

The Domp language of Central Ghana and its affinities

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TO BE DONE ON EXTERNAL PARALLELS. ALL COMMENTS WELCOME.]

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1. Introduction

This is an annotated wordlist of the Dompo language, spoken in Dompofie village Brong-Ahafo Region, Ghana. The wordlist was collected by Roger Blench from Mr. Kosi Mila (ca. 55 years old) and a group of villagers on the 2nd of April 1998. The oral traditions were narrated by the Chief, Mr. Nanas Sianɔ, assisted by the elders. I am grateful to all who took part for their enthusiastic co-operation.

The existence of the Dompo language has been known previously only through the 100 words given in Painter (1967) and the animal names transcribed by Cansdale (1971)¹. It has several times been reported not to exist, or to be just an ethnonym or a submerged clan. As the present document shows, this is false.

The wordlist was collected as a ‘one-shot’ exercise and the transcription must therefore be regarded as very preliminary. In general, tones are not marked. This document is being circulated to scholars for comment.

2. Location, history and sociolinguistic situation

2.1 Nomenclature

As far could be ascertained, Dompo is the name of both the people and the language. The name ‘Ndompo’ given in some documents seems to be a garbled version of this.

2.2 Location and settlements

The Dompo live in a settlement adjacent to Banda, the main town of the Nafaanra people. Painter (1967) gives a map reference as 8° 09' N 2° 22' W. Banda is reached from Wenchi by going northwards from the main road to Bondoukou in Côte d'Ivoire and is still south of the Black Volta. A new road is being built that will eventually join Banda to Kintampo via Mo, but this is presently only passable with a four-wheel drive. The quarter of Banda where the Dompo live is called Dompofie. One or two women who married out are said to reside in nearby villages, but this is the only settlement of the Dompo.

The map accompanying Painter (1967) shows two very small areas near Banda marked ‘Ndm̄po’ and a much larger area south of Larabanga marked NDMPO (Kwa Akan) inside the Gonja area. To judge by a slight mismatch between the list of surveyed villages (p. 31) and the data tables (p. 46 ff.) Painter probably found that only one of his sites actually spoke Dompo but subsequently failed to correct the map. This may also be the source of the idea that Dompo is only a Gonja subgroup, as this probably *is* the status of the larger group.

2.3 Language status

Dompo is spoken by ten households, all of whom are also fluent in Nafaanra. All members of these households seem to have some command of the language, but whether it will be transmitted to the next generation in more than an attenuated form is open to doubt. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that it has ever been spoken by many people and bilingualism in Nafaanra must long have been a feature of the community. There are presently some 60-70 people with some command of the language and perhaps 10 who can recall obscure lexical items.

2.4 Dompo culture and history

The Dompo people have a very rich oral tradition, explaining how they came to be at their present site, and their interactions with the other ethnic groups in the area. A summary form of this tradition is as follows;

¹ The present exercise confirmed, as far as possible, all Cansdale’s identifications, and that his transcriptions were also reasonably accurate.

[STILL TO BE DONE]

3. Phonology

The phonology of Dompo is based on rapid observations and should therefore be regarded as tentative at this stage.

3.1 Vowels

Dompo probably has seven phonemic vowels;

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Close-Mid	e		o
Open-Mid	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

3.2 Consonants

Dompo consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		[c] j	k g		
Nasal	m		n			ŋ		
Trill			[r]					
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ				h
Approximant					y		w	
Lateral Approximant			l					

3.3 Tones

The tone system of Dompo is quite restricted with only two tones. No cases of glide tones seem to occur. In most cases the tone is left unmarked.

5. Lexical comparison and the classification of Dompo

Dompo is clearly a problematic language to classify and I have tried to consult as wide a variety of sources as possible. Table 1 shows my data sources (only provisional here) for the lexical comparisons;

Table 1. Principal sources of data for lexical comparison

Language group	Source	Abbreviation (if any)
Gonja	Rytz (n.d.)	R
Ligbi	Persson and Persson (1980)	L
Nafaanra	Jordan and Jordan (1980)	N
Twi	Christaller (

A number of Twi and Nafaanra items were identified by speakers during the interviews.

Domp WORDLIST

	Gloss	Domp	Commentary
No.	Nouns		
1.	head	ɲu	
2.	hair (head)	nyine	
3.	eye	nyisi	cf. Gonja nìfí
4.	nose	kaŋgɔnɔ	
5.	mouth	kanu	cf. Gonja kánɔ
6.	ear	sepe	
7.	tooth	nyì	# nyì- is an ancient Niger-Congo root
8.	tongue	dandulo	cf. Gonja ki-dùndúlòŋ
9.	forehead	kasirɔ	
10.	cheek	ngbwi	
11.	chin	kaye	
12.	beard	kanufuu	‘mouth’ + fuu
13.	face	nyirɔ	The nyì element appears in ‘hair’ and ‘eye’
14.	neck	kɔnɔ	
15.	throat	gbɔntɔnɔ	
16.	arm/hand	hale	
17.	shoulder	baa	
18.	armpit	baa	
19.	elbow	hale mbwi	arm + ?
20.	leg	yaa	cf. Gonja kèyà
21.	thigh	jampulu	
22.	knee	ɲgwali	
23.	nail	ɲgurufe’	
24.	breast (female)	nyupo	A # ny- root for ‘breast is common in Kwa languages but also occurs in Dakoid, suggesting a Benue-Kwa origin.
25.	belly	punu	# pu- is a widespread Niger-Congo root for ‘belly’
26.	navel	pulu	presumably the pu- element is Niger-Congo ‘belly’
27.	back	kamene’	
28.	buttocks	ntɔnɔba	
29.	body	yuru’	
30.	skin	bla	
31.	bone	wuu	
32.	heart	lɔlɔŋo	< N
33.	lungs	fɔrɔfɔrɔ	
34.	liver	buruce’	
35.	blood	nkla	cf. Gonja ɲ-kàláj
36.	saliva	kilɔ	v
37.	tear (n)	nyisizu	
38.	shit	duni	
39.	urine	buflɔ	
40.	breath	futi	
41.	person	ʃya	
42.	man	nyine	

Dompo Wordlist – Circulation Draft
Commentary

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
43.	woman	kii	
44.	child (general)	kadya	
45.	husband	kulu	
46.	wife	ka	
47.	mother	ne nii	
48.	father	tru	
49.	son	nyine	
50.	daughter	kii	
51.	grandfather	nyi naŋgine	
52.	grandmother	nina	
53.	ancestors	nyaŋine ana	
54.	friend	nakpa	
55.	guest/stranger	fɔ	
56.	chief	wura	
57.	doctor (native)	durapu	
58.	blacksmith	gilihɔ	
59.	hunter	pampo	
60.	slave	dipo	
61.	thief	yudipo	ŋ
62.	witch	gbɛ	
63.	widow	kuluwepo	
64.	barren woman	emeŋkuri	
65.	shadow	kayu	
66.	corpse	buni	
67.	name	nyine	
68.	forest	duri	
69.	bush	fa	
70.	grass	fa	
71.	tree	yi	cf. Gonja keyia
72.	branch	yi hale	
73.	leaf	mfana	
74.	bark (of tree)	jɔfwe	
75.	root	li	
76.	seed	yisure	
77.	thorn	wi	
78.	vine	fla	
79.	mushroom	njerewe	
80.	sorghum	tuu	cf. Gonja kùtúwè
81.	millet	nee	
82.	maize	basawe	
83.	rice	malo	< N.
84.	yam (general) (<i>D. guineensis</i>)	jɔ	cf. Gonja kújɔ
85.	red yam	kaŋba	< Twi?
86.	aerial yam	kwi	
87.	new cocoyam ²	mankani	<
88.	cassava	li	
89.	sweet potato	mflojɔ	

² (*Xanthosoma mafaffa*)

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
90.	root plants	yisore	all plants that fruit underground
91.	cowpea (<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>)	cibi	cf. Gonja cèbè
92.	groundnut(s)	daŋra	
93.	Bambara groundnut	kwi	
94.	chili pepper	ciri	
95.	cotton	kurande	< ?
96.	sorrel	nsě	
97.	okra	ngbeni	cf. Gonja kàgbìní
98.	garden egg	tiri	cf. Gonja kàtèré
99.	onion	gyinde	
100.	tomato	gunisuri	
101.	melon	ŋkerawe	
102.	plantain	brana	< Twi
103.	banana (<i>Musa</i> AAA)	kɔdu	< Twi
104.	sugar-cane	afigye	
105.	pawpaw	brɔfrɛ	< Twi
106.	gourd (generic)	kawe	
107.	oil palm	abe'	< Twi
108.	raffia-palm	dinsa	
109.	silk-cotton tree (<i>C. pentandra</i>)	kle	cf. Gonja kàkíliyà
110.	shea tree (<i>V. paradoxa</i>)	ŋkili-u	cf. Gonja kàkùlúwù
111.	dawadawa (<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>)	kakune'	cf. Gonja kácónò
112.	animal	sɔ'	
113.	tail	sɔ'bi	
114.	horn	mfa	
115.	dog	kantiti	
116.	cat*	kaŋan nyisi	
117.	goat	sii	
118.	he-goat	luru	
119.	castrated goat	biseemɔ	
120.	sheep	sede	
121.	ram	sede nyine	
122.	bull	naa nyine	
123.	cow	naa	
124.	donkey*	kunumɔ	
125.	horse*	baŋa	
126.	pig*	piraku	< Portuguese via Twi?
127.	elephant	sulo	
128.	hippopotamus	ca	
129.	buffalo	bo	
130.	lion	nyinagbɔ	
131.	leopard	ŋkurofeso	
132.	serval	gban	

Dompo Wordlist – Circulation Draft

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
133.	civet	kaŋkane	Evidently a common word in this area, as it is identical in Mo, Wangara and Banda
134.	bush genet	gbari	
135.	porcupine	kɔ̀tɔ̀kɔ̀	Common to most nearby languages
136.	brush-tailed porcupine	apese	Common to Mo and Banda (Ashanti)
137.	hyena	kunu	
138.	hunting dog	mbokimbo	
139.	wart-hog	luwi	
140.	bushpig	kɔ̀kɔ̀te	Common to most nearby languages
141.	aardvark	soblɔ̀	
142.	giant pangolin	pra	
143.	tree pangolin	kulele	
144.	hedgehog	tɔ̀ɔ̀buru	similar to Banda (Ashanti)
145.	antelope spp.	sana	
146.	Western hartebeest	cɔ̀ɔ̀	
147.	red-flanked duiker	sana	
148.	monkey generic	yihosɔ̀	
149.	White-thighed colobus	popo	N.B. <i>Colobus polykomos vellerosus</i>
150.	green monkey	fari	
151.	patas monkey	prɛ̃	
152.	baboon	yya	
153.	bushbaby	fanyeemi	
154.	hedgehog	tɔ̀ɔ̀buru	similar to Banda (Ashanti)
155.	antelope spp.	sana	
156.	Western hartebeest	cɔ̀ɔ̀	
157.	red-flanked duiker	sana	
158.	Maxwell's duiker	kakpwɛ̃ɛ̃	
159.	grey duiker	coo	
160.	oribi	wuloɔ̀	
161.	reedbuck	folɔ̀ɔ̀	
162.	waterbuck	buruɔ̀	
163.	kob	fulofulo	
164.	Roan antelope	koo	cf. Mo ko , Lobi kɔ̀ɔ̀ , Dagbani kɔ̀ɔ̀ .
165.	bushbuck	lɔ̀ɔ̀	
166.	water-chevrotain	kirikirija	Identical word in Mo and Gyɔ̀ɔ̀
167.	hare	lɔ̀ɔ̀	
168.	Gambian squirrel	apuru	Resembles Gyɔ̀ɔ̀ and Banda (Ashanti)
169.	Ground squirrel	kyapo	
170.	Gambian mongoose	nyaawuro	
171.	dwarf mongoose	kɔ̀kɔ̀bo	The same word in almost all languages of the area
172.	bat, fruit	kɔ̀ɔ̀kɔ̀	
173.	bat, house	jampepe	perhaps resemble Mo word for fruit-bat jem
174.	rat (generic)	levuro	
175.	giant rat	kore	

	Gloss	Dompō	Commentary
176.	striped mouse	cawe	
177.	clawless otter	buso	
178.	honey badger	sisiri	
179.	cane rat	kōla	
180.	tortoise 1	siṅgunu	
181.	tortoise 2	seō	
182.	terrapin	kapaca	
183.	turtle	yilemi	
184.	crocodile	leṅe	
185.	frog	plu	
186.	toad	plu	
187.	agama lizard	lamre	perhaps generic for small lizard
188.	gecko	kadinsa	
189.	chameleon	gōṅguro	
190.	Bosc's monitor	tandi	
191.	water monitor	due	
192.	skink	blōblō	cf. Banda Ashanti
193.	snake (generic)	we'	an ancient Niger-Congo root
194.	spitting cobra 1	we' bibli	
195.	spitting cobra 2	dōdōdō	
196.	amphisbaenid	diṅculo	
197.	African python	ṅgle	
198.	royal python	ṅlegō	
199.	water snake	dumiri	
200.	sand snake	wepere	
201.	green mamba	vāva	
202.	rhinoceros viper	bere	
203.	carpet viper	gbeteri	cf. Banda, Gyɔɔ
204.	fish	kabee	
205.	mudfish	kōplo	
206.	tilapia	sikuri	
207.	electric fish	bugusu	
208.	crab (water)	ngla	
209.	bird	kabwi	
210.	wing	baa	
211.	feather	mutee	
212.	egg	fle	cf. Gonja fùlè
213.	duck (domestic)*	apro	
214.	chicken	kusi babi	cf. Gonja kòfí
215.	cock	kusi nyine	
216.	guinea-fowl	cya	
217.	vulture	kōkōsaki	
218.	black kite	lanḡe	
219.	cattle-egret	bōṅōbōṅō	
220.	owl	kayidi supo	

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
221.	housefly	tansi	
222.	cockroach	tebre	
223.	mosquito	kapini	
224.	louse	ɲso'	
225.	bee	ɲonsi	
226.	mason wasp	vuvuɲo	
227.	butterfly	katoto	
228.	praying mantis	bɔŋgɔɔ	
229.	ant (generic)	fifi	
230.	ant, flying	prepre	
231.	termite (generic)	kaŋka	
232.	termite hill	sipra	
233.	spider	nase'	
234.	giant scorpion	gagagoma	cf. Nafaanra, Gyɔɔɔ etc.
235.	brown scorpion	kanaa	
236.	village	ndɔwi	
237.	compound	landreɛnyɔ	
238.	road	kpa	cf. Gonja àkpábi
239.	field	raki	
240.	farm	ndɔ	
241.	granary	dɔŋdɔŋ	
242.	house	landɔ	
243.	roof	buɲu	
244.	door	klu	
245.	wall (of room)	ma	
246.	iron (metal)	glihɔ	
247.	axe	kafe	
248.	hoe (gen)	kadegbe	
249.	hoes (types)	kadegbe buɲɔ	
250.	handle (of tool)	foo	
251.	knife	bɔfia kacai	
252.	cutlass	bɔfia gbɔ	
253.	adze	luu	
254.	bow (weapon)	poo	
255.	arrow	paŋ	
256.	quiver	puri	
257.	rope	fla	cf. Gonja éfól
258.	chain	glihɔ	see 'iron'
259.	ladder	dipɔ	
260.	stool	kaja	
261.	bed	dihɔ	
262.	mat (gen)	janja	
263.	mat (sleeping)	deŋle	

Dompo Wordlist – Circulation Draft

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
264.	comb	kaṅwaari	
265.	money	ṅwəsire	
266.	cloth (wrapper)	kaca	
267.	bag (types)	puri	
268.	basket (general)	kake	
269.	head-pad	kne	
270.	broom	piṣi	
271.	mortar	pni	
272.	pestle	pnimpo	
273.	winnowing tray	kanuwe'	
274.	grindstone (lower)	bwi	see 'stone'
275.	pot (clay) (generic)	kalo	
276.	spear (types)	paṅ	but see 'arrow'
277.	food	giṣo	
278.	meat	bla	
279.	soup	po	
280.	salt	flo	
281.	fat	fwe	
282.	oil	ṅku	
283.	palm-wine	nsafufulu	water + ?
284.	water	nsu	cf. Gonja ṅcú
285.	fire	dee	cf. Gonja è-dé
286.	fireplace	sire	
287.	firewood	kadee	
288.	ashes	nsine	
289.	charcoal	dinu	
290.	smoke	disi	
291.	rubbish heap	ṅgwuna	
292.	earth, soil	kawole	
293.	stone	bwi	
294.	sand	nyise	
295.	mud	dopoo	
296.	clay (for pots)	cuu	
297.	dust	pi	
298.	hole (in ground)	pe	
299.	dew	mwezu	
300.	land/country	fi kawole	
301.	lake	bū	
302.	swamp/wetland	mpende	
303.	hill/mountain	bii	
304.	valley	kpa	
305.	river	bundō	
306.	riverbank	bundi	
307.	sky	bware nyiro	
308.	cloud	mpwece	
309.	wind	afu	
310.	rain (n.)	gwari	

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
311.	sun	pa	cf. Gonja èpèñí
312.	moon/month	fle	cf. Gonja kòfól . This is an ancient Niger-Congo root for moon given by Westermann (1927:276). This form, however, resembles the Benue-Congo attestations, often of the form #- fele
313.	star	mpwece abi	
314.	day	kake	
315.	night	kanya	cf. Gonja kányé
316.	today	kabiri	
317.	yesterday	ndiri	
318.	tomorrow	ke	
319.	year	kafaanu	
320.	disease / illness	lo'	
321.	sore / wound	lok nyimi	
322.	hunger	kaṅku	
323.	thirst	tyepu	
324.	war, fight	kɔ	
325.	death	lewu	
326.	work (n)	sumi	
327.	song	ṅgyɔ	
328.	medicine (trad.)	pru	
329.	God	bwarɔṅgo	
	Pronouns		
330.	I	mi	
331.	you	wo	
332.	he/she/it	nyine	
333.	we	aniya	
334.	you	aniide	
335.	they	bam	
	Verbs		
336.	accompany	yɔ	
337.	add to	kyakɔrɔ	
338.	arrive	lwa	
339.	be pregnant	kame	
340.	beat (drum)	la	
341.	beg	kuli	
342.	begin	tɔnɔ	
343.	bite	duɔ	
344.	blow (wind)	biri	
345.	blow (mouth)	fusɔ	
346.	boil (v)	daa	
347.	breathe	fute	
348.	build (house)	yu	
349.	burn (vi)	cɔ	
350.	buy	tɔ	

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
351.	call (summon)	tiri	
352.	carry (load)	hra	
353.	chew	we	
354.	choose	lyaku	
355.	climb	gyi	
356.	come	ba	cf. Gonja bà
357.	cook	daa	
358.	count	kla	
359.	cut (cloth)	kwi	
360.	cut down (tree)	kwi	
361.	dance	cya	
362.	defecate	kɔ	
363.	descend	bule	
364.	die	wu	cf. Gonja wú
365.	dig	pagyɔ	
366.	divide (share out)	mare	
367.	do/make	bɔ'	
368.	dream (v)	kudare	
369.	drink	nu	cf. Gonja nú though an ancient Niger-Congo root (W. 269)
370.	dry in sun	fa	
371.	eat	gyi	cf. Gonja jì
372.	enter	lwabrɔ	
373.	fall (v)	trɔ	
374.	finish (a task)	lwi	
375.	fly (v)	cu	
376.	forget	ta	
377.	gather (things)	kula	
378.	give	wɔ	
379.	give birth	kurɛ	
380.	go out/exit	yɔ	
381.	grind (vt)	kɔrɔ	
382.	grow (v.i.)	da	
383.	hear	nu	cf. Gonja nú
384.	jump	te	
385.	kill	mɔmɔ	
386.	kneel	guɣu ŋwale	
387.	know	nyi	cf. Gonja nyì
388.	laugh (v)	muse	
389.	lick	disa	
390.	lie (down)	kawole	
391.	like, want	lisɔ	
392.	live (exist)	wɔŋkpa	
393.	marry	liɣfu	
394.	mould (pot)	kula	
395.	pass (by)	kyɔ	
396.	plait (hair)	kiriɣu	
397.	pound (mortar)	wese	
398.	pour (vt)	bli	

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
399.	pull	briso	
400.	push	nyinimu	
401.	receive	wura	
402.	refuse (request)	homi	
403.	remember	kana	
404.	reply (question)	nyinji	
405.	return (vi)	laŋemba	
406.	ride (horse etc.)	gyi	
407.	roast	tɔ	
408.	rub	tugo	
409.	run	hile	cf. Gonja ɟilɛ
410.	say	yɛ	
411.	scratch	wɔle	
412.	see	wu	cf. Gonja wù
413.	sell	fee	
414.	send (s.o. to do s.t.)	swa	
415.	shoot (v)	manya	
416.	show	tu	
417.	sing	benjo	
418.	sit (down)	tyena	
419.	sleep (v)	dihɪ	cf. Gonja dí
420.	smell	fye'	
421.	sneeze	ŋgosi	
422.	spit	fwi kule	
423.	stand (up)	kaŋli	
424.	steal	yuri	
425.	suck	nyupɔ	
426.	swallow	mene	cf. Gonja mén but this appears to be a common West African root, reconstructed by Westermann for PMC.
427.	sweep (vt)	fi	
428.	swim	la	
429.	take off (clothes)	lyamɔ	
430.	throw (vt)	tu	perhaps related to common Niger-Congo #ta-
431.	turn round (vi)	hile kamla	
432.	twist (rope etc.)	ki	
433.	urinate	bu fulɔ	
434.	vomit	kwe	
435.	walk (v)	nare	
436.	wash	fru	
437.	weave (e.g. cloth)	luk	
438.	weep (cry)	su	
439.	wipe	dege	
440.	work (v)	sumi	
441.	yawn	fute	see 'breathe'
	Adjectives		

	Gloss	Dompo	Commentary
442.	black	bibiri	
443.	white	fufulu	
444.	red	pepere	
	Numerals		
445.	one	kòò	
446.	two	nyðð	cf. Lorhon nyooř
447.	three	saa	A weakening of #taa , an ancient Niger-Congo root for ‘three’
448.	four	nayi	
449.	five	nuum	the #nu- element is very widespread in West Africa (W. 271) but the bilabial nasal in C ₂ only exists in scattered attestations, e.g. Dogon nùmɔnɔ
450.	six	ʃye	
451.	seven	sonɔ	
452.	eight	buluwe	
453.	nine	kpannu	
454.	ten	kiri	
455.	eleven	kirikoo	
456.	twelve	kirinyðð	
457.	twenty	ɖyð	
458.	twenty-one	ɖyð na kiri	
459.	thirty	ɖyð na kuli	
460.	forty	ɖyð nyðð	
461.	hundred	lafa	< N. lafa

The Classification of Dompo

The most recent influence on the Dompo language is clearly Nafaanra, but Dompo is clearly not related to it. Painter (1967) assumes that Dompo belongs to North Guang, which, on the basis of the lexicostatistic counts used in his paper, it does. The numerous correspondences with Gonja suggest either that;

- a) it is a dialect of Gonja that has come under heavy influence from other languages
- b) it is a Guan language related to Gonja that has been relexified from Gonja and other languages
- c) it is a language of unknown provenance that has been heavily relexified from Gonja and other languages

One argument in favour of c) is that no names for wild animals in Dompo resemble those of Gonja in any way. Some of them resemble Mo and the Senufoid languages in the area (not only Nafaanra but Gyɔɔɔ and Banda Ashanti) but others seem to have no external parallels. Given the lack of detailed lexical material on many neighbouring languages this cannot be the basis for any firm conclusions. Nonetheless, it does suggest that Dompo might retain some traces of the pre-Niger-Congo languages of West Africa.

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