

Notes on the Geographic Distribution of the Mbay Language

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1. Introduction¹

The purpose of this brief paper is to attempt to delimit the Mbay speaking area more precisely than is done in Tucker and Bryan or in Fortier. The data were collected from 1977 to 1979, when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Chad serving as a high school teacher in Moissala. Since the high school served the entire subprefecture, we had students from the entire Mbay-speaking area; there were also students from Mbay villages in the Central African Republic, as well as a substantial number of speakers of Day and Nar. Although I was able to visit some of these villages, and thus personally confirm the data, the chief source of information was my students. I attempted to systematically question students from the entire Mbay-speaking area as to the location of their village, the names and locations of nearby villages, and the language or languages spoken there. I used two maps published by the *Institut Géographique National - Paris (Service Géographique - Brazaville)* entitled "Koumra" (NC-33-VI) and "Kouki" (NB-33-XXIV) to enter information. I used some of the place names on them to help jog informants' memories. I have been able to compile a more complete picture of the precise geographic location of the Mbay language area, as well as that of many of the languages which border it, than is available in the literature.

In describing the Mbay language area, it is convenient to divide the region into eastern, southern, western and northern sections.

2. Eastern Limits

The Mbay are bordered on the East by the closely related Ngam² (see Map 1). Mbay villages extend only a short distance – never more than 20 kilometres -- to the east of the Barh Sara River. Ngam villages actually border the river as it turns northeast, beginning about 20 kilometers northeast of Moissala. The Ngama villages include (from north to south):

- (5) Korkosse, Maikele, Kabakoutou, Kourbou, Mormoto(2),
BEKAMBA, Ndidja, Sateme, Maindou, and Niabodo (off map).

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² The Ngam inhabit an area similar in size to that of the Mbay, from the Bahr Sara river eastward to approximately 25 kilometers east of Maro, and from about 30 kilometers south of Sarh in the north all the way to Kabo in the Central African Republic (see map in the Introduction to Yangontan and Moymadide (1978).

The final three villages in (5) are directly east of Moissala on the road to Maro, the subprefecture capital of the Ngam area.

Mbay villages on the eastern side of the Bahr Sara River (Maps 1 and 2) begin about 10 kilometers northeast of Moissala and extend southward well into the Central African Republic. These villages include (from north to south):

- (6) Maimana, Do, Kembita, Doubadobo, Guirkaga, Narangasa, Maidibouyou, Sadago, Mousenini, Gongonodjio, Mandoulboulou, Nadili, Samasa, Dansama, Marmanga, DEMBO, Maikete, Korodrakasa, Nguende, Boukenawa I, Boukenawa II, Mayongo, Dedege, Maikoutou, Dahili, Maikoutou and Maya.³

There are two villages in this section which are inhabited by non-Sara peoples: these are Maikongo and Danamadji, located about 5 kilometers west of Dembo, between the road and the river (see the northern portion of Map 2). Informants stated that these new villages (they are not included on the Institute Geographique's map) are inhabited by a people they called the Dap (or Daba), who have immigrated to the area from the Central African Republic (see the southern portion of Map 3). It is interesting to note that both villages have, according to Mbay informants, Mbay names.

The final village in (6), Maya, is at the border with the Central African Republic. It is followed by two Mbay villages, Bekondjo and Didja (off the map); I do not know for certain what people inhabit the villages past Didja.⁴

Directly south of Dahili (6), approximately 15 to 20 kilometers inside the Central African Republic, there are four Mbay villages, on both sides of the eastern fork of the Bahr Sara River:

- (7) Mainana, Sabo, Maimoudou, and Satae.

Approximately 30 kilometers south of these villages, there lies a series of villages of whose ethnic identity I am not certain. Some Mbay informants stated that they are inhabited by a Sara-speaking people called the Woge.⁵ Another source said that they are Mbay villages.

³ Head of cantons (Lieu-chef-de-canton) and more important villages and towns will be indicated by printing in caps. In general, the French-style spellings will be retained, unless the village name is not that contained on the map. Note also that two villages have the same name -- Maikoutou. It is very common for villages to split, both retaining the same name, or else simply adding numbers to the newer villages. In other cases, a single village can be geographically separated by several kilometers. In this latter case, parentheses will be used to indicate the number of locations of a village.

⁴ The Yangontan and Moymadide (1978) map seems to indicate that the area is Ngama speaking, although no specific villages or towns are named.

⁵ It is possible that this is a place name, taken from the village Wogo.

In any case, they constitute the southernmost intrusion of Sara speakers in this area:

- (8) Para, Wogo, Kagoue, Kibo and Mere.

The Institute Geographique's map indicates the presence of an additional village, Kodingara, about 5 kilometers west of Para. Informants indicated that this village has been abandoned.

Approximately 40 kilometers south of these villages lie Kambakota and other villages, said by informants to be inhabited by the Dap (or Dabe).

3. Southern Limits

The Bahr Sara Rivers divides into three branches when it reaches the border with the Central African Republic. The principle branch is the one which turns southwestward, forming the border between Chad and the Central African Republic. Mbay villages line both sides of this branch of the Bahr Sara (see Map 4). On the northern side of the river in Chad, the villages include (from east to west):

- (9) Namle, Maibo, Nelimbi, Mainimga, Boumou, Yelko
Mayou.

South of the river in the Central African Republic lie the following Mbay villages (from east to west):

- (10) MAITOUKOULOU, Dibalo, Daga, Bara, Maita, Mayogo,⁶
Dokabi, Maissu, Kokou and Gale.

he immense and uninhabited Nana Barya Wildlife Preserve constitute the southern border for the Mbay in this area.

Approximately 15 kilometers southwest of Gale (10) begins a series of villages inhabited by the Sara-speaking Kaba. (see Map 5). These are (from east to west):

- (11) Kadjama Kota, Kangoro, Koukaba, Bele II, Bekinga,
Manda and Maikunda.

South and west of these lie a string of Suma⁷ villages (from north to south):

⁶ The *Institiut Geographique* map indicates that the village's name is Malougou, but informants insist that it is Mayogo.

⁷ I have been unable to find any reference to the Suma in Greenberg (1963) or Tucker and Bryan (1956). It is possible that "Suma" is the Mbay name for a people known by some other name in the Central African Republic.

- (12) Badama, Mbal, Betadji, Mbouli, Badjoli and Kakambia.

South of these areas, along the road leading to Kouki, are a string of village some of which are Suma while others are Kaba:

- (13) Bondourou(Kaba), Bodjorno(Kaba), Bogbete(Suma), Boulo(Kaba), Bodjomo Kete(Suma), Mbourandja(Kaba), Biranga(Kaba), Bondoro Kete(Suma), Bokale(Suma), Boningi(Kaba), Kadanga(Kaba), Kaboro(Kaba) and Boun(Suma), (all south of Bogbete are off map).

Directly south of Boun lies Kouki, and this town, as well as the villages immediately to its south, east and northeast, are all inhabited by the Gbaya.

North of the Bahr Sara River in Chad are a group of villages said to be inhabited by the Mbay-Doba. These are:

- (14) Yamodo, Goubeti, Bekandjia and Bilbo.

If this is correct, these villages constitute the southernmost intrusion of the Mbay-Doba, and they are completely cut off by the Gor from the main group of Mbay-Doba in the area around Doba. I suspect that Matetio, on the river, is also inhabited by Mbay-Doba, but I am not certain.

4. Western Limits

The principle area of Mbay region lies west of the Bahr Sara River and east of the Mandoul Flood Plains, to the southwest of Moissala (see Map 6). All villages in this area are Mbay. They are listed below, organized somewhat arbitrarily by means of the principle town to which they are nearest (from southwest to northeast):

- (15) a) KOLDAGA: Dominga, Mayo, Manga, Baga, Koktoro, and Dobo;
b) BEKOUROU: Safoyo, Bata(2), Goumoumanga, Kaba III, Santenia II, Santenia I, Mara, Koudoti, Bendouba, Kamkapti, Maita and Golo;
c) GON: Bebian, Betikanji, Maimbele, Guidikouti, Dakoti, Morbra, Debian and Dobadene V;
d) MAYUMTORO: Kaba V, Kaba IV, Bangdog;
e) KOYO: Sanassa, Kamata, Brakaba, Bindanga, Maimana, Gonhongon, Maininga, Maikolo, Andjimana, Ngabayan, Bepili and Bendi.
f) DAPORPOUTI: Gansila, Kingabila, Dakou, Daporpouti, Doba, Maimadja, Kiran, Daboutou, Maihaya, Maibian,

- Moyon, and Maihaya;
 g) DELINGALA: Gormongo, Nara, Bara, and Sangoutou;
 h) MOISSALA: Sanodjio, Ongtanian and Moissala Village.

5. Northern Limits

Northwest of Moissala (see Map 7), the Mbay are bordered by the western group of the Day, a non-Sara people. Mbay villages on the border area with the Day include (from west to east):

- (16) Kaga, Gongo II, Gongo, Dobadene(?), Maikolo, Maibian and Digadili.

At least two villages in this area are inhabited by a mixed group of Day and Mbay: Takaba and Sandene. The Day villages lie between the Mbay villages and the Mandoul Flood Plains as the Mandoul winds northeast.⁸ They include (from west to east):

- (17) Dinamba Mandoul, Kou Mandoul, Paresara(2), Paredoumga I, Paredoumga II, Sako, BOUNA, Da, Dingamdili, Parekoyo, Dili, Paribi, MOUSSORO, Nangda, Koyo, Sangara, Dobo, Kaba, Bouna Kaba, Guirkian, Maingara, Bara, Bara I, Bara II, Mourkoutou, Maingara, Djola II, Djola I (on Map 8), Bedegagra (on Map 8), Maimbaya, Guidimanti, BENGORO, and Roungo.

There are four villages which I am not certain whether they are Mbay or Day: Kembita, Kamkia, Maimbere and Danmadjia. There also are two other villages, Kamasse and Kadekouti (see the western portion of Map 8), which are either Day Nar, but again I am not certain as to which.

Mbay villages to the north of Moissala extend approximately 20 to 25 kilometers (see Map 8). These include the following, organized again on the basis of the nearest important town, (from south to north):

- (18) a) MOISSALA: Gourou, Gombe, Maibodo, Maikan, Kaba I, Salimbim, Pelko, Mounkoumba, and Maimana;
 b) BESSARA: Mada, Maikolo, Maimbere, Maimbaya, Djaroua II, Djaroua I, Moron;
 c) BENGORO(Day): Mondega, Dingadili, Namli, Beko Kotou, Kou, Guirkaga, Derguigui;
 d) BEGARA MBAYE: Kaditaya, Betikandjia, Doba, Mouskandjia, Mainana I, Mainana II, Kaba VI, Kogogue, Mainon, Dili, Derguigui, Dobadene, Doba, Montia, and Maingara.

⁸ There are also a few scattered Day villages.

My notes also indicate that five villages immediately south of Beboro are Mbay:

(19) Begara Daya(2), Massa, Ouardamgue and Dobo

It is surprising that a town with the name "Begara Daya" would be inhabited by Mbay rather than Day.

Nar villages border the Mbay villages north of Dobo, and this small Sara group inhabits a small area on both sides of the Mandoul Flood Plains. Their villages include:

(20) BEBORO, Moussoro, Sandene II, Sandene, Bada, Batibo, Kaba VII, Moskilim, Kaba VIII, Gonbe, Daoua, Bourou, Ndila, Doro, Daoua, Doguere, Doguere Moissala and Kaba.

North of the Nar live the Sara (Majinjay), who inhabit most of the subprefectures of Koumra and Sarh.

To the Northwest of Moissala, the Mbay are bordered by the Eastern or Ngalo Day. _13_
The Day villages in this area include the following (from north to south): _14_

(21) Kodio, Gonbe, NGALO, Maikolo, Manga, Simai, Sako Nabo, Ngassote, Sakoubou, Bendanga, Sako, Daguibe, Ngassote II, Gonkargue, Bili.

At least one village in this area, Mainana, is composed of mixed Day and Mbay populations. Another village, Maitama, located a few kilometers to the south of Ngalo, is inhabited by Gor (from the area south of Doba, west of the Mandoul Flood Plain). They are relatively recent immigrants to this area.