

The Damakawa language

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This article gives an account of a brief field visit to investigate the Damakawa language of northwest Nigeria.

Language situation

The Damakawa are a group of perhaps 500-1000 people living in three or four villages. These are situated just south of Maganda on the Dirindaji to Makuku road in Sakaba LGA, Kebbi State (see map TBD). The people have apparently been omitted altogether from previous ethnic and linguistic surveys. I first became aware of the existence of this people group in March 2008, and as far as I know they never been mentioned in print.

Sadly the language of the Damakawa is already moribund, and even the oldest struggle to remember basic terms. Young children in these villages now speak a neighbouring and probably related language, C'Lela, as their mother tongue. Hausa is also spoken, probably universally. This article lists those few Damakawa words and phrases that we were able to elicit. There did not seem to be anyone capable of speaking more than isolated fragments of the language. We were nevertheless informed that the language is still used in traditional rituals carried out on their mountain near Talata (a nearby Acipu settlement). In contrast to the situation with the Acipu, who are fiercely protective of their religion, the Damakawa we met said that outsiders would be welcome to observe them at worship.

Neighbouring tribes do not always hold the Damakawa in high regard. Cicipu accounts of their origin are uncomplimentary to say the least, and there is (or was) a taboo forbidding intermarriage with them (which may extend to other tribes as well). Such an attitude may have contributed to the small size of the ethnic group and the current state of the Damakawa language.

It is not obvious what to call the language. The original autonyms seem to be lost, and members of the ethnic group refer to themselves using the Hausa term Damakawa. The expected Hausa term for the language would be Damakanci, but those interviewed asked us to use the term 'Damakawa' for the language as well. In Cicipu the Damakawa people are referred to as the Adama'un [àdàmà'ù] and their language as Tidama'un [tidàmà'ù]. This was recognised by the Damakawa we met but there is no way of knowing if this was ever the autonym.

Interviews

I visited two Damakawa settlements on Tuesday 15th April and Sunday 20th April 2008 with Reuben Acheson, a missionary in a nearby Acipu village, and Israel Wade, an MA student from Jos and a fluent speaker of C'Lela. We were assisted on both occasions by Ibrahim Sule, who is ethnically Damakawa although he does not know the language. He identified the people who were most likely to be able to supply us with the words we were looking for.

On the first trip we visited Inguwar Kiilo [ki:lo] and interviewed Magaji Zaure, but we were unable to collect more than a few words and phrases, of dubious reliability. Much of what we were told was clearly Cicipu.



Illustration 1: Ibrahim Sule

On the second trip we revisited Inguwar Kiilo and interviewed the village head, Tanko Magajin Gari. We then proceeded to another village nearby, Marandu, and collected further words from Tura Zaure and his son Maraha Tura.



Illustration 2: Tanko Magajin Gari

Wordlist

Words in **bold** were collected from Tura Zaure and Maraha Tura in Marandu village. They are probably the most reliable of the data we have. Words in *italics* were collected from Magaji Zaure in Inguwar Kiilo. These words were collected under difficult conditions and are likely to be less reliable. Words in plain text were collected from Tanko Magajin Gari, again in Inguwar Kiila. They are probably intermediate in reliability.



Illustration 3: Maraha Tura (left)



Illustration 4: Tura Zaure

The numbers on the wordlist refer to the standard 228-item wordlist used in other West Kainji language surveys by Steve Dettweiler and others. We failed to elicit most of the items on this wordlist. Subsequent to the numbered wordlist are other words and phrases that we were offered.

| | Hausa | English | Damakawa | Notes |
|-----|--------------|-------------------|---|--|
| 1 | sama | <i>sky</i> | <i>eshiri</i> | as 'God' |
| 2 | rana | <i>sun</i> | ùráná | As in Kambari. Possible borrowing from Hausa. |
| 5 | wata | <i>moon</i> | ìppétíyò | <i>péetè</i> in C'Lela, widespread Eastern Benue-Congo (Blench) |
| 9 | dutse | <i>stone</i> | táalí/átáalí (pl.) | Widespread Niger-Congo root (Blench) |
| 10 | babban dutse | <i>mountain</i> | <i>tantaduga</i> | |
| 15 | wuta | <i>fire</i> | h̄ŕá / wùĺáa | Widespread WK. <i>wulaa</i> is close to Cicipu <i>ùĺáa</i> . See also <i>hwèlá</i> in C'Lela. |
| 18 | gatari | <i>axe</i> | ùd̄arkó | |
| 24 | ya sha | <i>drink (v)</i> | <i>sɔɔ</i> | Widespread Eastern Benue-Congo (Blench). |
| 29 | Allah | <i>God</i> | eshiri | Kambari <i>kə-shile</i> , also Duka <i>shir</i> . See also C'Lela. |
| 34 | mace | <i>woman</i> | àtíbaná | |
| 38 | yaro | <i>child</i> | ḏán m̀àkùná / cìyáná | |
| 59 | wake | <i>bean</i> | jìbírí | |
| 60 | gyadà | <i>groundnut</i> | h̀àgwínó | Widespread WK |
| 61 | dawa | <i>guineacorn</i> | gyándá/gyàntá also <i>shínà</i> | <i>i-shina</i> is Kambari (Western and Tsvadì) |
| 63 | gishiri | <i>salt</i> | lándá | Kamuku <i>mand</i> ??? |
| 71 | ya yi kuka | <i>cry (v)</i> | búrúgú | |
| 74 | ya gani | <i>see (v)</i> | káyò | |
| 81 | tuwo | <i>food</i> | <i>gáadù?</i> | <i>tV-ga</i> is widespread in WK |
| 82 | miya | <i>soup</i> | <i>kusã'ã</i> | Identical to Cicipu and Kambari, not found elsewhere |
| 92 | ya bari | <i>leave (v)</i> | ragana | C'Lela <i>laga</i> |
| 93 | ya zo | <i>come (v)</i> | ùhánkái = you came ùhánkà = go | Utma'in and Duka <i>haan</i> |
| 111 | ya so | <i>want (v)</i> | toono | C'Lela <i>tɔnɔ</i> |
| 112 | ya ba | <i>give (v)</i> | <i>caa</i> | Identical to Cicipu |
| 114 | ḏàki | <i>hut</i> | <i>máḏáarú</i> | |
| 115 | gida | <i>compound</i> | ùshíshí | |
| 137 | ya rera waƙa | <i>sing (v)</i> | mòzóbó (noun?) | <i>zɔg-</i> in Kamuku |
| 145 | ganye | <i>leaf</i> | cívá | <i>-va</i> in C'Lela |
| 149 | zafi | <i>hot</i> | <i>ḏaarume</i> | |

| | | | | |
|-----|--------|-----------------|------------------------------|---|
| 154 | kyau | <i>good</i> | dīràcù | |
| 168 | kaza | <i>chicken</i> | ùkúgá (female) | |
| 190 | mashi | <i>spear</i> | ùsímá | Gwamhi <i>u-somo</i> (Roger Blench, p.c.) |
| 192 | wuƙa | <i>knife</i> | mákáncú | Cicipu <i>mà-kántú</i> |
| 194 | fata | <i>skin</i> | ùráapá | Laru <i>yábà?</i> |
| 195 | kai | <i>head</i> | kíngá OR ùkúnkúmá | |
| 196 | gashi | <i>hair</i> | cìyáawà | Is this the Hausa word for <i>grass</i> ? |
| 202 | baki | <i>mouth</i> | hànú | -no/-nu widespread in WK |
| 204 | haƙori | <i>tooth</i> | hàníń | <i>v-nìń</i> in C'Lela |
| 206 | hannu | <i>hand</i> | ùhwáná | |
| 219 | đuwawu | <i>buttocks</i> | kàtííbá | |
| 222 | ƙashi | <i>bone</i> | kátélé | Widespread in WK |
| 229 | ni | <i>I</i> | ámú | Identical to Cicipu, sim. to other WK |

Other words

Again, in the list that follows words in **bold** were collected from Tura Zaure and Maraha Tura in Marandu village. Words in *italics* were collected from Magaji Zaure in Inguwar Kiilo. Words in plain text were collected from Tanko Magajin Gari, again in Inguwar Kiila. In terms of reliability **bold** > plain text > *italics*.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| díkúpá | <i>calabash</i> |
| díkáapí | <i>bush (countryside) – we were given ikáapí in Kiilo village</i> |
| rìbáná | <i>Darkarari tribe</i> |
| máđárú | <i>granary [but see hut]</i> |
| cìjáu | <i>talking (abin magana) – we were also given jáu</i> |
| | |
| kùtáđá | <i>kasko, kind of local pot/plate for serving soup – we also got ùtáđá</i> |
| shélí | <i>young girl</i> |
| dùngá | <i>small hoe (Hausa?)</i> |
| hóobú | <i>guest hut (we were told this was Kamarci)</i> |
| áyà | <i>grinding stone</i> |
| dímátá | <i>giving birth</i> |
| kúgá | <i>cock</i> |
| cígúligúli | <i>call (some kind of?)</i> |
| mòyóo | <i>beer</i> |
| mógújí | <i>sneeze</i> |
| zúmái | <i>brother (đan uwa)</i> |
| izánk ^w ó | <i>dawn</i> |
| đarƙó | <i>I am going(?)</i> |
| gɔɔ | <i>noise</i> |
| | |
| <i>shiishii</i> | <i>gossip</i> |
| <i>hàwáĩ</i> | <i>yes</i> |
| <i>rímò</i> | <i>meat</i> |
| <i>kàbá</i> | <i>take</i> |

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>wéetēerè</i> | <i>girl</i> |
| <i>mádáarú/bángú</i> | <i>stick [but see hut]</i> |
| <i>'ɔpɔ</i> | <i>hold</i> |

Some phrases

Again, in the phrases that follow those in **bold** were collected from Tura Zaure and Maraha Tura in Marandu village. Phrases in *italics* were collected from Magaji Zaure in Inguwar Kiilo. Phrases in plain text were collected from Tanko Magajin Gari, again in Inguwar Kiila. In terms of reliability **bold** > plain text > *italics*.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| màráabàkà vù | <i>welcome</i> |
| mì góodè kà | <i>I thank you</i> |
| kashin birki | <i>leftover tuwo</i> |
| gáadù hùrée | <i>hot food [also provided by Magaji Zaure]</i> |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>ingwédè kùngwà</i> | <i>I thank God</i> |
| <i>mòhyókònú</i> | <i>sannunku</i> |
| <i>mòyóo intàaní/màgúdáká</i> | <i>the beer has finished</i> |
| <i>hénkáyò ribáná</i> | <i>they saw Dakarkari</i> |
| <i>ràgàná jáu</i> | <i>stop talking</i> |
| <i>tén kàlàbâi</i> | <i>Good morning (yaya labari in Hausa)</i> |
| <i>sée kàlàahiyà</i> | <i>Fine (answer to the above)</i> |
| <i>ánù dǎná</i> | <i>Salam alaikum (peace to you)</i> |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>'yán màkúmà iní?</i> | <i>what did you get? (me kã samu?)</i> |
| <i>riimò tɔkəmɔ</i> | <i>you got meat</i> |
| <i>cáa mù!</i> | <i>give me</i> |
| <i>amu tɔnu kayu tɔntɔdugu</i> | <i>I am going [I want to go?] to the mountain</i> |
| <i>ùhánkà laahiya!</i> | <i>go well!</i> |
| <i>wùugénkà laahiya!</i> | <i>come back well!</i> |

Relationship with other West Kainji languages

Based on so few words, and given their dubious reliability, it is impossible to place Damakawa within West Kainji with any degree of certainty. There are similarities with Cicipu, Kambari, and C'Lela, but the speakers are in contact with all three of these languages, particularly C'Lela to which they have shifted as a mother tongue. The Kambari and Cicipu 'cognates' in the above list are suspiciously similar or identical and this suggests borrowing (or perhaps confusion) rather than close genetic relatedness. Although many of the Damakawa words have no cognates in the 228-item wordlists available from other WK languages, it should be borne in mind that the Damakawa words were collected with difficulty from rememberers. A closer inspection of the available dictionaries might suggest further cognates, but for now the best that can be done regarding language classification is to tentatively place Damakawa within the Duka, or north-west, group of West Kainji together with C'Lela, ut-Ma'in, ut-Hun and ut-Saare.

I would welcome comments on possible cognates from people working on other WK languages, and also if you are aware of any other references to the Damakawa people or language in the literature.