

The status of the East Kainji languages of Central Nigeria: recent research

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1. Introduction: the identification of an East Kainji group

The East Kainji languages are a poorly studied group of some 26 languages spoken north and west of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria. A wordlist of Takaya (Taura) is included in Gowers (1907) but the first extensive listing is in Meek (1925:137), where the classification (contributed by N.W. Thomas) lists them under ‘Nigerian Semi-Bantu’ along with Plateau and Jukunoid. Meek (1931, II: 125-218) collected wordlists of Piti, Atsam, Kurama, Janji, Gbiri and Niragu which have remained the basis for many later analyses. Westermann and Bryan (1952:106-108) list these languages (Atsam, Kurama, Janji, Piti, Jere) as ‘isolated language groups’ but classify them together with other ‘class languages’, although noting that Chawai has ‘no noun classes’. The group was originally identified by Greenberg (1955) as Plateau 1b, where Plateau 1a was what is now the geographically separate West Kainji, which includes such languages as cLela and Kambari. Rowlands (1962) seems to have rediscovered this using the wordlists of without reference to Greenberg, and argued that East Kainji should be treated as distinct from Plateau. The idea that Kainji languages were co-ordinate with Plateau rather than simply to be included within it seems to have surfaced in the Benue-Congo Working Group as did the informal use of the name Kainji, following the creation of Lake Kainji in 1974. Hoffman’s (1976) listing in the Index of Nigerian Languages calls them ‘Western Plateau’ and the term ‘Kainji’ seems to have only been formally recognised in print by Gerhardt (1989).

Published evidence for the unity of East Kainji as a group and for its subclassification is non-existent, as is any coherent account of its relation to West Kainji. Scattered wordlists, some very short, are found in the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist (BCCW) (Williamson & Shimizu 1968; Williamson 1972) and in the publications of Shimizu (1968, 1979, 1982). Many languages, especially of the Kauru group, appear to have no material available at all. Di Luzio (1972) is the only published grammar sketch of an East Kainji language, tiMap, while Anderson (1981) presented a more complete account of the noun classes of the same language.

2. East Kainji languages today

No reliable or even unreliable figures available for the number of speakers of East Kainji languages today, but most groups are very small and language competence is declining. It is unlikely that there are more than 100,000 speakers of all East Kainji languages. There are no serious literacy projects in any East Kainji language, although some initial work in Kurama and Amo has been undertaken. East Kainji languages have no profile in any other media. Since the field trips conducted by Shimizu in the 1970s there have been virtually no new materials published on East Kainji languages. As a consequence, from 2003, a survey of East Kainji communities has been undertaken especially in the Jos area, focusing on languages reported by Shimizu as severely threatened¹. So far data has been collected on the Boze [=Buji], Loro, Panawa, Sheni, Tunzu, Ziriya and Zora [=Cokobo] languages and the programme will try and visit all the remainder in the coming years. Appendix 1 provides a listing of the extant or recently extinct East Kainji languages with a tentative classification. Since there is no data for some languages, the grouping depends on statements by informants, especially in the Kauru area.

Almost all East Kainji languages are threatened, except perhaps Amo and Chawai, and many reported to exist may well now be extinct. The main source of endangerment is the spread of Hausa and the small size of communities. East Kainji languages abut the Hausa-speaking area to the north and their speakers tend to be fluent in Hausa. Many languages are threatened by the declining competence of younger speakers. Although there is now some energy to protect larger languages like Boze, Tunzu and Amo, isolated lects encapsulated among the Hausa, such as Kuda-Chamo, are virtually gone. Ziriya is completely dead, Sheni has just six speakers and Zora is clearly in decline (Appendix 2 presents the results of a field visit to Ziriya). It is unlikely the trend will be easily reversed, but larger speech communities such as the Boze, where there is an articulate older generation with an interest in language development, are a more realistic proposition.

¹ I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of John Nengel, University of Jos, who studied some East Kainji communities in the 1980s (Nengel 1999) and has accompanied me on all the field trips.

3. Linguistic features of East Kainji

3.1 Phonology

All East Kainji languages so far studied have a relatively simple phonology and broadly resemble one another. The system of εBoze is given below as an example.

εBoze has eight phonemic vowels;

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

All εBoze vowels have long and short forms;

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i:		u:
	e:	ə:	o:
	ɛ:		ɔ:
Open		a:	

There are no nasalised vowels.

Diphthongs

εBoze has no true diphthongs, that is, sequences of dissimilar vowels. But Vy and Vw sequences occur and are usually written Vi and Vu by speakers familiar with Hausa orthography. Nonetheless they only ever bear a single tone (Table 1);

Table 1. Vy and Vw sequences in εBoze

	εBoze	Gloss
ay	biǵà̀y	mushroom
	riwà̀y	year
oy	cǒ̀y	to drop pl.
	sò̀ò̀y	to put on (clothes) pl.
aw	isá̀w	grave
	udà̀ká̀nká̀w	tree sp.
ew	ù̀gew	hole in ground
əw	udầntầw	tree sp.

Vowel harmony

εBoze exhibits ± ATR vowel harmony in the stem, where central vowels can go with either harmony set. Prefixes do not underlyingly harmonise with the stem, but some speakers show a tendency to regularise the

system. So, one speaker may give a word with a ri- or ti- prefix, and while a member of the same community will use rɛ- or tɛ-.

Consonants

ɛBoze consonants are as follows:

	Bilabia l	Labio- dental	Alve- olar	Alveop alatal	Palatal	Vela r	Labial -velar	Glotta l
Plosive	p b		t d			k g	gb	
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ		
Trill			r					
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ				h
Affricates					tʃ dʒ			
Approximant					y		w	
Lateral			l					
Approximant								

The labial-velar /gb/ seems to alternate freely with /gw/ in many speakers. This occasionally surfaces with non-contrastive labialisation as [gbw]. However, /kp/ is not heard and is apparently always realised as /kw/. ɛBoze has no palatalised consonants, except for /ɲ/ which is a separate consonant. However, non-phonemic palatalisation can be heard before front vowels, /i/, /e/ and /ɛ/. Similarly, there are no labialised consonants except for /kw/ which appears to be an allophone of /kp/, but non-phonemic labialisation can be heard before back vowels, /u/, /o/ and /ɔ/.

Nasal prefixes in ɛBoze are quite rare and are shifting to i- prefixes in some speakers. However, they exist and are tone-bearing. They are usually homorganic with the following consonant. Thus N is realised as;

[n] before alveolars
 [ŋ] before velars
 [m] before bilabials

ɛBoze words usually end in a vowel, but can end in approximants (-w or -y) or a nasal, always be realised as -ŋ.

ɛBoze has medial doubled consonants as a consequence of nasal-final words. When speakers attempt write a word such as **ùgàllùŋ** ‘wing’, they often end up with **uganlung**. Compounds in which the first element originally ended with a nasal, followed by a a consonant of similar type, -n, -l, and -r, result in doubled laterals, via nasal assimilation. Hence;

Wing	ùgàllùŋ
Squirrel (ground)	bigɛɛ
Sleep	ìrrɔ

The first consonant of the two bears a tone, which is probably the tone of the deleted prefix in the second element of the compound. However, some words of this type are no longer etymologically transparent, so this cannot easily be checked.

Tones

εBoze has four level tones as well as rising and falling tones. Some of the glide tones arise from long vowels and diphthongs, but others occur on single vowels. Level tones are marked as follows;

SUPERHIGH	double acute accent above the syllable	˝
HIGH	acute accent above the syllable	´
MID	unmarked	
LOW	grave accent over the syllable	`

The superhigh tones arise from a tone rule which requires all tones in singular nouns to be raised one level in the plural. Thus;

Table 2. Genesis of superhigh tones in εBoze

Gloss	sg.	pl.
Guest/stranger	ógè̀n	ágen
Doctor	óbè̀rè	ábere
Grave	isáw	ńsa!w

εBoze has a variety of glide tones, symbolised as follows;

RISING	hachek over the syllable	˘	cǒy	to drop
FALLING	circumflex over the syllable	ˆ	ipôη	baboons

Glides can occur between almost any two adjacent tone-heights. In addition, when the tones are raised in plural formations, the glides are raised in the same way. Thus a glide tone in a plural is usually one level higher than the singular.

Normally, nouns exhibit only three levels within a word and the superhigh therefore appears only in plurals. But at least one words has been identified with four tone levels;

bìshèshéně tree sp.

This may arise form compounding.

Anderson (1980) does not explicitly set out the tonology of tiMap but it appears to have two tones plus a rising tone in his account.

3.2 Nominal morphology

The nominal morphology of East Kainji languages is simple compared with their Plateau neighbours, with regular affix alternations, transparent concord and usually CV syllable structures. Anderson (1980) is the only comprehensive description of such as system. Shimizu (1968, 1979, 1982) includes a summary of the noun-class pairings he deduces from his wordlists, but these are far from complete, and in many languages the plurals were not recorded. The prefix system of εBoze described below is an example of an East Kainji system. An intriguing feature of εBoze and its immediate relatives is the wide variety of allomorphs that individual stems can support. Table 3 shows the singular prefixes of εBoze nouns;

Table 3. Singular prefixes of εBoze nouns

Prefix	Allomorphs	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss
∅-		kway	suffering	νόηονό	Grandfather		
a-	ə-	átíyé	day	ədəshə̀ri	sky		
bi-	bu-	bikana	thorn	bùrà	rain		
ε-		eyɔ	length				
i-		íwì	fear				
ka-		karuna	path				
ma-	mə-	màgàgara	branch	mədərəsu	eczema		
n-		nìɔ	ashes				
ono-	onɔ-			onðrɔmɛ	man		
o-	ɔ-,	òomò	grass	òvðkðlò	bark of tree		
ri-	re-, rɛ-	rìjì	root	rèkoze	rainy season	rənó	relations
te-, tɛ-,		tèene	charcoal	térɔmɛ	courage		
u-		ùtítí	tree				

ka- does not appear in an affix pairing and it might be that words with this initial syllable have a zero prefix. However, the word ‘road’, **ùrùnà** *pl. tiruna*, has a diminutive **karuna** ‘path’ which shows that ka- is a movable element. This prefix may well be cognate with the ko- diminutive found in some Plateau languages, such as Berom. The word **tukà** ‘medicine’ may well also incorporate a **tu-** allophone of the tV- prefix set, since –kal- is a widerepad root for ‘medicine’ in the Plateau area.

Table 4 shows the plural prefixes of εBoze nouns;

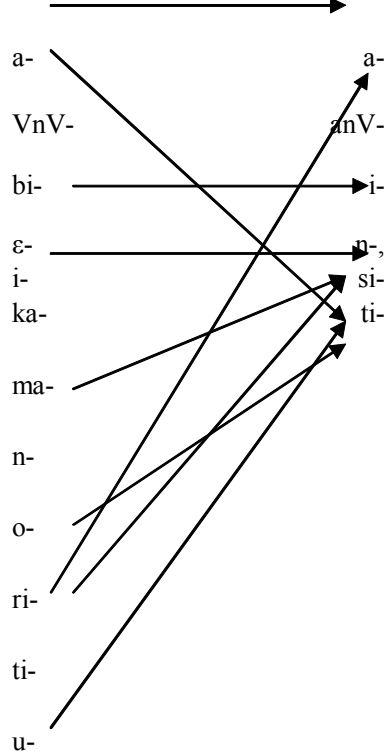
Table 4. Plural prefixes in εBoze nouns

Prefix	Allomorphs	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss
a-		àzuwa	stones				
anV-	ana-, ano-	ánàrómé	men	anóbáró	hunters		
ε-		εró	elephants				
i-		íkáná	thorns				
n-,	η-	ńsáw	graves				
si-	se-,	sìjì	roots	sèkoze	rainy seasons		
tí-	te-, tɛ-, tu-	tìtì	trees	tuva	leaves		

Just one noun, gecko, **mancɔ̀rò** *pl. m̀ancɔ̀rò* has a plural apparently marked by tone-change.

Figure 1 shows noun-class pairings in εBoze represented as a conventional affix net.

Figure 1. Noun-class pairings in εBoze



At least one language, tiSeni, has a radically different system. Instead of, or in addition to, affix alternation, tiSeni reduplicates the first syllable of the stem. Thus the prefix is sometimes retained and sometimes alternates. This is not recorded in neighbouring languages and Shimizu (ref) did not note it. Table 5 gives some examples of tiSeni nominal pluralisation strategies.

Table 5. tiSeni nominal plurals

Gloss	sg.	pl.
seed	ùgbérù	ùgbégbérù
forest	ùshìrím	ùshìrìshím
neck	iyâw	iyâwyâw
ear	ùtùway	tutuway

This suggests influence from non-Hausa Chadic languages; although there are no such languages in the area today. Hasha, a rather remote Plateau language, has undergone a similar development under the influence of the Chadic language, Sha. Despite this, tiSeni is otherwise lexically conventional.

Anderson (1980:174) give the singular/plural pairings of tiMap as follows;

Table 6. Noun-class affix pairings in tiMap

Singular		Plural	
u-	1	2	a-
ku-	3	4	te-
le	5	6	N-
N-	6	8	ni-
ki-	7	10	i-
fe-	9	12	ma-
ka-	11		

Source: Anderson (1980:174)

Although there are clear resemblances to εBoze, the widespread allomorphy of εBoze is not represented here and the system seems much more regular.

Appendix 3 presents data for a single gloss, ‘arm, hand’ for which one of the best datasets exists. Despite the varying quality of transcription it is clear that there is a common East Kainji root in all but a few languages, and that East Kainji has V- and CV- prefixes, which merge with the stem in some cases. The tones systems are evidently more elaborate than are yet recorded, and the surprising developments in tiSeni are yet to be explained.

4. Conclusions

Compared with West Kainji, which has undergone a wide variety of morphological changes that makes its component languages look very diverse, the East Kainji languages for which data exist are comparatively similar. Impressionistically, Atsam (Chawai) and Piti are somewhat different from the others, but the remainder form a continuous chain, although the Kuda-Chamo languages have clearly changed under the influence of the encircling Chadic languages. East Kainji languages are a little-studied group of languages in Central Nigeria, which represent a high priority in terms of endangerment and deserve more attention than this brief survey.

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Appendix 1. The East Kainji languages

- A. Southern
 - Piti
 - Atsam
- B. Jos group
 - a. Northern
 - i. Ningi cluster
 - Kudu-Camo (almost extinct)
 - Gamo-Ningi (Butu-Ningi†)
 - ii. Lame cluster
 - Gyem (almost extinct)
 - Shau (almost extinct)
 - iii. Lere cluster
 - Si (almost extinct)
 - Gana (almost extinct)
 - Takaya (almost extinct)
 - iv. North-central cluster
 - Izora (=Cokobo)
 - Lemoro
 - Sanga
 - Janji
 - εBoze (=Buji)-iGusu-iZeLe (=Jere)-iBunu (=Ribina)-iPanawa-iLoro
 - Iguta
 - Tunzu (=Duguza)
 - tiMap
 - v. Sheni cluster
 - Ziriya (extinct)
 - Kere (extinct)
 - Sheni (almost extinct)
 - b. Kauru
 - Gbiri-Niragu
 - Shuwa–Zamani
 - Surubu
 - Kurama
 - Mala-Ruma
 - Bina
 - Kono
 - Kaivi
 - Vono
 - Tumi
 - Kinuku
 - Dungu

Appendix 2. The end of Ziriya and Kεε

The Ziriya language is first referred to in Shimizu (1982: 108 ff.) where a brief wordlist is given. Sheni informants insisted that Sheni was the same language as Ziriya; however, the wordlists in Shimizu differ from one another, perhaps as a result of faulty recall. We visited Ziriya on 30th December 2003 and were able to interview Sarki Abubakar Yakubu, probably the last person with any recall of the language (Photo 1). Ziriya village is situated at N10° 22.6, E 8° 50. Ziriya was divided into a number of wards as follows;

Ziriya, Salingo, Kajakana, Wurno, Ungwar Marika, Funka and Farin Dutse.

The language has definitively disappeared, and even Sarkin Yakubu had only spoken it as a child, some sixty years ago. He could recall some greetings and some numbers, all of which corresponded to Sheni,

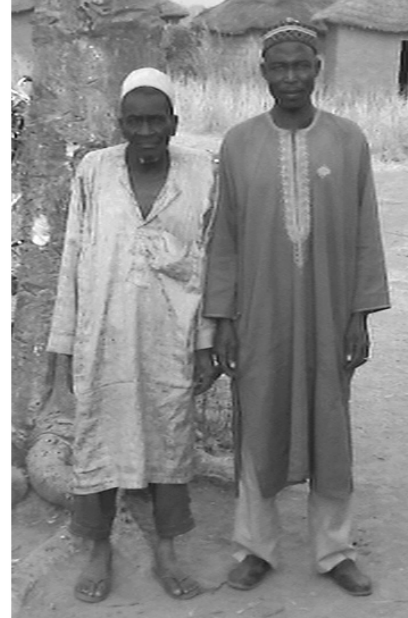
suggesting that the assertion that they were the same language is correct. There is a third village, Kere, somewhat further north, where the language was dropped even longer ago.

Appendix 3. East Kainji ‘arm, hand’

The following list for the word ‘arm, hand’ is based on the entries in the BCCW, but with entries from Shimizu (1979, 1982) and my own fieldwork. Languages for which no data exists are listed, to underline just how defective our understanding of this group remains. The column headed BCCW shows the language names used in that source.

<u>Language</u>	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>	<u>BCCW</u>
Southern			
Piti	mook		Piti
Atsam	wok		Chaw
Northern			
Ningi cluster			
Kudu	mò-ri		Kuda
Camo	ùkéri		Cham
Gamo	ù-ʔára	à-ʔára	Buta
Ningi			Ning
Lame cluster			
Gyem	ò-me ^k	cè-rèèku	Gyem
Shau	u-ʔara	tu-ʔara	
Lere cluster			
Si	àya		
Gana	ù-ʔaya		
Takaya	àyà		Taur
North-central cluster			
Izora	ù-ʔara	tààra	
eMoro	wàʔara	tàara	
Sanga	ò-ʔàra	tà-ʔàra	
Janji	tààre		Janj
εBoze	ò-wàrè	tàre	Buji
Gusu			
iZele	ò-warè	tà-are	
iBunu	ù-wàré	tà-àré	Ribn
iPanawa	ù-wàré	ti-wàré	
iLoro	ù-wàré	tààré	
iGuta	ù-wàri	tà-àri	
Tunzu			
tiMap	ùcàrà	àcàrà	Amo
Sheni cluster			
Ziriya (†)	àyí		
Sheni	taya	utataya	Shen
Kauru cluster			
Gbiri	*u-kula		Gure
	ka-kiara	na-	
Niragu	ka-tʃara		Kahu
Surubu	ka-tʃara	na-	Surb
Kurama	tá-àré	tí-	Krma
Mala			
Ruma			

Photo 1. Sarkin Yakubu (left), the last person to remember the Ziriya language



Language	Singular	Plural	BCCW
Bina			
Kono			
Kaivi			
Vono			
Tumi			
Kinuku			
Dungu			