

The Booni language

of

Bongo district, Upper East Region,
Northern Ghana

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AUTHOR**

Roger Blench
Mallam Dendo
8, Guest Road
Cambridge CB1 2AL
United Kingdom
Voice/Answerphone/Fax. 0044-(0)1223-560687
E-mail R.Blench@odi.org.uk
http://homepage.ntlworld.com/roger_blench/RBOP.htm

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1. Introduction

This is an annotated wordlist of the Booni language, spoken in Tindon Boko village, Bongo District, Upper East Region, Northern Ghana. The wordlist was collected by Roger Blench with the assistance of Emmanuel from a group of villagers in Booni on the 5th of June 2005. The language of elicitation was mixture of English, Hausa and Gurune.

The wordlist was collected as a ‘one-shot’ exercise and the transcription must therefore be regarded as preliminary. This analysis was prepared by Roger Blench, who added the comparative observations¹. This document is being circulated to scholars for comment.

2. Location, history and sociolinguistic situation

2.1 Nomenclature

The correct name of the people and language is as follows;

Boonja	one person
Boosi	people
Booni	language

Since this language seems to be previously unrecorded, there is no official or alternative form of the name.

2.2 Location and settlements

Booni is spoken in six villages around Bongo town; Tindin Boko, Adaboya, Duwa, Boorogo and Biyɔ̃ Boko (=Beo Boko). It seems to be spoken in parts of Bongo [Boonɔ̃] town only and to be relexified from Gurune, the dominant speech in this area. Boosi settlements are not discrete villages but rather individual compounds scattered across the countryside, so estimating the number of speakers is difficult, but there are probably 4-5000.

2.3 Language status

Rural Booni speakers interviewed in Tindon Boko do not generally speak any other languages except related Oti-Volta languages, such as the closely related Gurune. Only the literacy coordinator spoke some English and Hausa seems to be little known, despite its importance in markets in the region. Indeed, relexification from Gurune would appear to be the major threat, that Booni would gradually lose its distinctiveness. Indeed, some of the arguments over the ‘correct’ plural of nouns seem to derive from interference from Gurune.

3. Phonology

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

¹ I am grateful to Kay Williamson and Bruce Connell who have assisted me with external parallels and other comments.

3.1 Vowels

Booni probably has seven phonemic oral vowels;

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

Each of these exists in a long and short form.

All vowels can probably also be nasalised, although the evidence for this is incomplete to date. The following have been recorded;

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

Nasal vowels also show long-short contrast. In principle, some 28 vowel contrasts are possible although examples of many are missing. Nasal vowels are much rarer than oral vowels.

Booni has sequences of two dissimilar vowels, which some speakers separate with semi-vowels. Thus **sébiyù**, ‘wind’, can also be realised **sébiù**. These are transcribed as VyV or VwV in the present document.

3.2 Consonants

Booni consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alve- olar	Palata l	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		k g		ʔ
Nasal	m		n	ɲ	ŋ	ŋm	
Trill			[r]				
Fricative		v	s z		ɣ		h
Approximant				y		w	
Lateral Approximant			l				

Labialisation and palatalisation are apparently not distinctive. /r/ and /d/ appear to be allophones in medial position (? perhaps only after front vowels). Thus **bínhidé** ‘breast’ was also realised **bínhiré**. However, common o/ɔR sequences appeared to be stable. One word, **kðlɛθé**, ‘rivers’ included the unusual sound /θ/ even upon repetition. This may be an idiosyncratic local pronunciation. The velar fricative /ɣ/, which occurs in many Oti-Volta languages, may not be distinctive but in free variation with the velar /g/.

3.3 Tones

Booni appears to have a simple tone system, distinguishing High and Low, marked here ´ and ` . Nasals can bear tones, both initial and medial position. Speakers perceive tones where vowels have now dropped out, and thus will whistle a word, supplying a note for the ‘lost’ vowel between a consonant cluster.

4. Morphology

4.1 Nouns

The system of nominal plurals in Booni is highly complex and the plural of an individual noun is almost entirely unpredictable. With more data on the concord system, it should be possible to assign nouns to more structured noun-classes, as has been done for Gurene (Kropp-Dakubu 2004). This section therefore groups together nouns with common pluralisation strategies but without comment, awaiting further data for a more orderly presentation. The tables do indicate low levels of semantic clustering but also high levels of diversity.

Gloss	sg.	pl.
leaf	vǒǒ	vǒǒrǒ
bark	pǒkǒ	pǒgǒrǒ
shoulder	bǒkǒ	bǒgǒrǒ
rat (generic)	dèyùwò	dèyùrò
broom	sǒǒ	sǒǒrǒ

Gloss	sg.	pl.
woman	pǒká	pǒyǒsí
slave	yààmǒngá	yààmǒsi
tree	tìyá	tìisi
tongue	zèlǒngá	zèlisi
donkey	bǒòǒngá	bǒsè
hare	sǒòǒngá	sǒòǒnsi
crocodile	ébéngá	ébési
bush animal	dùngá	dùsi

Gloss	sg.	pl.
star	márbǒlá	márbǒbisì
chicken	nǒbǒlà	nǒbǒvisì

Gloss	sg.	pl.
hill, tail	zǒòrè	zǒyá
road	sǒòrè	sǒyá
mouth	nǒòrè	nǒyá
thigh	gèrè	gàyá
stomach	pǒóré	pǒyá
arrow	bǒǎǎrè	báyá
mortar	tǒóré	tǒyá

Gloss	sg.	pl.
person	nèrá	nèrèbá
blacksmith	kùtá	kùtùbá
thief	nàgányìgá	náányígìbà

Gloss	sg.	pl.
man	bùdíńgà	bùdímtù
head	zù(w)ó	zùùtò
hair	zòòmkò	zòòmtò

Gloss	sg.	pl.
father	bá	bármá
mother	má	mármá
guest/stranger	sááná	sáámá
king/chief/ruler	náábá	náármá
knee	dùnné	dùmà
bee	síhò	sím

Gloss	sg.	pl.
horn	ìlẹ́	ìlá
egg	gèlẹ̀	gélá
tooth	nyènẹ̀	nyèná
skin	ìngánẹ̀	ìngáná
hammer	záánẹ̀	záánà
spear	kánẹ̀	káná
bone	kòbrẹ̀	kòbà

Gloss	sg.	pl.
money	láyáhó	lígri
eye	nìhó	nìni
cow	náhò	nù
bow	táhò	tìni

Gloss	sg.	pl.
cheek	yáyàrẹ̀	yáyá
stone	kùgrẹ̀	kùgá

Gloss	sg.	pl.
meat	néńò	nénò
liver	sòlòńò	sòlnò
mat	sòńò	sòńò

Gloss	sg.	pl.
dog	báá	bááhé
cat	sákùà	sákòhè
goat	bú(w)á	bóóhé
porcupine	nyùmpééńá	nyùmpééhé
neck	yùgùlá	yùlùlhé

Gloss	sg.	pl.
snake	bùnséńá	bùnséńdúmá
needle	kárpíím	kárpíńdúmá

5. Booni wordlist

NO.	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Commentary
1.	Tree (generic)	tìyá	tísi	
2.	Leaf	vǒǒ	vǒǒrò	
3.	Root	nyèkèrè	nyààgà	
4.	Branch			
5.	Bark (of tree)	pòkò	pògòrò	
6.	Thorn	lùdíbdòò	lùdíbdòòrò	
7.	Stone	kùgrè	kùgá	
8.	Sand	tíntòn		
9.	Smoke	zúnṣì		
10.	Fire	bùgóm		
11.	Water	kò'úm		
12.	Afternoon	wùntéṅá		
13.	Moon/month	márgá	—	
14.	Sun	wilíṅá		
15.	Star(s)	márblá	márbìbìsì	
16.	Wind	sébíyù		
17.	Ground	tèṅá		
18.	Large River	kòlòkà	kòlèṭhé	
19.	Hill	zòòrè	zòyá	
20.	Bush	mōi		but wè in compounds
21.	Road	sòòrè	sòyá	
22.	Person/people	nèrá	nèrèbá	
23.	Man	bùdíṁṅá	bùdímtù	
24.	Woman	pòkà	pòyòsì	
25.	Child	bíyá	bíisì	
26.	Father	bá	bármá	
27.	Mother	má	mármá	
28.	Guest/stranger	sááná	sáámá	
29.	King/chief/ruler	náábá	náármá	
30.	Hunter	gòwíyá	gòwèéhé	
31.	Thief	nàgányìgá	náányìgìbà	
32.	Doctor	tíbà	tìbùrùmá	
33.	Witch	sòyá	sòòbá	
34.	Corpse	kùm		
35.	Dead people	kùùrè		
36.	Blacksmith	kùtá	kùtùbá	
37.	Slave	yààmṅgá	yààmṣì	
38.	Death	kíyá		
39.	Name	yùùré	yùùrá	
40.	Hunger	kòm		
41.	Horn	ìlè	ìlá	

NO.	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Commentary
42.	Tail	zòòrè	zòyá	
43.	Egg	gèlè	gélá	
44.	Wing	kèlèmpáká	kèlèmpáyáhé	
45.	Firewood	dòd	dòòrò	
46.	War	zébré	—	
47.	Work	tòònè	tòómá	
48.	Money	láyáhó	ligrì	
49.	Sore/wound	nótté	nóórá	
50.	Head	zù(w)ó	zùùtò	
51.	Eye	nihó	nìinì	
52.	Face	nèṅà	nèhè/nèsi	
53.	Cheek	yáyàrè	yáyá	
54.	Forehead	gé'ò	gètò	
55.	Nose	nyòòré	nyòyá	
56.	Ear	tóbóré	tòòbá	
57.	Mouth	nòòrè	nòyá	
58.	Tooth	nyènè	nyèná	
59.	Tongue	zèlíṅá	zèlsi	
60.	Throat	kùṅkóré	kùṅkóyá	
61.	Neck	yùgùlá	yùlùlùhé	cf. English 'jugular'
62.	Shoulder	bókó	bógóórá	
63.	Armpit	kèlèmpáká	kèlèmpáyáhé	as 'wing'
64.	Arm	nù(w)ò	nòṅùsí	
65.	Leg	ná'aré	námá	
66.	Thigh	gèrè	gàyà	
67.	Knee	dùnné	dùmà	
68.	Nail (Finger/toe)	iyá	èhè	
69.	Female breast	bínhídé	bínhá	
70.	Stomach	póóré	póyá	
71.	Navel	nyù'á	nyù'ùhí	
72.	Back	pòòrì	póyá	
73.	Buttocks	féhéka	fési	cf. French 'fesse'
74.	Skin	ìṅgáné	ìṅgáná	
75.	Bone	kòbrè	kòbà	
76.	Blood	zìim		
77.	Hair	zòòmkò	zòòmtò	
78.	Liver	sòlòṅò	sòlnò	
79.	Heart	sùṅgùré	sùnsùnyá	
80.	Body	ṅyá		
81.	Meat	néṅò	nénò	
82.	Animal (Bush)	dùṅá	dúsí	
83.	Cow	náhò	nù	
84.	Goat	bù(w)á	bóóhé	

NO.	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Commentary
85.	Sheep	péeyò	píísí	
86.	Dog	báá	bááhé	
87.	Cat	sákùà	sákòhè	
88.	Pig	kúrkúr	kúrkúrdúmá	
89.	Horse	wéhò	wíírì	
90.	Donkey	bòòṅá	bòsè	
91.	Elephant	wábùḡḡ	wóbòrò	
92.	Buffalo	wènáhó	wèniì	'bush-cow'
93.	Lion	gírùṅnè	gírémá	
94.	Leopard	wèbàà	wèbààhè	'bush-dog'. N.B. this is usually 'jackal'
95.	Porcupine	nyùmpééṅá	nyùmpééhé	
96.	Baboon	másábúká	másábúsí	
97.	Rat (generic)	dèyùwò	dèyùrò	
98.	Hare	sòòṅà	sòònsì	
99.	Nile crocodile	ébégá	ébésí	
100.	Agama lizard	báṅá	báhé	
101.	Toad	kámpúmté	kámpómá	
102.	Snake (Generic)	bùnsélá	bùnséldúmá	
103.	Fish (generic)	zìhò	zím	
104.	Bird (generic)	nyííṅá	nyíínsí	
105.	Chicken	nòblà	nòbìvisì	
106.	Guinea-fowl	kó'óṅó	kí'íní	
107.	Scorpion	náṅá	násí	
108.	Mosquito	dúṅá	dúsí	
109.	Spider ²	válgá	válsí	
110.	Bee	sìhò	sím	
111.	Housefly	zùṅá	zùṅù'sí	also = smoke [?]
112.	Termite	mòkà	mòkòsí	
113.	Oil	káám	—	
114.	Salt	yáárom		
115.	Soup/stew	zììrò		
116.	Porridge	sáyábò		
117.	Sorghum-beer	dáám mólgá		'red beer'
118.	Cutlass	sùkòbgó	sùkòbóró	
119.	Iron	kùrùgò	kùtò	
120.	Axe	lià	lèhè	
121.	Hoe	kùṅrè	kùnyà	
122.	Hammer	záánè	záánà	
123.	Knife	sùá	só'ósì	
124.	Broom	sóó	sóóró	
125.	Mortar (wood)	tóórè	tóyà	
126.	Pestle	tándùṅà	tándùsì	

² (*Acarina spp.*)

NO.	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Commentary
127.	Pot (generic)	dùkó	dògòrò	
128.	Head-pad	tùsónkó	tùsónó	
129.	Mat (generic)	sòṅò	sònò	
130.	Needle	kárpíim	kárpíndúmá	
131.	Spear	kánè	káná	
132.	Bow	táhò	tìni	
133.	Arrow	báárè	báyà	
134.	One	àkò		
135.	Two	yì		
136.	Three	tá		
137.	Four	náási		
138.	Five	nùù		
139.	Six	yòòbò		
140.	Seven	yòòpòy		? 6 + 1
141.	Eight	nù		pl. of 'four' ?
142.	Nine	ṅwé		
143.	Ten	pìyá		
144.	Eleven	pìyá là àkò		
145.	Twelve	pìyá là bàyì		
146.	Twenty	pùsì		pl. of 'ten' ?
147.	Thirty	pittá		
148.	Forty	pì náási		etc.
149.	Beat (s.o.)	ṅmé		
150.	Bite	dúm		
151.	Blow (flute etc.)	péblè		
152.	Buy	dá		
153.	Come	wà'áná		
154.	Count	kààlì		
155.	Cut in two	ṅmáá		
156.	Die	kí		
157.	Drink	nyù		
158.	Eat	dì		
159.	Enter	kè		
160.	Fly (birds)	èkè		? initial vowel' ?
161.	Fry (in oil)	kùim		
162.	Give	bó		
163.	Go	kéṅé		
164.	Grind	nèèm		
165.	Have	tàrà		
166.	Hear	wòm		
167.	Jump	èkè		cf. 'fly'
168.	Kill	kò		
169.	Lick	lèlè		

NO.	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Commentary
170.	Mix	gààm		
171.	Mould (pot)	yáyám		
172.	Pierce/stab	kùnsè		
173.	Plait (hair)	lò		
174.	Pound (in mortar)	tò		
175.	Pull	vè'è		
176.	Push	dà'á		
177.	Refuse	zágásè		
178.	Roast on coals	sé		
179.	Run	zóy		
180.	Say/speak	yèlè		
181.	See	nyé		
182.	Send	pògòsè		
183.	Shoot (arrow)	té		
184.	Steal	zùŋ		
185.	Swallow	vòlè		
186.	Take	dèkè		
187.	Throw	lòbé		
188.	Uproot (tuber)	tún		
189.	Want/need	mbòtí		
190.	Weave	wòyé		
191.	I	mám		
192.	You	hóm		
193.	He/she/it	ĩ		
194.	we	tùmá		
195.	you pl.	yámá		
196.	They	bámá		

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