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## Proper names and case markers in Sinyar (Chad/Sudan)

Pascal Boyeldieu\*

“We have stressed the need to rely on grammatical criteria, which are too often ignored in approaches to names.” (Van Langendonck & Van de Velde 2016: 38)

“Proper names are reported to combine with adpositions which differ from those of common nouns although identical grammatical relations are to be expressed.” (Dammel, Helmbrecht, Nübling, Schlücker, & Stolz 2017: 1)

“Sinyar has a Nominative for Nouns [...].  
Nominative and Accusative suffixes exist for personal names [...].” (Doornbos [1980?]: 6)

### Abstract

Sinyar, an alleged Central Sudanic language of Western Darfur, is characterised by two distinct and complementary case marker (sub)systems, the distribution of which provides a morphosyntactic justification of the distinction between common nouns and proper names. The paper considers the two case marking types as well as the semantic content of the category of names. It further presents and tries to explain the behaviour of several nouns that may also be marked as names. It finally reviews two types of units that show formal affinities with the marking of names, namely absolute locative nouns on one side, and demonstratives and personal pronouns on the other side.

### Keywords

proper names, case, toponyms, locative adjuncts, demonstratives, personal pronouns

### 1. Introduction

In line with the first quotation above, the aim of this paper is to expound, in the case of the Sinyar language, on grammatical evidence of a specific category of names. Indeed Sinyar, a language of Chad/Sudan, is one of the (few?) languages where the morphosyntactic contrast between common nouns and proper names is straightforward and obvious: each category calls for its own system of case markers, the two systems differing both in their expression – the form of the markers – and in their structure – the number of marked cases.

Section 2 is devoted to a presentation of the language and briefly puts some typological features forward, in particular the tonal behaviour of case markers. A detailed description of the two case marking subsystems that are characteristic of the categories of nouns and names respectively is presented in Section 3. Section 4 considers several situations where personal names are used as common nouns. Section 5 gives details of the different semantic fields that may be identified among the proper names. Beside typical units as personal names and toponyms, it is shown that two other subsets are, under conditions that are not quite clear, ambivalent and may function both as nouns or as names: some nouns/names referring to rather small or ‘atypical’ animals on one hand, and nouns/names referring to kinship and social relations on the other hand. In either case an attempt is made to explain the peculiar

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\* CNRS (UMR 8135, CNRS-INALCO, France) – [pascal.boyeldieu@cnrs.fr](mailto:pascal.boyeldieu@cnrs.fr)

behaviour of these terms by their semantic characteristics (namely ‘non-standard’ quality of the former or familiarity/intimacy of the latter). Lastly further types of units exhibit some formal affinities with proper names: absolute locatives that represent a limited set of frozen adverbial forms (Section 6), and demonstratives and personal pronouns that display the same four-case structure like proper names (Section 7). Section 8 concludes the paper.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Presenting Sinyar

### 2.1. Location and classification

The Sinyar language (*tààr 'fàmɲà* {mouth=language/Sinyar}) is spoken in Chad (Waddai region, main settlement: Mongororo) and Sudan (Western Darfur, main settlement: Foro Boranga). The general situation of Sinyar in central Africa is shown on [Map 1](#).

[Map 1 to be inserted about here (landscape format)]

For Chad only the number of speakers was estimated to be 12,300 in 2000 (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2019); a somewhat similar number may be claimed for Sudan. The language is directly surrounded by speakers of various languages that, apart from the unclassified Kujarge, all belong to the Nilo-Saharan phylum: Dar Sila Daju (Eastern Sudanic), Gele (also known as Kole or Fongoro, Central Sudanic), Masalit (Maban), and Fur.<sup>2</sup> Some Sinyar speakers may also speak neighbouring languages (namely Fur) and, above all, Chadian or Sudanese varieties of Arabic. As a consequence, the widespread use of Arabic has, at the lexical level at least, a strong influence on the language. Moreover, the numerous loanwords appearing in a folktale recorded by Paul Doornbos *in 1981 in the Sinyar country* show that this impact is not so recent and was not limited to big cities (Doornbos 1982).

Sinyar itself is considered to be Nilo-Saharan: upon the suggestion of earlier scholars it has been classified as a member of the SBB (Sara-Bongo-Bagirmi) branch of Central Sudanic (Tucker & Bryan 1956; Haaland 1978; Doornbos & Bender 1983, Bender 1992). However, Doornbos, the author of a grammatical sketch of the language, expressed doubts concerning this view ([1980?]: 1): “It is the contention of this writer that although many superficial bonds with the larger group [i.e. Sara-Bongo-Bagirmi] exist on the level of vocabulary, differences of phonology, grammar, and also vocabulary are very impressive.” Deeper insights into the language clearly confirm Doornbos’ view: Sinyar shares with the SBB languages a good part of its basic vocabulary and several striking morphosyntactic features, but differs also from them in complementary aspects of the same domains, the most remarkable one being the existence of a (double) system of case markers that are nonexistent in SBB.

This particular situation of ambivalence raises, of course, the question of the genesis of Sinyar, the present nature of which seems to result from two distinct, yet intertwined historical sources. How these two major legacies came to join together into one original language is a problematic issue, especially since the likely second – non-SBB – source of Sinyar remains unidentified. For the time being I would at most suggest that an exogenous language came into intensive contact with SBB languages of the Yulu/Gula type, thus bringing about the numerous interferences that may be now observed.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2. Typological features

A few words have to be said here concerning typological features that are more specifically relevant for the present topic:

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<sup>1</sup> I am very much obliged to two anonymous reviewers for the careful reading of a first draft of the present paper. Their comments and advices – in particular the numerous ‘minor issues’ listed by one of them – have been a great help for improving the text and making the presentation clearer.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed presentation of the Sinyar people, see Doornbos (1982, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> For a general presentation of the SBB languages, see Boyeldieu (2000: 15-45 & 166-175).

i.) The basic syntactic order is SVO, but the presence of case markers (see below) obviously allows numerous variations in this theoretical order with pragmatic effects that are not fully understood. Within the noun phrase, however, the order of words is more restrictive and the different modifiers always follow the head.

ii.) Except when directly followed by a case marker, the noun does not require any necessary marker nor determiner but may appear in its bare form. Beside a limited number of irregular, compact plural forms (e.g. *ùmmà'* /pl. *'mòmmò* 'woman/women', *bìsì'* /pl. *'bìsààr* 'dog/dogs'), plural is marked on nouns by means of a suffix *-ɲà/-ɲá* that is usually dropped in presence of an explicit plural case marker (e.g. *'càngè* 'animal', *'càngè-n* 'animal (NOMINATIVE.SG)', *'càngè(-ɲà)-sì* 'animals (NOMINATIVE.PL)').

iii.) Number is the only category that may affect the noun. There are no noun classes and no gender distinction, not even in pronouns.

iv.) Sinyar has a system of two contrastive level tones (Low/High, more briefly L/H). Moreover, frequent downsteps (marked by <sup>'</sup>) are attached to a lexical unit and may appear, especially between two successive L tones, at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the word.

The lowering effect of an initial downstep (e.g. *'càngè* 'animal', *'mòmmò* 'women') is perceptible only if the word is not sentence initial but preceded by another word ending with any tone, L or H.

Cases of internal downsteps (e.g. *kwòd'là'kìn* 'this year', *dē'è'* 'who?') – that could sometimes result from compounding or borrowing (?) – remain exceptional but are always effective.

As for final downsteps (e.g. *ùmmà'* 'woman', *bìsì'* 'dog'), they do not have a systematic impact on the following unit but their influence is limited to the initial L of the different clitics that may be suffixed to them. These clitics comprise several modifiers of the verb – such as verbal plurals, negation, object and applicative pronouns – and the nominal case markers that concern us more specifically for the present topic.

Example (1) shows that the final downstep of *ùmmà'* (LL<sup>'</sup>) 'woman, wife' has no impact on the following noun *simàrfà* 'man' (1b) and behaves tonally exactly like *mààsì* (LL) 'spear' (1c), i.e. the – virtual – final downstep of *ùmmà'* (LL<sup>'</sup>) is not activated, and both head nouns appear in this context as LL.

- (1)
- |    |                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------|
| a. | <i>ùmmà'</i> [ùm:à] 'woman, wife'   |
|    | <i>mààsì</i> [ma:sì] 'spear'        |
| b. | <i>ùmmà simàrfà</i> [ùm:àsìmàrfà]   |
|    | wife man                            |
|    | 'the man's wife'                    |
| c. | <i>mààsì simàrfà</i> [mà:sìsimàrfà] |
|    | spear man                           |
|    | 'the man's spear'                   |

By contrast a final downstep exerts its effect on a successive L-toned clitic, or may even condition the L-toned allomorph of an otherwise toneless or H-toned clitic. The first situation

is illustrated in (2) with the case marker of proper names *-(y)àà* ‘ACCUSATIVE.SG’: according to the final downsteps of *Kàwáynàṅ<sup>1</sup>*, the tonal realisation of *-yàà* is lowered in (2c).<sup>4</sup>

- (2)
- |    |                             |                     |                            |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| a. | <i>-yàà</i>                 | [ <i>-jà:</i> ]     | ‘ACCUSATIVE.SG’            |
|    | <i>Kùrgùl</i>               | [ <i>kùrgùl</i> ]   | ‘Kurgul [village name]’    |
|    | <i>Kàwáynàṅ<sup>1</sup></i> | [ <i>kàwájnaṅ</i> ] | ‘Kawaynan’ [village name]’ |
- 
- |    |                   |                      |                           |
|----|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| b. | <i>Kùrgùl-yàà</i> | [ <i>kùrgùljà:</i> ] |                           |
|    | Kurgul-ACC.SG     |                      | ‘Kurgul (Accusative sg.)’ |
- 
- |    |                                 |                                    |                             |
|----|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| c. | <i>Kàwáynàṅ<sup>1</sup>-yàà</i> | [ <i>kàwájnaṅ<sup>+</sup>jà:</i> ] |                             |
|    | Kawaynan-ACC.SG                 |                                    | ‘Kawaynan (Accusative sg.)’ |

The second situation is illustrated in (3) and (4) with the markers of common nouns *-n* / *(<sup>1</sup>)-n* ‘NOMINATIVE.SG’ and *-sí* / *(<sup>1</sup>)-sì* ‘NOMINATIVE.PL’ respectively.

In (3) the *-n* variant of the Nominative sg. is toneless and may function as the coda of a H-toned (3b) or L-toned syllable (3c) while the allomorph *-n̄* is conditioned – and lowered – by the final downstep of *ḃìsì<sup>1</sup>* ‘dog’ (3d).

- (3)
- |    |                                      |                                |                 |
|----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| a. | <i>-n</i> / <i>(<sup>1</sup>)-n̄</i> | [ <i>-n</i> ] / [ <i>-n̄</i> ] | ‘NOMINATIVE.SG’ |
|    | <i>kártí</i>                         | [ <i>kártí</i> ]               | ‘elephant’      |
|    | <i>sùrrù</i>                         | [ <i>sùrrù</i> ]               | ‘giraffe’       |
|    | <i>ḃìsì<sup>1</sup></i>              | [ <i>ḃìsì</i> ]                | ‘dog’           |
- 
- |    |                 |                   |                             |
|----|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| b. | <i>kártí-n</i>  | [ <i>kártín</i> ] |                             |
|    | elephant-NOM.SG |                   | ‘elephant (Nominative sg.)’ |
- 
- |    |                |                   |                            |
|----|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| c. | <i>sùrrù-n</i> | [ <i>sùrrùn</i> ] |                            |
|    | giraffe-NOM.SG |                   | ‘giraffe (Nominative sg.)’ |
- 
- |    |                            |                               |                        |
|----|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| d. | <i>ḃìsì<sup>1</sup>-n̄</i> | [ <i>ḃìsì<sup>+</sup>n̄</i> ] |                        |
|    | dog-NOM.SG                 |                               | ‘dog (Nominative sg.)’ |

In (4) the H-toned variant *-sí* of the Nominative pl. displays the default tone of the marker that appears after preceding H or L tone (4b-c). In a complementary way, the variant *-sì* is both triggered and lowered by the final downstep of *ìngà<sup>1</sup>* ‘mountain’ (4d).

- (4)
- |    |                                       |                                 |                 |
|----|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| a. | <i>-sí</i> / <i>(<sup>1</sup>)-sì</i> | [ <i>-sí</i> ] / [ <i>-sì</i> ] | ‘NOMINATIVE.PL’ |
|    | <i>tíccí</i>                          | [ <i>tí:cí</i> ]                | ‘year’          |
|    | <i>mààsì</i>                          | [ <i>ma:sì</i> ]                | ‘spear’         |
|    | <i>ìngà<sup>1</sup></i>               | [ <i>ì<sup>u</sup>gà</i> ]      | ‘mountain’      |
- 
- |    |                 |                     |  |
|----|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| b. | <i>tíccí-sí</i> | [ <i>tí:cí:sí</i> ] |  |
|----|-----------------|---------------------|--|

<sup>4</sup> A list of *Glosses and abbreviations* is provided at the end, after Section 8. For the use of an initial capital in the gloss ACC(USATIVE) (2a-c), see more precisely p. 9, footn. 13 below.

year-NOM.PL  
'years (Nominative pl.)'

c. mààsi-sí [ma:sisi]  
spear-NOM.PL  
'spears (Nominative pl.)'

d. ìngà<sup>1</sup>-sì [i<sup>ngà</sup>si]  
mountain-NOM.PL  
'mountains (Nominative pl.)'

By convention all downsteps are transcribed in the isolated citation form of words. Initial downsteps are not transcribed if they are sentence initial and do not contrast with a preceding unit. Internal downsteps are transcribed in every case. Lastly final downsteps are transcribed only when they do affect a following L-toned clitic.

### 2.3. Fieldwork and data

Paul Doornbos, a former researcher at the African Studies Center (University of Leiden) who spent several months in the Sinyar country around 1980 wrote a grammatical sketch of the language that remained unpublished (Doornbos [1980?]). However his transcription of a Sinyar folktale (see above) was published in 1982, together with a presentation of the group (location, history, culture, and names of the Sinyar sections). More recent fieldwork has been conducted by myself in Khartoum (Sudan) since 2009<sup>5</sup> and the data this article rests on consist of hundreds of handwritten pages of grammatical enquiries and questionnaires, several texts, and a provisional lexicon of about 2,000 words in the Toolbox<sup>®</sup> format.

A few sentences illustrating this paper were either transcribed on the spot or extracted from song texts, in which case they are explicitly marked as such. But most examples have been systematically elicited in order to investigate the properties of case markers and proper names.

Long vowels and geminated consonants are transcribed with doubled graphemes (e.g. *íílé* [i:lé] 'liver', *kàggá* [kàg:á] 'tree'). In accordance with a widespread – though questionable – usage in African linguistics, IPA [ɟ] and [j] are transcribed as *j* and *y* respectively.

### 3. A double system of case markers / alignments

As mentioned above, Sinyar indicates case by means of postpositions having the form of clitics suffixed to the last term of the noun phrase (order is *modified–modifier*, i.e. the head always comes first). However, the language has two different, complementary subsystems of case markers depending on the nature of the head word, common noun or proper name.

Two further clarifications have to be made right now:

- the presence of the case marker, if any for a given function, is regular and obligatory;
- the head word is not necessarily the one to which the case marker is suffixed. In the case of nouns, the case marker comes after the last modifier or modifying group of the phrase. An example is the identifying sentence in (5) that is composed of two nominal constituents, both regularly marked with the Nominative. The subject is a detopicalized, focalized demonstrative in the Nominative (*èni* 'THIS') and the predicate is a noun phrase, the head of which (*nîi* 'girl') controls a Nominative marker (*-nî*) that appears at the end of the sentence, after the last term of the relative clause, that is after the associative pronoun *ná'* 'his':

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<sup>5</sup> I hereby express my gratitude to my different assistants, translators from Arabic or Sinyar speakers, Messrs Zakaria Abdulkerim, Sheekhedin Osman, Mahammat Suleyman Baabikir, Hassan Sale, and, above all, Mr Bakheet Abdulkerim.

- (5) èni                      nî    'Bàkít'-lè                      t-ámá.mbiyáá                      'gì  
SUBJECT                      PREDICATE  
this.NOM.SG.DETOP girl Bakiit[Ar.]-NOM.SG REL-PST.provide\_for.APPL child  
ná'-n  
3S.GEN-NOM.SG  
‘THIS is the girl Bakiit [proper name of man] provided [as a wife] for his son.’

As for proper names, unless they are used as common nouns (see Section 4 below), they do not accept any modifier and case markers are always directly suffixed to them.

### 3.1. Common nouns

Noun phrases whose head is a common noun distinguish only two cases – Nominative (NOM) and Adverbial (ADV)<sup>6</sup> – beside instances of a morphologically unmarked or absolute form:

	(absolute)	Nominative	Adverbial
Sg.	<i>unmarked</i>	-n / (')-n̄ / -Ní / (')-Ní <sup>7</sup>	-tí / (')-tì
Pl.		-sí / (')-sì	

Table 1. Case markers for common nouns

The marking of the main syntactic functions is insured as follows:

– The subject – of any predicate (6-7) –, the nominal predicate (7), and the vocative (8) are coded in the Nominative:

- (6) *kàjjà-n*                      *ám-bí-'yà*  
*sun-NOM.SG*    3.PST.go-PFV  
‘The time is over.’ (lit. the sun has gone)                      (on the spot)
- (7) *gì*    *ándà céccé-tí-n*                      *nî-'nì*  
SUBJECT                      PREDICATE  
*child my first-NOM.SG*    *girl-NOM.SG*  
‘My first child is a girl.’
- (8) *wírjí.wàà-sà*                      *dìkààr-sí*  
IMP.remain.PERM-PL    *relative.PL-NOM.PL*  
‘Goodbye (lit. stay waiting), relatives!’                      (from a song)

– The adjuncts are marked with the Adverbial, which covers the different values of locative (9), temporal, instrumental, and comitative (10):

- (9) *mààsì-n*                      *wìsì-'nà-'à*                      *ìllì*    *'kwààl-tì*  
*spear-NOM.SG*    3.PST.stab-3S.ACC.PFV    *arm*    *right-ADV*

<sup>6</sup> Except if the head noun is modified by a demonstrative that imposes its own case marking (see 7.1 below).

<sup>7</sup> Allomorphs depend on the final of the term the clitic is suffixed to: *-n* is suffixed to a final short vowel (*-V-n*), *-li* to a final *-l* (*-l-li*), *-ri* to a final *-r* (*-r-ri*), and *-ni* to any other final consonant (*-C-ni*) or to a final long vowel (*-VV-ni*). Tonal variants are conditioned as indicated above before example (3).

‘The spear has stabbed him/her in (his/her) right arm.’

- (10) *nààlé ámbí-nnà<sup>1</sup>à bìsì<sup>1</sup>-tì*  
s/he 3.PST.go-PL.PFV dog-ADV  
‘S/he has gone with a/the dog.’ (lit. s/he, they have gone with a/the dog)

If the adjunct contains a modifier represented by an associative proper name marked with the Genitive (see 3.2 below), the Adverbial marker controlled by the head is directly suffixed to the Genitive marker of the modifier as illustrated in (11):<sup>8</sup>

- (11) *èèrè Móólà<sup>1</sup>-nà<sup>1</sup>-tì*  
name God-GEN.SG-ADV  
‘In the name of God[Ar.?!]’ (religious invocation, = Ar. *bismillahi*)

Similar patterns involve a head noun referring to a part of a whole (e.g. ‘top of’) or to a space relative to a whole (e.g. ‘front of’) that constitutes, together with the Adverbial marker, a complex, more or less grammaticalized circumposition. Examples are *àkkúrré... -ti* ‘behind’ (lit. in the back space of) with an unmarked common noun as associative in (12), and *kùbàl... -ti* ‘near’ (lit. in the proximity of) with an associative proper name marked with the Genitive (see 3.2 below) in (13):

- (12) *ùbbà-n àkkúré ìngà<sup>1</sup>-tì*  
river-NOM.SG back mountain-ADV  
‘The river is behind the mountain.’ (lit. in the back of the mountain)
- (13) *m-èbì<sup>1</sup> kùbàl<sup>1</sup> Fòrbàráńá-ná<sup>1</sup>-tì*  
1S-IPFV.live proximity Foro\_Boranga-GEN.SG-ADV  
‘I’m living near Foro Boranga.’ (lit. in the proximity of F.B.)

A further example is *’dì... -ti* ‘at the place of’ and, more precisely, with a human associative, ‘at (N)’s (French *chez*), to/from (somebody)’. This is illustrated in (14) with an unmarked common noun as modifier:

- (14) *m-áńńá<sup>1</sup> ’dì ńgáàr<sup>1</sup>-tì*  
1S-PST.stand\_up.PFV place chief-ADV  
‘I’m going (lit. I have stood up) to the chief’s.’

Now in the particular case where the associative of *’dì* ‘place’ is a proper name, the adverbial marker tends to be dropped, as if the structure of the adjunct were attracted by that of the unmarked locative proper names (see 3.2 below): the marker *-ti* has been noted as optional in (15) but is more often than not absent as in (16):<sup>9</sup>

- (15) *céè<sup>1</sup>-sì wírnjín-nà<sup>1</sup>à ’dì Zàkàríyà<sup>1</sup>-nà<sup>1</sup>(-tì)*  
person-NOM.PL 3.PST.sit\_down-PL.PFV place Zakariya[Ar.]-GEN.SG(-ADV)  
‘People have met at Zakariya’s.’

<sup>8</sup> This also applies to the Nominative markers, see (34) and Table 3b below.

<sup>9</sup> This ability to drop the Adverbial marker after an associative proper name is clearly limited to the choice of the head noun *’dì* ‘place’. Compare, for instance, with (35) below (‘... in Bocco’s house’), where the Adverbial marker is compulsory.





- (23) *bìsi*<sup>1</sup>-*ṅ*      *ràffà*  
*dog-NOM.SG* 3.be<sub>white</sub>  
 ‘The dog is white.’

### 3.2. Proper names

Noun phrases whose head is a proper name differentiate four cases – Nominative (NOM), Genitive (GEN),<sup>12</sup> Accusative (ACC), and Adverbial (ADV)<sup>13</sup> – beside a morphologically unmarked form:

	(absolute)	Nominative	Genitive	Accusative	Adverbial <sup>14</sup>
Sg.	<i>unmarked</i>	-n / (‘)-ṅ / -lè <sup>15</sup>	-nà <sup>1</sup> / -nâ <sup>16</sup>	-(y)àà	°-lèè
Pl.		-ngè		-ngàá	°-ngèèr

Table 3a. Case markers for proper/individual names

The allocation of these cases to the main syntactic functions is as follows:

– The subject – of any predicate (24-25) – and the nominal predicate (26) are coded in the Nominative:

- (24) *Ginàà*<sup>1</sup>-*lè*      *wèèṅ*<sup>1</sup>*à*  
*Ginaa-NOM.SG* 3.PST.come.PFV  
 ‘Ginaa [proper name of man] has come.’
- (25) *Bàkíit*<sup>1</sup>-*lè*      *cé.kíjjá*<sup>1</sup>-*ṅ*  
*Bakiit[Ar.]-NOM.SG* accountant-NOM.SG  
 ‘Bakiit [proper name of man] is the accountant.’ (on the spot)
- (26) *èèrè* *ándá*<sup>1</sup>-*ṅ*      *‘Bàkíit*<sup>1</sup>-*lè*  
 name my-NOM.SG *Bakiit-NOM.SG*  
 ‘My name is Bakiit.’

– The few available illustrations of a vocative are not consistent: the reference to a single individual appears in the unmarked form (27) while the associative plural (‘N and his/her mates/relatives/etc.’) is coded in the nominative (28):<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Note the formal similarity of Nominative and Genitive in the plural.

<sup>13</sup> In order to avoid confusion between the markers of common nouns (NOM, ADV) and those of proper names (NOM, GEN, ACC, ADV), the latter are glossed with an initial uppercase letter. The same convention applies to demonstratives and personal pronouns that show a similar case system (see Section 7 below).

<sup>14</sup> The sign ° indicates that the markers neutralise the effect of the preceding downstep if any, e.g. *Kájjè*<sup>1</sup> ‘Kajje (proper name of woman) > *Kájjè-lèè* (and not \**Kájjè*<sup>1</sup>-*lèè*) ‘with Kajje’.

<sup>15</sup> Allomorphs depend on the last syllable of the term the clitic is suffixed to: *-V-n*, *-VV-le*, *-C-le*. Tonal variants are conditioned as indicated above before example (3).

<sup>16</sup> The conditioning of the two variants *-nà*<sup>1</sup> / *-nâ*<sup>1</sup> is somewhat complex: 1. If the Genitive marker is final, its form is *-nâ*<sup>1</sup> in every case. 2. If it is covered by a second marker (NOM or ADV) relating to the preceding head noun, its form is *-nà*<sup>1</sup> when suffixed to a proper name ending with L<sup>1</sup>, and *-nâ*<sup>1</sup> in the other cases (name ending with H or L). See examples (13) above, as well as (34-35) and Table 3b below.

<sup>17</sup> Strictly speaking the form *‘Bàkíit*<sup>1</sup>-*ngè* could also represent a Plural Genitive. The Nominative interpretation is preferred by analogy with the behaviour of the common nouns (cp. [8] above) as well as with the personal pronoun *‘singé* ‘you [pl.]’, which appears in the same example (27) and is marked as a Nominative itself (see Section 7.2 below).

(27) *ʃék¹-nì ándáá 'gì náà : 'illé, 'Bàkiit¹, c-àbì*  
 chief[Ar.]-NOM.SG 3.PST.say.APPL child his 2S.NOM *Bakiit* 1P.IPFV.go  
*mààrà-tí*  
 hunting-ADV  
 ‘The chief said to his son: “you, Bakiit, let’s go hunting!”’

(28) *ʃék¹-nì ándáá òngá : 'sìngé, 'Bàkiit¹-ngè, c-àbì*  
 chief[Ar.]-NOM.SG 3.PST.say.APPL them 2P.NOM *Bakiit-NOM.PL* 1P.IPFV.go  
*mààrà-tí*  
 hunting-ADV  
 ‘The chief said to them: “you, Bakiit’s people, let’s go hunting!”’

– The simple object (29), the applicative object (30), each of both objects of a ditransitive verb (31), and the adjunct introduced by the preposition *kándááká* ‘like, as’ (32) are marked with the Accusative:

(29) *lál-tá 'Bàkiit¹-yàà*  
 3.IPFV.resemble-NEG *Bakiit-ACC.SG*  
 ‘He does not resemble Bakiit.’

(30) *Jiméézá¹-n (¹nìngé) Tàmár-lèè káy¹-ìnnáá*  
 Jimmeeza[Ar.]-NOM.SG they Tamar-ADV.SG 3.be\_near-PL.APPL  
*'Fòrbárángáà*  
*Foro\_Boranga.ACC.SG*  
 ‘Jimmeeza [locality] and Tamar [locality] are close to Foro Boranga [locality].’ (lit. Jimmeeza (they) with Tamar are close to Foro Boranga)

(31) *tààr 'ʃàm̀nà-n wiccà.bí¹ 'Bàkiit¹-yàà 'Dàkkwàsí-yàà*  
 language Sinyar-NOM.SG 3.IPFV.concern.pass *Bakiit-ACC.SG Dakkwasi-ACC.SG*  
 ‘The Sinyar language concerns Bakiit more than Dakkwasi [proper name of man].’

(32) *kándááká Sùdán¹-yàà sààr*  
 like *Sudan-ACC.SG* nowadays  
 ‘like Sudan today’ (on the spot)

– The associative (name modifying a head noun) is marked as Genitive (33):

(33) *ìngè Bóccó-nà*  
 house *Bocco-GEN.SG*  
 ‘Bocco’s [proper name of man] house’

If the full noun phrase itself requires a case marker, the common noun marker controlled by the head – Nominative (34) or Adverbial (35) – is directly suffixed to the Genitive marker of the name:<sup>18</sup>

(34) *̀nèggè Sùdán¹-nà¹-sì 'àmà¹-n núú lòòl*  
*girl.PL Sudan-GEN.SG-NOM.PL* 3.IPFV.have-PL much modesty

<sup>18</sup> See also ex. (11) above. Concerning the construction in (35), remember the tendency to drop the Adverbial marker in the sole case of *'dì* ‘place’ modified by a proper name with the meaning of ‘at (N)’s, to/from (N)’ (see 3.1 above, ex. [15-16] and introducing comments).

‘Sudanese girls are very reserved.’ (lit. the girls of Sudan have a lot of modesty)  
(on the spot)

- (35) èbì-n                    ʼingè    Bóccó-náʼ-tì  
3.IPFV.live-PL house Bocco-GEN.SG-ADV  
‘They are living in Bocco’s house.’

The full set of these combinations is displayed in Table 3b below (note that some groupings imply minor tone modifications that have not been described in Section 2.2 above; see also p. 9, footn. 16):

	GEN	GEN + NOM.SG	GEN + NOM.PL	GEN + ADV
Sg.	-náʼ / -náʼ	-náʼ-ń / -náʼ-ń	-náʼ-sì / -náʼ-sì	-náʼ-tì / -náʼ-tì
Pl.	-ngè	-ngè-n	-ngè-sí	-ngè-tí

Table 3b. Genitive of names + Nominative (sg./pl.) or Adverbial of nouns

– The adjunct is marked with the Adverbial if expressing a comitative value (36):

- (36) m-ábi      Éli-ngèèr                    súk-tì                    (~ m-ábi súk-tì Éli-ngèèr)  
1S-FUT.go Eli[Ar.]-ADV.PL market[Ar.]-ADV  
‘I’ll go to the market with Eli’s people.’

On the other hand locative proper names (i.e. toponyms referring to remarkable places, localities, mountains, rivers, regions, and countries, see Section 5 below) are not marked but appear in their absolute form only (37-38):

- (37) wìjèʼ-m-màʼà                                    ʼFòrbáráńá  
3.PST.bear-PL-1S.ACC.PFV Foro Boranga  
‘I was born (lit. they have borne me) in Foro Boranga [locality].’
- (38) nààlé ʼwìndéń                    ʼSàalé  
s/he 3.PST.bathe Saale  
‘S/he bathed in Saale [river].’

In (39) the toponym is also unmarked but introduced by the relative preposition *mín* ‘from, out of, since’ of Arabic origin:

- (39) ùmmà àní                    mín                    Kódòrò  
woman this.NOM.SG from[Ar.] Kodoro [village name]  
‘This woman is from Kodoro.’

The same principle of zero-marking further applies for orientatives in the case of names borrowed from Arabic and referring to cardinal points (see Section 5 below):

- (40) ámbi-ʼyà                    Rîʼ  
3.PST.go-PFV north[Ar.]  
‘He has gone to the north.’

So far we have no illustration available of proper names used with a temporal or instrumental value, although such uses probably exist, at least for the latter.

– Finally the citation form of names is clearly equivalent to their absolute, unmarked form. However, since proper names may function as common nouns when they are used with a generic value (see Section 4 below), one may wonder whether names are still names in the true sense of the term when used in the function of a citation.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3. The specificity of names

To sum up, Sinyar clearly differentiates proper names from common nouns by the way it marks them for case. Not only the marker forms are different for each category but also the two case (sub)systems differ since names differentiate four cases against only two for the nouns. However the functions taken on by the two common cases, Nominative and Adverbial, are essentially the same, the proper names using, in addition, a Genitive and an Accusative for signaling functions (chiefly associative and objects) that are left morphologically unmarked with common nouns.

It is noteworthy that locative names are unmarked (37-40), a situation that is well attested cross-linguistically (Stolz, Lestrade & Stolz 2014, Dammel, Helmbrecht, Nübling, Schlücker, & Stolz 2017: 1, Haspelmath [2018]). This construction could act as a model and explain the tendency to drop the adverbial marker when the common noun *'di* ‘place’ is modified by an associative personal name marked with the Genitive (‘place of N’), which makes the reference definite and unique (15-16) and links it with toponyms.

Table 4 recapitulates the different case marker forms for nouns and names respectively (note the similarity of the Nominative sg. allomorphs *-n / (')-n̄* for both categories).

		Nouns	Names
Nominative	Sg.	<i>-n / (')-n̄ / -Ní / (')-Nì</i>	<i>-n / (')-n̄ / -lè</i>
	Pl.	<i>-sí / (')-sì</i>	<i>-ngè (= GEN)</i>
Genitive	Sg.	–	<i>-nà' / -nâ'</i>
	Pl.	–	<i>-ngè (= NOM)</i>
Accusative	Sg.	–	<i>-(y)àà</i>
	Pl.	–	<i>-ngàá</i>
Adverbial	Sg.	<i>-tí / (')-ti</i>	<i>°-lèè</i>
	Pl.		<i>°-ngèèr</i>

Table 4: Compared case markers

Table 5 summarises the alignments of case with the main functions commented above.<sup>20</sup>

	Nouns	Names
Subject of any predicate	NOMINATIVE	NOMINATIVE
Nominal predicate	NOMINATIVE	NOMINATIVE
Object (including applicative and ditransitive objects)	<i>unmarked</i>	ACCUSATIVE
Adjunct introduced by <i>kándááká</i> ‘like, as’	<i>unmarked</i>	ACCUSATIVE
Associative (modifying a noun, including complex adpositions)	<i>unmarked</i>	GENITIVE

<sup>19</sup> In relation with this question, see also ex. (46-47) commented below.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed presentation of case alignment(s) in Sinyar, see Boyeldieu 2015.

Adjunct	locative, temporal, instrumental, and comitative: ADVERBIAL	locative: <i>unmarked</i> comitative: ADVERBIAL (others?)
Vocative	NOMINATIVE	NOMINATIVE (?)
Citation	<i>unmarked</i>	<i>unmarked</i> (?)

Table 5: Alignments of main functions and cases

#### 4. Names used as common nouns

Van Langendonck & Van de Velde (2016: 20) state that “Proprial lemmas [a notion including that of name] always allow common noun uses, albeit marginally, as in *I was thinking of a different Mary.*” Indeed the principle applies for Sinyar. Thus throughout (41-45), the personal name *‘Bàkiit’* is used with the generic value of an appellative. In (41-42) it is modified by an adjective or a quantifier and the noun phrase, working as a subject, is marked with the Nominative forms of the common noun. In (43) it represents an object that is modified by the optional Plural *-ŋà* and by a cardinal; just as for a common noun the whole phrase is unmarked for case. Finally, as a common noun again, the name *‘Bàkiit’* is modified by a demonstrative in both functions of subject (44) and object (45).

- (41) *‘Bàkiit kwíi-ní* (k-èbì) béeèrè  
*Bakiit other-NOM.SG FOC-3.IPFV.be house.LOC*  
 ‘There is another Bakiit at home.’
- (42) *‘Bàkiit kwóó-sí ámbí-nnà’ à* (~ *‘Bàkiit’-sì kwóó ámbí-nnà’ à*)  
*Bakiit all-NOM.PL 3.PST.go-PL.PFV Bakiit-NOM.PL all 3.PST.go-PL.PFV*  
 ‘All the Bakiits have gone.’
- (43) *‘Bàkiit’(-ŋà) ‘mùttà c-àma’* béeèrè  
*Bakiit(-PL) three 1P-IPFV.have house.LOC*  
 ‘We have three Bakiits at home.’
- (44) *‘Bàkiit èní* gíyà ánda’-n-tá  
*Bakiit this.NOM.SG brother 1S.GEN-NOM.SG-NEG*  
 ‘This Bakiit is not my brother.’
- (45) m-ìgàà’kà *‘Bàkiit (è)kín*  
*1S-IPFV.not know Bakiit this.ACC.SG*  
 ‘I don’t know this Bakiit.’

On the other hand, as already illustrated in (26), the identification of a name is expressed by a predicate that requires the Nominative marker of proper names. In (46) even the question about the identity of a person’s name has to use the partial interrogative *dē’è’-lè* ‘who?’ that also receives the same markers like proper names (see Section 5 below).

- (46) — èèrè nú’-n *dē’è’-lè*  
 name 2S.GEN.NOM.SG *who?-NOM.SG*  
 — èèrè ánda’-n *‘Bàkiit’-lè*  
 name 1S.GEN-NOM.SG *Bakiit-NOM.SG*  
 ‘— What is your name? (lit. your name is who?)  
 — My name is Bakiit.’

The interpretation of a last case is somewhat problematic: in (47) the name *'Bàkiit'* is unmarked but what is its function here? The corresponding question, which contains the partial interrogative *náá* 'how?', suggests that we have to deal with an adverbial adjunct. Should one then consider that this represents, beside unmarked toponyms (see [37-40] above), another case of unmarked names in an adverbial function?

- (47) — *náá kùù-n-nà*  
           how? 3.IPFV.call-PL-3S.ACC  
 — *kùù-n-nà 'Bàkiit*  
           3.IPFV.call-PL-3S.ACC *Bakiit*  
 '— How is he called? (lit. how do they call him?)  
 — He is called (lit. they call him) Bakiit.'

## 5. Subsets of names

If individual names of people and places represent, from a semantic point of view, the most prototypical members of the category of names, other units share – or may share – the grammatical properties of proper names as they have been exposed in Section 3.2 above. I will now review and comment on the different semantic subsets that constitute the category of names in a wider sense.

i.) As just said, a first subset contains what I would call proper or individual names in the narrow sense. Except for the possible use of personal names as common nouns (see Section 4 above), they are normally restricted to modifications by the markers of the second subsystem identified above and contain

– the personal names, e.g. *'Bóccó* (male), *'Kùnjàà'* (male/female), *'Gìnàà'* (m.), *'Cèèlcèlè'* (fem.), including names of Arabic origin (e.g. *Àsàn'* [m.], *'Zàkàriyà'* [m.], *Àrbàà 'bà'* [fem.], *Fànnè'* [fem.]) or else (*Póòl'* 'Paul' [Paul Dornboos, a former researcher on Sinyar], *Kóózi'* 'Sarkozy [French president]'), and also personified animals (e.g. *Mindéè 'lè* 'Rat, Mouse [character]');

– the individual names of places (*'Fòrbàráḡá* 'Foro Boranga [town]', *Fùrgúl* 'Firgul [village]', *Cááru* 'confluence of Azoum and Kaja rivers'), rivers (*Kájà'*, *'Sààlé*), mountains (*Ngèyré*, *Bùùrú*), and countries (*Cáàd'* 'Chad', *'Ingiltàrà'* 'England') or regions (*'Dààrfòòr'* 'Darfur');

– the designations of the points of the compass borrowed from Arabic (but not the Sinyar ones that behave as common nouns): *Kàrib'* (Ar.) 'west', *Rîi'* (Ar.) 'north', *Sàbàà'* (Ar.) 'east', *Sèyid'* (Ar.) or *Jùnûb'* (Ar.) 'south'. Examples (48-49) display Nominative and Genitive marking. An illustration of the unmarked use with a locative/orientative value has been given earlier in (40).

- (48) *Sèid'-lè 'àmà' inji'*  
       *south[Ar.].NOM.SG 3.IPFV.have rain*  
       'The south is rainy.'

- (49) *cèè Sèid'-nà'-n*  
       person *South[Ar.]-GEN.SG-NOM.SG*  
       'person from (lit. of) the south, southerner (Nominative)'

To this group we can also add

– the ‘joker’ name <sup>1</sup>*Nàkwà* ‘What’s-his/her-name, So-and-So [animate]’ that is ambivalent since it also behaves as a common noun (<sup>1</sup>*nàkwà* ‘thing, thingie, thingummy, what-do-you-call-it’) when referring to inanimates. Compare (50) and (51):

(50) *Nàkwà-lèè*  
*What’s\_his\_name-ADV.SG*  
 ‘with What’s-his-name’

(51) *nàkwà-tí*  
*what\_do\_you\_call\_it-ADV*  
 ‘with what-do-you-call-it’

– the partial interrogative *dè'è'* ‘who?’ that may be contrasted with *ìngá* ‘what?’, the latter receiving the case markers of a common noun. Compare the marking of subject and object of both terms in (52-53) and (54-55):<sup>21</sup>

(52) *dè'è'-lè*      *k-òòj'á*  
*who?-NOM.SG*    *FOC-3.PST.come.PFV*  
 ‘Who has come?’

(53) *ìngá-n*      *k-ùj'á-là*  
*what?-NOM.SG*    *FOC-IPFV.hurt-2s.ACC*  
 ‘What does hurt you?’

(54) *n-ándì*      *dè'è'-yàà*      (*~dè'è'-yàà n-ándì*)  
*2-FUT.see*    *who?-ACC.SG*  
 ‘Whom will you see?’

(55) *n-àndìj'ná'*      *ìngá*      (*~ìngá n-àndìj'ná'*)  
*2-PST.see.PFV*    *what?*  
 ‘What have you seen?’

ii.) A second subset contains items – primarily referring to animals – that seem to be more likely to function as names but, for most of them, may also behave as common nouns (c.n.) although the possible contextual or semantic implications of this choice or variation have not been clarified.

– Animals:

<sup>1</sup> <i>àbtándàr'</i>	‘marabou stork (bird sp.) (also c.n.)
<sup>1</sup> <i>àjikòdòkòdòò'</i>	‘praying mantis’
<i>àlimègíyá</i>	‘bird sp. (lives on the water, eats fish)’ (also c.n.)
<i>bàjàbájà'</i>	‘cattle egret’ (also c.n.)
<i>bórjò'</i>	‘fox’
<sup>1</sup> <i>bùrgù</i>	‘locust sp. (flying in clouds, goes out in the night, attracted by fire, annihilates vegetables, edible and appreciated)’ (also c.n.)
<i>gómsi'</i>	‘owl sp. (= Ar. <i>búma</i> )’ (name? also c.n.)
<i>gúúgùm'</i>	‘owl sp. (= Ar. <i>amgúgum</i> )’ (also c.n.)
<i>gùrààngú</i>	‘crowned crane (?)’ (also c.n.)
<i>kèrèkèrèw'</i>	‘bird sp.’ (also c.n.)

<sup>21</sup> Note that both partial interrogatives require to be focalized (subject-focalizing verb prefix *k(V)-*) when they function as subject. For *dè'è'* ‘who?’, see also example (46) above.



<i>kócòl'</i>	'locust sp. (edible)'
<i>'màdààlìyé</i>	'stork (bird sp.; = Ar. <i>kundji</i> , <i>simbiriya</i> )' (also c.n.)
<i>'màgúróòró</i>	'locust sp. (yellow)'
<i>mbèèbírmbèèbìr'</i>	'bat' (also c.n.)
<i>'nqèdè</i>	'bird sp. (small)' (also c.n.)
<i>njàràñjàràñ'</i>	'locust sp.'
<i>'njèdnjèd'</i>	'locust sp. (given as male of <i>sòlósòlòò'</i> )'
<i>njìkìjnìkìjn'</i>	'bird sp. (small coloured budgerigar?)'
<i>nàmúró'</i>	'spider' (also c.n.)
<i>nìjàngàr'</i>	'locust sp. (used as a bait on the fishing line)'
<i>sìyàsìyáy'</i>	'locust sp. (often on excrement, hence his name)' (cp. <i>sìyá</i> 'excrement, faeces; need for defecating')
<i>sòlósòlòò'</i>	'locust sp. (given as female of <i>'njèdnjèd'</i> )'
<i>tààtà'</i>	'woodpecker' (also c.n.)
<i>'tòngwòò'</i>	'chameleon'
<i>tóòtò'</i>	'duck'
<i>tóòtò bísbis'</i>	'bird sp. (kind of duck)'
<i>wèfjìjùìr'</i>	'fish sp.'
<i>wíiwí'</i>	'dragonfly' (also c.n.)
<i>'wìyááyè'</i>	'bird sp.' (also c.n.)

– Diseases: *'kàrmbà* 'cold (disease)' (also c.n.)<sup>22</sup>, *kìrrá* 'malaria' (also c.n.), *úwà'* / *úwàà'* 'measles' (also c.n.)

– Brand marks of medicines: *'Bànàdól'* 'Panadol [medicine containing paracetamol]' (also c.n.), *'Kòmòkìn'* 'Camoquin [antimalarial medicine]' (also c.n.)

– One plant name: *'àmùńòò'* 'kind of edible squash or marrow' (also c.n.)

– One artefact (?): *'gòmbótì'* 'fish trap' (name or c.n.?)

Some examples are:

(56) láál                      'ingè nàmúró'-nà  
 3.IPFV.resemble house spider-GEN.SG  
 [The assistant, speaking of the complexity of the language:]  
 'It looks like a spider's nest.' (on the spot)

(57) úwàà'-lè              k-íká-nà'à  
*measles-NOM.SG* FOC-3.catch-3S.ACC.PFV  
 'S/he has measles. (lit. MEASLES has caught him/her)'

Two approaches may be suggested in order to explain this particular situation. With reference to names of diseases and biological species, Van Langendonck & Van de Velde (2016: 36-37) write the following:

“As we move further away from the most prototypical types of names, we encounter categories for which only some members receive a name, whereas other members are designated by means of an appellative. The distinction is not random. Phenomena that are familiar tend to be treated as one of a kind, that is, categories of their own, and they are not designated by means of a name. On the other hand,

<sup>22</sup> As a common noun the same word also refers to 'nasal mucus'.

unfamiliar phenomena tend to be treated as belonging to a category of which the individual members receive a name. [...]

From a grammatical point of view, names of subspecies low on the biological taxonomy are sometimes Names in Bantu languages.”

In other words, languages would have a tendency to treat as names the less typical, most marginal or unexpected notions of a semantic domain.

On another issue, commenting on the semantics and grammatical behavior of Bambara phrasal compounds, Dumestre (1983: 4) remarks:

“If these complexes [i.e. phrasal compounds] may fulfil every nominal function, in practice, the longest of them are mainly used ‘in citation’ or topicalized, their formal complexity being a barrier to their integration into an utterance.” (*my translation*)<sup>23</sup>

In my opinion Dumestre’s ‘formal complexity’ could have a similar effect like a low degree of semantic typicality on the actual use and nature of units that would be essentially restricted to functions of identification and labelling, and preferably considered as names.

Such an explanation could be relevant here, in particular for the designation of several kinds of locusts and (small?) birds, as well as for different remarkable, ‘non-standard’ animals such as dragonfly, chameleon, bat, praying mantis, spider, stork, woodpecker, etc. Moreover, it is certainly not fortuitous that these names display unusual, expressive phonological structures (involving length and reduplication, see the above list).

iii.) A third and last subset contains most terms referring to social relations (in a wide sense, including titles) that normally function as common nouns but may also be used – both as terms of reference or terms of address – as names, with an absolute value referring to specific people whose identity is unequivocal in a certain discourse context (cp. English *Mother has made a cake* or *Is the director in his office?*). Although it does not refer to a human being, I also count here the term *bîs*’ ‘(home) cat’ (Ar.?) that seems to be a pet name and shares a similar feature of ‘familiarity’ (see below).

<i>’abbá</i>	‘father, daddy’ (term of address + name, no c.n.)
<i>’abbó / ’abbóò</i> ’	‘grandmother, grandma’
<i>’abbó</i>	‘chief (of tribe) (= Ar. <i>naazir</i> )’
<i>’addá / ’addáá</i> ’	‘paternal aunt, auntie’
<i>àkîm</i> ’ (Ar.)	‘doctor’
<i>’âtìnè</i>	‘grandchild, grandson, granddaughter’
<i>bîs</i> ’ (Ar.?)	‘(home) cat’ (also c.n.)
<i>báá</i> ’	‘father’
<i>báá</i> ’ <i>bà</i> ’	‘father, daddy’ (term of address + name, no c.n.)
<i>’bîryá</i>	‘master’ <sup>24</sup>
<i>cékàmmíyá</i>	‘father/son-in-law’
<i>cé. ’kùbbò</i> ’ / irr. pl. <i>cé. ’mirdà</i> ’	(lit. person.big) ‘respectable person, elder, chief, president’
<i>gíyà</i> ’ / <i>gíyàà</i> ’	‘brother’

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Denis Creissels for having drawn my attention to this article by Gérard Dumestre. The original citation reads: “Si ces complexes peuvent apparaître dans toutes les fonctions du nominal, en pratique les plus longs d’entre eux sont essentiellement utilisés ‘en citation’ ou topicalisés, la complexité de leur forme étant un obstacle à leur intégration dans un énoncé.”

<sup>24</sup> To be contrasted with *’bîr* ‘owner’ (c.n. only), see end of this section below.



nevertheless share with these obvious formal and, to some extent, even semantic features: absolute locatives (this Section 6) are marked in a way that reminds the Adverbial marking of singular proper names while demonstratives and personal pronouns (Section 7) display a four-case structure that is parallel to that of names, although the marking processes are different.

As seen in Section 3.1 above, common nouns referring to spaces, places, containers or landmarks may be marked with the Adverbial *-tí / (')-tì* and constitute, either alone or expanded with (a) modifier(s), locative phrases such as (61b-d):

- (61) a. 'ngàmà 'plantation, field'  
 b. ngàmà-tí  
 field-ADV  
 'in the field'  
 c. ngàmà ngààr'-tì  
 field chief-ADV  
 'in the field of the chief'  
 d. ngàmà bá ándá'-tì  
 field father 1S.GEN-ADV  
 'in my father's field'

Beside these syntactically open constructions involving nouns that may be characterized as 'relative locatives', a limited, closed set of the same nouns may appear, with an absolute value – i.e. with no further modifier but with an implicit reference to the context or to the speaker –, in a specific, frozen form suffixed with *-(V'Vr)è*.<sup>25</sup> These terms are listed in the right column of Table 6 below.

Noun	Relative locative (Adverbial case marker <i>-ti</i> )	Absolute locative (frozen suffix <i>-(V'Vr)è</i> )
béér 'family compound, house'	béér (...) -ti 'in the compound/house (of)'	béèrè '(at) home'
káár 'inside of (building)' 'kìdiká 'door, doorway'	káár (...) -ti 'inside (...)' 'kìdiká (...) -ti 'at the door (of)'	káàrè 'inside (it)' 'kìdikààrè 'in the doorway, at the door'
kòlló 'home garden'	kòllò (...) -ti 'in the home garden (of)'	kòllóòrè 'in the home garden'
kùbàrà 'flat area used as drying ground or meeting place'	kùbàrà (...) -ti 'on the drying/meeting ground'	kùbàrààrè 'on the drying/meeting ground'
kùjá 'water'	kùjà (...) -ti 'in the water (of)'	kùjààrè 'in/into/ to/at the water (place)'
móór 'inside of (container)'	móór (...) -ti 'inside (...) (from an external point of view?)'	móòrè 'inside (it) (from an internal point of view?)'

<sup>25</sup> If probably not exhaustive, the present list of absolute locatives is nevertheless clearly limited and the suffix not (any more) productive, hence the qualification of 'frozen forms'. As for the suffixation, it follows the two main patterns *CVCV+-(V'Vr)è > CVCV'Vrè* and *CVVr+-(V'Vr)è > CV'Vrè*.

ndjìbì <sup>1</sup> ‘land, country’	ndjìbì (...) -ti ‘in the country (of)’	
màsàlà <sup>1</sup> ‘Masalit’ <sup>26</sup>	ndjìbì màsàlà <sup>1</sup> -tì ‘in the Masalit country’	màsàlààrè ‘in the Masalit country’
<sup>1</sup> fàmɲà ‘Sinyar’	ndjìbì <sup>1</sup> fàmɲà-tí ‘in the Sinyar country’	<sup>1</sup> fàmɲààrè ‘in the Sinyar country’
njànnà ‘middle of’	njànnà (...) -tì ‘in the middle (of)’	njànnààrè ‘in/until the middle (of it)’
( <sup>1</sup> ùbbà ‘river’)? <sup>27</sup>	ùbbà (...) -tì ‘in the river (of)’	bààrè ‘in the river’

Table 6. Relative and absolute locatives

Some of these locatives are illustrated in context with examples (62-64) below:<sup>28</sup>

- (62) — ámbí<sup>1</sup>yà      î      kààrè  
3.PST.go-PFV INTERR *inside.LOC*  
— lóò<sup>1</sup>lò àbbì.fà      èɓì.wàà      <sup>1</sup>kìdikààrè  
no! 3.IPFV.enter.PASTNEG 3.IPFV.be.PERM *door.LOC*  
‘— Has he gone inside?  
— No, he did not enter, he is still at the door.’
- (63) [...] wò      c-àb      kùjààrè      [...]  
and[Ar.] 1PE/D-IPFV.go *water.LOC*  
[A woman tells about women’s traditional activities in the Sinyar country:]  
‘... and we go to the water (place) [to fetch water] ...’ (Text B-3)
- (64) nààlé ndésí<sup>1</sup>yà      mín      béeèrè  
s/he 3.PAST.go/come\_out.PFV from[Ar.] *house.LOC*  
‘S/he has gone out of the house.’

Obviously, the absolute locatives have something to do with names: beside their incompatibility with a modifier, the same features of uniqueness and familiarity/closeness that have been identified for certain social relations (see preceding section) are clearly present at least in the case of *béeèrè* ‘(at) home’, probably also *kìdikààrè* ‘in the doorway, at the door’, *kòllóòrè* ‘in the home garden’, *kùbàrààrè* ‘on the drying/meeting ground’, *màsàlààrè* ‘in the Masalit country’, and *<sup>1</sup>fàmɲààrè* ‘in the Sinyar country’. As for the suffix *-(V̄V̄r)è*, it is most probably connected with the singular Adverbial marker of names *°-lèè* (see also the suffix *-rèè* of the Adverbial personal pronouns *<sup>1</sup>mààrèè* ‘with me’, *<sup>1</sup>lààrèè* ‘with you (sg.)’, and *<sup>1</sup>nìyààrèè* ‘with him/her’ in Section 7.2 below).

## 7. Demonstratives and personal pronouns

As was already mentioned, names do not represent the only grammatical category that shows a four-case system: demonstratives and personal pronouns are organised according to

<sup>26</sup> The Masalit are close neighbours of the Sinyar people.

<sup>27</sup> The formal link between *ùbbà* ‘river’ and *bààrè* ‘in the river’ is uncertain.

<sup>28</sup> See also (41) and (43) above. Note that ‘locative’ is used here in a wide sense, as a cover term for *location without motion* (62), as well as *motion to* (62-63), and *motion from* (64) (equivalent, for instance, to the three *locative*, *allative*, and *ablative* in Haspelmath [2018] : 3-4). Despite the possibly limited translations, the three values seem to be valid for every term in Table 6.

paradigms that reveal a similar structure, despite the fact that the case marking is formally much more amalgamated here. Nevertheless personal pronouns show, with the case markers of names, limited but obvious similarities that cannot be mere coincidence (in the case of demonstratives, the similarities are much questionable, and they would rather point to the case markers of nouns). In addition, demonstratives and personal pronouns lack absolute, unmarked forms: they are always combined with the expression of one of the four cases, Nominative, Genitive, Accusative, or Adverbial.

### 7.1. Demonstratives

Demonstratives – pronouns and modifiers – are illustrated in Table 7a:

		Nominative*	Genitive	Accusative	Adverbial
‘near’	Sg.	èní / ènì	(è)kín.náà <sup>1</sup>	(è)kín	íngèr
	Pl.	ègí / ègì	(è)kígí.níngè	(è)kígí	(è)kígí.tí
‘far’	Sg.	àná / ànà	(è)wín.náà <sup>1</sup>	(è)wín	(è)wísèr
	Pl.	àgá / àgà	(è)wísí.níngè	(è)wísí	(è)wísí.tí
‘far+’	Sg.	áná	áwín.náà <sup>1</sup>	áwín	áwísèr
	Pl.	ágá	áwísí.níngè	áwísí	áwísí.tí

\* Variants with LL tone pattern (right of the slash) are detopicalized, i.e. characteristic of focalized personal subject or personal predicate.

Table 7a. Demonstrative pronouns and modifiers

The demonstratives distinguish three degrees of remoteness in relation to the speaker/situation: near, distant (‘far’), and very distant (‘far+’).

Some nominative forms (‘near’ and ‘far’ only) show tonal variations corresponding to syntactic or pragmatic environments: the LH pattern is reserved for the subject that is normally topicalized while the ‘detopicalized’ LL pattern applies to focalized subjects and nominal predicates.

The genitive forms of demonstratives result from a combination of the accusative demonstrative plus the 3S/3P genitive (associative) form of the personal pronoun (-náà<sup>1</sup>/-níngè, see 7.2 below);

The adverbial forms of plural demonstratives (è)kígí.tí, (è)wísí.tí, and áwísí.tí combine the accusative demonstrative with the ADV marker of common nouns (-tí);

We may remark

- a formal similarity (and historical relationship?) between the ‘near’ demonstrative èní ‘this (Nominative sg.)’ and the nominative marker of nouns NOM.SG -n/-Ni;<sup>29</sup>
- a formal similarity between the ‘far’ demonstrative (è)wísí ‘these (Accusative pl.)’ and the nominative marker of nouns NOM.PL -si (!)<sup>30</sup>;
- formal similarities between the singular demonstratives íngèr, (è)wísèr, and áwísèr (Adverbial sg.) and the plural marker of names ADV.PL °-ngèr (!).

When modifying a head noun, the demonstrative takes on the case marking and forces its own four-case system to the whole noun phrase. The following examples illustrate the different constructions a. without demonstrative, b. with a demonstrative modifier, and c. with a demonstrative pronoun alone in the different functions of subject (65), object (66), adjunct (67), and associative (68):

<sup>29</sup> The same link has been observed for certain Bantu languages (König 2008: 252).

<sup>30</sup> Note that there is an accusative or object marker -si in Fur (Tucker & Bryan 1966: 223; Jakobi 1990: 96).

- (65) a. *fikà-n*                    <sup>1</sup>fùggòl  
*road[Ar.]-NOM.SG* 3.be\_long  
 ‘The road is long.’
- b. *fikà*        *èní*                    <sup>1</sup>fùggòl  
*road[Ar.] this.NOM.SG* 3.be\_long  
 ‘This road is long.’
- c. *èní*                    <sup>1</sup>fùggòl  
*this.NOM.SG* 3.be\_long  
 ‘This one is long.’
- (66) a. *ìgàà<sup>1</sup>kà*                    *fikà*  
 3.IPFV.not\_know *road[Ar.]*  
 ‘S/he does not know the road.’
- b. *ìgàà<sup>1</sup>kà*                    *fikà*        *(è)kín*  
 3.IPFV.not\_know *road[Ar.] this.ACC.SG*  
 ‘S/he does not know this road.’
- c. *ìgàà<sup>1</sup>kà*                    *(è)kín*  
 3.IPFV.not\_know *this.ACC.SG*  
 ‘S/he does not know this one.’
- (67) a. *ábí*                    <sup>1</sup>*fikà-tí*  
 2.IMP.walk *road[Ar.]-ADV*  
 ‘Walk on the road!’
- b. *ábí*                    <sup>1</sup>*fikà*        *ìngèr*  
 2.IMP.walk *road[Ar.] this.ADV.SG*  
 ‘Walk on this road!’
- c. *ábí*                    *ìngèr*  
 2.IMP.walk *this.ADV.sg*  
 ‘Walk on this one!’
- (68) a. *àllà*                    <sup>1</sup>tòllò <sup>1</sup>*fikà*  
 2.IMP.follow side *road[Ar.]*  
 ‘Follow the side of the road!’
- b. *àllà*                    <sup>1</sup>tòllò <sup>1</sup>*fikà*        *(è)kín.nàà<sup>1</sup>*  
 2.IMP.follow side *road[Ar.] this.GEN.SG*  
 ‘Follow the side of this road!’
- c. *àllà*                    <sup>1</sup>tòllò *(è)kín.nàà<sup>1</sup>*  
 2.IMP.follow side *this.GEN.SG*  
 ‘Follow the side of this one!’

Just as is the case for names (see 3.2 above), the form of a genitive demonstrative may be directly followed by another marker that is controlled by the head noun. In the example below the Adverbial *-tì* is suffixed to the genitive demonstrative *(è)kín.náà'* that functions as modifier (69a) or as pronoun (69b):

- (69) a. ábí            *'tòllò 'fikà (è)kín.náà'-tì*  
 2.IMP.walk side road[Ar.] this.GEN.SG-ADV  
 'Walk on the side of this road!'
- b. ábí            *'tòllò (è)kín.náà'-tì*  
 2.IMP.walk side this.GEN.SG-ADV  
 'Walk on the side of this one!'

Table 7b displays all such possible combinations:

		GEN	GEN + NOM.SG	GEN + NOM.PL	GEN + ADV
'near'	Sg.	<i>(è)kín.náà'</i>	<i>(è)kín.ná'-n</i>	<i>(è)kín.náà'-sì</i>	<i>(è)kín.náà'-tì</i>
	Pl.	<i>(è)kígí.níngè</i>	<i>(è)kígí.níngè-n</i>	<i>(è)kígí.níngè-sí</i>	<i>(è)kígí.níngè-tí</i>
'far'	Sg.	<i>(è)wín.náà'</i>	<i>(è)wín.ná'-n</i>	<i>(è)wín.náà'-sì</i>	<i>(è)wín.náà'-tì</i>
	Pl.	<i>(è)wísí.níngè</i>	<i>(è)wísí.níngè-n</i>	<i>(è)wísí.níngè-sí</i>	<i>(è)wísí.níngè-tí</i>
'+far'	Sg.	<i>áwín.náà'</i>	<i>áwín.ná'-n</i>	<i>áwín.náà'-sì</i>	<i>áwín.náà'-tì</i>
	Pl.	<i>áwísí.níngè</i>	<i>áwísí.níngè-n</i>	<i>áwísí.níngè-sí</i>	<i>áwísí.níngè-tí</i>

Table 7b. Genitive of demonstratives + Nominative (sg./pl.) or Adverbial of nouns

## 7.2. Personal pronouns

The system of personal pronouns is more complex and calls for specific comments. Nevertheless, it clearly has to be interpreted in the terms of a contrast between four cases (here also without unmarked form). These pronouns are displayed in Table 8a.

[Table 8a to be inserted about here (landscape format)]

As is the case for demonstratives (see 7.1 above), the independent forms of the Nominative show tonal variations corresponding to different syntactic or pragmatic environments: the most frequent form by far applies to the subject that is normally topicalized while the second one is specialised in focalized subjects and nominal predicates. The nominative indices are attached to the verb (the suffixes *-sà* and *-(i)n* express a plural affecting the subject index).

The genitive (associative) pronouns represent the so called 'possessives'.

The independent forms of the Accusative are non-bound pronouns that are mainly used as topics. The indices are clitics suffixed to the verb. Most of them have a tonal variant that signals the Applicative when this is not expressed by the verb stem itself.

Finally the adverbial forms chiefly express a comitative value (but see ex. [80] below for a locative meaning).

The following similarities with the case markers of names may be observed:

- the final segments of personal pronouns *-le/-nge* in the Nominative (sg./pl.) independent form with the nominative markers of names NOM (sg./pl.) *-n/-lè / -ngè*;
- the final segments of personal pronouns *-aa/-ngáá* in the Accusative (sg./pl.) independent form with the accusative markers of names ACC (sg./pl.) *-(y)àà/-ngáá*;
- the final segments of personal pronouns *-rèè/-ngèèr* in the Adverbial (sg./pl.) form with the adverbial markers of names ADV (sg./pl.) *°-lèè/°-ngèèr*.

Examples (70-73) illustrate some of these pronouns in different contexts and functions.



- (70) náára (<sup>1</sup>illé) n- àbàr <sup>1</sup>gì  
 why? 2S.NOM 2- IPFV.chase child  
 TOPIC/SUBJECT SUBJECT INDEX  
 ‘Why do you (sg.) chase the child away?’
- (71) (nìyáà) kàmbòrò<sup>1</sup>-n̄ k-íkà -nà<sup>1</sup>à  
 3S.ACC fear-NOM.SG FOC-3.PAST.catch -3S.ACC.PFV  
 TOPIC/OBJECT -OBJECT INDEX  
 ‘(S/he,) s/he is afraid.’ (lit. (s/he,) THE FEAR has caught him/her)
- (72) úmbáà<sup>1</sup> kándááká <sup>1</sup>màá  
 3.PAST.become.PFV like 1S.Acc  
 ADJUNCT  
 ‘S/he has become like me (i.e. same way of being, same nature, etc.).’
- (73) (nìngé) n̄ìì<sup>1</sup>-n̄ <sup>1</sup>cèèsààngèèr  
 3P.NOM 3.PAST.shelter\_from\_rain-PL 1PL.ADV  
 TOPIC/SUBJECT LOCATIVE  
 ‘They sheltered from the rain at ours.’

Just as for names (3.2) and demonstratives (7.1), an associative personal pronoun marked as Genitive may be immediately followed by the case marker controlled by the head, e.g. (74):

- (74) nìngé àngwà ándá<sup>1</sup>-sì  
 3P.NOM guest 1S.GEN.SG-NOM.PL  
 ‘They are my guests.’

The full set of such combinations is indicated in Table 8b below.

	GEN	GEN + NOM.SG	GEN + NOM.PL	GEN + ADV
1S	-ándá <sup>1</sup>	-ándá <sup>1</sup> -n̄	-ándá <sup>1</sup> -sì	-ándá <sup>1</sup> -tì
2S	-n̄ùn <sup>1</sup>	-nú <sup>1</sup> -n̄	-nú <sup>1</sup> -sì	-nú <sup>1</sup> -tì
3S	-náá <sup>1</sup>	-ná <sup>1</sup> -n̄	-náá <sup>1</sup> -sì	-náá <sup>1</sup> -tì
1PE	-náákú	-náákú-n	-náákú-sí	-náákú-tí
1PD/I	-násà	-násà-n	-násà-sí	-násà-tí
2P	-núkú	-núkú-n	-núkú-sí	-núkú-tí
3P	-níngè	-níngè-n	-níngè-sí	-níngè-tí

Table 8b. Genitive of personal pronouns + Nominative (sg./pl.) or Adverbial of nouns

Demonstratives and pronouns are both characterised by features of monoreferentiality, definiteness and specificity that link them to some degree with the category of proper names. This affinity is emphasized by their common organization regarding the marking of case: under this respect the three categories jointly differ from that of common nouns that are reduced to two cases only, Nominative and Adverbial.

## 8. Conclusion

To sum up, Sinyar is characterised by two complementary case systems that clearly differentiate common nouns on one hand, and proper names on the other hand. The difference affects not only the form of the grammatical markers but also their number and structure. However, except for the fact that locative proper names (toponyms) are not marked, the two common cases, Nominative and Adverbial, assume the same functions in both categories. The difference simply results from the fact that the supplementary cases of proper names, Genitive and Accusative, are used for marking functions that are left unmarked in the case of nouns. In other words, there is no significant difference in the way the same cases are assigned to functions but there is a noticeable contrast concerning the extent and nature of the functions that are overtly marked for case in either category.

Beside the core of proper names, chiefly consisting of individual names of persons and places that are only seldom used as nouns, there are essentially two sets of terms that usually may act as both names and nouns. In the first case, essentially consisting of names of animals, as well as a few diseases and brand marks, the conditions of choice between either category are still unexplained. But most if not all terms share a low degree of semantic prototypicality together with a strong formal expressivity that probably explain their possible individuation through their treatment as names. The second set includes terms referring to social relations that act as names when they are used, in reference to the speaker and/or the situation, with an absolute value implying familiarity and emotional closeness. In addition, a limited group of absolute locatives contains specific, frozen forms of adverbial nouns that suggest a similar feature of familiarity/intimacy like in the latter set.

Lastly, the four-case system of names has its exact parallel in the two categories of demonstratives and personal pronouns, even if the formal means to mark case are different there. In this respect names, demonstratives and personal pronouns face together the two-case system of nouns. If we now consider the high degree of animacy that characterizes both the proper names and personal pronouns, we guess how beneficial it can be for a language to explicitly signal the less prototypical object – the ‘animate patient’ – by the means of an overt accusative marking. But if this ‘explanation’ has a sense, how can we extend it to the demonstratives that are not particularly animacy-oriented? And finally we are not even thinking of a hypothesis that could justify the existence of a Genitive marker in the only categories of names, demonstratives, and pronouns.

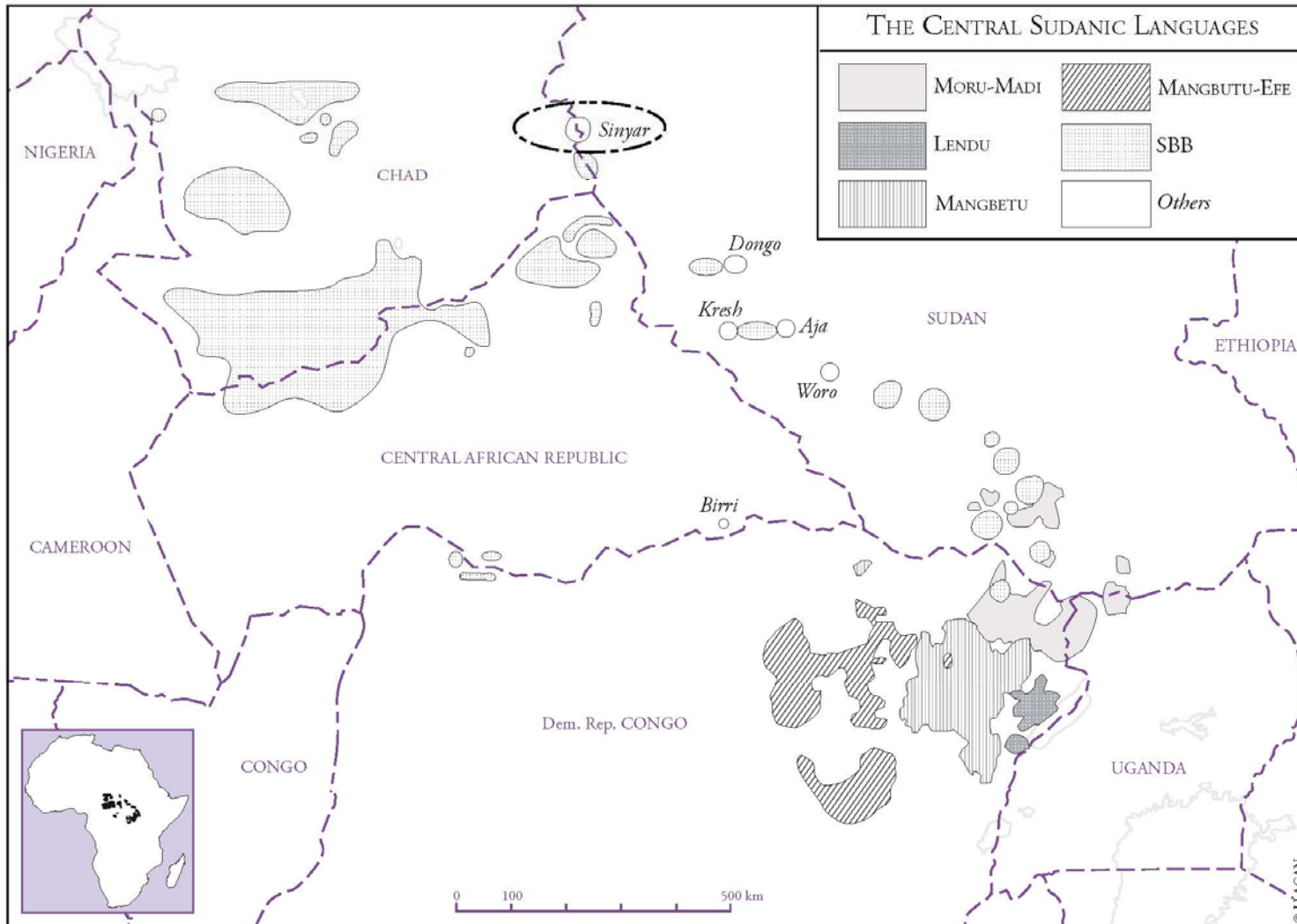
## Glosses and abbreviations

!	Tonal downstep (tonology)	fem.	Female
◦-	Neutralisation of preceding tonal downstep (see p. 9, footn. 14)	FOC	Focalizer (of subject)
=	Equivalent/similar to	FUT	Future
1/2/3	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> person	GEN	Genitive (names, demonstratives, and personal pronouns)
ACC	Accusative (names, demonstratives, and personal pronouns)	IMP	Imperative
ADV	Adverbial (nouns)	INTERR	Interrogative
ADV	Adverbial (names, demonstratives, and personal pronouns)	IPFV	Imperfective
APPL	Applicative	irr. pl.	Irregular plural
Ar.	Arabic	LOC	Locative suffix
c.n.	Common noun	m.	Male
D	Dual	NEG	Negative, Negation
DETOP	Detopicalized form	NOM	Nominative (names, demonstratives, and personal pronouns)
		NOM	Nominative (nouns)

PASTNEG	Past negative	PRGR	Progressive
PE	Plural exclusive	PRHB	Prohibitive
PERM	Permansive	PST	Past
PFV	Perfective	REL	Relative
PI	Plural inclusive	SBB	Sara-Bongo-Bagirmi
P, pl., PL	Plural	S, sg., SG	Singular

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**Map 1.** Sinyar and the Central Sudanic languages in central Africa (Sudan borders as before the 2011 partition)

	Nominative		Genitive (Associative)	Independent	Accusative		Adverbial
	Independent*	Indices			Indices**		
1S	'mààlé / mààlè ~ màà	m(V)- <i>VERB</i>	-ándà'	màá	-má / (')-mà ( <i>Appl.</i> -má)	'mààrèè	
2S	'illé / illè	n(V)- <i>VERB</i>	-nûn'	làá	-lá / (')-là ( <i>Appl.</i> -lá)	'làárèè	
3S	'nààlé / nààlè ~ nàà	Ø- <i>VERB</i>	-náà'	nìyáà	-nà	'nìyààrèè	
1PE	'cìngé / cìngè	c(V)- <i>VERB</i>	-náákú	cìngáá	-'sìngà ( <i>Appl.</i> -sìngà)	'cìngààngèèr	
1PD	'cìyé / cìyè			-násà	cìyáá	-'sìyà ( <i>Appl.</i> -sìyà)	'cìyààngèèr
1PI	'cèèsá / cèèsà	c(V)- <i>VERB</i> -sà	-núkú	cèèsáá	-'sààsà ( <i>Appl.</i> -sààsà)	'cèèsáàngèèr	
2P	'sìngé / sìngè	n(V)- <i>VERB</i> -sà		sìngáá	-sìngá ( <i>Appl.</i> -sìngá)	'sìngààngèèr	
	'sèèsá / sèèsà			sèèsáá	-sìyá ( <i>Appl.</i> -sìyá)	'sèèsáàngèèr	
3P	'nìngé / nìngè	Ø- <i>VERB</i> -(i)n	-níngè	nìngáá	-nìngá (~ <i>Appl.</i> -sí)	'nìngààngèèr	

1PD = 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (dual), 1PE = 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (exclusive), 1PI = 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (inclusive).

\* Variants with final low tone (right of the slash) are detopicalized, i.e. characteristic of focalized personal subject or personal predicate.

\*\* *Appl.*: forms of pronouns specific of the applicative verb form.

**Table 8a.** Personal pronouns