

Daba is a Sara language spoken in a small number of villages in southern Chad and northern Central African Republic. It is closely related to Sar (Madjingay) and Mbay. The data here was gathered in 1989 from a single student, Gradjim Gobeti. Mr. Gobeti was raised in the Daba village of Maikongo, east of the Barh Sar River a short distance to the south of Moissala, the capital of the subprefecture. The Daba villages found in this part of Chad are small in number, and their inhabitants are recent immigrants to the area from the Central African Republic. They are surrounded by Mbay villages. Mr. Gobeti himself was living among Mbay at the time I worked with him. Nonetheless, he seemed to be able to differentiate Mbay from Daba words in a fairly consistent manner. 1

Viewed only from the basic vocabulary examined here, it is clear that Daba is very closely related to Sar, and better than 95% of the words collected are cognates. The phonology is also very typical of eastern Sara languages, although it maintains a number of interesting elements which might be considered conservative.

This brief work is an organized synopsis of my field notes, and is intended to provide only a very preliminary glimpse of Daba. It consists of three parts: a brief summary of the phonology, with emphasis on the ways Daba is distinct from other eastern Sara languages; a summary of the basic verbal and nominal inflection; and finally, a section of word lists. These include a number of convenient categories, followed by a full listing of approximately 350 words in English alphabetic order.

2. Phonological Notes

The vowels and consonants found in Daba are identical to those found in the other Eastern Sara languages:

(1)

CONSONANTS	Stops	Prenas	Impl	Nasal	Liq	Glide	Other
Bilabial	b p	mb	ḅ	m			
Alveolar	d t	nd	ḏ	n	r, l		s
Velar	g k	ŋg	--	[ḡ]		w	
Other						h	
Pal/post-alv	--	nj	--		--	y	j

VOWELS

i	u
e	o
a	

The phonology of Daba differs only slightly from that of Sar. The canonical patterns and harmonic constraints on morphemes typical of Eastern Sara (see Keegan [1986]) clearly apply in Daba. Daba is somewhat more conservative than Sar and Mbay in that it tends to retain the vowel quality on neutralized syllables.

(2)

tìbì	electric fish	yùbū	oil
kòsò	cucumber	yētē	wasp
kānjā	fish	òdò	touch

These forms are distinct from most eastern dialects of Sara in that the second syllable is not neutralized to a schwa. It should be noted that the second vowel in each of these cases is pronounced markedly weaker than the first. There are also many more cases in Daba where the final vowel is retained following a sonorant consonant or a prenasalized stop:

(3)

ngúlū	yam	màngā	cow
kòlò	giraffe	ngárā	sand
èmbè	be greasy	hōngō	anger

These forms appear in most eastern languages of Sara without a final vowel, and with the tone for the vowel transferred to the sonorant (e.g. Mbay /ngār/ 'sand', or /èm/ 'be greasy'). Daba is not consistent in this regard, and in other cases, Daba follows Sar and Mbay in dropping the final vowel (e.g. dān 'to accompany.')

The vowel pattern /u...o/ or /...o/ of Sar and Mbay sometimes appears as /i...o/ in Daba, while /u...a/ or /...a/ often appear as /i...a/:

- (4)
- | | | | | |
|----|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|
| a) | míró | bale of grass | mīndō | blind person |
| | ndílō | shine | tīrō | type of grass |
| b) | hīnā | type of plant | ndīmā | lend |

The neutralized first vowel of Eastern Sara stems of this shape retains its quality in Daba.

The vowel pattern /i...a/ of Sar and Mbay often appears in Daba as /i...o/:

- (5)
- | | | | |
|------|----------------|------|--------------|
| rībō | type of squash | hīdō | type of tree |
| sīyō | to filter | hīyō | porcupine |

The distinction between long vowels and short vowels found in related languages such as Mbay is much less pronounced in Daba. Long vowels occur only in words of a single syllable. Further, there is a strong tendency for monosyllabic words consisting of an open syllable to have a long vowel, even in cases where short vowels occur in related languages:

- (6)
- | | | | | |
|----|-----|---------|-----|----------|
| a) | tòo | lie | nòo | forehead |
| b) | tòo | piroque | lòo | place |

Cases such as (6a) and (6b) contrast in Mbay, but do not contrast in Daba. Other contrasts are lost because word-initial short vowels are not neutralized and dropped:

- (7)
- | | | | |
|------|----------|------|------|
| ndàa | be white | ùndà | hit |
| làa | be wide | ùlà | send |

Initial /w/ of Mbay frequently appears as /h/ in Daba:

- (8)
- | | | | |
|-------|--------------|------|--------------|
| hīyō | porcupine | húlū | peanuts |
| hōó | type of fish | hòò | fish trap |
| hōngō | anger | hīdō | type of tree |

3. Morphological Notes

Basic verbal and nominal inflection is virtually identical to that found in other language/dialects of Eastern Sara, the only difference being in the pronunciation of neutralized or partially neutralized vowel:

(9)

Subject prefixes

m̄sáā	múlá	mādē	mījō	múdá	I seek/send/give/weave/show
īsáā	úlá	ādē	ījō	údá	you seek/send/give/weave/show
sáā	ùlà	àdē	ìjō	ùdà	he seeks/sends/gives/weaves/shows
kèsáā	jùlà	jàdē	jìjō	jùdà	we seek/send/give/weave/show

Object prefixes

sáāī	ùlàī	àdīi	---	ùdàī	seek/send/give/---/show you
------	------	------	-----	------	-----------------------------

Possessive suffix

dòm/dòí/dùwá/dòjé/dòsé/dòdé	my/your/his/our/your/their head(s)
mósúm/mósíi	my/your blood
bùràám/bùráí/bùráa	my/your/his father

The verb 'to be' is /à/ in Daba. (In Sar and Mbay, /à/ is an auxiliary functioning to indicate future or habitual aspect.)

- (10)
- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| m-ā mōy. | I am sick. |
| m-ā ngàndòyáá. | I am a farmer. |

The first person possessive form /-m̄/ 'my' appears to have a variant /-m̄á/ (e.g. /kóbúm̄á/ 'my neck', /kòmm̄á/ 'my eyes', /mbīm̄á/ 'my ears', etc.

4. Word Lists

4.1 Numbers

(11)

1. kádā	2. jōdó	3. mètá	4. sóo	5. m̄í
6. m̄í-há	7. mésé-jōdó	8. jōdó-sóo	9. jūnū-húu	10. dōo
20. dōo-jōdó	30. dōo-mètá, etc.			
100. ùgàná kádā	1000. sákè kádā			

4.2 Nouns

4.2.1 Parts of the body

(12)

dò	head	nòo	forehead	tà	mouth
kòm	eye	njà	leg, foot	kón	nose
kíl	elbow	kèm	stomach	mbàa	breast
mósé	blood	kúm	belly button	gùu	chest
mbāy	beard	gày	rump	ndòe	tongue
kāsē	shin	gìdè	back	kóbé	neck
ngāng	teeth	jīi	hand	bāgē	shoulders
mbī	ear	bīsēdò	hair	b̄ī	body hair
bāng	thigh	ndārtà	lips	dàajī	palm
dāarō	body	gūrū	testicles	ndār	skin
bèlkòm	eyelid	jōlkóbé	Adam's apple		

4.2.2 Kinship Terms and Human Relationships

(13)

bùrà	father	kóo	mother	n̄o-ndè	sibling
d̄e	woman	nān	mat. uncle	n̄%	wife
kàa	grandfather	dìngà	man	wárúm	my sister-in-law
n̄ī	co-wife	ngōn	child	jàngā	male rival
dèe	person	b̄ā	enemy	nōjō	family
kàbā	bachelor	mālā	sorcerer	ngà	owner
n̄e	sister	bèr	pat. aunt	ndùngāgē	twins

4.2.3 Animals

(14)

a)	súndá	horse	màngā	cow	bīyā	goat
	bātā	sheep	bísí	dog	dògèdògūm	rabbit
	dògò	buffalo	bòng	hyena	bèñ	rhinoceros
	kòlò	giraffe	màdà	baboon	màrà	crocodile
	bètē	monkey	mùlà	wildcat	kèdē	elephant
	bòrē	boar	hīyō	procupine	ndàmà	squirrel
	tìbò	lion			yàbà	hippopotomus
	nàsē	antelope	dùl	deer	pànà	small deer
	tímbír	shrew	yégē	rat	līi	snake
b)	yèlē	bird	kòy	owl	lòbò	marabu stork
	būlūm	ostrich	légē	nightjar	kúlē	small bird
c)	kānjā	fish	hōó	fish sp.	tìbì	electric fish
d)	hīñi	mosquito	yētē	wasp	tàw	caterpillar
	kōng	fly	bìrìb̄ì	wasp		

4.2.4 Plants, foods and crops

(15)

a)	wàrùm	tree sp.	kūrā	tree sp.	mātā	tree sp.
	màsā	tree sp.	dīl	mahogany	hīdō	tree sp.
	bitò	tree sp.	hīnā	tree sp.	tīrō	grass sp.
	ngàrà	thorn bush	gàgèrà	grass sp.	bùndū	grass sp.
	tēy	millet				
b)	sāy	tea	tāa	sauce	kàw	egg
	yùbū	oil				

c) wàsā	pumpkin	ngúlū	yams	húlū	peanuts
kòsò	cucumber	wàā	millet	bùlú	cotton
mònjò	beans	kémberé	corn	gàmsè	sorghum

4.2.5 Earth and Elements

(16)					
hòdò	fire	màn	water	kàdà	sun
ndīi	rain	kūl	cold	ḅàr	rainy season
dànèng	earth	bāa	river	ḅāl	dry season
nāā	moon	ndōo	day/night		

4.2.6 Implements and Tools

(17)					
sànā	filter	kūngā	axe	dàlì	type of drum
kòsò	hoe	kéngòró	clay pot	ndògò	grass fence
háya	paddle	kulā	string	dàmà	granary
nìngà	spear	gùrù	club	nīngá	ring
tòo	pirogue	bāy	clay bowl	hòo	fish trap
kèē	basket	pālā	mat	hīl	hearthstone

4.2.7 Abstract Nouns and Concepts:

(18)					
yāā	thing	lòo	place	nājā	reason
yòo	death				

4.3 Verbs

4.3.1 Eastern Sara verbs stems with Initial Weak Vowel. There is a fairly large class of verbs found in Eastern Sara language/dialects which contain an initial vowel which is neutralized to a schwa or in some cases (as in Mbay) dropped completely. In Daba, the quality of this vowel is clearly retained.

(19)						
a)	ùlà	send	ūndā	put	ūmbā	pay
	ùdà	count	údā	show	ùndà	hit
	ùbà	grow	ùsà	eat	ūbā	press
	ùwà	seize	ūmbā	propose		
b)	ìngà	find	ìkō	laugh	ìjō	weave
	ìlā	throw	ìlà	wear	ìjà	cut
	ìsō	fall	ìtō	carry	ìyà	let

What is interesting here is that Daba appears to maintain a distinction on the basis of the vowel quality of the first vowel in these stems (e.g. /ùlà/ 'to send' vs. /ìlà/ 'to wear'). 2

4.3.2 Eastern Sara stems with weak final vowel. As noted above, Daba tends to retain the quality of the final weak vowel in stems of the shape (C)VCV. As a result, many Eastern Sara stems of the shape VC appear in Daba as CVC.

(20)						
a)	ùrū	sew	ndódō	pull	ùrù	dig
b)	ùl	raise	ùn	take	ìl	suck
	tōn	lick				
c)	ùgù	scratch	òjò	give birth	ùdù	go down
	ùtū	close	ùsù	rub		

4.3.3 Adjectival verbs

(21)					
kìng	cool	lōbē	soft	bòo	big
jōó	small	ngāl	long	gòjò	short
àrā	clear	làa	wide	yèrè	disgusting
kìjè	new	ày	dry	mbōl	wet
nòm	ripe	ngór	unripe	ngāng	hard
òy	heavy	kònō	old	bàsá	handsome

èē	white	mbòjò	lazy	èmbè	oily
àtà	sharp	tìngā	hot	àsà	red
kìdē	red	ìdī	soft	hīnī	soft
màsā	acidic	ìl	black		

4.3.4 Verbs with underlying identical vowels:

(22)

a)	àdē	give	tápē	bother	tójē	show
	òtè	smell				
b)	gāa	reflect	òō	see	sāā	look for
	rīī	dent	bùr nàā	stir	bāā	find
	lōō	yawn	tāā kōō	rest	dōō	fight
c)	nēng	suck	túy	fetch	dān	accompany
	ndāw	grill				
d)	dùbū	plant	dùdū	crush	nàjà	dry (in sun)
	tájā	insult	ndūbū	praise	ndèbè	tremble
	ndájā	imitate	ndóḏō	pull	késē	cough

Cases such as (22a) are somewhat rare, and contrast with those in (22d) where the last consonant is an obstruent. In Keegan (1996) I argue that final schwa in Eastern Sara dialects is derived from a form with underlying identical vowels. Also, see discussion in Footnote 1. Cases in (22c) are not uncommon, but they contrast with cases such as /ndīlí/ 'yululate'.

4.3.5 Verbs of shape /u...e/ and /i...e/:

The /u...e/ is somewhat rare in the data, but this shape does not occur at all in some of the other Eastern Sara language/dialects, such as Mbay.

(23)

ndùlē	become thin	kùlè	put over (fire)
ndùlē	sleep	gìjè	burp

4.3.6 Verbs of shape /i...a/, /u...a/, and /i...ú/

(24)

a)	sūlā	instigate	njúbā	bother	tūwā	chase
	sùmbā	aim	tūnā	lend		
b)	yítā	honor	ndīmā	lend	tíngā	grill
	tīgā	lòò	walk			
c)	sīyō	filter				

4.4 Interrogative Pronouns

(25)

dá?	where?	dí?	what?
náāóó	who?	ndōō	dí when?

5. Alphabetical List of Words

accompany	v. dān	acidic	v. māsā
Adam's apple	n. jōlkóbé	aim	v. sùmbā
anger	n. hōngō	animals	n. dāa
antelope	n. nāsē	axe	n. kūngā
baboon	n. màdà	bachelor	n. kàbā
back	n. gídè	bale of grass	n. mīró
bark	n. kóó-māmā	basket	n. kēē
beans	n. mōnjò	beard	n. mbāy
beautiful	n. ngō-màndè	become thin	v. ndùlē
belly button	n. kúm	big	v. bòò
bird	n. yèlē	bitter	v. àtā
black	v. ìl	blind person	n. mīndō
blood	n. mósé	boar	n. bòrē-ngiyò
body	n. dāarō	body hair	n. bìlōó
bother	v. njúbā	bother	v. tápē
breast; milk	n. mbàa	buffalo	n. dògò

burp	v. òngè	carry	v. ìtō
caterpillar	n. tàw	chase	v. tūwā
chest	n. gùu	child	n. ngōn
chop	v. ùgà	clay bowl	n. bày
clay pot	n. kéngòró	clear	v. àrā
climb	v. àl	close	v. ùtū
clothes	n. kūbū	club	n. gùrù
co-wife	n. nìlòó	cold	n. kùl
concern	v. ndètì	cool	v. kìng
corn	n. kémbééré	corpse	n. nín
cotton	n. bùlú	cough	v. késē
count	v. ùdà	cow	n. màngā
crawl	v. àgà	cricket	n. kémbètélē
crocodile	n. màrà	crush	v. dùdū
cucumber	n. kòsó	cut	v. ìjà
dance	v. úlālā	day	n. ndōō
death	n. kòy	deer	n. dùl
dent	v. rìl	dig	v. ùrù
dirt	n. mīdó	disgusting	v. yèrè
dog	n. bísí	don't	v. òté
drink	nm. yībī	drum	n. kòddò
dry	v. ày	dry (in sun)	v. nàjà
dry season	n. bāl	dry up (water)	v. ìl
ear	n. mbī	earth	n. dànèng
eat	v. ùsà	egg	n. kàw
eight	nm. jòdòsósó	elbow	n. kíl
electric fish	n. tìbì	elephant	n. kèdē
eleven	nm. dòōgìdèkárā	enemy	n. bàā
excrement	n. kùj	eye	n. kòm
eyelid	n. bèlkòm	fall	v. ìsō
family	n. nōjō	farmer	n. ngàndòōyáa
father	n. bùrà	fetch	v. túy
fight	v. dōō	filter	n. sàná
filter	v. sīyō	find	v. ìngà
find (on ground)	v. bāā	fire	n. hòdò
fish	n. kánjā	fish sp.	n. hōó
fish trap	n. hòō	five	nm. míj
fly	n. kónḡ	foot, leg	n. njà
forehead	n. nòo	four	nm. sósó
fresh	v. mbōl	giraffe	n. kòlò
give	v. àdē	give birth	v. òjò
go down	v. ùdù	goat	n. bìyā
good	v. mbēē	granary	n. dàrà
grandfather	n. kàa	grass	n. mùuóó
grass fence	n. ndògō	grass sp.	n. bùndū
grass sp.	n. gágèrà	grass sp.	n. tīrō
greasy	v. èmbè	grill	v. ndàw
grill	v. tíngā	grow	v. ùbà
hair	n. bìsèdò	hand	n. jīl
handsome	v. bàsá	hard	v. ngàḡḡ
head	n. dò	heal	v. àjè
hearthstone	n. hīl	heavy	v. òy
hippopotomus	n. yàbà	hit	v. ùndà
hoe	n. kòsò	hole	n. hólbēē
honor; flatter	v. yítā	horse	n. súndá
hot	v. tíngā	hundred	nm. ùgàrà kárā
hyena	n. bònḡ	imitate	v. ndájā
instigate	v. sūlā	insult	v. tájā
knife	n. kùyā	last (grain)	v. ìi
laugh	v. ìkō	lazy	nm. mbòjò
leg, foot	n. njà	lend	v. ndīmā
lend	v. tūnā	leper	n. ngà-bānjā
let	v. ìyà	lick	v. tōn
lie	v. tòo	lion	n. tìbò
lips	n. ndārtà	long	v. ngāl
look for	v. sáā	mahogany	n. dīl
male rival	n. jàngā	man	n. dīngà
marabu stork	n. lòbò	market	n. súkē
mat	n. pālā	mat	n. túbā
mat. uncle	n. nān	medicine	n. kīiòó

middle	n. dàn	millet	n. tēy
millet	n. wāā	money	n. bátà
monkey	n. b̄ètē	moon	n. n̄āā
mosquito	n. híñi	mother	n. k̄oq
mouth	n. tà	mud, mud wall	n. daboya
neck	n. k̄óbé	new	n. k̄ijè
nightjar	n. légē	nine	nm. j̄ūñh̄úy
nose	n. kón	nostril	n. hól̄b̄ēekón
oil	n. yùbū	old	n. k̄ònō
one	nm. kádā	ostrich	n. b̄ūlūm
owl	n. k̄ōy	owner	n. ngà
paddle	n. háyá	palm	n. dàajī
pat. aunt	n. b̄ēf	pay	v. ūmbā
peanuts	n. h̄úlū	pen	n. b̄ùlà
person	n. d̄ēē	pig	n. b̄òrē
pirogue	n. t̄òò	place	n. lòo
placenta	n. k̄òbò	plant	v. d̄ùbū
plant	n. m̄āā	porcupine	n. h̄īyō
praise	v. nd̄ūbū	press	v. ūbā
porcupine	n. h̄īyō	propose	v. ūmbā
pull	v. nd̄ódō	pumpkin	n. wàsā
put	v. ūndā	put over (fire)	v. k̄ulè
rabbit	n. d̄ògèd̄ògūm	rain	n. nd̄īi
rainy season	n. b̄àr	raise	v. ùl
rat	n. yégē	razor	n. n̄īngá
reason	n. n̄àjā	red	v. k̄idē
red	v. àsà	reflect	v. gāa
rest	n. k̄òō	rhinoceros	n. b̄ēñ
ring	n. n̄īngá	ripe	v. nòm
rival (male)	n. jàngā	river	n. b̄āa
rock	n. hòr	row	v. p̄ēlē
rub	v. ùsù	rump	n. gày
sand	n. ngárā	sauce	n. t̄āā
say	v. èl	scars	n. nd̄ījā
scratch	v. ùgù	see	v. òō
seize	v. ùwà	send	v. ùlà
set (trap)	v. k̄ūyā	seven	nm. m̄ésj̄ōd̄ó
sew	v. ùrū	sharp	v. àtà
sheep	n. bàtā	shin	n. k̄āsē
shine	v. nd̄ílō	short	v. ḡòj̄ò
shoulders	n. b̄āgē	show	v. t̄ój̄ē
show	v. údā	shrew	n. t̄ímbír
sibling	n. neq̄-ndè	sickness	n. m̄òy
sister	n. n̄ēē	sister-in-law (my)	n. wárúm
six	nm. m̄íi-há	skin	n. nd̄ār
sky	n. dàrā	sleep	v. nd̄ulē
small	v. j̄ōó	small bird	n. k̄ulē
small deer	n. p̄ànà	smell	v. òtè
snake	n. l̄īi	soft	v. l̄ōbē
song	n. p̄āa	sorcerer	n. m̄ālā
sorghum	n. ḡamsè	spear	n. n̄ìngà
squeeze	v. ùr	squirrel	n. nd̄àmà
stir	v. b̄ùr n̄āā	stomach	n. k̄ēm
string	n. k̄ulā	suck	v. n̄ēng
suck	v. ìl	sun	n. k̄adà
sweet	v. r̄ēpē	take	v. tàā
take	v. ùn	tea	n. sáy
teeth	n. ngāng	ten	nm. d̄òō
testicles	n. ḡurū	thick	v. nd̄ēr
thigh	n. b̄āng	thin	v. mbàtà
thing	n. ȳāā	think	v. gāa tàa
thorn	n. k̄ōnō	thorn bush	n. ngárā
thousand	nm. sákè	three	nm. m̄òtá
throw	v. ìlā	tongue	n. nd̄òē
touch	v. òdò	trap	n. ḡūm
tree	n. k̄āgā	tree sp.	n. h̄īdō
tree sp.	n. h̄īnā	tree sp.	n. k̄ūrā
tree sp.	n. m̄ātā	tree sp.	n. m̄àsā
tree sp.	n. wárúm	tree sp.	n. b̄ìtò
tremble	v. nd̄èbè	twenty	nm. d̄òōj̄ōd̄o

twins	n. ndùngāgē	two	nm. jōdó
type of drum	n. dàlì	type of fish	n. hōó
type of grass	n. tīrō	type of plant	n. hīnā
type of tree	n. hīdō	ululate	v. ndīlí
unripe	v. ngór	walk	v. tīgā lòo
wasp	n. bìrìbìjì	wasp	n. yētē
water	n. màn	wear	v. ìlà
weave	v. ìjō	week (French)	n. dèmásè
wet	v. hīnī	wet	v. ìdī
what?	pr. dí?	when?	pr. ndōō dí?
where?	pr. dǎ?	whistle	n. tīw
white	v. ndàa	white	v. èè
who?	pr. náāōō	wide	n. làa
wide	v. táté	wife	n. nī%
wildcat	n. mùlà	woman	n. dèé
work	n. kùlà	yam	n. ngúlū
yawn	v. lóō	ylulate	v. ndīlí

NOTES

1. The one area where I noted some inconsistency in Mr. Gobeti's data was in that of the vowel quality of weak vowels in bisyllabic stems. At times, my impression was that he pronounced these as schwas, but when I reviewed the data with him, he would often pronounce the vowel without loss of its quality. At such times, he was insistent that the form without neutralization was the correct Daba pronunciation. At other times, the review did not produce any change -- and I did not attempt to elicit a form where the vowel was not neutralized, despite my suspicion that his long exposure to Mbay had begun to influence his pronunciation.

2. This is true not only with verbs of this shape, but with all words of the Eastern Sara pattern CVCV, where the first vowel is weak.