
THE LARU PEOPLE AND THEIR LANGUAGE

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The Laru people live on the west bank of Lake Kainji in a number of villages near Shagunnu. Only Sansani village appears to be predominantly Laru. There are Laru families in the following settlements;

Shagunnu	Luma
Sankwa	Tsoho Sansani
Swashi	Amboshidi
Bagopiya	Berabite

There probably only some 1000 Laru -yet there is no evidence that the language is dying out although all speakers seem to be highly multilingual.

In view of this it seems useful to compile all the available evidence on Laru so that it can be evaluated and made the basis for further checking.

The basis of this wordlist was taken by Janie Stark in Papiri village on 20/7/89. The informant was a young man ca. 30 years of age. The order of the original wordlist has been modified on the basis of semantic unities and the verbs are sorted alphabetically. There are two other pieces of evidence on the Laru language -a wordlist taken by T. Hoskyne Abrahall in the 1920s and found in Meek's Linguistic Notes (I:181-2). In addition, there is a list of Laru fish-names taken by Jonathan Jenness. These have been incorporated into the present wordlist. Orthographic forms are given in **SWISS** type-face to distinguish them from modern language data.

Ethnographic notes on the Laru

The Laru at Karabanji village, which is on the outskirts, north of New Busa town, say that they are about 300 persons in the village. Elsewhere, the Laru are found close to the bank of the Niger in Borgu LGA, Niger State in the following villages: Shagunu, Tungan Sansani, Sabon Sansani, Sangba and some at Luma-Bare, Luma-Sanke and Swashi. The people at Amboshidi are of Nupe stock and do not accept that they are Laru though they speak the language. In 1973, their population was given at 1,000 (SIL).

The Laru language is Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta Congo, Benue Congo, Kainji, Western and Kainji Lake (Ethnologue 2005).

History

They are descendants of Kishera. All of them were living together and speaking one language without dialects. But at a time, while they were at Ngaski, they got separated into groups so as to fight against and drive away the Europeans. The other tribes around co-operated with the Europeans and so they were defeated. Following the defeat, they could not reunite; so the various groups scattered and settled in different places. Now as a result they have these dialects:- Sangwa (around Shagunu), Sausani (also near Shagunu), Berekete (near Shagunu), Amboshidi (enslaved Nupe), and Shagogi (these claim to be the real Laru). All these understand each other but the dialects have minor differences.

Culture

Naming:

When a woman was about seven months pregnant, she went to her parents' place to deliver there. Seven days after delivery, her husband slaughtered a sheep and people gathered. The father of the child pronounced the child's name. It was done like this until the 1970s.

Circumcision:

Boys were circumcised when the child was between 3 and 10 years old, but could be done later. A cow was killed when a boy was circumcised and he was given a lot to eat and taken care of well.

Marriage:

Parents arrange for marriage of their children right at the time of birth. When the girls reach 11 to 15 years of age, the marriage is consummated. In the first year after an agreement has been made at the parental level, a bag of each crop harvested from the farm is given to the parents of the girl by those of the boy. The measure increases each year by an additional bag till the marriage is finalised. On the wedding day, much food with meat, and beer, are made available. Young men, friends of the groom, go and carry the bride from her father's house on their shoulders. When they arrive at the groom's house, they throw her on the groom's bed, then leave and close the door after them. A feast to celebrate the marriage follows for seven days.

Burial:

A person is normally buried on the day of death. If the person was an elder or important person in the community, the *Ogun* festival follows for seven days. A small hole is dug in the compound of the dead person in which sand taken from the grave, representing the dead person, is buried. A chief's grave is made by tunnelling from outside into his compound. The body is lowered into the hole and it is closed up with sand.

Greetings:

The general custom of greeting is that one has to kneel and stretch his hands forward on the ground. This is for both sexes and especially when greeting elderly or important persons.

Religion:

Swaa is the name of the God of creation in the Laru language. *Swaa* is present everywhere but he lives above in heaven. He is the source and sustainer of life. Because *Swaa* is not close to men, they worship him through stones, carved wood or rivers, using blood of sheep, goats or fowls to sprinkle on those objects. Drinking of beer follows. The religion itself is called *Gwa* and a good portion of the Laru are still practising it presently.

Swaa is worshipped through the following gods: *Kao*, *Malan*, *Amboo*, *Daudu*, *Maantsu*, *Rinshidi*, *Givintan*, *Maigiro*, *Zandu*, *Harakoi* and others. *Kao* is the chief god. Whenever a person requires anything, he approaches *Kao* with a sacrifice. *Kao* directs the person to one of the other gods who will provide for the need. The god to whom *Kao* directs the worshipper will require another sacrifice before he grants the request. The transaction between worshippers and gods is done through a priest. The gods are worshipped all together during the festival called *Izika*.

Madudasowo is a deity believed to punish offenders. It is invisible but when someone wants it to punish a person, he or she makes a sacrifice to it so that it will punish the person that wronged the one who offered the sacrifice. Women take part in all religious rites, and there is no initiation. The religion is practised in all their areas though the people claim to be Muslims. No Laru Christian is known.

The majority of the literate Laru people, who are a very small portion of the population, have only an Arabic education. They like modernization but not very much. To most of their towns, the roads are not tarred, but they are fairly motorable the year round. They are grain farmers and fishermen. The Laru at Karabandi have an advantage over the others because they are living in a resettlement village, so they are more exposed to modern social infrastructure like schools. Skin diseases are common among them. They say that they do not like shouting by Christian preachers. Some preachers have been visiting Karabandi village but the people have never responded to the Gospel.

Question marks following Abrahall's glosses are in the original manuscript. The annotations are by Roger Blench, comparing Laru to other languages, especially Lopa.

Acronyms;

A.	
NC	Niger-Congo
NS	Nilo-Saharan
BC	Benue-Congo
WK	West-Kainji
*	proto-form
#	quasi-reconstruction

Wordlist of Laru

English	Laru	Comments
eye	mèmbí	cf. Lopa ru-ɔmbi
ear	có	General Niger-Congo #to. A. has to
nose	gó	A. has goro . Cf. Lopa ro-horo
mouth	nú	cf. Lopa nu (a widespread root)
tooth	yùwí	?cf. Lopa fo-yefə
tongue	lágùzù	
head	shírí	cf. Common Benue-Congo -si
hair	shírípù	A. has puru
neck	wòʷ	
belly	pʷí	General Niger-Congo #pu
navel	posiri	
breast	gínòbí	A. gimebe
buttock	ìnógò	
knee	pùnàú	
foot	púnà	cf. Lopa kuna suggesting *kp is original C ₁
hand	tá	cf. Lopa taha
finger nail	táá + zùùṅù	?cf. Lopa gungu
body	pali	
skin	yábà	?cf. Lopa yaagu
intestines	pwègúmbì	
bone	ùṅgú	?cf. Lopa iṅgə
urine	ʰmà	
blood	ure	?cf. Lopa ŋ-ɔrɔŋ

guinea-	sekwise	
fowl		
pigeon	lukuku	from Nupe ?
feather	kúmpù	
wing	tápɛŋgizì	
horn	káù	
tail	ínà	cf. Lopa ri-ina
egg	kwínʔì	A. has iri
butter	zabamo	et. 'cow-fat'
milk	zàbàgípù	A. has vi
fat	mwí	General Benue-Congo root
meat	múgà	
salt	có	
beer	tu	
night	íyà	A. has ira
moon	piyòm	? common BC #piya. A. has pero
month	pere wokwa	
	kwaba	
star	càcàʔí	A. has tece
sun	gyè	cf. Lopa gwi . A. has gure
sky	piyáʔwà	A. has suara (also for God)
cloud	sú'àprà	
thunder	múbùgùbùgù	
wind	nyã	cf. Lopa nyã
rain	sùwàgí	A. has ron (?)
dew	nèbògí	
water	gí	
river	sùhàbí	
fire	rèwá or rwá	cf. Lopa la but also common BC
smoke	ʷwágù	A. has rayu
firewood	shérèwá	
ash	còm	
mountain	sámá	
ground	bódè	
earth	bure	
dust	lúgù	
sand	gùnúpùbí	A. has gunda
stone	tái	Common NC root
tree	shé	Common NC root
root	gwà	
bark	shéwéngú	
leaf	fò	cf. Lopa fwã
grass	far	
seed	piʔò	
acca/iburu	babi	
banana	ayaba	fr. Hausa
cassava	bablega	
groundnut	um	Lopa ru-umwə
guinea-	gwu	Common W. Kainji
corn		

millet	toro (?)	cf. Lopa rə-tsuuru
maize	dumajo	cf. Lopa ru-tumaji
rice	keri	cf. Lopa ru-gwerə
oil-palm	sowan	
silk-cotton	umu	cf. Lopa fu-umwəbi
baobab	celi	
house	nàm	A. pis
village	fɔ̀bígwò	
farm	ana	
road	magani	
path	gwàńá	
pot	ímbí	cf. Lopa ĩjbi if proto-Lake is *gb
gown	puwutare	
penis	sarala	
sheath		
iron	gíyèbí	A. has twa
gold	wura	
silver	anufu	
potash	wa kanwa	from Hausa
bow	tabi	common NC root
arrow	iye (?)	
spear	tàgú	cf. Lopa fo-taabu
shield	shembabo	
rope	gwì	
hoe	rizibe	
knife	shí	cf. Lopa sõĩ
stool	bà	cf. Lopa baarə
war	áásù	cf. Proto-West-Kainji * gyasa
sleep	rabo	
dream	gweba	
hunger	wòm	
dry season	hummi	
day	gweba	
year	gùwá	
one	kíní	cf. Lopa kinə
two	ijí	
three	tàú	Common NC
four	ná?à	Common NC
five	tú?ù	tawon
six	tə̀bùkíní	A has tawonmakene
seven	tə̀bìjì	A has tomoige
eight	tə̀btáú	A has tomotarú
nine	tə̀bìná?à	A has tomoma
ten	úbà	cf. Lopa obwa but common WK. A has uva
Eleven	uva mi kini	
Fifteen	puna kini	
Twenty	kiseni	
Forty	kwazani	
Hundred	kwanaton	
Thousand	zejimauba	

warm	tàréndù	
cold	gúbè	
dry	únà	
big	kurugu	
long	sàgàbí	
short	lòkótòbì	
small	dubíbì	A. has mofitibi
round	kwàlǎá	
all	píkí	
many	dádàshí	
full	dàshí	
good	mákàgà	A. has mukya
new	dùní	
old	dumina	
who	dùgàù	
what	kywo	
red	séi	?cf. Lopa jeerə
black	mwì	A. muneri
white	pú	Common NC/NS
bark	núsuwəŋ	
bite	dáròm	cf. Lopa rum
bloo?	úwə'	
blow	píbì	cf. Lopa piibu
burn	òndú	
bury	bì	
come	ránà	
cough	kwá	Common NC/NS
count	pì	
cultivate	cúmà	
die	ú ^w	cf. Lopa u
drink	múgù	cf. Lopa gũ
eat	múriyè	ri element is common NC. Compounded form?
fall	pilé	
fear	gyù	
fly	yú	
give	náò	widespread BC root
give birth	májì	cf. Lopa maazə but ma is a widespread root
hear	yó'è̄m	cf. Lopa yum
hit	cǎb ^w ì	cf. Lopa biinə
kill	dáw ^ə ð	? widespread NC #wu root
know	fébì	cf. Lopa figi
laugh	mánè̄syì	cf. Lopa manji
leave	ù?yú	
lie down	ſim	
marry	āúcì	
play	réì	
pour	kùm	
press	súwù	
pull	ſúwù	
push	cúm	

say	yócò	
scratch	tàhájì	
see	ǰgì	
send	còndí	
show	sùwáù	
sing	swàrú	cf. Lopa ajaaru
sit	cìm	
sleep	ʳábù	cf. Lopa lahu
smell	sàndú	
spit	úntàbìgí	
split	bàngà	
stand	yóbìgí	
steal	gìbì	
suck	gùgìbàbì	
swell	pùyínà	
swim	gígùwò	
talk	yócò	
throw	nù	
vomit	pìjì	
walk	ínàhà	cf. Lopa i'inə
want	yà	
wash	múkùm	
whistle	ǰém	
I	ma	
he,she	duni	
we	ti	
you pl.	darni	
they	darni	

Fish Names from Jenness (1967)

<i>Protopterus annectens</i>	geji
<i>Polypterus spp.</i>	anna
<i>Hyperopisus, Mormyrus etc.</i>	beri
<i>Mormyrops deliciosus</i>	boroji
<i>Gymnarchus niloticus</i>	aru
<i>Papyrocranus afer</i>	fefele
<i>Clupisudis niloticus</i>	kuru
<i>Hepsetus odoe</i>	zangi
<i>Hydrocynus spp.</i>	shiri
<i>Alestes baremose</i>	saibi
<i>Alestes nurse</i>	kare
<i>Alestes leuciscus</i>	chiobi
<i>Alestes macrolepidotus</i>	kuruka
<i>Distichodus spp.</i>	fatan
<i>Citharinus spp.</i>	puji
<i>Citharinus citharus</i>	zoru
<i>Citharidium ansorgei</i>	bandiwoko
<i>Labeo spp.</i>	guri
<i>Heterobranchus bidorsalis</i>	gbaje
<i>Clarias spp.</i>	iyebi
<i>Schilbeidae</i>	nare
<i>Arius gigas</i>	hama
<i>Bagrus docmac, bayad</i>	sonu
<i>Clarotes laticeps</i>	dengusu
<i>Chrysicthys spp.</i>	sute
<i>Auchenoglanis spp.</i>	kenguncobi
<i>Synodontis spp.</i>	kem
<i>Synodontis courteti</i>	kem buru
<i>Malapterurus electricus</i>	ni
<i>Lates niloticus</i>	kamara
<i>Hemichromis spp.</i>	pesugu
<i>Tilapia spp.</i>	kpebi
<i>Paraphiocephalus obscurus</i>	korom
<i>Ctenopoma spp.</i>	kioguru
<i>Tetraodon fahaka</i>	kukum

The wordlist taken by Abrahall is generally similar, but there are some interesting differences that suggest (remarkably) dialect variation.

A striking feature of the phonology of Laru and Lopa is the rarity of the labio-velars /kp/ and /gb/. However, the correspondences between Laru and Lopa suggest labial-velars in proto-Lake. For example;

Gloss	Laru	Lopa	Proto-Lake
pot	ímbí	ĩḡbi	*iNḡbi
spear	tàḡú	fo-tabu	*-tagbu
foot	púnà	kuna	*kpuna

It appears superficially as if Laru has essentially eliminated the system of noun-prefixes characteristic of most other members of the West Kainji group unless this is an artefact of the wordlist. Abrahall includes a few plurals such as 'snake'

s. gwa pl. gwa suda

A simple plural complement is added. His list gives more examples of this and also **masu**, **dashi** and **kende** as other pluralisers.

The case for linking Lopa with Laru may be considered proven on the evidence of this list. Nonetheless, the relationship is not close and the sound correspondences not yet clear.

Further information on Laru would be welcome.