

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE MAHA LANGUAGE

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Under the heading of the Bura language group, Westermann and Bryan (1952, p. 153) include the following note: "Magha appears to be the name of a language spoken west of BABUR, of which however nothing is known." The reference is obviously to the Maha who inhabit Gulani and surrounding villages in Gujba Division in southwestern Bornu Province, Northern Nigeria, latitude 10° 45' N., longitude 11° 45' E. The only other reference to the Maha in the literature is by Temple (1922, p. 263) who states that the Maha ("Maga") are descendants of a small group of Kanakuru who came from Shani and settled near the present site of Gulani at the beginning of the 17th century.

The question then is whether Maha is a "West Chadic" language, Greenberg's (1963) group 1, closely related to Kanakuru, as claimed by Temple, or whether it is an "East Chadic" language, Greenberg's group 3, related to Bura as implied by Westermann and Bryan. As the accompanying word list clearly indicates, Maha belongs to the West Chadic language group but linguistic evidence does not support the assertion of a particularly close historical relationship between Maha and Kanakuru. Rather, the proper linguistic position of Maha is within the Bolewa-Ngamo-Karekare cluster.

Maha, like the other members of the Bolewa cluster and like all West Chadic languages, has separate masculine and feminine pronouns in the 2nd and 3rd person singular and one 1st person plural pronoun, there being no distinction between "we" inclusive and "we" exclusive. On the other hand, Maha is the only West Chadic language which has lateral fricatives, phonemes characteristic of the Bura-Tera ("East Chadic") group of languages. (See, e.g., numbers 11 and 67 in word list.) The occasional presence of these laterals is not surprising, however, in view of the geographical proximity of the Maha to the Babur, Bura and Tera with whom they have had considerable contact over some length of time.

WORD LIST¹

	MAHA	NGAMO		MAHA	NGAMO
1. one	modi	modi	11. ashes	bufo	buto
2. two	bolu	bolo	12. back	boy	be
3. three	kunu	kunu	13. belly	aho	hawo
4. four	paɗu	hoɗo	14. bird	widi	rayi
5. five	ba	baɗi	15. blood	dom	dom
6. six	binkunu	baʔasimodi	16. bone	osok	oso
7. seven	ɲgano	babilo	17. breast (f)	bogjito	wodi
8. eight	jiley	horhido	18. dog	ada	ada
9. nine	kwalak	ɓonu	19. ear	kuma	kumo
10. ten	bemba	bimbad	20. egg	dɪnfi	ʔyinsa

¹ The informant for the Maha list was a secondary school student from Gulani. The informant for Ngamo, which represents the Bolewa cluster, was a secondary school student from Kadi village in Fika Division. These word lists were collected as part of an extensive comparative study of Chadic languages which is still in progress. In this study tone has been ignored in reconstructing forms and in grouping and subgrouping languages; thus it has also been omitted in this paper, which limits itself to the genetic classification of the Maha language.

	MAHA	NGAMO		MAHA	NGAMO
21. eye	ida	ido	64. die	muto	mato
22. fire	wofi	wosi	65. drink	se	sena
23. fish	kerwo	kifi	66. eat	ti	tuna
24. flesh (meat)	lo	lu	67. fly	gito	duro
25. foot	se or dele	feke	68. give	oni	ona
26. hair	sofi	som	69. hear	solu	kolariri
27. hand	sara or baha	sara	70. kill	duhayo	dukfi
28. head	ko	ka	71. know	nonayo	mba?ata
29. heart	jito	tili	72. lie down	gandi	suno
30. hill	oho	gumfi	73. say	pori	ana
31. horn	belem	balum	74. see	we or kali	moyno
32. knee	burum	buru	75. sit	dena	deno
33. louse	jan?kar	korkoto	76. sleep	monsom	som
34. man	bomoji	mizi	77. stand	deri	hindi
35. milk	wodi	wodi	78. big	goro	na?ako
36. moon	tarya	tere	79. black	tiŋ	unu
37. mouth	boho	bo	80. cold	n?julur	ye?o
38. name	sum	sun	81. dry	asirkina	foy?iko
39. neck	wah	ga?ya	82. full	ngemkina	ngama
40. night	bo?i	be?i	83. good	zinaŋ	zina
41. nose	wotiŋ	wunti	84. hot	girgir	yam
42. oil	mor	mor	85. left (side)	ga?e	ga?e
43. path	dore	bunde	86. long	ngadaŋ	gara
44. person	latu	nggo	87. new	poyo	fikin
45. rain	daso	hamde	88. red	dey	dey
46. root	sorom	fori	89. right (side)	monay	tin
47. salt	buto	manda	90. round	korkornikina	kureno
48. seed	fidom	fida	91. small	de?e	mamba
49. skin	dimbi	fata	92. white	pe	fetere
50. smoke	olok	olio	93. all	ča?ap	kirkir
51. snake	wifi	da?fo	94. many	haŋ	du
52. star	tendrefi	jenja	95. that	nafi	wom?i
53. stone	guji	gofo	96. this	nam	woyo
54. sun	poti	foti	97. what?	luway	ni
55. tail	pata	kotur	98. who?	ley	lo
56. tongue	di?lis	linsa	99. I	ina	neye
57. tooth	udo	udo	100. thou (m)	ke	koy
58. tree	n?iwi	royi	101. thou (f)	fi	fi
59. water	amma	ham	102. he	si	si
60. woman	modu	mandu	103. she	ta	te
61. bite	adayo	atio	104. we	mine	wuni
62. burn	boko	beke	105. you (pl)	ku	nguni
63. come	aytu	de?tu	106. they	kuta	nzuni

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