

Avatime Noun Classes and Concord

Avatime¹ is one 14 “Central Togo” languages (earlier called “Togo Remnant Languages”). These languages are spoken in eastern Ghana and neighboring areas of Togo. The largest Avatime-speaking town is Amedzofe. The Central Togo languages, including Avatime, are unusual for languages of this part of West Africa in having active noun class and concord systems similar to those of the Bantu languages.

A feature of Avatime that is shared with many languages of Ghana and neighboring countries is *ATR vowel harmony*. “ATR” stands for “Advanced Tongue Root”. ATR harmony languages have one set of vowels with the tongue root (the part of the tongue extending into the pharynx) drawn forward to expand the pharyngeal cavity (the [+ATR] vowels) and another set with the tongue root retracted toward the back pharyngeal wall (the [-ATR] vowels). The vowel system of Avatime is as follows:

Avatime vowels:

		Front	Central	Back
High	[+ATR]	i		u
	[-ATR]	ɪ		ʊ
Mid	[+ATR]	e		o
	[-ATR]	ɛ		ɔ
Low	[-ATR]		a	

Like many ATR harmony languages, Avatime does not have a [+ATR] counterpart for the low vowel, probably because of the unnatural action of drawing the tongue root forward and placing the body of the tongue low within the oral cavity.

Tones: Avatime has four level tones: high (á), upper mid (ā), lower mid (à), low (à). The focus of this problem is the segmental form (consonants and vowels) of the morphemes, but you might try to supply tones for the roots.

The data consists of phrases of nouns modified by adjectives. Unlike the Bantu languages, where Bantuists follow a standard class numbering system across languages, there is no standard for Avatime. The class numbers here are those of Mary E. Kropp Dakubu and Kevin C. For, “The Central-togo languages,” in M.E. Kropp Dakubu (ed.), *The Languages of Ghana*, pp. 119-154, London: Kegan Paul, 1988.

Classes 1-2

ɔ̄gā vidiē ²	big animal	bāgā vidiwā	big animals	
ónō dxódzōē	tall man	bánō dzódzōwà	tall men	
ōkūsī kókoē	old chief	bēkūsī kókōwà	old chiefs	

Classes 3-4

ðkplō vidi ^l ō	big table	lī kplō vidi ⁿ ē	big tables	
òsē dzódzōlō	tall tree	līsē dzódzōlè	tall trees	
òhū kókōlō	old car	līhū kókōlè	old cars	

¹ Data come from my field notes, collected in November 1994. The Avatime noun class and concord system is described in Russell G. Schuh, “Avatime noun classes and concord,” *Studies in African Linguistics*, 24:123-149, 1995, and in other works cited there.

² When two vowels come together, the result is always one syllable. The details, which are complex, are laid out in Schuh (1995:134-135). If the first vowel is a front vowel, it most commonly becomes a glide [j], and if it is a back vowel it becomes a glide [w], but sometimes one of the vowels is elided completely.

Classes 5-6

lī klā v̀dìnè	big stone	āklā v̀dìnà	big tables	
lītō dzódzōlè	tall moutain	ētō dzódzōlà	tall mountains	
līgbō kókōlè	old chair	ēgbō kókōlà	old chairs	
līgbō v̀v̀v̀nè	new chair	ēgbō v̀v̀v̀nà	new chairs	

Classes 7-8

kíkū v̀idiè	big yam	bíkù v̀idiwè	big yams	
kìsēwī dzódzōè	long stick	bìsēwī dzódzōwè	long sticks	
kí dē kókoè	old mortar	bí dē kókōwè	old mortars	
kí dē v̀v̀v̀è	new mortar	bí dē v̀v̀v̀wè	new mortars	

Classes 9-10: This pair of classes consists entirely of mass nouns, like ‘hair’, ‘grass’, and language names, like *s̀ỳàsè* ‘Avatime language’. The commonly used form is “Class 10”, which, in a sense, is like a plural. The “singular” Class 9 is rarely used.

Classes 11-12

kúdè v̀idiò	big road	bèdè v̀idiwà	big roads	
kūlī dzódzò	tall palm tree	bālī dzódzōwà	tall palm trees	
kùsà kókò	old cloth	bàsà kókōwà	old cloths	

Classes 13-14

kètsē v̀idià	big monkey	kùtsē v̀idiò	big monkeys	
kēsēkpē dzódzòà	long log	kùsēkpē dzódzōwà	long logs	
kāwā kókoà	old axe	kùwā kókò	old axes	

(a) Noun roots: Fill in the roots for the nouns in the boxes to the right of each row.

(b) Adjective roots: List the roots for the adjectives. Is there any allomorphy?

‘big’

‘tall, long’

‘old’

‘new’

(c) Allomorphs of class markers on nouns: For each class (the odd numbered classes are in the left-hand column, the even numbered ones in the right hand column), list the allomorphs of the class marking on nouns.

{CLASS 1}

{CLASS 2}

{CLASS 3}

{CLASS 4}

{CLASS 5}

{CLASS 6}

{CLASS 7}	{CLASS 8}
{CLASS 11}	{CLASS 12}
{CLASS 13}	{CLASS 14}

(d) Distribution of allomorphs of noun class marking morphemes: Account for the distribution of allomorphs in as general a way as you can, that is, look at the sets of allomorphs as a group and try to come up with distributions that don't just list the allomorphs for each class.

(e) Allomorphs of class agreement markers on adjectives: Fill in as for part (c).

{CLASS 1}	{CLASS 2}
{CLASS 3}	{CLASS 4}
{CLASS 5}	{CLASS 6}
{CLASS 7}	{CLASS 8}
{CLASS 11}	{CLASS 12}
{CLASS 13}	{CLASS 14}

(f) Distribution of allomorphs for class agreement morphemes on adjectives: Work out general distributions as for part (d).

(g) Consonants of affixes: In general, the consonants of affixes are the same for all the allomorphs of a particular class. However, Classes 3, 4, 6 have an alternation in consonants. How would you account for this?

(h) The same class or different classes? Compare the noun class markers of Classes 1 & 3 and of Classes 2 & 12 and also those of Classes 4 & 5 and Classes 11 & 14. In each of these pairs, it looks as if the class markers are the same. How would you argue that the markers for each class should be considered separate morphemes, as implied by giving them different class numbers, rather than a single morpheme as suggested by homophony?