

# Notes on the classification of Sara Kaba languages

*John M. Keegan*

*Sara-Bagirmi Language Project*

*September, 2013*

Frawley (2003) classifies the Sara Kaba languages as a subgroup of Sara Proper. However, although the Sara Kaba languages<sup>1</sup> are fairly closely related to the Sara (Proper) languages, even a preliminary comparison show that they need to be considered a distinct language group.

## ***Phonological Differences***

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

1) there are no nasalized vowels as phonemes. Unlike the Sara Proper languages, nasalized vowels occur, phonetically, only next to nasalized consonants.

2) /ɲ/ contrasts clearly with /y/ in Sara Kaba languages, and is clearly a phoneme. Unlike the Sara Proper languages, 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 neutralized vowels – , and there is no schwa (ə).

4) In the Sara Kaba languages, 'e' contrasts with 'ɛ'. Thus, in Deme, èē 'to drink' contrasts with èē 'and, but' (Palayer 2006:204 and 201). The same is also true of Na.

## ***Morphological Differences***

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

1) –kī 'you (s. acc.), vs –ī in Sara Proper.

2) The first and second person subject forms, jégè 'we' and ségè 'you (pl.)' are different from the forms found in the Sara languages.

## ***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 a cognate of any word used in Sara Proper:

---

<sup>1</sup> I am currently working only with data from Deme and Na.

	<u>Kaba Nà</u>	<u>Sara Proper</u>
child	mōnō	ngōn, ngō
yesterday	njínjósò	tàgínè, tàgíbè, etc.
year	<b>tànáà</b>	bāi
yawn	náw	ló, lóō
woman	màndé	dèné, dìyá, etc.
with	rè	kà, etc.
speech	hàā	tà, nàjī
be wide	àbà	là, etc.
where?	kílé	dá
which?	kòy	kí-rá
what?	rèkí	dí
how?	njòkò	bán, bày
weep	káy	nō
vomit	túré	tōm, tōmbō, etc.
song	lā	pā
wash	tósò	tógō, etc.
wait	ákò	ngóō, ngébbī, etc.
under	mèy	gír, gín
today	yàāré, yèē	bōkínè, bōnè, etc.
crocodile	kíbàlè	màr, mà
not, no	só	àí, àlé, etc.

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

wrestling	mbìlè	mèlè, mùlà, etc.
weave	òyō	èjō, òjī
langue	ndòlò	ndòn, etc.
thousand	<b>dùrù</b>	dūbú, etc.
stomach	<b>màkè</b>	kàm, mè, etc.
suck	òlì	ìl
be dry	ndútù	tútù, etc.

These lists are by no means complete, and constitute but a small sample of the many lexical differences between Sara Kaba and Sara Proper.

