

Fam wordlist with Ndoola corresponding terms

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This is a wordlist of a language spoken in a single village, Sabon Gida, some 17 km. east of Kungana on the road from Mararaba to Bali in Taraba State, Nigeria. Outsiders call the language and village Koŋa. The people call themselves Fam and the language Awol Fam. There cannot have been more than 500 speakers when it was recorded in 1984, and I have no more recent information about the people or language. This data was when my linguistic skills were rudimentary, hence the lack of tone-marking. The choice of words for a basic wordlist may seem rather eccentric, but at the time I was more interested in cultural and had no idea how strange this language was to prove to be.

Most words have a standard plural **-bǎ**, which resembles many Mambiloid and Dakoid languages, but is hardly diagnostic. Some plurals also have an *a-* prefix, which also recalls Jukunoid, while many singular nouns also seem to have frozen *a-* prefixes. ‘Man’ and ‘woman’ have unusual plurals as is common in West Africa. The presence of the dental fricative /θ/ is characteristic of Jukunoid and atypical for Mambiloid languages.

I went into print in 1993 to say that this was a Mambiloid language related to Ndoola (Ndoro) on the basis of a very few cognates. Since that date, our knowledge of both Mambiloid and Dakoid has expanded considerably and reconsidering the data now I am much less sure about the affiliation of Fam. Many words have no obvious cognates at all, and this may be an isolated language, perhaps a single branch of Bantoid.

I have now retyped the wordlist in Unicode format, and it is given below. For comparison purposes, the list also includes the lexemes for Ndoola extracted from a list recorded in Zongo Ajiya in 1999 and transcribed by Bruce Connell, but it is all too clear that only a few resemble Fam. The comments column refers only to the Fam item. Any further suggestions would be welcome.

Gloss	Fam	Ndoola	Comment
man	yeyir pl. ayerbo	nūŋwárā	
woman	yife pl. yeswǎp	nūŋwánā	
head	cɛl	húlā	?
face	ŋgir	ʃí	?
nose	nwun	ŋ ^w úná [̄]	common in Mambiloid though usually with <i>n-</i> . Also in Plateau, Jukunoid, Cross River. cf. Horom wǎl pl. awǎl , Fyem đu-wól pl. awól , Berom wól pl. bāwól , Kulu ìweene , Wase nwán , Leggbo ŋ^wũ .
mouth	ŋwũ	ŋ ^w ũ	widespread Niger-Congo root. Occurs in Mambiloid, e.g. Oumiare Wawa nū ŋ , Nizaa nũũ
tooth	juŋ	ĩŋā	Proto-Mambiloid would be something <i>#nine</i> . This form is more similar to Plateau, e.g. Morwa a-juŋ . The back vowel is unusual in the widespread Niger-Congo root
tongue	álám	mēlā	These consonants are regularly metathesised in Niger-Congo. Mambiloid reflects both, and Fam may be cognate with Hore Taram lem and Nizaa kílémnī .

Gloss	Fam	Ndoola	Comment
neck	acuŋ	mènā	Fam reflects a widespread Benue-Congo root something # ton , found in Mambila as Maberem tŋgǒ .
arm, hand	vwa	āŋgáró	Fam reflects widespread Benue-Congo # bok- , but more closely Plateau languages such as Berom vwó .
leg	akwal	āŋg ^w úrā	Fam reflects a widespread Mambiloid root some like # gwari , e.g. Somyev g^wári , Vure gwááŋ , Nizaa gbāw . However see also Batu Kamino (Tivoid) áká 'leg'. Also Agwaagune Adim é:káli and other Bantoid, e.g. Bendeghe (Ekoid) è-kád . see 'meat'
animal (gen.)	ɪnam gənə	njāmā	# nam is a Niger-Congo root, but the change n→ɲ is classically supposed to indicate Bantu-like languages.
meat	ɪnam	njāmā	
horse	avun	vénā	Fam and Ndoro are probably cognate and do not otherwise resemble Mambiloid, but the horse is not very old in the region. Perhaps connected with Fulfulde vamnde , 'donkey'? Niger-Congo # -na(k) and found throughout Mambiloid.
cow, zebu	ane	néē	However, the fronting of the central vowel is highly unusual
fowl, chicken	àfóò	ʃōōrā	Characteristic Mambiloid root, e.g. Lemele Mambila tʃɔr .
goat	aɟwəl	vólá	Fam resembles Oumiare Wawa ɟɟéɾ and Mwanip ɟɟin . The remainder of Mambiloid reflects the older # bi root.
sheep	dim ɵey	váltimbín	No obvious external resemblances, but this must be a compound
dog	aɟo	ʃíē	cf. isolated Mvanip ɟɟuar .
cat	akule	wáípiánk ^w è	The cat is a recent introduction, and this must be a loanword, but the source is unknown to me.
elephant	aθa	sāŋgāmā	see below
hippopotamus	aθa ɪnum	ɟzáí	'elephant of water'. Ndung has tàn , which also looks similar to widespread terms for 'elephant', e.g. Bamessing kà-tàn . This could be cognate with widespread # ton for 'elephant'. widespread Benue-Congo root for 'buffalo', e.g. Nupe eya . Mambiloid roots almost always feature a second syllable with -ɛ- as C ₂ as Ndoro.
buffalo, "bushcow"	iya	jáárā	
lion	awuyir	wūyígā	One of the few roots where Ndoro and Fam resemble each other and no surrounding language.
leopard	asar	mbárá	cf. isolated Mvanip sere .
hyena	abay	támbinā	Mambiloid has generally borrowed from Fulfulde, so this is an isolated root.
tortoise	f uwa kway	f úlā	Ndoro and Fam resemble each other and no surrounding language.
crocodile	ɟep	ŋgāānā	Fam is isolated, although there is a very similar root in Upper Cross which looks as if it is to be reconstructed #ɪɟep. cf. Mbembe ɪjèp , Akam dèp .
fish	aɟwey	ndūŋā	cf. Upper Cross Agwaagune é^lzén , Lokə èsàu
bird	awun	nōnā	?
egg	ɟɪndɟwo	ŋjènā	?
yam (gen.)	vuŋ	ŋgòlā	?
millet	gambal	gārā	?
sorghum	θi	jīgā	?
okra	ʃum	tūrē	cf. Upper Cross Kukele éʃùt ,
old cocoyam ¹	tuùŋ	ākūrā	cf. isolated Vute mitùú .
sorrel, roselle	ʃwɔŋ	bāzārā	?
beans (gen.)	sa	ēʃíē	?
groundnut(s)	aθi wap	ŋg ^w ōmā	Fam = Bambara groundnut. aθi is a borrowing from Jukunoid

¹ (*Colocasia esculenta*)

Gloss	Fam	Ndoola	Comment
banana	agwe	ʃūē	?
tree	ʃfi pl. aʃfi	ʃi	cf. Niger-Congo #-ti ‘tree’. Upper Cross Ofonokpan ìʃfi
leaf	ra	fú	?
locust tree	àlám		?
sun	aŋgwo	ānjārā	cf. Upper Cross Etuno II ìpáŋù ,
moon, month	aʒer	ʃtè	?
sand	aθa	nʃi	?
stone	tal pl atalbə	ʃélā	Common Mambiloid root. e.g. Lemele tól . Also widespread in Benue-Congo, e.g. Upper Cross Kukele lèttà:l .
water	jim kwe	mbúrá	Widespread in Mambiloid, e.g. Ba Mambila nì mò , Kwanja Ndung ɲòm . The ɲi element also occurs in Plateau and Jukunoid.
fire	va	ŋgūrā	Mambiloid has wa(a) almost throughout.
go (finally)	harə	ē, éruā	perhaps cf. Ndoola form and Somyev tehorya .
come	kaŋbə	gəbə	?
eat	ləra	ʃié	? cf. Tep liē
drink	nuwunə	ŋwā	cf. Cambap ŋwárā , Tep wúrā .
play (games)	mun	wəlā	?
sing	yar	dūè	?
kill	val bəle	fórā	?
beat (drum), flog	za	nāŋā	?
one	wuni	ʃírə	This resembles the Upper Cross languages, e.g. Leggbo wòní , Mbembe wòní .
two	baale	hājlā	Fam retains the older Niger-Congo root as does Nizaa baāra and Vute baām .
three	tawnə	tājrā	A common Niger-Congo root. This resembles the Upper Cross languages, e.g. Leggbo àttán , Mbembe ntàn .
four	daare	njá̄	? A reflex Niger-Congo root for ‘three’
five	ʃwiine	sōnī	? cognate with common Niger-Congo root #tooni . cf. Ndung ʃū:n , Nizaa téénā . cf. Upper Cross Lubilo àté:n , Leggbo àdʒè:n
six	ʃowuna	sōŋkírə	5 + 1
seven	ʃipalə	sōŋk ^w əlā	5 + 2
eight	twitawnə	sōŋtāmṛā	5 + 3
nine	ʃundaarə	sōŋnjá̄	5 + 4
ten	kwoy	jóbə̄t	Not reflected in Mambiloid but looks like a retention of widespread Plateau root #kwop .
twenty	ɲiwunə	ɖʒāŋ	? The second element looks like ‘one’ but why this should occur in ‘twenty’ is unclear.

Conclusion: the classification of Fam

Further research on the affiliations of Fam make it no clearer, indeed its network of regional connections is more puzzling. However, the claim of a relationship with Ndoro is now seen to be very weak. Fam has quite a number of common lexical items with no obvious etymology. It has many more cognates with Mambiloid, but often with items that are isolated within Mambiloid and are therefore not proof of a genetic connection. For example, the shared items with the Mvanip language (‘leopard’, ‘dog’) are particularly noteworthy. Given that these languages are quite remote from one another today, this is possible evidence for a shared substrate. Although there is some evidence of Jukun contact in the phonology, there seems to be no convincing evidence for a Jukunoid affiliation. More striking are the common lexical items with Upper Cross, notably ‘one’. The northernmost Upper Cross languages are around Ogoja, which is far from the Fam area. However, these are not striking or regular enough to propose genetic affiliation.

It is clearly impossible to give a definitive answer to the classification of Fam based on the present dataset. It is not impossible that even if there were more data, Fam would prove to be an isolate within the Benue-Congo/Bantoid region. Its complete loss of noun-class apparatus does suggest a Bantoid affiliation and probably it is best treated as an isolated Bantoid language which has been in contact with Upper Cross languages at an unknown period when ethnolinguistic patterns were remote from those in place today.

References

Blench, R.M. 1993. An outline classification of the Mambiloid languages. *Journal of West African Languages* XXIII(1): 105-118.