

Classification of the Sara Kaba Languages

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Although there are many similarities between the Sara Languages and Sara Kaba languages such as Na, there are also major differences. There are a large number of features typical of the Sara Languages that do not apply to the Sara Kaba languages, and vice versa.

Phonological Differences

The phonology Sara Kaba languages is different from that of the Sara Languages in the following ways:

1. unlike all the Sara Languages, there are no nasalized vowels as phonemes. In Na and Deme, phonetic nasalized vowels occur only next to nasalized consonants. In this regard Sara Kaba languages resemble Bagirmi and Kenga, which also have no nasalized vowels as phonemes.
2. Like Bagirmi and Kenga, but unlike the Sara languages, in the Sara Kaba languages the consonant /ɲ/ is a phoneme, and contrasts clearly with /y/. It freely occurs in intervocalic position. In the Sara Proper languages, [ɲ] occurs only in initial position, and next to a nasalized vowel.
3. In the Sara Kaba languages there is no weak vowel -. In the Sara Languages and Bagirmi, this sound is common.
4. In the Sara Kaba languages there is no schwa (ə), while many Sara Languages, as well as Bagirmi, do have this vowel.
5. In the Sara Kaba languages, 'e' contrasts with 'ɛ'. Thus, in Deme, è ē 'to drink' contrasts with èē 'and, but' (Palayer 2006:204 and 201). The same is also true of Na and Kulfa, as well as with Kenga. In the Sara Languages and Bagirmi, this contrast does not exist at the phonemic level.

Morphological Differences

While most of the personal pronouns in Sara Kaba are cognates with the pronouns found in the Sara Proper languages, there are a few interesting differences:

1. The second person singular object pronoun is kī, vs. -ī in Sara Proper and Bagirmi.
2. The first and second person subject forms, jégè 'we (incl.)', dégè 'we (excl.)', and négè 'they' are different from the forms found in the Sara languages and Bagirmi.
3. The third person plural forms, subject, object and oblique, are all forms that do not exist in the Sara languages. Both languages differ from the forms found in Bagirmi.
4. Sara Kaba is novel in that it has a dual in addition to the inclusive and exclusive forms found in the Sara Languages.

Syntactical Differences

1. Sara Kaba, like Bagirmi and Kenga, but unlike the Sara Proper languages, does not distinguish between alienable and inalienable nouns: thus we find *b̀ìyà má* 'my father' and *màgè má* 'my field', whereas in the Sara Proper languages only inalienable nouns are immediately followed by another noun or possessive pronoun (e.g. *b̀òò-m̀* 'my father' vs. *nd̀òò l̀ò-m̀* 'my field' in Mbay). One aspect of inalienable nouns is that they require a complement. In Sara Languages, for example, a word for a part of the human body must be followed by a complement that indicates the person to which it belongs. In Na, on the other hand, expressions using parts of the human body do not require this complement. This gives the languages a very distinct feel.
2. In Sara Kaba, the locative marker is not required in locative/temporal phrases. In all the Sara Languages, it is required. Compare the first sentence (Na) with the second (Mbay):¹

Bútù màā l̀òò má ré t̀òg̀ò k̀ò. (Na)

Grass in field my that got.big already.

The grass in my field has already gotten big.

M̀ỳ k̀àm k̀òf̀ t̀é l̀ò-m̀ t̀òg̀è ẁòy. (Mbay)

Grass in field Loc. of-me got.big already.

The grass in my field has already gotten big.

3. In Sara Proper languages, a large number of verbs are both transitive and intransitive. For example, *t̀èt̀é* is both 'to break (intrans.)/be broken' and 'to break (trans.)' in many Sara Proper languages. In Sara Kaba, this distinction is more often handled by the morphology: verbs beginning with 'nd-' are intransitive (e.g. *nd̀ēk̀ī* 'to break (intrans.)/be broken') while transitive verbs begin with 't-' (*t̀ēk̀ī* 'to break (trans.)' in Na).
4. In the Sara Kaba languages, including Na, Deme and Kulfa, there exist two auxiliaries, *ǹì* and *t̀ì*, used to indicate doubt, orders, indirect speech, etc. These do not exist in the Sara Languages nor in Bagirmi.
5. The rules for generating the numbers 30-100 are completely different in Na and Kulfa from the 'ten-based' system used in the Sara Languages and in Bagirmi.

¹ In Bagirmi, Szobody (ND) has shown that the locative 'k̀ī' is required in noun phrases which are definite, but not when they are indefinite.

Lexical Differences

The vast majority of the core vocabulary of the Sara Proper languages are cognates. With the Sara Kaba languages, on the other hand, there are a substantial number of cases, probably the majority, where a Na or Deme word is not an easily identifiable cognate of any word used in Sara Proper.

	<u>Kaba Nà</u>	<u>Sara Proper</u>	<u>Bagirmi</u>
not, no	só	àí, àlé, àng	èlí
child	mōnō	ngōn, ngō	ṅōnō
be good/bad	òrī/àsū	màjè/màjàí	---
be big	òō	bò, bòý	ngòlò
be small	sákū	dūú, etc.	mbàsà
buttocks	mèy	gír, gín, mbùḥ	jā-p̄lā
to speak	òtì	èl, èl, pà	dégàà
speech	hàā	tà, nàjē	làw
and, but	bī	nà, nè, etc.	---
to hit	òpī	ìndà, àndè, etc.	mbálà
yesterday	njínjòò	tàgínè, tàgábè	tébré
'boule' ² ròkù	mùḥ, mùrū, mbùḥ	jùmù	
today	yàāré, yèḥ	bōkínè, bōnè, etc.	njānīkī
year	tānāà	bāl	lūwā
yawn	nāw	ló, lóō	---
with	rè, nè	kè, sè	dís, sè
be wide	àbà	là, etc.	wàsè
where?	kílé	dá	dā
which?	kòý	ké-rá	én-dā
what?	rèkí	dí	dī
how?	njòkò	bàn, bàý	kárkà-dī
to weep	káy	nō	nō
vomit	túrē	tōm, tōmbō, etc.	tōmō
song	lā	pā	kā
wash	tóò	tógō, etc.	njúgòò
wait	ákò	ngóō, ngébē, etc.	gódò
crocodile	kíbalè	màr, mà	màrà
be tall	rōngō	ngāl	jàmò
be swollen	àgō	tí	---
natte	bàkù	tūwā, ràgà, etc.	ràgà
ostrich	gāw	bū, būrùm, etc.	bū
owl	dídídì	kòý, kòwē	gúmù
mohagany	bólo	mbàgē, dīl, jīl	dēlū
bran	gìrà	bènā, bìnā	bènà

² 'Boule' is the most common food in Southern Chad, a sort of large hard dumpling served in a gourd and eaten with sauce.

pot	gírò	jó, etc.	dèrùwà
words,speech	hàā	tàr,tà	làw
plow, plant	njàkā	ndòṛ, ndòṣ, etc.	nápò
yawn	náw	lóṣ, ló	---
be slimy	òmé	ndòl, lṣ	---

In many other cases, the words in Kaba Na are cognates, but still quite different from the word found in Sara Proper:

	<u>Kaba Na</u>	<u>Sara Proper</u>	<u>Bagirmi</u>
bird	àlī	yèl, àl, etc.	yèlè
wrestling	mbìlè	mèlè, mùlà, etc.	tákà
weave	òyō	èjō, òjṛ	kìrò
tongue	ndòlò	ndòn, etc.	njùlò
stomach	màkē	kàm, mè, etc.	ngālā
suck	òlì	ìl	---
be dry	ndútù	tùtù, etc.	tùtù
hand	jīlī	jī	jī
head	jòṣ	dò	jò, dālā
bat	dòngì	dōw, dō	---
bee	tàgì	tèjṛ, tètṛ	kén-tètṛ
shoulder	dāgī	bāgṛ, dām, etc.	dām
pigeon	déè	dér, etc.	dérè
oil	bū	yìbṛ, yùbṛ, ùbū, etc.	bùbù
pestle	gòṣ	gòy	gòyò
moon	nōhṛ	nṛ, nṛy	nāpō

There are also false cognates:

màndé	woman	màndṛ	be pretty
ròsò	be numerous	ròsṛ	to fill
ndò	to exist not	ndòṣ	poverty

These listings are by no means inclusive. The data suggests that Sara Kaba Na is no closer to the Sara Languages than is Bagirmi. Further, using merely lexical comparisons, it appears that a Bagirmi word is more likely to resemble a Sara word than is a Na word.

As a result of these major differences, a speaker of a Sara language does not understand Sara Kaba languages such as Na. On several occasions I have asked people from different Sara languages to listen to recordings of sentences from Na or Kulfa. They have been consistently unable to understand the sentence, and for most they don't even have an idea as to the topic of the conversation. When they listen to other Sara Proper languages, on the other hand, they will have at the very least a vague notion of what is being said, and often understand the sentences well.