



## Polci Languages

Bernard Caron

### ► To cite this version:

Bernard Caron. Polci Languages. 3rd Biennial International Colloquium on the Chadic Languages (BICCL 3), Nov 2005, Villejuif, France. halshs-00647754

**HAL Id: halshs-00647754**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00647754>**

Submitted on 2 Dec 2011

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Polci languages

Bernard Caron

LLACAN\*

### Abstract

This paper aims at characterizing the common morphology of Polci languages, and contrasting it to that of Zaar. Zaar and Polci languages all belong to South-Bauchi-West Chadic languages, although they have been assigned to different language clusters by (Shimizu 1978).

### Résumé

Cet article présente la morphologie commune des langues polci, et la compare à celle du zaar. Les langues zaar et polci appartiennent toutes aux langues tchadiques de la branche Sud-Bauchi Oriental, bien que pour leur classification interne, (Shimizu 1978) les a rangées dans des groupes de langues différents

Polci languages have been presented as a genetic sub-unit by Shimizu (1978). This language cluster belongs to Chadic, West A; South-Bauchi West languages, Sub-group North. It comprises the following languages: Zùl, Barang, Dìir, Bili, Nyámzax, Lundur, Posə.

From 1995 to 2004, I have done fieldwork on : Dìir, Bili (Buli), Nyámzax (Langas), Posə (Polci) and Luri. Due to difficult conditions of work, the Luri data is very limited<sup>1</sup>; likewise, the Buli data is of very poor quality and will not be used in this work.

In this paper, I will give a presentation of the common morphology of the Polci language cluster (CP) as a first step to characterise South Bauchi West languages (SBW). I intend to repeat the operation for the other SBW language clusters identified by Shimizu. As a matter of comparison, the Zaar equivalents (Za) are given next to CP. I will concentrate essentially on verbal and pronominal morphology and give only a few examples of the rest of the morphology and the lexicon. As a convention, I will call the Polci cluster 'Polci' and the Polci language 'Po'.

Po and Za are three-tone languages (Lo = à ; Mid = a ; Hi = á) ; the others are two-tone languages (Lo = à ; Hi = a). This will make it difficult for the time being to mark tones on CP

**Abbreviations** : ACC: accomplishment; AOR: aorist; COP: copula; CP: Common Polci; Di: Dir; DO: direct object; f: feminine; foc: focus; FUT: future; Hi: High tone; IMPF: imperfect; Lo: Low tone; Lu: Luri; Mid: Middle tone; Ny: Nyamzax; m: masculine; p: plural; PC: Proto-Chadic; Po: Polci; Pp: Predicative particle; PREP: preposition; PRO: pronoun; s: singular; Ri:

---

\* LLACAN: Langues, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire, UMR 8135 (CNRS, Inalco, Paris 7). <http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/>; [caron@vjf.cnrs.fr](mailto:caron@vjf.cnrs.fr)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caron, Bernard. 2004. Le luri. Quelques notes sur une langue tchadique du Nigeria. In *Langues et cultures: terrains d'Afrique. Hommages à France Cloarec-Heiss*, eds. Pascal Boyeldieu and Pierre Nougayrol, 193-201. Louvain-Paris: Peeters..

Rising tone; SBW: South Bauchi West; TAM: Tense-Aspect Marker; Za: Zaar.

## 1. Pronouns

SBW has lost gender and tends to express number through tone contrast. Polci has not taken that process as far as Za. All different paradigms show little variation. We give individual forms only when they differ from CP.

### 1.1. Independent

	CP	Zaar
1s	ám	myááni
2s	kí	kyááni
3s	yà(x)/tí	yááni
1p	mù	myààní
2p	kèn	kyààní
3p	wúr	yààshí

1s Di:ámí. 2s Ny kóŋ.

2s Ny kóŋ. 2p Po kì; Ny & Lu: gèn.

3s yà(x) is the most common form and is characteristic of SBW. It contrasts with PC \*si (m.) and \*ta (f.). Lu has kept the original PC 3s feminine as tí for common 3s. This gender levelling in favour of the feminine gender has been observed by Rudolf Leger in Southern Bole languages (cf. Leger, 2005). Po has kept ti/tə as a variant in Independent Pronouns, and as a logophoric pronoun which appears in [+foc] clauses as well:

- 1 yàà<sub>x</sub> wolé dī tə<sub>x</sub>/yàà<sub>y</sub> kaḃó ràŋ.  
 3S.PERF say COMP 3S.LOG take NEG  
*He<sub>1</sub> said that he<sub>1</sub> would not take [it].*
- 2 a gaa xən tə/\*yàà yu nyen.  
 in calabash COP 3S.PERF pour milk  
*She poured milk IN THE CALABASH.*

Po has another form, ər, which alternates with yàà/tí/tə and appears with [-human] referents. It is very common in the expression : ər xən... ‘this is why’... It is a grammaticalization of ər ‘thing’ which is found only in Po and Zodi, a neighbouring SBW language belonging to the Dass cluster (cf. Caron, 2002).

3p wúr is characteristic of Polci. Ny wúr; Di wúrí; Po wún; Lu wùl.

### 1.2. Non-verbal Subject

The segmental forms of Non-verbal Subjects (subjects of predicative particles) are very close to those of Independent subjects. Tones of Non-verbal subjects vary a lot in Polci. For example, Lu has Lo everywhere; Ny has Lo everywhere except for 3s; Di has Hi in 1s and 2s, Lo elsewhere. /K/ stands for k/g.

	CP	Zaar
1s	am	mì
2s	kə	kì
3s	ya(x)	cì
1p	mì	mì
2p	Kən	kì
3p	wur	cì

1s Lu à. 1p vowels vary: Po mù; Ny mù; Di mù; Lu mē.

2s kə is uniform. 2p Ny & Lu gèn; Di kèn; Po kì.

3s Po & Lu yàà; Ny yáx; Di yàx. 3p Po & Di wúr; Ny wùr; Lu wù.

### 1.3. Direct Object

Tones vary according to number (i.e. Po 2s ká & 2p kà) but the variations from one language to another are enormous, i.e. Po has Hi except for 1p & 2p = Lo whereas Ny has Lo except for 1p & 2p = Hi when suffixed to monoverbs beginning with a voiced obstruent, although these consonants usually have a depressing influence on tones (cf. Caron, 2005 on Za).

	CP	Zaar
1s	-m	-əm
2s	-Kə	-kə
3s	-Tə	-tə
1p	-mi	-mí
2p	-gən	-kí
3p	-wur	-shí

1s Di -ini.

2s Po & Ny -kə; Lu gə; Di wuu. 2p Ny & Lu gən; Po kə; Di un.

3s T stands for t/d which are either phonological or morphological variants.

3p Di is reduced to -r.

### 1.4. Independent Genitive

The base is the Genitive link suffixed with a clitic genitive pronoun : gə-Pro.

	CP	Zaar
1s	geem	gətn
2s	gii	gwàà
3s	giis	gòs
1p	geemi	gòpm
2p	giini	gwààn
3p	gəsən	gwààsən

Except for 3s, forms are highly variable.

1s Ny gáám; Di gèémí; Lu gèèn; Po gəón. 1p Di & Lu gèèmì; Po gām; Ny gəməŋ.

2s Di gñ; Po gəà; Lu gèè. 2p Di gèémí; Po gām; Lu gèèmì. NB: Ny gíígəŋ (2s) vs gíígəŋ (2p).

3s Dy & Di gñs; Lu gəs; Po gəs. 3p Lu gəsən; Po gəsən; Ny gñzən; Di gèézənì.

## 2. TAM

### 2.1. Aorist-Perfective

The Perfective is also used as a narrative and a subjunctive (cf. *infra*). The aspect morpheme is Ø, leaving the person indexes bare. K stands for k/g.

	CP	Zaar
1s	a	mə
2s	Kə	àà
3s	Ø	tə
1p	mə	mə Lo-V
2p	Kə	àà Lo-V
3p	wu	tə Lo-V

- 1p Di mù.
- 2s kə is uniform except for Lu gə. 2p Ny gə, Lu gən.

- 3s Polci is Pro-drop with a Ø person index (cf *infra*). 3p **wu** is uniform.

## 2.2. Subjunctive

The paradigm of the Subjunctive is the same as that of the Perfective, with the following exceptions: 3s has tone variations and in Di and Lu, 2p has a **-n** suffixed to the verb.

## 2.3. Imperfective

Apart for Lu and Ny which share the same **-aa** formative for the Imperfective, the forms are variable.

	CP	Zaar
1s	(n)aa	myáá
2s	kaa	kyáá
3s	Ø	cáá
1p	maa	myàá
2p	gaa	kyàá
3p	waa	càá

- 1s Po **ám** ; Di **á** ; Ny **naa** ; Lu **áá**. 1p Po **mùú**; Di **mú** V-Ri; Ny **maa**; Lu **màà**.
- 2s Po & Di **kó** ; Ny **kaa** ; Lu **káá**. 2p Po **kòó** ; Di **kó** V-Ri ; Ny **gaa** ; Lu **gàà**.
- 3p Po & Di **wú** ; Ny & Lu **wùù**.

## 2.4. Continuous

In SBW, the Continuous is the grammaticalization of a locative construction based on the paradigm of non-verbal subject pronouns : PRO+COP+PREP. In Polci, the COP is a zero morpheme. The prepositions vary for each language: Po **nó**; Ny **pó**; Di **dàn**. We give the full paradigm of Di as an example. In Za, the copula is the defective verb **yi**, ‘be’ and the preposition **ká**.

	Di	Za
1s	<b>ám dàn</b>	<b>mighá</b> (<mi-yi-ká)
2s	<b>kó dàn</b>	<b>kighá</b> (<ki-yi-ká)
3s	<b>yàx dàn</b>	<b>cighá</b> (<ti-yi-ká)
1p	<b>mì dàn</b>	<b>mìghá</b> (<mì-yi-ká)
2p	<b>kèn dàn</b>	<b>kìghá</b> (<kì-yi-ká)
3p	<b>wú dàn</b>	<b>cìghá</b> (<ù-yi-ká)

## 2.5. Future

Future is generally expressed by the Imperfective. However a second future shows various degrees of grammaticalization of the verb **ró**, ‘come’ in the Imperfective followed by the main verb in the Aorist. It is still a quasi-serial verb construction in Po, and has become a *bona fide* TAM in Di. Let us compare the 1p in the three languages where it has been observed, first in Po:

3    **kó**            **ró**            **kə**            **pad-əm**  
       2S.IMPF    come    3S.AOR    meet-1S.DO  
       *You will meet me (lit. you will come to meet me).*

In Ny, the verb is no longer conjugated, and **ró** combined to a **gə** morpheme is added to the Imperfective paradigm.

4 kàà rógè bósl yààzló  
 2S.IMPF FUT shoot bird  
*You will shoot a bird.*

In Di, **kè** appears instead of **gè**. Let us see the full paradigm:

	CP	Za
1s	âr kè	ma
2s	kóró kè	ka
3s	yààr kó	wò
1p	mûr kè	má
2p	kórè kè	ká
3p	wûr kè	tá

### 3. Varia

/K/ stands for a class of phonetic realisations [k/g/ŋg/y/x] of a velar archiphoneme.

	Po	Ny	Di	Za
gàà (Ha)	yi	tén	á kènì	Kəndí
àkwai (Ha)	ree	nèrá	nórá	Káy
Stabilizer	Kən	nè	kènì	Kən

NB: In SBW, constituent order for the thetic particles ‘*here is*’ (Ha **gàà**) & ‘*there is*’ (Ha **àkwai**) is different from Hausa: Ha <**gàà** X> = Polci & Za <X Pp>; Ha <**àkwai** X> = Polci & Za <X Pp>. As in Hausa, the stabilizer ‘*it is*’ (Ha **nee/cee**) follows the NP it identifies.

Neg	ràŋ	ràŋ	yáŋ hù	hù
Gen.Link	Kè	gè	kè	Ká
VN	-tə	-gèn	-(tén)í	-Kən
ACC	wú	wì	wì	-í

ACC =accomplishment marker (cf. Ha grade 4) suffixed to the verb phrase.

Def	-ì	-tù	-sì	-í
wani (Ha)	gólám	gənəm	gwónì	gwón
wasu (Ha)	jílám	dñzì	jénì	
this	bágon	-tén	myéénì	gín
these	bójen		mónjènnì	
that	bógyaa	-tù	méétàràà	gíí
those	bója		mééjùràà	
here	sən	nón	děè	dúúni
there	róósak	rənûrgà	bàrtú	dáni

NB: indefinite and deictic determinants in Po and Di mark number agreement through palatalization. Absence of number agreement in Ny may be due to incomplete data.

### 4. Lexicon

Basic vocabulary seems to be quite stable in Polci, and gives a good comparative basis.

	Po	Ny	Di	Lu	Za
human	mbáàm	mbarém	mbórém	mbàrá	zaar

	Po	Ny	Di	Lu	Za
1	nəm	nəm	nyém	nəm	nàmbón
2	rop	rôp	róóp	róp	mbásləŋ
3	myeen	myéen	myáxken	míígán	mááy
4	wópsə	wùpsə	wúpsée	wúpsə	wupsə
5	nantám	nàmtám	námtám	námtám	nandam
6	mááxə	máágà	mwàà	máágà	lim
7	wósərmyeen	nìŋgéé	níŋkí	nyíŋgé	wottsəmay
8	wósəpsə	wùsəsée	wúsəsée	wúsəsée	tá:nta:n
9	nantóropsə	wùnnún	vùnnèem	áánən	tókndam
10	zup	zúp	kúsl	zup	dzúp

## 5. Comments

### 5.1. General comment on verb and pronoun morphology

Both are quite limited, with a very economic system of pronouns : the same segments are used in the various pronominal functions. The number of aspects is very limited. The core of the system is provided by two underived aspects: Perfective-Aorist and Imperfective. The Continuous is a grammaticalized locative construction, and the Future is derived from an auxiliary construction.

### 5.2. 3s & Pro-drop

The proof that 3s **yàà** which appears with verbs in the various aspects is originally a topic, not a TAM person index, is provided by the Po Negative Perfective. Example (5) shows the normal construction with the first segment of the discontinuous negative morpheme **đii ... ràŋ** occurring on the left of the TAM marker:

- 5    **đii    kə.Ø    zlerə    ràŋ.**  
          NEG   2S.PERF   stop   NEG  
*You did not stop.*

Example (6) shows the negative 3s Perfective with the same **đii** occurring on the right of **yàà**.

- 6    **yàà    đii    Ø    zlerə    ràŋ.**  
          3S.TOP   NEG   PERF   stop   NEG  
*He/she did not stop.*

This indicates that what appears to be the TAM marker in the 3s of the perfective is in fact a topic pronoun, which is compulsory when the [+human] subject is omitted<sup>2</sup>. The Po Future 3s gives another corroboration:

- 7    **yàà    rə    Ø    pad-əm**  
          3S.TOP   come   3S.AOR   meet-1S.DO  
*He will meet me (lit. he will come to meet me).*

to be compared with 2s:

- 8    **kə    rə    kə.Ø    pad-əm**  
          2S.IMPF   come   3S.AOR   meet-1S.DO  
*You will meet me (lit. you will come to meet me).*

In (7), the 3s Po Imperfective shows the form **yàà rə** where **yàà** is the Topic (independent pronoun) and **Ø** is the form of the Imperfective when the subject is a noun. If **yàà** had been a TAM, it would have been repeated between **rə** and the main verb.

<sup>2</sup> For 3s Po **yàà/ər** : cf. Independent pronouns *supra*.

### 5.3. 2s ambiguity

Polci languages adopt various solutions to avoid the ambiguity between 2s & 2p. :

- Ny & Lu contrast 2s = [–Voiced] with 2p = [+Voiced]: **kə** / **gə** ; **kən** / **gən**;
- Po marks 2p with a Lo tone on the TAM: Perf **kə** vs **kə̀** ; Imperf **kó** vs **kə̀ó**; Cont **kón** vs **kăn**;
- Di marks 2p with a Lo tone on the verb: Perf 2s **kə̀** vs 2p **kə̀** Lo-V;
- In the genitive, Ny contrasts 2s –**gən** with 2p –**gəŋ**.

### References

- Caron, Bernard. 2001. Guus, aka Sigidi (Chadic, West-B, South-Bauchi): Grammatical notes and vocabulary. *Afrika und Übersee* 84:1-60.
- Caron, Bernard. 2002. Dott, aka Zodi (Chadic, West-B, South-Bauchi): Grammatical notes, vocabulary and text. *Afrika und Übersee* 85:161-248.
- Caron, Bernard. 2003a. The pronominal system of South-Bauchi West Chadic languages. Paper presented at *Proceedings of the 17th Congrès International de Linguistes. Prague 24-29 juillet 2003*.
- Caron, Bernard. 2003b. South-Bauchi West TAM System. Paper presented at *Proceedings of the 17th Congrès International de Linguistes. Prague 24-29 juillet 2003*.
- Caron, Bernard. 2004. Le luri. Quelques notes sur une langue tchadique du Nigeria. In *Langues et cultures: terrains d'Afrique. Hommages à France Cloarec-Heiss*, eds. Pascal Boyeldieu and Pierre Nougayrol, 193-201. Louvain-Paris: Peeters.
- Caron, Bernard. 2005. *Za:r (Dictionary, grammar, texts)*. Ibadan (Nigeria): IFRA.
- Leger, Rudolf & Ulrike Zoch. 2005. Logophoric Pronouns in the Southern Bole-Tangale Languages. In *Sprachbund in the West African Sahel*, eds. Bernard Caron and Petr Zima, 205-214. Louvain-Paris: Peeters.
- Shimizu, Kiyoshi. 1978. The Southern Bauchi Group of Chadic Languages. A survey report. *Africana Marburgensia* 2 (Special Issue):50.