



HAL
open science

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 limited¹; 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: Langages, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire, UMR 8135 (CNRS, Inalco, Paris 7). <http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/>; caron@vjf.cnrs.fr

¹ 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_x wolé dī tə_x/yàà_y kabó ràŋ.**
 3S.PERF say COMP 3S.LOG take NEG
He₁ said that he₁ 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 **wù**.

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 | mí |
| 2s | kə | kí |
| 3s | ya(x) | cí |
| 1p | mí | mì |
| 2p | Kən | kì |
| 3p | wur | cì |

1s Lu **à**. 1p vowels vary: Po **mù**; Ny **mù**; Di **mì**; Lu **mə**.

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 gəán. 1p Di & Lu gèèmì; Po gám; Ny gəmáŋ.

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

3s Dy & Di gñs; Lu gəs; Po gás. 3p Lu gəsán; Po gəsán; Ny gñzən; Di géézánì.

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 \emptyset 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 | \emptyset | cáá |
| 1p | maa | myáá |
| 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 | ám dàn | mighá (< mi-yi-ká) |
| 2s | kó dàn | kighá (< ki-yi-ká) |
| 3s | yàx dàn | cighá (< ti-yi-ká) |
| 1p | mì dàn | mighá (< mì-yi-ká) |
| 2p | kèn dàn | kighá (< kî-yi-ká) |
| 3p | wú dàn | cighá (< 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** **paɸ-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 bósì 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/ɣ/x] of a velar archiphoneme.

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

NB: In SBW, constituent order for thethetic 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 | -(tón)í | -Kən |
| ACC | wú | wì | wì | -í |

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

| | | | | |
|------------------|--------|---------|----------|-------|
| Def | -ì | -tù | -sì | -í |
| <i>wani</i> (Ha) | gáləm | gənəm | gwónì | gwón |
| <i>wasu</i> (Ha) | jíləm | dîzi | jénì | |
| this | bágon | -tón | myéénì | gín |
| these | bójen | | mónjèni | |
| that | bógyaa | -tù | méétàràà | gíí |
| those | bója | | mééjùràà | |
| here | sən | nón | dèè | dúúni |
| there | róosak | 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 |
|--------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| <i>human</i> | mbáàm | mbarém | mbórém | mbàrám | zaar |

| | Po | Ny | Di | Lu | Za |
|----|------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| 1 | nəm | nəm | nyém | nəm | nàmbóŋ |
| 2 | rop | rôp | róóp | róp | mbásləŋ |
| 3 | myeen | myéén | myáxken | mííǵón | máày |
| 4 | wópsə | wùpsá | wúpséé | wúpsá | wupsə |
| 5 | nántám | nàmtám | námtám | námtám | nandam |
| 6 | mááxə | máágà | mwàà | máágà | lim |
| 7 | wósərmyeen | nìŋǵéé | níŋkí | nyíŋǵé | wottsəmay |
| 8 | wósəpsə | wùsəséé | wúsáséé | wúsáséé | tá:nta:n |
| 9 | nantóropsə | wùnnún | vùnnèèm | áánə́n | 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 zleró 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 zleró 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 omitted². The Po Future 3s gives another corroboration:

7 *yàà ró 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 *ká ró 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 ró* 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 *ró* and the main verb.

² 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 **kè** ; Imperf **kó** vs **kò**; Cont **kón** vs **kǎn**;
- Di marks 2p with a Lo tone on the verb: Perf 2s **kə** vs 2p **kè** 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.