

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 Kamuku 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.

It seems that the Damakawa are not well-regarded by neighbouring tribes. Acipu 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, although other WK cognates are similar.
5	wata	<i>moon</i>	ìppétíyò	<i>péete</i> in C'Lela
9	dutse	<i>stone</i>	táalí/átáalí (pl.)	Widespread WK root
10	babban dutse	<i>mountain</i>	<i>tantaduga</i>	
15	wuta	<i>fire</i>	hírà / wùláa	Widespread WK. <i>wulaa</i> is closest to Cicipu.
18	gatari	<i>axe</i>	ùdérkó	
24	ya sha	<i>drink (v)</i>	sɔɔ	Widespread WK
29	Allah	<i>God</i>	eshiri	Kambari <i>kə-shile</i> , also Duka <i>shir</i>
34	mace	<i>woman</i>	àtíbáná	
38	yaro	<i>child</i>	dfán màkùná / <i>cìyáná</i>	
59	wake	<i>bean</i>	jìbírí	
60	gyaḍa	<i>groundnut</i>	hàgwínó	Widespread WK
61	dawa	<i>guineacorn</i>	gyándá /gyàntá also shínà	<i>i-shina</i> is Kambari (Western and Tsuwaḍi)
63	gishiri	<i>salt</i>	lándǎ	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>	gáadù?	<i>tV-ga</i> is widespread in WK
82	miya	<i>soup</i>	kusǎ'ǎ	Identical to Cicipu and Kambari, not found elsewhere
92	ya bari	<i>leave (v)</i>	ragana	
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>	caa	Identical to Cicipu
114	ḍaki	<i>hut</i>	máḍḍáarú	
115	gida	<i>compound</i>	ùshíshí	
137	ya rera waḵa	<i>sing (v)</i>	mòzóbó (noun?)	<i>zɔg-</i> in Kamuku
145	ganye	<i>leaf</i>	cívá	
149	zafi	<i>hot</i>	ḍaarume	
154	kyau	<i>good</i>	ḍíràcû	
168	kaza	<i>chicken</i>	ùkúgá (female)	

190	mashi	<i>spear</i>	ùsímá	
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	
202	baki	<i>mouth</i>	hànú	-no/-nu widespread in WK
204	haƙori	<i>tooth</i>	hàníṅ	<i>v-nìṅ</i> in C'Lela
206	hannu	<i>hand</i>	ùhwáná	
219	ɗuwawu	<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*.

ɗíkúpá	<i>calabash</i>
ɗíkáapí	<i>bush (countryside) – we were given ikáapí in Kiilo village</i>
ribáná	<i>Darkarari tribe</i>
máɗárú	<i>granary [but see hut]</i>
cìjáú	<i>talking (abin magana) – we were also given jáú</i>
kùtáɗǎ	<i>kasko, kind of local pot/plate for serving soup – we also got ùtáɗǎ</i>
shélí	<i>young girl</i>
ɗùṅǎ	<i>small hoe (Hausa?)</i>
hɔɔbú	<i>guest hut (we were told this was Kambarci)</i>
áyà	<i>grinding stone</i>
ɗímátá	<i>giving birth</i>
kúgá	<i>cock</i>
cìgúligúli	<i>call (some kind of?)</i>
mòyóo	<i>beer</i>
mɔgújí	<i>sneeze</i>
zúmáí	<i>brother (ɗan uwa)</i>
ìzánk'ó	<i>dawn</i>
ɗǎrƙó	<i>I am going(?)</i>
gɔjɔ	<i>noise</i>
<i>shii</i>	<i>gossip</i>
<i>hàwǎ</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>rìimò</i>	<i>meat</i>
<i>kàbá</i>	<i>take</i>
<i>wéetēerè</i>	<i>girl</i>
<i>máɗáarú/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>

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

<i>'yán màkúmà iní?</i>	<i>what did you get? (me kã samu?)</i>
<i>riimò tókamò</i>	<i>you got meat</i>
<i>cáa mù!</i>	<i>give me</i>
<i>amu tǎnu kayu tǎntǎdugu</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.

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.