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The verb final suffix /-m/ in Ikwere: a rare case of agreement in a language with no agreement system

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Abstract

Ikwere verbs in sentences can sometimes contain the nasal bilabial consonant /-m/ in the final position. We notice however, that this feature is fairly marginal in the language because the consonant in question mainly occurs where the subject of the sentence is the first person singular. This article claims therefore, that /-m/ marks agreement based on person, meaning that it is evidence of a cross-referencing between the subject noun and the verb. Interestingly, the first person singular does not automatically co-occur with /-m/. On the other hand, /-m/ may co-occur with the second and third persons singular as well as the first, second and third persons plural. The aim of this article is to outline the conditions under which this agreement occurs. And while hinging on the absence of noun class agreement or agreement based on gender and number in this language, it is finally suggested that the subject-verb agreement in Ikwere should be regarded as a residual of a more elaborate archaic system which, like the noun class system in some Niger Congo languages (cf. Welmers 1973: 189) including Ikwere, will sooner or later become obsolete.

Keywords: grammatical agreement, category of person, post-verbal nasal consonant, male and female distinction, verb affixes, Igboid languages.

Introduction

There is no known system of agreement in Ikwere.¹ That is if we consider agreement as “the covariance or matching of features between two separate elements, such as noun and adjective” (Corbett, 1994: 55).

If we take Bantu languages for instance,² they have a noun class system. The thing with their kind of noun class system is that it has what Poulos (1990) calls concordial agreement. This means that categories in the language which are grammatically related to the noun, show agreement with the class of the noun by using a concord of that class.³ Put differently, there is agreement between subject

¹ Ikwere is an Igboid language of the Benue-Congo branch. It is spoken by over a million people in Rivers State. (Estimate based on 1991 population census, published in the *Annual abstract of statistics* by Federal Office of Statistics, Nigeria, 1998).

IPA symbols are used in Ikwere examples except that dʒ is replaced with j; tʃ with c, and j with y. ɸ and ʙ are nonexplosive, bilabial stops with no velar occlusion. They resemble their explosive counterparts p, b in several ways but differ from them in that they involve no buildup of air pressure behind the occlusion. The symbol gb (replaced in some of my works elsewhere with ɸ) represents a sound that is fully voiced and nonimplusive while kp (replaced in some of my works elsewhere with ʙ) is preglottalized, voiced prior to release, and frequently imploded. Although they are also written gb and kp in the current orthography of Ikwere, we must avoid confusing them with labiovelar stops such as those found in Gbe languages. (Interested readers may see Clements & Osu 2002). Tones in Ikwere are indicated as follows: á for High, à for Low, ǎ for Rising, â for Falling, and ǎ̄ for Down-step High. The tilde under a vowel indicates nasalization. Ikwere has a system of vowel harmony according to which with a few exceptions, all vowels of a word are either [+ATR] or [-ATR]. Hence, *-lem* changes to *-lem̃*, *-g^wu* to *-g^wũ*, *-ru* to *-rũ* and the 3SG *o* to *õ*. Ikwere also has a system of nasal harmony according to which nonobstruent sounds nasalize if followed or preceded by a nasal vowel -indicated with a tilde-; for instance the underlying form for *-nem* is *-nem̃*. (See Clements & Osu 2003, 2005, Osu & Clements 2009 for further discussion).

² Mohamadou (1994: 20, 2016: 159-160) also talks of agreement in Peul, an Atlantic language spoken in the Aadamaawa region in Cameroon (alternate name, Fulani, spoken in Nigeria). And though Mòurè, a Gur language spoken in Burkina Faso and its environs, also has a noun class system, it does not seem to have any concordial agreement. See Kabore (1985 & 2016).

³ Poulos (1990: 5) writes: “Nouns are put into classes according to the form of their prefix. In other words, speakers of these languages use a system of prefixes to classify the “constituents” of the universe. So, for

nouns and other elements of the sentence (verbs, modifiers and pronouns). And this agreement is marked using specific affixes. Each subject noun determines what affix is used. (Watters 2000: 202). Ikwere does not have a noun class system and does not mark any noun class agreement of the sort found in Bantu languages.

Afro-Asiatic languages such as Amharic (see e.g. Negga 2016) and Touareg (see e.g. Aghali 2016),⁴ as well as Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan languages (Welmers 1973: 248) are characterized by the fact that they have a gender system. These languages formally mark the difference between masculine and feminine gender. Here again, Ikwere has no gender system and does not grammatically mark the difference between masculine and feminine gender.

Further, Ikwere does not mark any difference between singular nouns (or verbs) and plural nouns (or verbs). In other words, Ikwere has no agreement system based on grammatical number.

However, the Ikwere verb sometimes contains the /-m/ consonant in the final position. A careful analysis reveals that this consonant mainly occurs where the subject of the sentence is the first person singular. We may therefore consider the feature under focus as fairly marginal in contemporary Ikwere.

Interestingly, the first person singular does not consistently co-occur with /-m/. On the other hand, we find cases where /-m/ co-occurs with the second, third persons singular as well as the first, second and third persons plural. How do we account for all this?

In English for instance we have *I am* as opposed to *He is*. The verb form indicates that we are dealing with the first person singular in the first case and the third person singular in the second case. Likewise in French, “the pronoun *Nous* automatically leads to the use of the inflectional morpheme *-ons* in the verb *chantons*. In other words, *-ons* signifies that the subject noun is the first person plural (Culioli 1968: 28)”.

The aim of this article is to outline the conditions under which the agreement between the first person singular subject and the verb takes place.

This article is organized as follows: First I provide data showing that Ikwere has no agreement system whatsoever. The discussion draws on the absence of agreement based on gender and number. Second, I argue that the agreement feature is not totally absent in Ikwere. I show that there are instances where the verb and the first person singular subject must agree otherwise the sentence is not well formed. I also show that such agreement is marked by placing the nasal consonant /-m/ in the final position of the verb. I then examine the various conditions under which this consonant occurs in the verb. Third, I turn to the conditions under which the subject-verb agreement does not apply. Finally, I suggest that the subject-verb agreement in Ikwere, a language with no agreement system, should be regarded as a residual of a more elaborate archaic system that existed in the language.

Ikwere, a language with no grammatical agreement system

The discussion first focuses on the category of number, and then on gender and ends with the category of person.

Lack of agreement based on number

A typical feature of Ikwere nouns (as opposed to verbs) is that they are invariable i.e., they do not change form. Thus, a noun remains morphologically invariable irrespective of the number value of the subject noun, as in (1):

example, a referent such as “a person” would be categorised differently from a referent such as “an instrument”. [...]. By the phenomenon of concordial agreement is meant that those categories in the language which have some or other bearing on, or which are grammatically related to the noun, show agreement with the class of the noun by using a concord of that class. So, for example, if a noun is used which belongs to class 2, and an adjective is used with it, then the adjective would incorporate a concord of class 2 as well; and in the same light, if a verb were used with the same noun, then the verb would also contain a concord of class 2.”

⁴ We also find gender systems in many Indo-European languages such as German, French, Portuguese and Russian.

(1)	ótù	íwó	‘a dress’
	1	dress	
	íwó	étó	‘three dresses’
	dress	3	
	íwó	tó ⁺ lú	‘nine dresses’
	dress	9	
	ótù	ék ^w ú	‘a laddle’
	1	laddle	
	óg ^w ú	ék ^w ú	‘20 laddles’
	20	laddle	

Besides, the verb form does not vary with respect to person or number, as illustrated in (2) to (7) below:

(2) m̀ ǹèrì wírí.
 m̀ n-èrì wírí
 1SG PROG-V.B.eat food
 I am eating.

(3) ì ǹèrì wírí.
 ì n-èrì wírí
 2SG PROG-V.B.eat food
 You are eating, right?

(4) ò ǹèrì wírí.
 ò n-èrì wírí
 3SG PROG-V.B.eat food
 S/he is eating.

(5) à ǹèrì wírí.
 à n-èrì wírí
 1PL PROG-V.B.eat food
 We are eating.

(6) ànò ǹèrì wírí.
 ànò n-èrì wírí
 2PL PROG-V.B.eat food
 You are eating, right ?

(7) bè ǹèrì wírí.
 bè n-èrì wírí
 3PL PROG-V.B.eat food
 They are eating.

In a very few cases however, Ikwere distinguishes between unitary and multiple terms. Where such distinction occurs, Ikwere uses different lexical items that do not resemble each other. This is illustrated with kinship terms⁵ in table (1) below:

⁵ According to Emenanjo (1978: 208-209), some Igbo dialects (including Onitsha cf. Williamson 1972: 177 and 368), still have cases where the singular is opposed to the plural, especially among kinship terms. Consider:

<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>	
ògòlì	‘married woman’	ìgòlì	‘married women’
òkolo	‘young man’	ìkolo	‘young men’
okènyè	‘old man’	ìkènyè	‘old men’
òkpòro	‘woman’	ìkpòro	‘women’
òhà	‘people’	ìhà	‘peoples’

UNITARY		MULTIPLE	
ńwǔ	'child'	rómò	'children'
ńyẹ	'individual, person'	éle	'individuals, person'
ńwǔ ómá	'good child'	rómò (tàkírí) ómá	'good children'
ńyẹ ómá	'good individual, person'	éle ómá	'good individuals, persons'
ńwǔ ń ⁺ dá	'father's child'	rómò ń ⁺ dá	'father's children'
ńyẹ òk ^w ǎ	'old individual, person'	éle òk ^w ǎ	'old individuals, persons'

Table 1: Unitary vs multiple terms

Lack of noun class agreement

A noun class agreement, particularly in the Bantu languages, implies that in a given sentence, every word (verb, numeral, modifiers, etc.) contains a prefix that cross-references it to the subject noun. This is illustrated in (8) and (9) below with Ejagham (Ekoid Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo) spoken in Nigeria and Cameroon, and Iteyè, Bantu, B71a, spoken in Gabon.⁶

- (8) yè àkpáŋ èbhĩn èjè ényàné (Watters J.R. 2000: 201)
 yè à-kpáŋ è-bhĩn èj-é é-nyàné
 C1:3SG C1:PFV-hoe C5-farm C5-POSS:3SG C5-yesterday
 She hoed her farm yesterday.

- (9) bàánà bàkjèyè bàkínà (Tsoue P. 2009: 45)
 bà-ánà bà-kjèyè bà-kín-à
 CL2-child PND-small PV-RAD-VF
 Small children are dancing.

The noun class prefixes are in (8) *e-* and its variants, and in (9) *ba-*. There are no noun classes or noun class prefixes in contemporary Ikwere. Thus, in (10) and (11) below, no noun prefix is repeated in the verb (*wàg^wò*, *nèté*) or in the complement (*àwà*, *é⁺rí*).

- (10) ótù ék^wè wàg^wò àwà.
 ótù ék^wè wà-g^wò àwà
 one stool V.B.break-STAT REDUP
 A stool is broken.

- (11) rómòtàkírí nèté é⁺rí.
 rómò-tàkírí n-èté érí
 children-small PROG-V.B.-dance dance
 Small children are dancing.

Lack of gender agreement

Ikwere does not formally assign units to classes on the basis of gender. Thus, examples in (12) do not belong to the masculine, the feminine or the neutral gender.

- (12)
- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| áyâ | 'eye' |
| ánú óhyá | '(meat+bush=) animal' |
| ávù | 'fish' |
| bádù | 'human being' |
| èhám | 'sun' |
| èlì | 'soil, ground' |
| ísísí | 'plant, tree' |
| ódó | 'mortar' |
| ógbò mí ⁺ ní | '(means of locomotion+water=) canoe' |

⁶ See Kadima (1969: 82) for fuller discussion of noun classes in Bantu languages. But see Delplanque (1996) for a different view.

The Amharic language (Afro-Asiatic family) in Ethiopia opposes the 3rd person masculine singular and the 3rd person feminine singular as illustrated in (13a) but neutralizes such opposition in the 3rd person plural as in (13b).

- (13a) 3e m.sg əss-u ‘he’ vs 3e f.sg əss-wa, ‘she’ (Negga 2016)
 (13b) ənnä-əss-u, ‘they’

The French language (Indo-European, Romance) opposes 3rd person masculine singular and plural with the 3rd person feminine singular and plural. As for the English language (Indo-European, Germanic), it distinguishes between the 3rd person masculine singular *he* and the feminine counterpart *she*. Here again, the opposition is neutralized in the 3rd person plural, just like in Amharic.

The situation is slightly more complex in Telugu (a Dravidian language spoken mainly in the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states, in India). Telugu distinguishes between the 3rd person masculine singular and the 3rd person singular feminine and neuter. It also opposes the 3rd person plural masculine and feminine with the 3rd person plural neuter. The masculine singular is marked with the *-du* suffix while the feminine and neuter counterparts bear the *-ei* suffix. Further, the masculine and feminine plural have the *-ru* suffix while the neuter bears the *-yi* suffix. This is further illustrated in (14) to (17), drawn from Aikhenvald (2000: 46).

- (14) waad(u) unnaadu.
 he be+MASC.SG
 He is.
- (15) ad(i) unnaði.
 she/it be+FEM/NEUTRE.SG
 She/it is.
- (16) waaru unnaaru.
 they be+MASC/FEM.PL
 They (those persons: M,F.) are.
- (17) aw(i) unnaayi.
 they be+NEUTRE.PL
 They (those things) are.

Quite unlike the languages mentioned above, the *m* ‘1SG’, *i* ‘2SG’, *ò* ‘3SG’, *à* ‘1PL’, *ánò* ‘2PL’, *bé* ‘3PL’ in Ikwere are not grammatical gender markers. Besides, they can interchangeably refer to a male or female person. It turns out from the discussion so far that Ikwere does not have a grammatical gender system and consequently does not mark any agreement based on gender.

Male and female distinction

Nonetheless, Ikwere does express sexual differences utilizing lexical items that embody biological features of male and female. This is particularly seen in N₁N₂ relationships. The interesting thing here is that the terms used for such differences depend on whether we are dealing with human beings or not.

Human beings

Sexual differences in relation to the human category are expressed using *rùkâ* for male and *riyâ* for female. Thus, the speaker in (18a) wishes to know the sex of a newly-born baby. The speaker in (18b) uses *rùkâ* to refer to a male child (a boy) and *riyâ* to refer to a female child (a girl).

- (18a) ò mòrò kìní.
 ò mò-rò kìní
 3SG V.B.deliver-EFF what
 What did she deliver (meaning ‘what is the sex of the baby she delivered’)?
- (18b) ò mòrò rùkâ/riyâ.

ò mòrò rùkâ/rìyâ
 3SG V.B.deliver-EFF male/female
 She delivered a boy/a girl.

Actually, in N₁N₂ relationships, *rùkâ* (roughly ‘male’) and *rìyâ* (roughly ‘female’) occur in the N₂ position. They help to determine the sexual value of N₁ as the latter value is initially unspecified. Consider the following:

(19) ñyé rùkâ, byă.
 ñyé rùkâ byă
 person.adult male V.B.come
 Sir, (please) come!

(20) ñyé rìyâ, byă.
 ñyé rìyâ byă
 person.adult female V.B.come
 Madam, (please), come.

(21) ñhê ò wèrù bó ótù wéné rùkâ kpóy.
 ñhê ò wè-rù bó ótù wéné rùkâ kpóy
 chose 3SG V.B.have-DAT V.B.be.IDF one collateral male only
 He has just one brother/cousin.

(22) ñhê ò wèrù bó ótù wéné rìyâ kpóy.
 ñhê ò wè-rù bó ótù wéné rìyâ kpóy
 chose 3SG V.B.have-DAT V.B.be.IDF one collateral female only
 He has just one sister/cousin.

Non human categories

Such differences are however expressed outside the class of humans (i.e., fauna, flora, ailments (sickness), price of commodities, drum sounds, and so on), by using *ókê* for male and *éwèrè* for female. See examples in (23):

(23)
 ókê ákòṁ ‘male malaria’⁷ versus éwèrè ákòṁ ‘female malaria’
 ókê rók^wà ‘male drum’ versus éwèrè rók^wà ‘female drum’
 ókê kóm ‘male cat’ versus éwèrè kóm ‘female cat’
 ókê àtábàlà ‘male tilapia’ versus éwèrè àtábàlà ‘female tilapia’
 ókê ñwṓ ‘male child’ versus éwèrè ñwṓ ‘female child’

In an N₁N₂ relationship, *ókê* and *éwèrè* naturally occur in N₁ position. Besides, they combine with terms irrespective of whether they have or do not have biological sex.

A more complete study (Osu 2003) shows that *ókê* associates with features such as aggressiveness, danger, urgency, violence, excessiveness and the male sex value while *éwèrè* associates with mildness, kindness, melodiousness and the female sex value.

What this means is that the speaker selects these features based on the term *ókê* or *éwèrè* combines with.

More importantly, we must take note of the fact that N₁ and N₂ do not contain any affix indicating the agreement between one term and another. Simply put, Ikwere does not mark any agreement based on gender or noun classes.

⁷ A male kind of malaria is severe in nature. It causes unbearable pains. A female kind goes together with bearable pains. A male kind of drum has a high-pitched, harsh sound. It is beaten in a community to signal a state of emergency while the female kind has a bass low-pitched sound that is soft and melodious.

Agreement based on person

We have seen that Ikwere does not mark agreement based on number and gender. But when it comes to the category of person, we find that in a given utterance, the verb may contain the nasal consonant /-m/ in the ultimate position. I claim that this consonant is evidence of the verb-subject agreement. The question is: what are the basic conditions for /-m/ to occur?

Conditions for /-m/ to occur in the verb final position

For /-m/ to occur, it will require one or more of the following conditions:

- (a) The subject of the verb is the first person singular
 - (b) The subject of the verb is the first person singular in the emphatic form and with contrast effect
 - (c) The verb contains the primary verb prefix *y-* or any of the following suffixes *-g^wu*, *-lem* and *-ru*
- Each of these cases is examined in detail.

(a) *The subject of the verb is the first person singular*

The speaker in (24) explains why she has put on weight.

- (24) *m̩* *zì-m* *rímé.*
 1SG V.B.be.LOC-AGR interior
 I am pregnant.

Consider an altogether different situation:

I earlier refused to lend money to a friend who later finds me with a bundle of naira notes and shows his surprise to see me with such amount of money. To calm him down, I can reply:

- (25) *í wàzíméné nó m̩ ríḡ^wúm cíkè óḡ^wó.*
 í *wàzímé-né* *nó* *m̩* *rí-g^wú-m* *cíkè* *óḡ^wó*
 2SG V.B.forget- NON AFF PFT.INTERROG LINK 1SG V.B.eat-STAT-AGR chike debt
 Don't forget I owe Chike money?
 (The verb final /-m/ occurs in the verb *ríḡ^wúm*)

- (26) *m̩ zèrùm nhê dǎ.*
 m̩ *zè-rù-m* *nhê* *dǎ.*
 1SG V.B.go-EFF-AGR thing Daa
 I went to Daa's house.

Examples (24) to (26) clearly show that it is only when the first person singular *m* occurs in the sentence that the /-m/ consonant occurs in the final position of the verb (see *zì-m*, *ríḡ^wú-m óḡ^wó*, *zèrù-m*).

(b) *The subject of the verb is the first person singular in the emphatic form and with contrast effect*

The specific thing with the first person singular in the emphatic form and with contrast effect is that the speaker tends to consider the person referred to as a member of a class. He focuses on the person without clearly stating that he excludes the other members of the class with respect to the process in question. This is illustrated in (27) to (29):

- (27) *méé bóm n̩wḡ wḡgà yáa bó n̩wḡ òrǐjí.*
 méé *bó-m* *n̩wḡ* *wḡgà* *yáa* *bó* *n̩wḡ* *òrǐjí*
 1SG.CONTR.EMPH V.B.be.IDF-AGR child Woga him V.B.be.IDF child Oriji
 I am Woga's child, (while) she is Oriji's child.

- (28) *méé byàwám ó.*
 méé *byàwá-m* *ó*
 1SG.CONTR.EMPH V.B.come-AGR SFP
 As for me, I'm going.

- (29) mée zég^wòm ó.
 mée zè-g^wò-m ó
 1SG.CONTR.EMPH V.B.go-STAT.NEG-AGR SFP
 As for me, I am not going.

As can be seen, the speaker does not in any way specify whether other people are going or not. He talks of his own case, no more, no less.

c) *The verb contains a primary verb affix y- (prefix), -gwu, -lem et -ru (suffixes)*

This is illustrated in (30) – (35) below.

- (30) m̀ yòwǎm máyâ nǎg^wò.
 m̀ y-òwǎ-m máyâ nǎg^wò
 1SG MOD-V.B.drink-AGR wine palm
 I drink palm wine (instead). (The speaker first refuses the drink offered him and then proposes an alternative choice).

- (31) m̀ zèg^wùm ék^wò.
 m̀ zè-g^wù-m ék^wò
 1SG V.B.go-STAT-AGR farm
 I am going to the farm. (Answer to ‘where are you going?’)

- (32) m̀ zég^wòm.
 m̀ zè-g^wò-m
 1SG V.B.go.NEG-STAT-AGR
 I refuse to go (so don’t just insist).

[A friend looked for me but didn’t find me at home. I tell him why:]

- (33) m̀ zèrùm nhê dá.
 m̀ zè-rù-m nhê dá
 1SG V.B.go-EFF-AGR thing Daa
 I went to Daa’s house.

- (34) nǎg^wá m̀ byálém.
 nǎg^wá m̀ byá-lém-rí
 alright 1SG V.B.come-AFF PFT.AGR
 Alright, I have come (that’s what you wanted).

- (35) nǎg^wá m̀ byâlèm.
 nǎg^wá m̀ byá-lè-m̀
 alright 1SG V.B.come-NEG.PFT-AGR
 Alright, I admit, I didn’t come.

Examples (30), (31), (33) and (34) are affirmative sentences while (32) and (35) are negative sentences. They all have the verb final /-m/.

Conditions under which /-m/ does not occur in the verb final position

There are three basic conditions under which the subject-verb agreement does not hold.

- The subject of the verb is not the first person singular
- The subject of the verb is the emphatic first person singular with the exclusion effect
- The verb contains a primary verb prefix (n- or z-)

Each of these conditions is hereafter examined in detail.

a) *The subject of the verb is not the first person singular*

Consider the set of examples below. The subject of the verb is the 2nd person singular in (36), the 3rd person singular in (37), the 1st person plural in (38), the 2nd person plural in (39) and the 3rd person

plural in (40). Further, the subject is Osi in (41). The absence of /-m/ in all these examples clearly adds weight to my claim that the verb final nasal consonant only occurs with the 1st person singular.

[One can say to a friend who isn't careful with the way he spends money.]

- (36) í wàzíméné nó í ríḡ^wú cíkè óḡ^wḡ ?
 í wàzímé-né nó í rí-g^wú cíkè óḡ^wḡ
 2SG V.B.forget-NON AFF PFT.INTERROG LINK 2SG V.B.eat-STAT chike debt
 Have you forgotten that you owe Chike some money? (The focus here is the verb *ríḡ^wú*).

- (37) ò zèrù nhê dǎ.
 ò zè-rù nhê dǎ
 3SG V.B.go-EFF thing Daa
 S/he went to Daa's house. [Reply to a friend who wanted to see Chike.]

- (38) à zì nó rímé órò wírí.
 à zì nó rímé órò wírí
 1PL V.B.be.LOC LINK interior house food
 We are in the kitchen. [A reply to a neighbour searching for us.]

- (39) ànò zèrù nhê dǎ.
 ànò zè-rù nhê dǎ
 2PL V.B.go-EFF thing Daa
 Did you go to Daa's house?

The question reading here is certainly brought about by the situational context and the speaker's intonation.

- (40) bè zèrù nhê dǎ.
 bè zè-rù nhê dǎ
 3PL V.B.go-EFF thing Daa
 They went to Daa's house.

- (41) ósì zì nó rímé órò wírí.
 ósì zì nó rímé órò wírí
 ósì V.B.be.LOC LINK interior house food
 Osi is in the kitchen. [A reply to a neighbour who came looking for Osi.]

Any attempt to introduce /-m/ while the subject is not the first person singular leads to an unnatural sequence as in (42):

- (42) *ò zèrùm nhê dǎ
 ò zè-rù-m nhê dǎ
 3SG V.B.go-EFF-AGR thing Daa
 *She went to Daa's house. [Reply to a friend looking for Chike.]

b) The subject of the verb is the emphatic first person singular with the exclusion effect

The subject-verb agreement does not hold if the subject of the verb is the emphatic first person singular. This type of use of the first person singular goes together with the exclusion of any other subject or person. Consider (43) and (44):

- (43) mé ríró á
 mé rí-ró á
 1SG.EMPH.EXCL V.B.eat-EFF it
 I ate it.

- (44) má gbáró á
 mé gbá-ró á
 1SG.EMPH.EXCL V.B.do-EFF him
 I set it. (It's about a trap for porcupines).

A sequence like **mé ríróm á* or **má gbáróm á* is just not possible.

c) *The verb contains a primary verb prefix (n- or z-)*

Among the primary verb affixes, the *y-* prefix and the *-g^wu-*, *-lem-*, and *-ru* suffixes do co-occur with the verb final */-m/* as shown in (30) to (35). In contrast, the *n-* and *z-* prefixes never co-occur with it. This is shown in (45) to (48). Note in passing that for reasons yet unknown to me, the *z-* prefix is realized *m-* in (46) and (48) where it comes after the syllabic nasal *m*, i.e., the 1st person singular subject. Note also that (46) and (48) are meant to be affirmative sentences.

(45) **m̀ ǹèrím wírí*
m̀ n-èrì-m wírí
1SG PROG-V.B.eat-AGR food
Intended English equivalent: *I am eating.

(46) **m̀ mèrím wírí érí.*
m̀ z-èrì-m wírí érí
1SG FUT-V.B.eat-AGR food REDUP
Intended English equivalent: *I will eat.

(47) **m̀ nàzám ñhê*
m̀ n-àzã-m ñhê
1SG PROG-V.B.sweep-AGR thing
Intended English equivalent: *I am sweeping.

(48) **m̀ màzám ñhê*
m̀ z-àzã-m ñhê
1SG PROG-V.B.sweep-AGR thing
Intended English equivalent: *I will sweep.

In an attempt to account for the impossibility of these two prefixes to combine with the verb final */-m/*, I first present arguments drawn specifically on Ikwere, and later arguments drawn on related Igboid languages such as Echie, Igbo and Ukwuani.

Reasons for the incompatibility of *n-* and *z-* with the verb final */-m/*

These two elements have been identified by Worukwo (1983: 59-63) as auxiliary verbs in Ikwere. He thus writes them *na* and *ze* respectively. But while the *na* auxiliary does not exist as an autonomous unit in Ikwere, the verb *zi* ‘be’ does. This verb implies that someone or something is located somewhere. I assume that *zi* is the same unit Worukwo writes *ze*.

The basic idea here is that if these two elements earlier served as auxiliary verbs, then they might have lost part or all of their auxiliary status and have gradually come to merge with the main verb, serving this time as prefixes. Thus, in (49) the hypothetical original form should be *nà àzã* ‘is sweeping’; in (50), *zì àzã* ‘will sweep’. In that case, and quite in line with the rule of no successive vowels or consonants in Ikwere, the first vowel from the left (that of *na* or *zi*) drops while that of the main verb is maintained, the tones being identical with that of the initial vowel of the main verb stem coalesce with the latter. And we obtain *nàzã* or *zàzã*. All this is illustrated in the set (49) to (56) below.

(49) ò n-àzã ñhê.
3SG na-V.B.sweep thing
3SG PROG-V.B.sweep thing
S/he is sweeping the house.

(50) ò z-àzã ñhê.
3SG zi-V.B.sweep thing
3SG FUT-V.B.sweep thing
S/he will sweep the house.

- (51) bè n-ètí mbí.
 3PL na-V.B. play cards
 3PL PROG-V.B. play cards
 They are playing cards.
- (52) bè z-ètí mbí.
 3PL zI-V.B. play cards
 3PL FUT-V.B. play cards
 They will play cards.
- (53) à n-òtó mí* ní.
 1PL na-V.B. knock water
 1PL PROG-V.B. knock water
 We are fetching water (from the well).
- (54) à z-òtó mí* ní.
 1PL zI-V.B. knock water
 1PL FUT-V.B. knock water
 We will fetch water (from the well).
- (55) ò n-ògbú ígbúgbú kè ézí.
 3SG na-V.B.kills pains LINK bigness
 3SG PROG-V.B.kills pains LINK bigness
 It pains too much.
- (56) ò zògbú í ígbúgbú ó
 ò z-ògbú í ígbúgbú ó
 3SG FUT-kill you pains SFP
 It will pain you, just know it.

It is because *n-* and *z-* function as prefixes that they do not combine with the verb final /-m/ in the examples above. Let us consider the following:

- (57) Speakers A and B are sisters. A does not want B to eat the food she prepared because B did not do the domestic chores she was asked to do. When their mother returns from the market, she finds A eating alone. She asks to know why B is not eating and gets either of the following answers.

A₁: kè ònyê sirù, mé? hây, ò z-êrí ó
 kè ònyê sì-rù, mé? hây, ò z-êrí ó
 LINK who V.B.cook-EFF 1SG.EXCL INTERJ.NEG 3SG zI.NEG-V.B.eat SFP
 LINK who V.B.cook-EFF 1SG.EXCL INTERJ.NEG 3SG FUT.NEG-V.B.eat SFP
 The one prepared by who, me? No way, she won't eat it.

A₂: kè ònyê sirù, mé? hây, ò zê- n-èrí ó
 kè ònyê sì-rù, mé? hây, ò zê- n-èrí ó
 LINK who V.B.cook-EFF 1SG.EXCL INTERJ.NEG 3SG zI.V.B.NEG PROG-V.B.eat SFP
 LINK who V.B.cook-EFF 1SG.EXCL INTERJ.NEG 3SG FUT.V.NEG PROG-V.B.eat SFP
 The one prepared by who, me? No way, she will not eat it.

In (57) (A₂), we find *ze-*, the negative form of *zI*. It is used here to negate the progressive verb form of *neri*. I assume it is the same *z-* prefix that is used here as an auxiliary verb. Let's put it this way, in (57) (A₁), *z-* merges with the verb base while in (57) (A₂), the *n-* prefix arrests the merging process. Now compare the following set:

(58) A: byà ì zèrí wírí òhè í zé ék^wò óbó.
 byà ì z-èrí òhè í zé ék^wò óbó
 V.B.come.INJ 2SG zI-V.B.eat.NEG thing 2SG V.B.go farm in question
 V.B.come.INJ 2SG FUT-V.B.eat.NEG thing 2SG V.B.go farm in question
 Tell me, won't you eat before going to the farm?

B₁: m̀ m̀r̀ érí.
 m̀ z-èrí⁸ érí
 1SG zI-V.B.eat REDUP
 1SG FUT-V.B.eat REDUP
 Of course I will.

B₂: ^ʔé^ʔé, m̀ zém èrí, rók^wó yágbá^wóm àgbà.
^ʔé^ʔé m̀ zé-m èrí rók^wó y-ágbá-g^wô-m àgbà
 no 1SG zI.NEG-AGR V.B.eat stomach MOD-V.B.open-STAT.NEG.1SG REDUP
 no 1SG FUT.NEG-AGR V.B.eat stomach MOD-V.B.open-STAT.NEG.1SG REDUP
 No, I won't eat, I am not yet hungry.

In (58) (A) and (B₁), *z-* merges with the verb base *èrí*, whereas in (58) (B₂), it doesn't. What we have is the auxiliary form *zém èrí*.

(59) A friend phones me.
 B₁: m̀ z^ʔnòⁿú òhè í nòk^wú.
 m̀ z^ʔ-n-òⁿú òhè í n-òk^wú
 1SG zI.V.NEG-PROG-V.B.hear thing 2SG PROG-V.B.speak
 1SG FUT.V.NEG-PROG-V.B.hear thing 2SG PROG-V.B.speak
 I can't hear you.

OR:

B₂: m̀ zém nòⁿú òhè í nòk^wú.
 m̀ zé-m n-òⁿú òhè í n-òk^wú
 1SG zI.V.NEG-AGR PROG-V.B.hear thing 2SG PROG-V.B.speak
 1SG FUT.V.NEG-AGR PROG-V.B.hear thing 2SG PROG-V.B.speak
 I can't hear you.

In (59) (B₁), *z-* contributes to the negative construction of the process, hence *z^ʔ-n-òⁿú* and therefore does not have an auxiliary status. In (59) (B₂), it equally contributes to the negative meaning construction of the sentence. But in this case, we have the auxiliary form *zém n-òⁿú*.

What brings about the use of the sentence in B₁ or B₂ remains very unclear to me at this stage of my investigation. The fact that the two forms coexist tends to indicate that we are at a stage in the evolution of Ikwere where *zì* is gradually losing its auxiliary function.

Recap (59) (B₁):

-merging of the auxiliary with the verb. This leads to the loss of the final *m* (alternative analysis may claim that the two nasal consonants i.e., the final *m* in *zém* and the initial *n* in *na* merge):

zémnòⁿú ⇔ *zénòⁿú*

-weakening of the negation marking vowel:

z^ʔnòⁿú with the result that *zé* loses its auxiliary function.

Recap (59) (B₂):

-The corresponding negative form for *zì* is *zì+é*, realised as *zé*

-This negative form agrees with the first person singular subject: *zém*

-The verb *òⁿú* 'hear' is in the progressive: *n-òⁿú*

-The auxiliary in the negative form + the verb 'hear' in the progressive: *zém + n-òⁿú*

⁸ Recall that the *z-* prefix is realized *m-* if preceded by the syllabic nasal *m*.

Arguments drawn from related Igboid languages

Auxiliary verbs have been reported to exist in Igboid languages. For instance, a progressive auxiliary marker has formally been identified in Èchiè and Igbo.⁹ Reporting precisely on Igbo, Green & Igwe (1963: 141) write: “We have found only one true auxiliary verb. It has the stem *na* and it is always followed by a participle”.¹⁰ Ndimele (2003: 43) also writes: “The progressive aspect in Èchiè is expressed by either the suffix *-gha* or the auxiliary verb *na*”. Ndimele further reports the use of an auxiliary verb for future time expression in Èchiè. As he puts it (2003: 62), “[...] the auxiliary verb *-ga* [...] expresses future time reference”. Emenanjo (1978: 182) considers the low tone auxiliary *gà* as the (general) future marker in Igbo. In translating *gà* as ‘will’, Anyanwu (1998: 139) seems to agree with Emenanjo on future marking in Igbo. Below is a set of examples illustrating the issue under discussion. These examples are taken from Igwe & Green (1964: 35-36) and Okonkwo (1977: 36-38) for Igbo; then from Ndimele (2003: 43) for Èchiè and finally from Williamson (1968: 50, 53) for Ukwuani. I adopt IPA symbols and where necessary, segment words and provide interlinear morpheme by morpheme glosses to make reading a little easier.

The progressive marker in Igbo

(cf. Igwe & Green 1964: 35-36 and Okonkwo 1977: 36-38)

(60) anà m àzò anò.
a-nà m¹¹ àzò anò
ISG-PROG ISG buy meat
I am (was) buying (buy, bought) meat.

(61) anà m ekè anò.
a-nà m ekè anò
ISG-PROG ISG divide meat
I am (was) sharing meat

(62) ana m ata.¹²
a-na m ata
ISG-PROG ISG chew
I am chewing.

(63) ana m eri.
a-na m eri
ISG-PROG ISG manger
I am eating.

The progressive markers gha and na in Èchiè

(cf. Ndimele 2003: 43)

⁹ For more details, interested readers may see Echeruo (1998); Anyanwu (1996: 133); Carnochan (1955: 66); Emenanjo (1978: 126); Williamson (1972: 296). Recall that Igboid languages include Èchiè, Èkpeye, Igbo, Ìka, Ìkwere, Ìzi, Ògba, Ùkwuani.

¹⁰ In a later publication, these authors write *inà* (cf. Igwe & Green, 1964: 35). The presence of the *ɪ* vowel in the initial position supports the claim that we are dealing with a verb in its auxiliary function. We must point out here that a typical uninflected Igbo verb has an initial prefix that harmonizes with the vowel of the stem. Voir Green & Igwe (1963: 64) for more discussion.

¹¹ Note that most scholars working on Igboid languages do not analyze the verb final */-m/* as a subject/verb agreement marker. Anyanwu (1996: 134-138), for instance, distinguishes between Independent and Dependent forms of the personal pronouns in Igbo. She then considers */-m/* as part of a Dependent form, written [ɛ or á ... m]. This form is used only as subject and has the syntactic status of a clitic. According to Emenanjo (1978: 61-62), taking after Green & Igwe (1963: 34), we are dealing with a pronoun that is characterized by the fact that it has a discontinuous form *e / a ... m*.

¹² Tones are left unmarked in examples (60) - (63) in the original texts.

- (64) ɔ-zàghà ɔlò.
 ɔ-zà-ghà ɔlò
 3clitic-sweep-PROG house
 S/he is sweeping the house.
- (65) ɔ-nà-àzà ɔlò.
 ɔ-nà-àzà ɔlò
 3clitic-aux-pr-sweep house
 S/he is sweeping the house.

The progressive marker na in Ukwuanj
 (cf. Williamson 1968: 50, 53)¹³

- (66) ñ nàagba ɔsɔɔ.
 ñ nà-agba ɔsɔɔ
 1SG AUX.PROG-V.B.run race
 I am running
- (67) ñ nèete eguù.
 ñ nè-ete eguù
 1SG AUX.PROG-V.B.dance dance
 I am dancing
- (68) adi ñ nàagba ɔsɔɔ.
 adi ñ nà-agba ɔsɔɔ
 1SG-V.B.be LOC.NEG 1SG AUX.PROG-V.B.run race
 I am not running
- (69) adi ñ nèete eguù.
 adi ñ nèete eguù
 1SG-V.B.be LOC.NEG 1SG AUX.PROG-V.B.dance dance
 I am not dancing

The auxiliary future marker ga in Igbo
 (cf. Okonkwo 1977: 36-38)

- (70) aga m ata.
 a-ga m ata
 1SG-FUT 1SG chew
 I will chew.
- (71) aga m eri.
 a-ga m eri
 1SG-FUT 1SG eat
 I will eat.

The auxiliary future marker ga in Echie
 (cf. Ndimele 2003: 62)

- (72) ɔ-gà nri.
 ɔ-gà nri
 3sclitic-Aux prefix-eat
 S/he will eat.

¹³ The verb final /-m/ occurs in examples (68), (69), (76) and (77) among others. I need to recall at this point that my main purpose here is to show that the presence of the auxiliary of the progressive (*n-*) or the auxiliary of the future (*z-*) renders the verb final /-m/ compatible with the first person singular.

- (73) ɔ-gà nzá.
 ɔ-gà nzá
 3SGclitic-aux pr-sweep
 S/he will sweep.

The auxiliary future marker in Ukwuani
 (cf. Williamson 1968: 50, 53)

- (74) mà àba àgba ɔsɔ̀.
 mà àba àgba ɔsɔ̀
 1SG FUT.AUX V.B.run race
 I will run

- (75) mà àbeète eguù.
 mà àba ète eguù
 1SG FUT.AUX V.B.dance dance
 I will dance

- (76) ejekó m jààgba ɔsɔ̀.
 ejekó m jà-àgba ɔsɔ̀
 1SG-jekó 1SG FUT.AUX-V.B.run race
 I will not run

- (77) ejekó m jèète eguù.
 ejekó m jè-ète eguù
 1SG-jekó 1SG FUT.AUX-V.B.dance dance
 I will not dance

This set of examples clearly shows that Igboid languages do have auxiliary verbs. In Igbo, the first person singular marker /-m/ occurs in the final position of the auxiliary verb. In other words, if the auxiliary occurs, it takes the final /-m/. But where the auxiliary merges with the stem, meaning in that case that we have only one verb, /-m/ occurs in the final position of the verb. This is quite similar to the case of the progressive marker in Ikwere. It is as if the speaker no longer analyzes *n-* as an auxiliary.

We can therefore link the absence of the verb final /-m/ in sentences containing the verb prefix *n-* in Ikwere to the current state of the language change.

It is crucial to note that the final verb /-m/ does not occur in all the examples where one might expect it. In Ukwuani for example, we have in (66) *ñ nàagba ɔsɔ̀* ‘I am running’ and in (67) *ñ nèete eguù* ‘I am dancing’. In contrast, we have in (68) *adi ò nàagba ɔsɔ̀* ‘I am not running’, in (69) *adi ò nèete eguù* ‘I am not dancing’. We notice that the verb final /-m/ occurs in (68) and (69) where the first person singular is marked with something other than the syllabic nasal *m*. Further investigations are needed to get a better understanding of the issue at stake here.

The *-lêm* suffix

The peculiar thing with this verb suffix is that it already contains *m* in the final position of the affirmative (78) – (80) form though not in that of the negative form (81) – (82). Consider the following:

- (78) ò rík^wólêm.
 ò rí-k^wó-lêm-ò
 1SG V.B.eat-V.B.finish-AFF PFT-AGR
 I have finished (we can go now).

- (79) ò rík^wólêm.
 ò rí-k^wó-lêm
 3SG V.B.eat-V.B.finish- AFF PFT
 S/he has finished eating (you can now tidy up the table).

- (80) bè rík^wólêm.

In this view, we can hypothesize that Ikwere formerly had a more elaborate system of agreement based on person and perhaps gender, number, and so on. And therefore, the verb final /-m/ can rightly be considered as a residual feature of a system of agreement.

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Abbreviations

AFF PFT	affirmative perfect	MOD	modality
AGR	agreement	NEG H	high tone negation marker
AOR	aorist	NON AFF	non-affirmative
CONTR	contrast	PFT	perfect
DAT	dative	PROG	progressive
EFF	effective	REDUP	reduplicant
EMPH	emphatic	SFP	sentence final particle
EXCL	exclusive	V.B.	verb stem
FUT	futurity	1SG	1 st person singular
IDF	identification	1PL	1 st person plural
INTERJ	interjection	3SG	3 rd person singular
Q	question marker	3SGO	3 rd person singular in the complement position
LNK	linker	3PLO	3 rd person plural in the complement position
LOC	locative		

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