This definition views pluralization as a type of inflection which does not change word class but mark grammatical categories. Pluralization is a vital part of grammar. It occurs in all languages of the world but differs in its formation from one language to another.

## Pluralization of Nouns in English

Ngulube (2019, p. 242) evinces that 'nouns differ and forming their plurals is never the same for all nouns. In forming the plural of any noun, the phonological component is usually taken into consideration in determining how the plural of a particular noun should be formed '. Ngulube further listed some ways of forming plurals to include the following:

Adding 's' to the singular form of the noun

| | |
|---|---|
| Cup | cups |
| Bottle | bottles |
| Student | students |
| School | schools |

Adding 'es' to nouns that ends in 's', 'ch', 'x', 'sh', 'z'

| | |
|---|---|
| Glass | glasses |
| Dish | dishes |
| Tax | taxes |
| Fox | foxes |

The plural formation of some nouns which ends with letter 'o' differ. Where a vowel precedes the 'o', the plural is formed by simply adding 's'

| | |
|---|---|
| Zoo | zoos |
| Radio | radios |

Where a consonant precedes the 'o', many other endings are used to form the plural.

Adding 's'

| | |
|---|---|
| Silo | silos |
| Photo | photos |

Adding 'es'

| | |
|---|---|
| Tomato | tomatoes |
| Potato | potatoes |

Others that end in 'f' or 'fe' have the 'f' changed to 'v' before any addition:

| | |
|---|---|
| Shelf | shelves |
| Self | selves |
| Knife | knives |
| Calf | calves |

Certain nouns have irregular plural forms:

| | |
|---|---|
| Child | children |
| Goose | geese |
| Sheep | sheep |

Foreign nouns keep their original plural forms:

| | |
|---|---|
| Datum | data |
| Cherub | cherubim |
| Crisis | crises |
| Stadium | stadia / stadiums |
| Phenomenon | phenomena |

Some foreign nouns either use their foreign plural or adopt a native English one:

| | |
|---|---|
| Appendix | appendixes/appendices |
| Curriculum | curriculums/curricula |
| Formula | formulas/formulae |

Some nouns are always used in singular form e.g.
        Furniture                      equipment
Some other nouns are always plural, but singular in usage e.g news, politics, physics, etc.

Based on the different examples above, it is obvious that the rule of pluralization in English is not something that can be overlooked.

## Pluralization in Gokana

Available literature on Gokana language reveals that the language does not show regular or irregular nouns(s); hence, pluralization in the language is marked in a peculiar way. Isaac (2003, p. 92) claims that 'nouns in Gokana lack grammatical means of showing singular – plural contrast as in English (e.g boy – boys, chair – chairs). There is no specific grammatical forms to designate nominal plurality '. According to Isaac, reference to the category of number is lexicalized in the language. He therefore identifies two lexical items which are *gbo* 'group' and *pa* as pluralizers.

Isaac further submits that *gbo* occurs as a general plural marker in the noun phrase, adding that whenever *gbo* directly precedes any noun, the noun acquires a plural reading.

Examples:                  gbò                      bòl
                         Pl                      goat
                         'goats'

Again, Isaac explains that unlike *gbo*, the pluralizer *pa* has a limited application as a result of certain semantic restrictions, adding that it can be used in specifying plurality only for nouns that names a group of people acting as an indivisible unit. Example

                       Pà                      bon
                       Pl                      villager
                         'villagers'

Apart from *gbo* and *pa* as pluralizers in Gokana, Isaac also identifies classifiers and numerals as pluralizers in Gokana. Since no other work has faulted the claim of Isaac on the above noun pluralization in Gokana, this work therefore agrees with this claim but with different approach. The reason is that the two works examine two different things. While Isaac's work examines the grammar of Gokana, this present study focuses on pluralization of nouns in Gokana.

## Data analysis on noun pluralization in Gokana

### The use of gbò as plural marker

The word *gbo* is used to precedes a noun in Gokana to mark plurality. Consider the data below:

### Data 1:

    (a)                Gbò                      bélè
                         Pl                      bag
                          'bags'
    (b)                Gbò                      gbógò
                         Pl                      dog
                        'dogs'

(c)              gbὸ                    nen

                 Pl                  person

                 'persons'

(d)              Gbὸ                bóli

                 Pl                  plate

                 'plates'

(e)              gbὸ                gbárà

                 Pl                  man

                 'men'

(f)              gbὸ                pianwin

                 Pl                  child

                 'children'

Note that without the plural marker in data (1 – f) above, the nouns may hover between a singular and plural reading as in the following:

(a.i)         bélè as in:                 bá doma bélé

                                                   They bring bag

                  'bags'               'they brought a bag/ they brought bags'

(b.i)         gbógò  as in:              bà kél gbógò

            Dog                        they slaughter dog

                 'Dogs'           they slaughter a dog/ they slaughter dogs

**The use of Pá as plural Maker**

*Pa* is used in Gokana to mark plurality when it precedes a noun as shown below:

**Data 2:**

(a)           Pá                  vigà

           Pl                  relation

                'relations'

(b)  Pá                    tǫ/bè

     Pl                    family

           'family members'

(c)  Pá                    bon

     pl                    villagers

          'villager'

(d) Pá

Pl                                              kóó
                                                Friend
            'friends'

Observe that the nouns in data 2 (vigà,tọ, bon and kóó) appear to be singular when they are alone but plural when they are proceeded by pà. This can further be demonstrated as follows:

(a.i)        Ndà      iyè           vigà

             I        have a       relation (singular)
             Ndà      iyè          pá vigà
             I        have         relations (plural)

(b.i)        a        kóó          kè     dù

             His/her friend        is     coming (singular)

             Pá       kóó          ké     dù

             His/her friends       are    coming (plural)

Note that there are not many '*pá* plural marker in the language unlike the gbó plural marker'. This is attributed to some semantic restriction. However, while gbo can be used for both animate and inanimate, the usage of pá is restricted to only humans.

**The use of Classifiers as Plural Markers**

Classifiers can also be used to mark plurality in Gokana. This can be achieved through complete reduplication of a given classifier. Example:

**Data 3:**

(a)
     (i)     Bȯl                              záábèkéé

             Classifier (henceforth cl)       pawpaw

                     'pawpaw'
     (ii)    Bȯl     bȯl                      záábèkéé

             Cl      cl                       pawpaw
                     'pawpaws'
(b)
     (i)     Gü                               gbáá

             Cl                               belly

                     'pregnancy'

     (ii)    Gü      gü                       gbáá

             Cl      cl                       belly

                     'pregnancies'

(c)

    (i)    Kpȯ                           dem
            Cl                            stone
                             'stone'

    (ii)   Kpȯ   kpȯ                     dem
            Cl     cl                    stone
                           'stones'

(d)

    (i)    Gbúlù                        giă
            Cl                         yam
                         'yam'

    (ii)   Gbúlù   gbúlù               giă
            Cl      cl                 yam
                         'yams'

Recall that the items in data 3 above demonstrate that different classifiers can be used to mark plurality in Gokana. Furthermore, the (i) counterparts of the nouns in (3 a – d) have a singular reading while the (ii) counterparts have a plural meaning. Observe that the plural reading of the (ii) nouns is attributed to the total reduplication of the preceding classifiers. Note that in Gokana, a reduplicated classifier changes the number of the following noun. It makes the noun to have a plural interpretation. This is shown in the sentence below:

1.           Lebe      nem       záábèkéé
              Lebe      gave me a   pawpaw (singular)
2.           Dumle    nem  bȯl  bȯl  záábèkéé
              Dumle     gave me (some)  pawpaws (plural).
3.           A   tóvi   kpȯ   dem
              He   threw (a)     stone… (singular).
4.           A   tóvi   kpȯ  kpȯ  dem
              He    threw (some) stones … (plural)

### The use of Numerals as plural markers

Cardinal numerals can be used to indicate plurality in the number category of Gokana nouns. Examples:

**Data 4:**

    (a)    Báá                bélè
          Two                  bag
                'two bags'

    (b)    Vȯȯ             bȯb
          Five              bundle

                'five bundles'

| (c) | téni | déé |
|---|---|---|
| | Four | day |

'four days'

| (d) | álàbà | nen |
|---|---|---|
| | Seven | person |

'seven persons'

| (e) | Óp | è̀ |
|---|---|---|
| | Ten | moon |

'ten months'

Observe that item (a) in data 4 above has *baa* which means two. It precedes the noun *bele* (bag) to indicate plurality. This, therefore, gives us *baa bele* – two bags. The same thing we observe in item (a) is also applicable to items (4 b – e). Going further, è̀ as used in item (e) of the data above means moon. However, in Gokana, è̀ is used when reference is made to month. For example, one can say:

Móni kà è̀ ne é di è̀
What month are we?
Or
Ndà I záli fáá m è̀ éà ké dùi
I will buy a car by next month.

In sum, the morphemes gbò, pá, classifiers and numerals provide number marking on Gokana nouns and therefore, serve as pluralizer in Gokana language.

**Contrast: English vs Gokana pluralization**

Firstly, it is important to note that both Gokana and English are considered to have emerged from two different languages family – Niger-Congo and Indo-European language families.

It was observed that while English uses suffixes to mark plurality, Gokana uses prefixes. Similarly, it was also revealed that while English uses regular and irregular form to mark plurality, Gokana employs different strategies (that cannot be considered regular or irregular) to mark plurality. Again, while pluralization of foreign nouns varies in English, pluralization of foreign nouns in Gokana cannot be accounted for since there are no foreign nouns in Gokana.

As also observed, English can mark plurality without any prefix. Gokana on the other hand cannot mark plurality without the use of prefix. Furthermore, noun- verb agreement for plurality is a general feature in English while it is not in Gokana. It was further revealed that in English, plurality is overt mainly through morphological change while in Gokana, much of number interpretation is covert.

**Teaching implication**

1. Materials to be used for teaching must be structured in a way that it will show the structural differences, pointing out that English uses clear overt marker while Gokana does not.

2.    Teachers must make pluralization rules in English to be part of the curriculum that is meant for the Gokana - speaking learners of English.

3.    Teachers need to point out regular vs irregular plurals in English (e.g books, places and children) and contrast with Gokana patterns.

4.    Teachers can employ listening and pronunciation exercises to expatiate the differences that exist in the languages.

**Learning Implication**

1.    Learners will require some exposures and contextual practice in other to be familiar with English plural forms.

2.    Gokana learners are likely going to use interlanguage especially where pluralization is inconsistent or influenced by L1 rules.

Some of the errors that may likely occur on the part of the learners include:

(i)    Overgeneralization. For example: *mans* instead of men.

(ii)    Omission of plural markers. For example: *two chance* instead of two chances.

**CONCLUSION**

The comparison between English and Gokana noun pluralization shows clearly how each language expresses plurality. English makes use of clear and consistent morphological rules which include adding suffixes like -s or es or by applying irregular changes to mark plural

nouns. However, Gokana often does not use direct morphological changes to mark plural nouns. Instead, it employs other strategies such as classifiers, numerals, reduplication, or the use of specific words like determiners to convey plural meanings. These contrasts show case the typological divergence between English and Gokana. Analysing these differences enhance our understanding of language diversity and at the same time, provides useful insights for language learning translation and linguistic research.

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