

## ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF NANCERE\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Nancere is a language spoken around Lai, especially to the south-west of it, in the Subdivisions of Kélo and Lai, Préfecture de la Tandjilé, Republic of Tchad. The language area is shown in a little sketch map by Pierre Lami (1951). Estimates of the number of speakers vary considerably. According to Lami (1951) Nancere is spoken by 17,000 people, while Tucker and Bryan (1956) give the number of speakers as about 20,000, and the British and Foreign Bible Society estimate (Coldham, 1966) of Nancere speakers is 50,000. According to Lami (1951) Nancere has two dialects: Nancoa (Nantchoa) and Kabalai, while Tucker and Bryan (1956) consider Gablai (=Kabalai) as another, if closely related, language. The name of the language has been variously written as Nangire, Nanjeri, Nandjéré, Nantjere, Nantchéré. Probably also Bruel's 'Masa de Nung-Tiéré' (Gaufrey-Demombynes, 1907) is nothing but another alternative name for the same language, as far as one can judge by the numerals given by Bruel (see below).

The first data on this language seem to have been published by Bruel in a work on 'le cercle du Bas Logone'<sup>1</sup> which I have not seen, but from which M. Gaufrey-Demombynes (1907) cites the numerals 1-10, 15 and 20 of 'Masa de Nung-Tiéré'. A first short vocabulary of 133 items was collected in 1910/11 by Duke Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg during his German Central Africa Expedition and published as '13. Nangire' by Johannes Lukas (1937). There is also an undated study of the Nancoa dialect by Pierre Lamy (Lami?) (cf. Bibliography and Tucker and Bryan, 1956, p. 184) which I have not seen. And since 1947 more and more data have become available through the translations of parts of the Bible by the American Bible Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Scripture Gift Mission (Coldham, 1966): Mark, 1947; John, 1949; Luke and Acts, 1949-50; New Testament, 1956; Selections, 1957; New Testament (reprint?), 1969.

### PREVIOUS CLASSIFICATIONS OF NANCERE

Almost from the beginning, publications of data on Nancere were accompanied by suggestions for the classification of the language. M. Gaufrey-Demombynes (1907) included 'Masa de Nung-Tiéré' in his Tumak-Ndam Group in which he also included Tumak, Ndam, Somrai, Sarwa, and Gabri (pp. 292-3), as well as Miltu (p. 301). J. Lukas (1937) grouped Nangire together with Somrai, Gabri, Dormo, and Kaba in his Somrai Group (pp. 71-93). But he also referred to relations between Somrai and Medegel and Somrai and 'Tuburi' (p. 71), although he kept both Medegel (Modgel) and 'Tuburi'<sup>2</sup> as

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<sup>1</sup> This is the reference to his source as given by M. Gaufrey-Demombynes (p. 300). But in 'Les langues du monde' (1952, p. 788) one finds the following reference: G. Bruel, *LE CERCLE DU MOYEN-LOGONE* (Paris, 1905).

<sup>2</sup> Lukas's two 'Tuburi' vocabularies ('Tuburi-Kera' and 'Tuburi-Fianga') contain a language which is altogether different from the Tupuri of which Mouchet has collected a vocabulary and which is an Adamawa-Eastern Niger-Congo language. Lukas's 'Tuburi' is a Chadic language. It might be the language mentioned in the literature as Kera.

separate groups: Modgel Group (pp. 96–7) and Tuburi Group (pp. 100–102). And under Gulei which he set up as a separate Gulei Group (pp. 94–5) he considered (p. 94) the possibility that Gulei might formerly have been more closely related to the Somrai group. In 1940 Diedrich Westermann (Baumann and Westermann, 1957) grouped Nancere (Nandjéré, Nangiré) together with Kaba, Somrai, Gabri, Tumak, Ndam, Lele, Mesme as well as Laka, Sara and Nduka in a Sara–Laka Group (p. 459) which in turn is a subdivision of his 6th Group (Bongo–Baka–Sara–Laka–Bagirmi Group) of his ‘Languages of the Inner Sudan’ (section D of his Sudanic Languages). In 1950 Joseph H. Greenberg grouped Nangire together with Gabri, Dormo, and Chire (Tshire) under subgroup (b) of his group 9 of Chadic, while Somrai, Tumak, Ndam, Miltu, Sarwa, and Gulei appeared under subgroup (a) of the same group. This arrangement was kept in 1963 (Greenberg, 1963, p. 46). A. N. Tucker and M. A. Bryan (1956) included Nancere in their ‘Isolated Language Group? Somrai’ (pp. 43–5), together with Somrai, Gabri, Gablai, Tumak, Ndam, Gam, ‘Kim’, Besme, ‘and perhaps other units’. Later, in 1966, they added Miltu and Sarwa to their Somrai Group (Tucker and Bryan, 1966, p. 161). C. F. and F. M. Voegelin (1964) included Nancere in their ‘Zone Six of Chadic’ (pp. 319–21), together with Somrai, Tumak, Ndam, Gablai, Gam, Kim, Besme, Miltu, Sarwa, Tunya, Dai, Buso, Fanya, Dormo, Gabri, Sokoro, Mubi, Mogum, Dangaleat, Bidyo, Jongor, Modgel, Tuburi, and Karbo. Strangely enough, Nancere is listed twice, once under the name Nancere as (8) and again under Nangire as (16). This double listing of one and the same language under two variant names as well as the internal order and the scope of the languages included here show that the compilers of this classification cannot have been very familiar with the languages in this section of their book. Paul Newman and Roxana Ma (1966) do not mention Nancere itself, but consider Greenberg’s Group 9 as a whole a division of their Plateau-Sahel branch of Chadic (pp. 219–20).

If one compares the various views on the classification of Nancere, there seems to be little disagreement about the languages to which Nancere is most closely related. Gabri (with Chire), Dormo, Gablai (Kaba, Kabalai), Lele, and Somrai, Ndam, Tumak, Gulei, Miltu and Sarwa are listed in all or most of the groupings. (Languages such as Sara, Laka and Nduka listed by Westermann, ‘Kim’ listed by Tucker and Bryan, and Kim, Tunya, Dai, Buso, Fanya listed by the Voegelins do, of course, belong to quite different language families and cannot be seriously considered in this context.) Some minor difference exists between Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Lukas, Westermann, and Tucker/Bryan on one hand and Greenberg on the other in that Greenberg sets up two subgroups (a) and (b) where the others seem to recognize only one group (the Tumak–Ndam Group of Gaudefroy-Demombynes, the Somrai Group of Lukas and Tucker/Bryan, and the Sara–Laka Group of Westermann, disregarding, of course, in the latter the unrelated languages Sara, Laka, and Nduka). However, a major disagreement exists over the question whether Nancere is a Chadic language or not. Greenberg, the Voegelins and Newman/Ma regard it explicitly or implicitly as Chadic, while Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Lukas and Westermann do not. Tucker/Bryan do not consider it Chadic either, but do not want to rule out such a possibility. Lukas was the first to recognize and set up a ‘Chado–Hamitic’ group, and his views in this matter are therefore of some importance. He does not treat Nancere or the related languages in the section dealing with ‘Chado–Hamitic’ languages, nor does he make any remarks about the possibility of such a relationship. Westermann, who substitutes his own ‘Hausa–Kotoko Group’ for Lukas’s ‘Chado–Hamitic’ group, similarly excludes these languages from his ‘Hausa–Kotoko group’ and includes them in his

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'Bongo-Baka-Sara-Laka-Bagirmi group' (p. 459). But when Greenberg revised Lukas's concepts of a 'Chado-Hamitic' group and set up his own Chadic family, he included Nancere in it. Unfortunately his Comparative Word List (1963, pp. 51-64) does not contain any cognates taken from Nancere. Newman and Ma's Comparative Word List (1966, pp. 232-42) does not contain any cognates from Nancere either, and only very few from Gabri, Somrai and Ndam.

It is therefore justifiable to raise the question whether there is in fact any evidence that supports Greenberg's inclusion of Nancere in the Chadic languages. The following paragraphs try to answer this question and are a first attempt to show that there is in fact ample grammatical and lexical evidence to justify the inclusion of Nancere in Chadic. The evidence is entirely taken from the New Testament in Nancere and must be regarded as very preliminary, being gleaned, as it is, from a very cursory inspection of the New Testament. A longer systematic study of this source would presumably reveal much more evidence in support of the Chadic character of Nancere.

### GRAMMATICAL GENDER

The first point to be mentioned is probably the existence of grammatical gender in Nancere. Grammatical gender in Nancere is of a type very commonly found in Chadic languages, e.g. in Hausa, Kotoko, Masa or Mubi, namely a combined gender/number system of three terms: masculine, feminine (both implying singular), and plural (without any distinction of gender). In itself, this would only be a typological criterion and not of much use for purposes of a genetic classification. But the actual gender/number exponents are morphemes some of which, if not all, have well-known cognates in other Chadic languages (especially within Greenberg's group 9) and even beyond that in Cushitic. In Nancere these morphemes are:

masculine:	ku
feminine:	te
plural:	ka'

They appear as linkers, e.g. between Head and Genitival Qualifier, Head and Adjectival Qualifier, Head and Relative Qualifier, the choice of the linker depending on the gender/number of the noun functioning as Head in the group. With the above gender/number morphemes of Nancere compare, for example, the genitival linkers of Dangla (Dangaleat) (Fédry, 1969), Jegu (Jungraithmayr, 1961, esp. pp. 98-9), and Mubi (Lukas, 1937, pp. 159-60):

	Dangla	Jegu	Mubi
masculine:	ká	ku (ko, kɔ, ki, ke)	gì
feminine:	tá	tu (to, tɔ, ti, te)	dì
plural:	kú	ku (ko, kɔ, ki, ke)	hì

There can be little doubt that we are dealing with essentially the same system in all four languages, and nobody would deny that Mubi, Dangla and Jegu are Chadic languages. Compare also points 1 and 2 in Greenberg's list of morphological resemblances between Chadic languages and other Afroasiatic languages (1963, pp. 46-7).

### THE PERSONAL PRONOUN

Another point of similarity of Nancere with other Chadic languages is the system of the personal pronoun, both as regards the general organization of the system and the actual morphemes that are the exponents of the system. As in various other Chadic (and for that



Table 2

Numerals	one	two	three	four	five	six	seven	eight	nine	ten
Nancere	pena	sue	sab	peri	bai	menej	madal	perpende	cele	gware
Lele	pina	so	subu	poring	bai	meneng	mataling	—	cela/celang	goro
Dormo	penā	saa	subu	porin	bai	jis	jurgum	margum	tigesu	moid
Gabri (AF)	penā	saa	subu	porin	bai	jis	jurgum	margum	tigesu	moid
Gabri (Dec)	penda	so	sap	pari	baī	gi	dyurgum	margum	tegès	goara
Tshire	pon	wō	sōbu	porbu	bay	jī	jurgum	márgum	tingěshū	mōdo
Gablai (Kaba)	pena	suo	sabu	pori	bai	ji	jurugum	margum	tegesu	guara
'Masa de Lai'	kuna <sup>3</sup>	so	saba	pori	baī	gi	dyurgum	margum	tegese	gora
Somrai (Na)	mon	sir	súbu	wódi	jī	dénā sir	dénā súbu	dénā gúbí	dénā men	moj
Somrai (Ba)	man	sa	sūbu	wayti	ishi	ūgi	tágsūba	wōdewōde	dōso	kōār
Somrai (AF)	men	ser	subu	uóde	ji	kubi	urusu	denāsr	denāomen	moid
Somrai (Dec)	mun	sie	supo	wodi	gi	kubi	urugi subo	dina o mun	dena u sie	moet
Ndam (Ba)	man	sa	sūbu	wayti	—	—	dagsūbū <sup>4</sup>	—	—	—
Ndam (Br)	man	sa	sup	weti	si	wegi	daksup	welwel	disa mane	ankwar
Ndam (Dec)	minei	reje	supu	woro	usi	ugi	wosubo	wodu wodu	tīše	kwar
Tumak (Dec)	mon	ehe	sup	woli	siñ	wuhu	daksup	wowue	disa	koar
Tumak (Br)	man	ya	sup	uri	usi	ugi	laksup	worwek	bisa mane	kor
Gulei	mün	hē	cuba	uori	using	wugi	dagsuba	uáruar	sāmen	koār
Miltu	man	sa	sobo	wedi	iši	wegi	laksup	welwel	disa mane	kwar
Sarwa	muni	rei	sup	we	uju	ju biru min	ji esa re	marta	doso	doko

<sup>3</sup> 'Masa de Lai' kuna is presumably not the numeral 'one', but the indefinite qualifier 'a certain, some' referring to a masculine noun, cf. Nancere kune, f. tune, pl. kane 'a certain, some'.

<sup>4</sup> Ndam **dagsūbū** is given by Barth as 'seventy' (in the column after that for 'seven'), while 'seven' itself is left open. It seems reasonable to presume that this is either an error in the lay-out of the vocabulary or else an error in recording, and that **dagsūbū** means in fact 'seven'.

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differences between Nancere, Lele, Dormo, Gabri, Chire, Gablai and 'Masa de Lai' on one hand and Somrai, Ndam, Tumak, Gulei, Miltu and Sarwa on the other. These systematic differences are further supported by similar differences in other parts of the vocabulary; for example, in the words for 'water', 'moon', 'sun', 'fire' and 'fish'. The term 'Somrai group' ought therefore to be used only with reference to the latter group of languages (Somrai, Ndam, Tumak, Gulei, Miltu and Sarwa), equivalent to Greenberg's group 9(a), while the former group of languages (Nancere, Lele, Dormo, Gabri, Chire, Gablai and 'Masa de Lai'), approximately equivalent to Greenberg's group 9(b), might be called the Nancere group, Nancere being the best-known member of it.

### OTHER LEXICAL ITEMS

Finally, the Nancere lexicon generally has to be considered. Although the analysis of the New Testament has not gone very far, a certain number of lexical items have come to light which appear to have cognates in other languages of the Chadic family. Quite a few are in fact reflexes of items for which PC reconstructions have already been suggested. A few examples may serve as an illustration.

- 'blood': kubera m., cf. PC b-r- (Newman/Ma 5; cf. also Greenberg 9). This item has a k- prefix in Nancere which appears in a number of instances without any known function, e.g. also in 'water' and 'moon'. The vowel of this prefix seems to vary.
- 'bone': ese, cf. PC 'W-s- (Newman/Ma 127; cf. also Greenberg 11).
- 'to die': má, cf. PC m-t- (Newman/Ma 20; cf. also Greenberg 23). Sometimes a consonant in 2nd radical position seems to have been lost in Nancere.
- 'dog': gare, cf. PC k-r- (Newman/Ma 21).
- 'dream': sune, cf. PC (w-)s-n- 'sleep' (Newman/Ma 97; cf. also Greenberg 68).
- 'to drink': se/sè, cf. PC s- (Newman/Ma 23; cf. also Greenberg 25).
- 'ear': sema-, cf. Greenberg 26 (PC s-m-).
- 'elephant': june m., cf. PC g-w-n (Newman/Ma 27).
- 'eye': ? ter, cf. PC -d- (Newman/Ma 29; cf. also Greenberg 29). (With a prefix t-?)
- 'fire': tua f., cf. PC w-t- (Newman/Ma 33).
- 'fish': kusá. This is different from PC k-rf- 'fish' (Newman/Ma 34). It has cognates in languages of Group 9, e.g. Gabri kusá, Kaba kusā, Dormo gusá, Somrai góse, in the Ron Group, e.g. Daffo gushé, Sha gwàshé, Bokkos gùshé, and in the Southern Bauchi Group, e.g. Baram kwissi, Geji kwesi, Kopti gūshi, Zar (Seyanci) gyas. Whether Mubi b̀̀g̀̀s̀̀s̀̀ is cognate, is not clear.
- 'to give': be, cf. PC b-(r-) (Newman/Ma 41).
- 'head': ? ca, cf. PC k-(n) (Newman/Ma 47; cf. also Greenberg 36).
- 'if': ma, cf. Bura ma, Margi ma, Higi ma, Matakam aman.
- 'to know': sen, cf. PC s-n- (cf. Newman/Ma 57 Z-n-; cf. also Greenberg 42).
- 'left side': gula, cf. PC g-d- (Newman/Ma 59; cf. also Greenberg 44).
- 'moon': kedere, cf. PC t-r- (Newman/Ma 66; cf. also Greenberg 50). This word has a k- prefix in the languages of the Nancere Group. Compare 'blood'.
- 'ox': sī m., cf. PC s- 'cow' (Newman/Ma 18; cf. also Greenberg 21).
- 'pot': degele m., cf. PC D -gh-l- (Newman/Ma 137).
- 'to put': se, cf. PC s-(k-) (Newman/Ma 82).
- 'root': sar-, cf. PC s-rw- (Newman/Ma 87; cf. also Greenberg 60).
- 'sheep': damge f., pl. gamge, cf. PC t-m-k (Newman/Ma 92). The plural gamge is

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probably etymologically different from the singular and might be a reflex of PC (N)g-m 'ram' (Newman/Ma 84).

'to untie': pure (pera), cf. Margi mpəl, Bura mpələmta, Higi pələntɛ, Glavda pəl, Bacama para, Matakam pra, Musgum pela.

'to wash/bathe': pele, ? cf. PC b-n- (Newman/Ma 115). This word seems to have irregular reflexes (due to early variants?). Nevertheless the forms seem to be related. Cf. Bura pəra, Margi pər, Mofaw pərá, pəréy, Matakam pana, Paduko aparea, Udlam bar, Mada bal, Zelgwa bera, Glavda bar, Gabri pelē, Dormo pelenga, Kaba polokožu, Modgel péle.

'water': ká, cf. PC ( )-m (Newman/Ma 116; cf. also Greenberg 75). This seems to be a case of the k- prefix and loss of the second radical. Compare Kaba kāma, Gabri kama, kam, kang, Dormo káng, Chire kam.

'what?': me, mene, cf. PC m-(n-) (Newman/Ma 117; cf. also Greenberg 77).

'who?': wei, cf. PC w-(n-) (Newman/Ma 118).

Admittedly, this is a short list. It is nevertheless impressive, as it contains quite a number of items that have a wide distribution in Chadic and that can be regarded as diagnostic Chadic or Afroasiatic vocabulary, such as, for example, 'to die', 'dog', 'to drink', 'ear', 'to know', 'sleep/dream', 'moon' or the numeral 'four' mentioned earlier.

Apart from showing that Nancere is a Chadic language, some lexical items give more precise information about its place in the family and show that Greenberg was justified in distinguishing between group 9(a) and 9(b). The word for 'moon', for example, has a k- prefix in the languages of group 9(b), but not in 9(a). The word for 'water' begins with a k- in 9(b), but with an n- in 9(a). The words for 'sun' and 'fire' generally begin with a t- in 9(b), but with a d- in 9(a). The word for 'fish' similarly begins with a k- in most cases in 9(b), but with g- in 9(a).

### CONCLUSION

The above paragraphs have, it is hoped, provided sufficient evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Nancere is a Chadic language and that Greenberg was justified in so classifying it. They have also shown that there is not a single Somrai group as outlined by Lukas or Tucker and Bryan, but rather two separate, but related groups, namely a Somrai group and a Nancere group, corresponding almost exactly to Greenberg's groups 9(a) and 9(b).

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