The Niger-Congo Languages

A classification and description
of Africa's largest language family

Editor: John Bendor-Samuel
Assistant Editor: Rhonda L. Hartell

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PREFACE

Why this book and how did it come about?

The work of J.H. Greenberg in the '50s culminating in his 1963 *Languages of Africa* largely set the classificatory framework within which most scholars have worked since. Both the external boundaries of his Niger-Kordofanian, here renamed Niger-Congo, and the internal groupings within that family, which he set up, have been generally accepted. The publication of *Current Trends in Linguistics, 7: Linguistics in Sub-Saharan Africa* in 1971 was based on the Greenberg classification and nothing published since has superseded it.

CTL7 was a state-of-the-art book which summarized what was known about the major families and subfamilies of the languages of Africa and also presented summaries of other language-related topics, such as the development of alphabets in Africa, the language policies of governments, language standardization, surrogate languages, etc. As Greenberg himself readily admitted, however, there were still many classificatory questions unresolved and many details that remained to be worked out. Research in the last 20 years has clarified some of these issues and suggests that certain aspects of the internal classification need to be revised.

The continuing West African Languages Congresses organized by the West African Linguistic Society every second year have given opportunity for face to face discussion among scholars who are working in African languages and who have a particular interest in classificatory questions. Flowing out of these congresses, the Niger-Congo working group provided stimulation and a forum for further interaction among those working on the languages of this family. In more recent years the annual colloquium on African languages at Leiden University has also served a similar purpose.

By the early '80s a consensus seemed to be forming that the time had come for an update to be made covering at least the languages within Greenberg's Niger-Kordofanian family. A group of those of us who were interested discussed the possibility of collaborating in a volume which would update the CTL7 volume in this respect, although it was never our intention to attempt to update the other parts of that very comprehensive volume. I agreed to contact scholars who might serve as contributors and prepare an outline that we could follow.

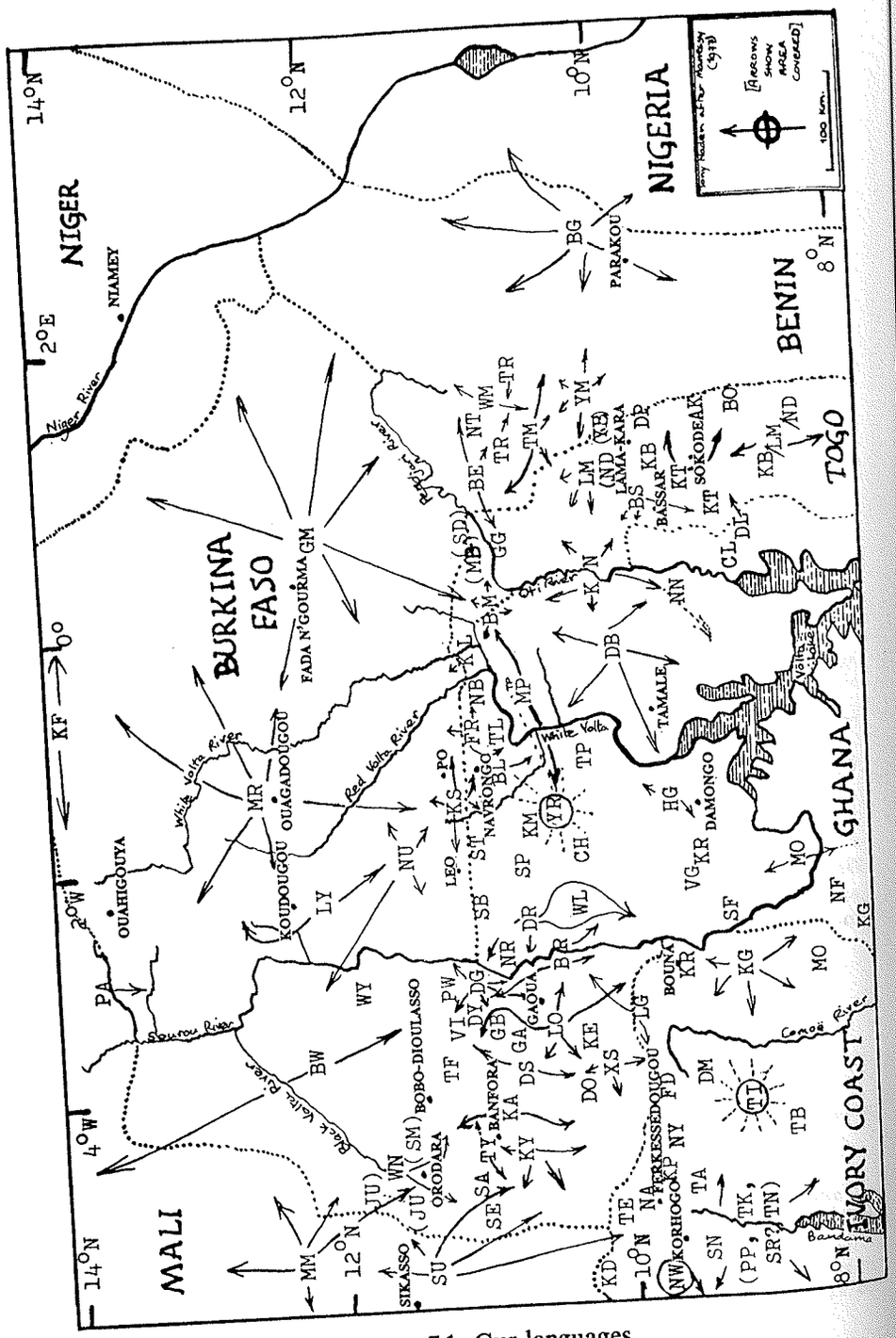

PLATE 7.1 Gur languages

7 Gur

Tony Naden

7.1 EARLY SCHOLARSHIP

The Gur or Voltaic languages[1] are spoken in a belt of the Sudan/Sahel savanna lands of West Africa. Politically the area constitutes the northern parts of Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, and most of Burkina Faso. This region was cut off from direct contact with the early European traders by the forest belt and its peoples, was separated from the Saharan trade routes by the Fulani-Mali-Songhai states, and thus long remained comparatively unknown to the outside world. Even today main cities tend to be near the coast, with the exception of landlocked Burkina Faso, and the area where Gur languages are spoken is still somewhat of a backwater. As a result, discoveries of new languages and more adequate data leading to changes of classification continue to be made. Any account such as this must be considered an interim report.[2]

Twelve of Koelle's (1854) word lists represent ten different Gur languages, but little further was heard until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when explorers and missionaries began to publish

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[1]The name 'Gur', originally suggested by Krause in the nineteenth century because of names in the area containing this syllable ('Gurma, Gurunsi' etc.) is mainly used by English and German speakers; the francophone name is the geographically based *langues voltaïques*.

My grateful thanks go to all the colleagues who have spent many hours with me discussing Gur languages, and whose contributions of data and analyses, orally or in unpublished writings, underlie much of the discussion.

[2]Note that because of publication times Bendor-Samuel (1971) and Fivaz and Scott (1977) do not represent any significant data more recent than Swadesh et al. (1966). The present chapter is being prepared in the first half of 1984.

vocabularies which vary in quality from excellent to frankly dubious. Both linguistic and sociolinguistic information is uniformly meager.[3]

The next studies by linguists and anthropologists in the twenties and thirties were more informative, though this and the immediately preceding period were characterized by writers with axes to grind. After the second World War, Westermann in particular, came to a clearer and more objective understanding, and Westermann and Bryan (1952) show both the achievements and the confusion of the earlier period.

Not until the 1950s were any Gur languages studied except in as far as they were included in general studies of an area (see the Niger-Congo Overview in this volume). The main scholars have been Köhler and Manessy. Köhler apparently produced a full classificatory schema in 1952 that was never published (from Manessy 1977). Manessy is systematically exploring comparative-historical principles starting with lower-level groupings (1969, 1971, 1975) and working up to more inclusive relationships (1978, 1979). A beginning outline, from the data and analyses of Swadesh et al. (1966) with further information from other sources, was done by Bendor-Samuel (1971). It is also important to mention Prost, who has been indefatigable in making available primary data on many languages, both from his own research (especially studies on the 'Atakora' languages; Prost 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975) and from the work of his colleagues in Roman Catholic missions (e.g., Melançon and Prost 1972).

7.2 CLASSIFICATION

Although Manessy (1977:153f. and elsewhere) takes pains to emphasize the superiority of his comparative historical method to the word list comparison approach of Swadesh et al. (1966), which largely underlies the classificatory schema of Bendor-Samuel (1971), the results in general are the same, apart from cases where Manessy had access to significant new data. We readily recognize the distinct identity of the subgroups Grusi and Oti-Volta, and Manessy's careful studies show clearly how these relate to each other and Kurumfe and Kirma/Tyurama to form 'Central Gur'. The Senufo group is more distantly related, while Win and Kulango seem intermediate between this group and Central. Informal inspection suggests that Bargu, Bwamu, and Lobi and its neighbors may be additional branches of Central. It is doubtful that Seme and Dogon are Gur. Seme appears to be Kru (ch. 6). Dogon has not yet been assigned to any group (ch. 8).

[3]For example, a list of southwestern Grusi type-headed 'Siti' appears in one early report (Westermann and Bryan 1952:62) and this language name continues to be included in all classifications of Gur languages, although no such name of place, language, or people has ever been identified since.

The question is where to draw a line and say: this is Gur. In an informal test I coded items on the Swadesh 100-word list from Guthrie's (1967/71) Common Bantu reconstruction, following as closely as possible the Swadesh method (1966): the resultant set gives a 66% correlation with a Central Gur language like Moore. This is a straw in the wind, not a scientific procedure, but it does suggest that the word lists give no reason to assume that languages lacking high percentage scores in the Swadesh calculations can be taken to belong to Gur any more than to any other branch of Niger-Congo. This threshold would in fact exclude from proven relationship, apart from internally in subgroups, any of the Swadesh groupings; even for Grusi/Oti-Volta the highest 'score' is 58%! We can therefore only reliably tabulate relationships established by Manessy's detailed work (fig. 7.1).

The languages[4] listed in figure 7.1 are grouped according to Manessy's findings, with a few adjustments based on more recent data. The remaining languages listed below (7.2.3-6), especially Senufo, may well be no more closely related to Central Gur than to Guang or Togo Remnant, or than these to Central Gur or Volta-Comoe. Classificatory studies at a level between these lower-level groupings and the level of Volta-Congo are presently in flux.

I. Northern
- A. Oti-Volta
  1. Buli/Konni
  2. Eastern
  3. Western
  4. Gurma
  5. Yom/Nawdm
- B. Bwamu
- C. Kurumfe

II. Southern
- A. Grusi
  1. Eastern
  2. Northern
  3. Western
- B. Kirma/Tyurama
- C. Dyan, Gan, Dogoso...

FIGURE 7.1 Central Gur relationships

[4]The identification of a 'language' for the purposes of this classification is based on practical criteria, languages requiring separate treatment for written materials and other communicative functions, co-dialects being mutually-intercomprehensible. This explains some differences from other recent classifications such as Manessy (1981) or Fivaz-Scott (1977).

In the inventory below the following abbreviations have been used.

Approximate no. of speakers:	A	small	0-5,000
	B	medium-sm	5-50,000
	C	med-large	50-100,000
	D	large	100,000+
Country: BF - Burkina Faso; Gh - Ghana; Bn - Benin; Ml - Mali; IC - Ivory Coast; Tg - Togo			
Location: N - northern or north of: thus S, E, W. + - and (extending into) & - and (in a separate area)			
Language-name: (* means a sample appears in *Data Sheets*, Kropp Dakubu (1977/80) **BL** two-letter language abbreviation ( ) Alternative names (other than obvious spelling-variants, including French-orthography variants: note that in western areas many names contain a voiced velar fricative variously spelled **g, gh, r,** and **rh**) [ ] names referring to the people rather than the language { } linguistically significant dialects			

7.2.1 CENTRAL GUR - NORTHERN

A. Oti-Volta:

1. Buli/Konni:
   BL Buli (Guresha, Kanjarga [Builsa]) - B, Gh
   KM Konni [Koma] - A, Gh
2. Eastern:
   BE Bieri [Berba, Bariba, Bibaliba] - ?, Bn
   WM Wama (Yoabou [Waba]) - B, Bn
   TR Tayari [Natimba] - ?, Bn
   TM DiTammari (Tãmari [Tamberma, Somba]) {Niende} - D, Bn

3. Western:
   a) Northwest:
      FR* Frafra[5] (Gurenne[5], Nankanni [Nankansi])
      {**NW** Nankan} - D, Gh
      MR Moore (Mole [Mossi, Nyonyosi]) - D, central BF
      {Gyoore, Yadre, Saremde, Taolende}
      DR* Dagaari group[6] (Dagarti) - D, Gh + BF
      {**DG** Dagara (Wule, Oule, Wili) - C, BF
      NR Nura (Lawra Lobi, Lobiri) - B, Gh
      BR Birifor - C, Gh + BF}
      WL Waali (Batigi, Nome, Femara) - C, Gh (see d)
      SF Safalaba - A, Gh
   b) Nõõtré:
      NT Nootre [Bulba] - A, Bn
   c) Southeast:
      KL* Kusaal [Kusaasi] {Agole in E, Toende in W}
      - D, NE Gh
      NB Nabit [Nabdem] - B, Gh
      TL Talni [Tallensi] - B, Gh
      MP* Mampruli (Mampelle, ŋmampulli) - C, Gh
      HG* Hanga (Anga) - A, Gh
      {**KR** KaMara (Mara) - A, Gh & IC}
      DB* Dagbani (Dagbanli [Dagomba]) - D, Gh
      {**NN**: Nanun [Nanumba][7] - B, Gh}
   d) **YR** Yare (Kantoontri [Kantoonsi]) - A, wanderers of ?Waali (a above) origin in N Gh.

4. Gurma:
   BS Bassari (Ncham [Chamba]) {Tobote [Chamba]} - C, Tg
   AK Kasele (Akasele, Chamba) - B, Tg

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[5]The provenance of the distinct FR and GN lists in Swadesh et al. (1966) is not known. Rattray's 'Nankani' (1932) is the same as FR. Rapp's 'Gurenne' (1966) is probably also the same (see further Naden and Schaefer 1973).

[6]According to a survey conducted by Sandie Banasik all these languages are mutually intercomprehensible. Isoglosses do not bundle either geographically or topologically; there is no complex of features which together distinguish Birifor from Waali or Dagara from Nura. For social reasons separate written languages are used for BR and DG in BF, WL and DR in Gh.

[7]The Nanumbas are a functioning ethnic group, but are in the last stages of abandoning their language or dialect in favor of Dagbani; the exact nature and status of Nanun is therefore difficult to determine.

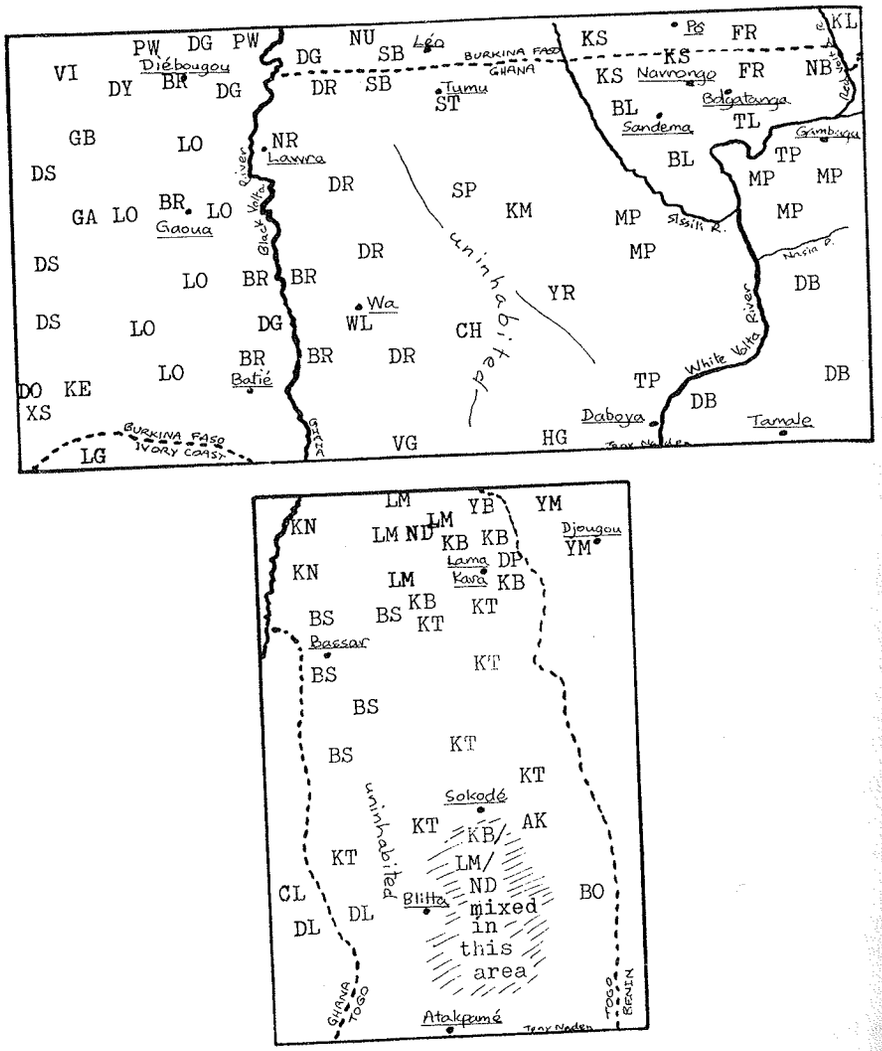

PLATE 7.2 Gur languages (detail)

KN* Konkomba {many clan dialects, Likoln [Komba]}
- D, Gh + Tg

GG Gangam (Dye) - B, Tg

GM Gurma (Gourmanche, Gulmacema [Binumba])
- D, BF + Tg

BM Moba (Bimoba, Moor, Gurma)
{Bem in Tg, Look [Bimoba] in Gh} - C, Tg + Gh

5. Yom/Nawdm:

YM[8] Yom ((K)Pila(k)pila, Djelana, Kilinga) {Tangelem [Taneka]} - C, Bn

ND Nawdm (Naudem, Losso) - B, Tg

B. Bwamu:

BW Bwamu (Boomu, Bwa, (Red) Bobo, Bore, Nyenyege)
- D, BF + Ml {Koniko, Togo, Wahu, San, Mandiakuy, Bomborokuy, Sanaba, Solenso, Mao, Massala, Dédougou, Bondoukoy, Ouakara, Sara, Hounde, Yaho, Mamou, Bagassi - Manessy (1983)}

C. Kurumfe:

KF Kurumfe [Fulse, Kurumba] - A, BF

7.2.2 CENTRAL GUR - SOUTHERN

A. Grusi

1. Eastern[9]:

KB Kabre (Kabiye) - D, Tg

LM Lamba (Anima)
{Defale (Kande), Kadjalla, Yaka (Agbande)} - B, Tg

DP Dompago (Logba, Likpa) - B, Bn + Tg

KT Tem (Kotokoli) - D, Tg

BO Bago - A, Tg

DL Delo (Ntrubo) - A, Gh + Tg

CL Chala (Cala) - A, Gh + Tg

2. Northern[9]:

PA Pana - A, BF + Ml

KS* Kasem ([Kasena], Yuli, Aculo) - C, Gh + BF

NU Nuna (Nununa) - B, BF

LY Lyele (L'ele) - C, BF

3. Western[9]:

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[8] PL (Pilapila) in Swadesh et al. (1966).

[9] More precise geographically would be Southeastern, Northwestern, and Southwestern, as in Barker (1986) and Naden (1987).

WY Winye (Ko) - A?, BF
PW Phwi ([Phwo] Puguli, Buguli) - B, BF
ST[10] Sisaala (Isala)-Tumuli {Gilbagle} - C, Gh
SB[10] Sisaala-Busillu - B, Gh + {Debi} BF
SP[10] Sisaala-Pasale - B, Gh
CH Chakali - B, Gh
TP Tampulma [Tampolensi] - B, Gh
VG* Vagla - B, Gh
MO Deg (Mo, Degha) - B, Gh & IC

B. Kirma/Tyurama:
KY[11] Cerman (Kirma, Gouin, Mbouin [Cira]) - B, BF
TY Tyurama (Turka [Cura]) - B, BF

C. Dyan:
DY Dyan - B, BF [see 7.2.3 A, **LO**, below: note]

D. Gan/Dogose:
1. **GA** Gan - C, BF
GB Gbadogo (Padogho, Bodoro) - A, BF
2. **DS** Dogose (Sorosie) - B, BF
XS Khisa (Komono, Siti) - A, BF

E. Dogoso/Khe:
DO Dogoso - A, BF
KE Khe - A, BF

7.2.3 POSSIBLE CENTRAL GUR

A. Lobi:
LO Lobi (Lobiri) - D, BF + IC
[Manessy (1982) associates Lobi closely with Dyan (**DY**) but I do not consider this relationship to have yet been adequately demonstrated]

B. Logon:
LG* Logon (Loma [Lomapo], Lorhon) {Teen(ge) Teghesye [Tunbe]} - B, IC [Logon/Teenge may be closely related to Kulango (Manessy 1982; Bendor-Samuel 1971) but little evidence is available for this relationship]

[10] SS in Swadesh et al. (1966) is Tumuli; the northwestern (SB) and southeastern (SP) 'dialects' are functionally distinct languages in spite of the ethnic group identity of Sisaala vis-à-vis their neighbors; (some discussion in Rattray 1932). The Burkina Faso dialect (west of Léo) is closer to SB but may be a fourth Sisaala language.

[11] KR in Swadesh et al. (1966).

C. Kulango:
KG Kulango (Nkuraeng [Kulambo]) - C, IC & Gh
[see note on **LG** above]

D. Bargu:
BG Bargu (Baatonum [Bariba]) - D, Bn + Nigeria

7.2.4 IMPROBABLE CENTRAL GUR

A. Viemo:
VI Viemo (Vig(u)e) - A, BF

B. Tyefo:
TF Tiefo - A, BF

C. Win:
WN Win (Toussian, Tusia) - B, BF [Win is associated tentatively with Senufo (7.2.5. below) in Manessy (1981:106)]

D. Wara-Natioro:
SA Samu (Samunti [Same], Natioro) - A, BF
SE Samwe ([Same], Wara) - A, BF + Ml

7.2.5 SENUFO GROUP

(largely following Bendor-Samuel 1971; Manessy 1980 and personal communication)

A. Senari:
SN Central Senari {Gbonzoro, Kafire, Kasara (Kufuro), Kufuru, Kofolosenre, Patoro (Gbato), Tagara} - D, IC
TB Tyembara (Tyebali) - C, IC + Ml + BF [not the same as **TE**] {Tagbari Mbengui, Nielle}
TE Tyebari (Tyebala, Tyebali, Bamari) {Pongara, **TN** Tenere} - C, IC
SW Southwest Senari {**NW** Nowulo (Nohulo); Dugubesyeeri, Gara} - B, IC
KD Kandere (Tengrela) - B, IC
PP Papara - B, IC
NA Nafaga (Nafara) - IC [not the same as **NF** Nafaanra, below]
NY Nyarafoloro - B, IC
FD Fodoro (Folo) - B, IC
SR Senar [further details unknown]
(Some of these may still be different names for the same language or dialect, the situation is not yet fully clarified.)

B. Suppire:
SU Suppire (Sup'ide, Tagba) - D, Ml + BF + IC
MM Mianka (Minianka, Mambar [Bamana, Nanergue, Sendege]) - D, Ml + BF

C. Tagbana:
1. **TG** Tagbana {Djidanan, Fondebougou, Katiara, Katiolo, Niakaramadougou, Niangbo, Niediekaha} - C, IC
TA Tafire (Tafile) - B, IC [considered an independent co-dialect with Senari, SU, and KA versus TG... in Manessy (1980)]
2. **DM** Dyimini {Bandogo, Dofana-Dyafolo, Dyamala, Folo, Sigala-Todele} - C, IC

D. Karaboro:
KA Karaboro (Syer) {Sheer ([Sheem] Tanyeer), Kar ([Kai] Kler)} - B, BF [associated particularly with groups A and B above (versus C, E - G) by Manessy (1981)]

E. Kpalaga:
KP Kpalaga (Pallaka, Palara) - B, IC [associated particularly with **NF** Nafaanra, Manessy (1981)]

F. Tyeliri:
TI Tyeliri - ? size, scattered clan of smiths in IC

G. Nafaanra:
NF*[12] (Pantera, Fantera, Banda) - B, Gh
[see KP above, note: not **NA** Nafaga]

7.2.6 OTHER

A. Mentioned in the literature or recent surveys but insufficient information is available to determine linguistic affinities:

1. Kparli [Kparba} Gh : dying or dead
2. Moru - IC : ? a form of Lobi (LO) ?
3. Zarga - BF : ? the same as Dyan (DY) ?
4. **JU** Jugu ([Jum] Samogho) - A, BF : not the same as Samo(gho)-Marka, Mandaic language N of Bobo Dioulasso, BF
5. **YB** Kuyobe (Miyobe [Biyobe] Soruba, Solla)[13] - A, Tg + Bn

[12]Represented by FN and PN lists in Swadesh et al. (1966); these two are not recognized dialects or languages.

[13]The only data available is a 100-word list collected by John Callow, of which Manessy (personal communication) says 'C'est surement une langue Oti-Volta', while to my eye up to a quarter of the roots are not even Gur!

6. **MB** Meburma - A, Tg: ? dialect of Bieri (BE)?
7. **SD** Sadoba - A, Tg + BF
8. Gouressi - list from Delafosse: considered Grusi by Manessy (1969) but many non-Grusi forms characteristic of Buli area.

B. Mentioned as Senufo languages/dialects but nothing further known:
Kulele
Wora.

C. Formerly classified as Gur:
1. **SM** Seme (Siamou) - B, BF: a Kru language
2. **DN** Dogon - D, Ml: affiliation unknown

7.3 PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Linguistic science has not provided us with a method for exemplifying characteristic features of a group of languages or systematically contrasting their differences. In addition to the published descriptions of specific languages, various examples and facts about Gur languages are found in Westermann and Bryan (1952:70ff.), Bendor-Samuel (1971:152ff.), Manessy's work (1969, 1971, 1975, 1979, 1982, and 1983), and Naden (1986a, 1987). Welmers (1973), who has specialized in the 'lunatic fringe' (Bargu and the Senufo group!), has complementary examples to the above materials which are mainly on Central Gur.

In view of the wide spread of these languages and their questionable unity as a group, it is impossible to make generalizations about Gur. Almost anything described in African languages in Welmers' (1973) monumental conspectus can be found somewhere amongst these languages.[14] One can give a general picture of Niger-Congo languages, as Welmers has so brilliantly done, or sketch typical and distinctive features of a tight subgroup like Western Oti-Volta (Naden 1986a). I will attempt to list features found in many Gur languages, based in some places on Manessy's reconstructions.

[14]Amongst features you might try to use to crack this generalization: Arabic 'broken' plurals have parallels in Nafaanra noun morphology, resemblances to Bantu verb morphology are only obscured because the West African orthographic tradition is to write circum-verbal morphemes as separate pronouns and particles rather than as affixes, and clicks are frequently heard (mainly meaning 'yes', 'I'm listening', or 'Oh, dear!').

7.3.1 CONSONANTS

A full Gur phonology would have as consonants voiced and voiceless plosives and fricatives, and also nasals, at five points of articulation - labial, alveolar (phonetic dentals are rare), palatal, velar, and labiovelar - plus /l, y and w/. Velar fricatives are normally allophones or substitutes for stops. Phonetic [r] (usually a flap or a lightly retroflexed continuant) is regularly a non-initial allophone of /d/.

Phonetic [h] may be an allophone of /s/ (especially with front vowels) or /f/. Glottal stop is usually a subordinate feature or an allophone rather than a full phoneme: one Oti-Volta proto-phoneme has reflexes /ʔ, ŋ, and ɲ/: 'boat' KL **'aaruŋ**, DB **ŋarɔŋ**, MP **ɲariŋŋu**. Especially in the western part of the area (BW, SB, DG and some Senufo languages) there are implosive, preglottalized, or lenis /ɓ, ɗ/, as in the neighboring Kwa (Stewart 1973) and Mande (Bearth 1971) languages. /ɡ/ is often 'weak', having allophones or morphological alternants [ʔ], [ɣ], [y][15] ~ [w] or zero in non-initial positions.[16] Although varying correspondence sets lead Manessy (1979:22) to reconstruct six palatals (in addition to *ɲ and *y), many languages have no contrastive palatal obstruents, and others have perhaps two palatal plosives/affricates as phonemes, possibly only partially independent (Naden 1980b).

m	n	ɲ	ŋ	ŋm	ʔ
p	t	c	k	kp	
b	d	ɟ	g	gb	
ɓ	ɗ	ʄ			
f	s	ç			
v		j			
		y		w	
		ʔy			

FIGURE 7.2 Proto-Central Gur initial consonants (after Manessy 1979:3)

The velar and labiovelar obstruent sets are partially complementary (Naden 1980b) and there are signs of morphological alternation linking items like 'kill/die' (MP **ku/kpi**, BM **kpii/kpo**) and 'sleep (n./v.)' (MP **goom/gbisi**, MR **gwem/gusi**). These may well go back before proto-Gur, however, as similar relationships are seen in Bantu and Benue-Congo reconstructions, particularly of a unit with varying reflexes in **kp, kw**, and **kuõ** as in Gur 'bone': BM **kpabl**, BL **kwobe**, HG **kobiri**.

[15] Using **y** for the palatal semivowel; high front rounded vowel is written **Y**.

[16] One pronunciation of the DB medial 'ɣ' is a pharyngeal flap.

Most Gur languages have phonetic [ɲ (or ỹ), ŋ, ŋm (or ŋw or w̃)], but often two, or even all three of these, are in complementary distribution. The lenis stops and some of the proliferation of units in the dental/palatal sets may reflect allophonic or dialectal variations rather than phonemic contrasts in the proto-language (Naden 1980c:157).

7.3.2 VOWELS

Generalizations about vowels are even more elusive than the parameters of vocalic contrast. Bendor-Samuel's statement (1971:154) that "a number of Gur languages display . . . vowel harmony" as expanded by Stewart (1976:8) "Gur languages demand . . . reconstruction of an original ten-vowel system" is overstated. In Central Gur vowel harmony is characteristic of a geographically and genetically contiguous subgrouping, the northern and western Grusi languages.[17]

i		u
I		U
e		o
	a	

FIGURE 7.3 Proto-Central Gur vowels (after Manessy 1979:36)

Manessy (1979:35ff.) describes his procedure in terms that suggest he was doing all he could to reconstruct nine vowels, but the evidence did not support **e/ɛ** and **o/ɔ** contrasts. The discrimination of **I/i** and **U/u** mainly depends on Manessy's thesis that inconsistencies between transcriptions of **'i'** or **'e'**, **'u'** or **'o'** signal that the vowel is contrastively the 'lax', retracted tongue-root, non-expanded-pharynx version. However, in many of these languages the **[i]/[ɪ] [u]/[ʊ]** distinction is a conditioned variation, with the 'tense' vowel in final position and when the vowel is long, the 'lax' elsewhere. Reconstruction is hampered by unexpected alternations even in closely related languages: 'to tie' HG **le**, MP **lɔ**; 'hands' KM **nuusi**, BL **nisa**.

[17] Bendor-Samuel also mentions the harmonic effects in the adjacent NW Oti-Volta language DR, but the variations between harmony sets of specific items in transcriptions from different authorities and dialects do not suggest that this can be a reconstructable inherited system.

A systematic contrast of vowel length is characteristic of these languages. As in English, the two sets contrast both in length and in quality (the long being tenser-advanced-expanded) and/or complexity: long vowels may have diphthongized or glottalized forms, e.g., BM /ɔɔ/ is realized **[wa]**, and FR and KL insert a glottal stop in lengthened vowels, as in 'frafra potatoes' MP **peesa**, KL Agole **piesa**, FR **pɛ'ɛsa**. A set of long vowels may have some members that are clearly phonetically long and others where the contrast of quality is more salient. These systems could be analyzed either as 5 vowels x length or as 10 vowels. However, there is characteristically a morphophonemic alternation between the two sets, vowels 'lengthening' or 'shortening' in certain environments (e.g., in MP most CV roots lengthen before most suffixes), that favors the 5 x 2 interpretation. Some transcriptions and orthographies record surface phonetic variations implying a larger number of vowel contrasts than are underlyingly present.

Apart from non-contrastive nasalization adjacent to nasal consonants (and **h**),[18] nasalized vowels are normally derived synchronically or diachronically from an intervocalic or syllable-final nasal consonant. Of course, if one assumes *a priori* that these languages have no underlying nasal consonants, and that these are derived on the surface from contrastively nasalized vowels (Stewart 1973, 1976:12-13) this abstract analysis can be carried through. Really existent nasal vowels are found a) in the southwest languages, which may or may not be Gur, adjacent to Kwa, and b) in Gurma languages of the Ghana-Togo border where two types of underlying syllable-final nasal have different morphophonemic realization rules, giving a contrast word-finally between a nasalized vowel and a nasal consonant.

These facts do not exclude the possibility that an ancestral language may have had vowel harmony and contrastively nasalized vowels, but only show that Central Gur languages do not furnish any reason for postulating such systems.

Diphthongs or dissimilar vowel clusters occur in a number of the languages but their origins are diverse; the phenomenon does not suggest that such sequences were inherited from the ancestral language. Some sources are: a) allophonic diphthongization (two common cases being **[wa]** and **[ya]**, 'broken' variants of /ɔ/, /ɛ/ (Naden 1980b)) and variant realizations of long vowels (above); b) metathesis of -CV suffixes; c) spread

[18] The glottal stop representing a lengthened vowel may have a nasalizing effect like **h**, but contrast 'sweep together' MP **piisi**, KL **pi'is** with glottal but no nasalization.

of back-vowel quality of suffix; d) loss of medial consonant of CVCV forms, or weakening of **/b, g/** to back vowel; or e) CV roots followed by -V suffixes.

Marked feature combinations like front-rounded or back-spread are not common, except under strong environmental pressure. Centralized allophones are common but not contrastive central phonemes (except for **/a/**).

7.3.3 SYLLABIC NASAL

Gur phonologies usually include a syllabic nasal which contrasts in distribution with both consonantal nasals and syllabic vowels (including nasal V if present). It usually occurs only in affixes, particles, and pronouns, and is only phonetically syllabic when not adjacent to a vowel. Where it carries its own tone it may remain distinguishable from a nasal C by its contribution to the pitch pattern even when not given its own syllabic timing.

7.3.4 TONE SYSTEMS

Analyses of tone for Gur languages have postulated systems varying from two-tone-and-downstep terrace systems to one with four level and two glide tones. The domain of tone may be word, morpheme, syllable, or mora (as in BS where a single CVVC syllable can have three independent tone choices for the two vowels and the coda C). Tone rarely carries a heavy functional load in contrasting lexical items; it often signals or reinforces grammatical choices. The few detailed analyses that have been made set up underlying basic tones that are altered by complex morphotonemic rules to yield surface forms. In order to compare languages one would need analyses made on the same model by the same analyst. As a result of dubious or non-existent transcriptions of tone and the variety of analytical models underlying the more scientific markings, Manessy was unable to reconstruct tones even for the close-knit Oti-Volta group (1975:72ff.).

It may well be that an alternative analysis on entirely different principles, as yet undiscovered, is needed to account for Gur pitch and accentual phenomena.

7.3.5 RHYTHM AND INTONATION

Stress-accent is not a feature of Gur languages; the characteristic rhythm is syllable-timed with high tone, intonation peak, and vowel length

determining the prominence of syllabics. Even among closely related languages there may be clear differences, for instance the alternation of long and short vowels gives a kind of rocking rhythm to MR and MP in contrast to the more staccato effect of DB, where most vowels are short; the glottal breaking of long vowels is the salient feature of FR.

Common intonational effects are exaggeration or minimization of pitch phenomena for affective purposes, the downdrift of most breath-groups, and features, usually sentence-final, marking polar questions[19] and perhaps imperative. Question intonation usually involves falling pitch and lengthening of final syllables; imperative sometimes has a final rising pitch. Occasionally other categories such as negative are reinforced by final features like the contrast of a sharp glottal cut-off with a breathy fade-out; these features may reinforce the contrast of final high and low tone.

7.3.6 MORPHEME STRUCTURE AND SYLLABLE TYPES

Both CV and CVC roots are reconstructed for Central Gur and are present in all the languages. In some cases CVCC roots appear and the optimal analysis for some particles and affixes may be as a single C. Single V morphemes occur as pronouns or related forms (Naden 1986a) or as affixes (see e.g., noun classes in fig. 7.5). Vowel-initial words are rare, mainly derived from foreign languages, especially Arabic words borrowed with the prefixed article (as in English 'alcohol', 'algebra'), or from the weakening of a consonant. Numerals often have a vocalic or syllabic nasal prefix. With CVC(C) roots and C(V) suffixes there are therefore frequent underlying medial consonant clusters: in many languages, however, there is a strong surface drive towards phonetically optimal CV'CV'CV . . . syllabification, which is mainly achieved by inserting transitional vowels - usually a basic high-central vowel taking on a flavor of the vowels of neighboring syllables.[20] These transitional vowels are treated differently in transcriptions and orthographies, being either ignored (DB orthography) or written uniformly as **i** (HG orthography), **e** (French orthographies), or **a** (earlier HG transcriptions), or with various vowels.

[19] Hanga is the only language known to me where the interrogative question-word question has the special intonation that also marks polar question.

[20] Conversely, V-initial words may cause elision of preceding word-final vowel or, less frequently, insertion of a consonant: MP **siidi** 'cedi' (Ghana currency unit) / **siid ' anaasi** 'four cedis', DB **adaka** 'box' / **a d'adaka** 'your box'.

A nasal consonant usually adapts to the same point of articulation as a following C, and the latter may also assimilate the nasal quality. Consonants which are never word-initial (syllable-final or suffix-initial) do not show contrasts of voicing; the surface form is normally voiced (except for the sibilant, see fig. 7.4), but in a number of languages, if preceded by the same C, a voiceless geminate results.

Figure 7.4 shows Manessy's reconstruction of root-final consonants in proto-Central Gur.

b	d	g
	l*	
m	n	
	s	

*d but all reflexes are l except r in WM

FIGURE 7.4 Proto-Central final consonants (in Manessy 1979:33)

"The restrictedness and asymmetry of the inventory," says Manessy (1979:33)[my translation], "has led us to interpret this as a list of 'extensors' [i.e., grammatical morphemes of indeterminate function] which could be added to roots with a canonical CV structure." This view is probably supported by the frequent necessity of reconstructing CV and CVC alternants such as Oti-Volta ***bu/bud** 'goat'. An alternative view is implied by Bantu, Benue-Congo, and Western Nigritic reconstructions which often have a CVCV form of which CVC and CV could be progressive simplifications: 'goat' PWN ***-budi**, Guthrie's Common Bantu ***-búdì**, and Benue-Congo (De Wolf 1971) ***-bwoni**. This might push the time at which the process of extension was functional further into the past, since we also find comparable variation in the Common Bantu, e.g., ***-gò**, **-gòyi** 'leopard', and the PWN e.g., **pí-**, **píd-** 'sweep, broom'.

In the southwestern corner of the area an obstruent-high vowel-continuant-vowel sequence may elide the first vowel, giving many forms like **tlɔ, tra, ble** (all NF words). This is an areal feature affecting languages of all families in these latitudes at least from western Ivorian Kru and Mande to eastern Ghana, where it is noted in Guang and Togo Remnant languages as well as in Ewe.

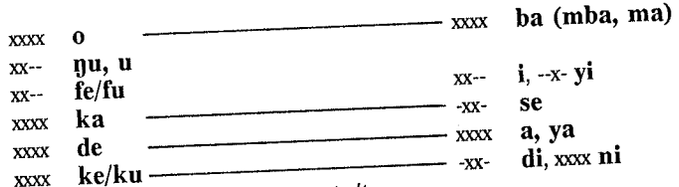
7.4 MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

7.4.1 NOUN MORPHOLOGY

Nominal morphology in Gur has aroused some interest because of the noun class systems, some of which are clear examples of this general Niger-Congo feature (Greenberg 1963:9). Nouns characteristically have singular and plural class suffixes (sometimes, especially in the east, prefixes also or, rarely, instead). In some languages pronouns and perhaps other NP elements concord with the class of the head noun. In Central Gur characteristically one either has concordant anaphorics and noun declensions, or nominal declensions with semantically selected or invariable pronouns (Wilson 1971; Naden 1982, 1986a). Other languages have nouns cross-classified by independent plural declensions and 'gender' anaphorics (BW, some Senufo; NF has declensions but no concord).

Manessy's reconstructions of class elements for proto-Central are displayed in figure 7.5: lines from left to right indicate regular pairings correlating singular and plural, while the triangle in the middle refers to the probable hypothesis that ***te** was originally a collective class, with ***ku** as its singular, and a further correlation with ***di/ni** as a plural of ***ku**.

Partial complementarities in the **be/bu**, **fe/fu**, **bi**, **fi** elements make it improbable that all are independent contrasting classes.



N.B.: The marks preceding the words represent presence (x) or absence (-) in subgroups, from left to right Kurumfe, Oti-Volta, Grusi, Kirma-Tyurama.

FIGURE 7.5 Central Gur noun class elements (after Manessy 1978:106)

7.4.2 VERB MORPHOLOGY

Most verbal markers are treated as particles rather than affixes in Gur languages. The most widely marked inflectional category is the contrast between imperfective (continuous) and a form better described as 'neutral' (a markedly 'perfective' form may be a contrasting inflection). Manessy argues (1975:166ff.) that the idea of making such a distinction diffused through the area some time after the main divisions of Oti-Volta, as a common concept has no reconstructable shared formal exponent; however, the **da/ra/ta** form seems rather widespread (Bendor-Samuel 1971:162, Tab. 2) in this function. Where there is no suffix consistently marking the imperfective, verbs are grouped into apparently arbitrary sets with various ways of marking this category; tone change, vowel lengthening or diphthongization, and suffixation may all coexist. In the last case the unsuffixed form may be imperfective in some verbs and neutral in others. This situation is found in eastern Oti-Volta (TM at least), Bwamu, and most northern and western Grusi languages.

Other possible verbal inflections are imperative (suffix **-ma**, e.g., in DB, MP, and YM) and perfective (completed action, present relevance, agentless passive, e.g., MP **u niŋŋi-ya**, 'he has done (it)' or 'he has been done', according to the context). These and other verbal categories, such as subjunctive, irrealis, consecutive and various tense/aspect systems are usually realized by preverbal particles or auxiliaries, and/or by tonal patterns on the subject, verb, verb phrase or whole clause.

7.4.3 DERIVATIVE MORPHOLOGY

Verb roots are normally the bases from which forms are derived.

Sisaala-Tumuli:

		su	'fill something'
hu	'hide'	**sugi**	'close, block something'
hugi	'bury'	**suri**	'open something'
huri	'exhume'	**surisɛ**	'move out of the way'

chu	'cover, put hat on'
chugɛ	'remove a headload'
chugilɛ	'bow the head'
chugisi	'nod the head'

There are many examples of a system whereby one or two consonantal extensors form derived categories with senses such as causative, reversative (or releasive, e.g., tie/untie), singular or plural, or repetitive:

This system is particularly developed in ST, MP, DB, HG, and KL, but similar phenomena are found in most of the languages. Correlation of particular meaning with a particular extensor is not consistent in ST (above), and not very consistent between languages: perhaps the most widely attested is **-g** 'reversative/obstructive'. Reduplication is found in some languages for habitual or repetitive action, as in KS **gigili** 'turn round and round', **titigi** 'rub something'.

Verb-root + ***d** + nominal suffixes of class ***o/ba** (fig. 7.5) forming agent nouns are widely attested. There are also derivatives for patient and instrument.

7.5 SYNTAX AND DISCOURSE CHARACTERISTICS

Little published material is available on the syntax of Gur languages. Linguistic science has not only offered a welter of conflicting and ever-changing models, which frustrate comparison of what has been written, but has also focused interest on the universals of human language rather than the distinctive structures of particular languages. Bendor-Samuel (1971) lists some surface features used in description of these languages, while Naden (1987) gives parallel sets of exemplar structures in a Grusi and an Oti-Volta language (VG and MP). I will attempt here to outline some features of the discourse/ pragmatic side of language rather than duplicate what has been said elsewhere.

1) **Opening.** All verbal interactions in the societies where Gur languages are spoken necessitate an initial greeting, usually elaborate (Naden 1986b; for other West African languages: Irvine 1974; Naden 1980a). Typical ingredients seem to be an initial phase referring to the time of day and/or the activity in which the person addressed is engaged, a following section of generalized inquiries after the health of the interlocutor and his immediate family (with ritual positive response even if they are not well), and an optional and extendable coda involving specific inquiries about known and named family/friends.

2) **Thematic structure.** The core predication is always subject-verb. There is commonly a left dislocation (frontshifting) by which a thematically prominent element is brought into focus, but this option is not open to the subject or the verb. The boundary between the left-dislocated element and the 'rump' of the clause is usually indicated by a particle, and there is no recapitulatory element in the position out of which the item has been moved. Interrogatives as well as locative, temporal, and logical adjuncts are normally in this thematically prominent position. If a verbal complement is left-dislocated, the degree of contrast or emphasis is more marked than in these other cases; sentential complements cannot be fronted. Most of these languages have further devices for fine-tuning sentence perspective, mainly particles and verbal affixes (or tones); these vary from language to language both in terms of formal realization and of precise function. In some cases they are best described as assertion markers as they do not occur in negative clauses. Contrast, emphasis, topic and theme all may be relevant in explaining the functioning of these systems, sometimes referred to as 'focus'.

Thematic grouping of a succession of predications is mainly done by using pronominal and zero anaphora and various consecutive and serial constructions (see 5) below). Same/different subject (or thematic participant) markers are not characteristic of these languages, nor are logophoric pronouns. The indefinite and emphatic pronouns (Naden 1986a: Tables 1, 4-5, 12) may be used for new or previously mentioned participants when contrasted with the one currently holding thematic stage (including indirect quotation where the neutral 3rd person pronoun may represent an original 1st, the speaker, while emphatic pronoun represents original 2nd or 3rd).

3) **Asking questions.**[21] At a macro-functional level the social significance of questions needs serious consideration (Goody 1978). To obtain information as to the truth or falsity of a whole proposition, the polar question intonation may be used on an otherwise unmarked sentence. A final particle may be obligatory or optional, usually the 'or' that links the parts of an alternative question. Alternatives are usually either complements or adjuncts ('did he eat rice or fufu?', 'did he go home today or yesterday?') or else a positive proposition and its negative, the latter reduced to subject pronoun and verb ('did your father go to market or (did he) not go?'). Apparent second leg alternative questions like 'or what?', 'or am I lying?' may be inserted in discourse as feedback cues similar to English tag questions.

Question intonation (and particle) may be added to other questions or imperatives, as well as statements, to form echo questions to ver-

[21] Questions and interrogatives in one of these languages are covered in J. Hewer (1976).

ify one's perception of what has been said, stall for time, express incredulity, etc.

Negative questions most commonly function as polite commands or 'whimperative' wheedling requests ('haven't you any...to give me?'); the answer commonly applies to the negative presupposition of the question ('yes (you're right) I haven't.').

To question a particular element, this is replaced by an interrogative word, and this or the phrase containing it is frontshifted (2 above). The answer may have the element that was interrogative frontshifted, and this may be given alone, or in a 'skeletonized' clause with the verb alone, or verb plus pronouns representing other main elements. 'How many?' often has a reduplicated (distributive) form used especially for 'how much each?' in marketing. 'when?' is normally 'what?' or 'which...?' with a specific measure 'what day?', 'what time?', 'which month?', and so on. In some languages there is one 'where?' interrogative for use with any verb-based predicate and also an interrogative copula to ask the location of a single item.

Mampruli:

i pɔ'a bɛ ya ni?
thy wife exist where? at — 'where is your wife?'

i pɔ'a lee?
thy wife is-where?

4) **Commands and obligations**. Imperative is usually marked by a tone pattern and/or verbal suffix as well as by omission of 2nd person singular subject, so that other person/number jussives and cohortatives can be indicated by addition of the appropriate subject pronoun. In indirect quotations the imperative is retained but the 3rd person subject pronoun is added. A verb 'let' as in English 'let's go!', 'let him go' may alternatively be used for non-second person commands. Polite commands may be conveyed by negative questions, by adding a matrix verb like 'I beg you to...', or by prefixing the command with elaborate and respectful greetings (and a small gift).

Gur languages apparently do not have either grammatical or lexical means to convey deontic notions. 'Must', 'ought', 'should' are conveyed either by loan words (often Hausa **kamata**) or by expressly mentioning the authority: 'God/the chief/our customs say...(+ imperative)'. Another possible construction is an 'unless' form ('unless you go tomorrow!' (you won't get what you want), i.e., 'you must go tomorrow!'), but the 'unless' is often also a foreign form, though perhaps more indigenized (usually **see** from Hausa **sai**).

5) **Narration**. A high proportion of clauses are of minimal structure, and compound or successive actions of one participant are rendered by a serial construction where all verbs after the first have no independent choice of subject, tense, or aspect (discussion in Welmers 1973:364ff.; see also Huttar 1981). The subject may be reduced to a personal pronoun (KS), a special 'same-subject' marker (HG), or zero; the verbs may be marked by a non-finite affix (DB), or by absence of marker (FR). Different degrees of conceptual cohesion may be expressed by different combinations of these options, and also by contrasting coordinate constructions with a conjunction and choice of zero, pronoun, or NP as subject, and of independent verb modalities (P. Hewer 1976). The narrator usually pauses every few sentences for feedback from the audience; this feedback may consist of the echoing of the last clause or phrase before the pause (possibly with question intonation), confirmatory interjections (including clicks), or conjectures as to what the next sentence is going to be.

6) **Argumentation and dialogue**. As with narrative, monologue exposition is not the rule: the speaker tries to elicit acceptance of a series of positions until he has manoeuvred his opponent/audience into concurring with his major thrust. Much use is made of tautology, proverb, and parable in argumentation. Historically it seems that these languages mention cause and effect (in the logical order) with either a simple conjunction (this structure can mean 'therefore' or 'but, however, nevertheless' according to its (un)expectedness) or a 'therefore' construction; if the order is reversed with a 'because' link, the latter is always a loan (in northern Ghana the Hausa **dama** is common, and **because** is heard even from non-English speakers).

Interruptions and several people speaking at once are less negatively-valued than in English dialogue; to forestall an interruption an intonation contour may be carried over into an introductory phrase of the next sentence or paragraph before breaking for breath/thought. A didactic style may be used for giving careful instructions to the young, inattentive, or forgetful.

7) **Background and negation**. Paragraphs, particularly near the beginning of both narrative and argumentation often begin with stative or imperfective clauses and full noun phrase participant reference to establish background and set a scene. Negation is also a sort of background (Grimes (1975) treats it as collateral information), setting against actual

events a consideration of what might have happened, but did not. The negative is normally a particle or auxiliary between the subject and the main verb; it is often echoed by a clause- or sentence-final marker, and one or both of these may be realized non-segmentally by tone or a final glottal or non-release feature. There are also verbs with intrinsically negative lexical meaning: 'to not-exist, not be located' is in virtually all the languages;[22] other common negative verbs are 'to not-be' (equative), 'to not-know', and 'to not-have'.

8) **Statements**. Location, possession and equative-classification ('that man **is** my brother', 'tree-roots **are** medicine') are expressed with verbs, a fact that distinguishes these languages from many in Africa (Welmers 1973:308ff.; Naden 1973, 1982b:211). The only common verbless constructions are identificational ('what **is** that?' - 'it **is**....') usually comprised of a noun phrase and a demonstrative, possibly of a special type or with some thematic or copula particle (example in J. Hewer 1976:14ff.).

State, process, and motion verbs may have some special features. State and process are intrinsically durative and so may either have only the neutral form, without the marked imperfective inflection or, less commonly, marked imperfective. There may be some formal mark distinguishing some or all of these types from action predicates. Motion verbs may be subclassified according to whether they take a reference point (destination or source) complement, and if so, whether this occurs with or without a locative marker (usually a postposition or a locative noun in an associative construction).

Description may be effected by using a descriptive state verb, e.g., 'to be red', or by the perfective of a process verb 'to have become red', or by an adjective. Each language usually has all three constructions, and a given concept may have any one, two, or three of these alternatives for its expression. The verbal and adjectival forms may be derivationally related or independent. There are also some nouns of quality that are usually 'possessed'. Adjectives are normally bound nominals used in nominal compounds following the described root. These forms often cannot stand alone (e.g., in predicate position, or for citation,) so a dummy noun such as 'thing' is used. These adjectives sometimes show class concord with the substantive (Canu 1968/71), but more often have their own class-membership; in Kasem, at least, the anaphoric pronouns concord with the class of the adjective: **ka-balɔrɔ kom** 'woman-ugly the (class D)' / **ka-gora kam** 'woman-wretched the (class C)' (Teviu and Callow n.d.:1n.28.a, 31.a).

[22] And non-Gur languages of the area (see Naden 1982b:exx. 5,7,9,12, and 16).

For the descriptive modification of predicates and whole clauses there are manner auxiliary verbs ('to do...quickly'), a few simple adverbs, and a number of ideophones with special phonological form[23] and often special collocational restrictions (like 'stone' in English 'stone cold', or 'jet' in 'jet black').

Action verbs may take one or two objects, normally in post-verbal position (O-V in Senufo group, VI and BG). The object immediately following ditransitive verbs is often described as indirect because this position is used for the recipient with 'give'. However, in other comparable clauses we may have 'they threw him stones (they stoned him)' which asserts both 'they threw stones' and 'they bombarded him'; where there is both an inanimate and an animate object, the latter occupies this slot. Often a separate manipulative verb is used to take the instrument or inanimate object: 'they took stones threw (at) him', 'he took money gave (to) me'; similarly the verb 'give' can carry the beneficiary - 'they did work gave him (they worked for him)'. These multi-verb constructions are used to avoid having more than one case role of any given surface verb filled by a full noun phrase (Wilson 1970, 1976). The same verb can often be used both transitively and intransitively with no marking other than the presence or absence of a complement.

9) **Quotation**. A quotative particle usually follows verbs of speech and cognition ('think', 'plan', 'know'...) introducing either direct or indirect speech. The particle, used alone, may indicate the speaker is repeating someone else's words. In many cases the particle cannot be considered a reduced form of any recognizable verb of speaking.

10) **Deixis, anaphora, numeration**. The associative noun phrase precedes the head noun, other noun phrase modifiers follow. Demonstratives are usually close to the head (sometimes affixed) followed by a numeral or a relative clause. Articles (usually only definite is marked) often appear phrase final and may appear in addition to possessive or demonstrative modifiers. The final article may serve to mark the end of the relative construction (e.g., DB), or there may be a special particle in this function (KS). In some languages there is an enclitic article before the head noun.

[23] Typical special phonological forms are **h**, glottal stop, nasal vowel, or final consonant in languages where these are not in the regular phonology, over-lengthened vowels and continuants, and reduplicative patterns of the **baga-baga-baga**, **lim-lim-lim**, or **tililili** types.

Gur numeral systems include straight decimal systems (MP), perhaps with a few subtractives ('twenty lacking two' = 18 in DB). 6, 7 is sometimes '5 + 1, + 2' (LG, NF, VG); 8 may be unanalyzable (MP), or '5 + 3' (LG, NF), or '2 times 4' (VG). There are some vigesimal systems (BS, but not KN; DR, BW, NF) geographically scattered and with no resemblance between their words for 'twenty'.

Demonstratives may or may not distinguish proximal, neutral, and distal, and article selection may be sensitive to 'previous mention' and 'unique referent'.

11) **Tense, aspect modality.** Apart from the general tendency to distinguish imperfective aspect in the verb (7.4.2 above), verbal categories are mainly expressed by a number of particles, auxiliaries, and auxiliary verbs (i.e., grammatically full verbs but with senses like 'to keep on doing...' which require another verb for completeness) in post-subject[24] position. Tense as such is not a comprehensive system, but often marks 'past' versus 'non-past' and/or 'future' versus 'non-future' and there may also be time-depth particles (e.g., 'one day away' = 'tomorrow' with future, 'yesterday' with non-future). Some of these categories may be marked by a tone on the subject pronoun or on the segmental marker of another category, or a fusion of the two. Every system has to be analyzed afresh as each has its own categories and means of marking them.

12) **'I have gone home!'** The proleptic perfective used in many Gur languages as a farewell.

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[24] That is, in SOV languages they precede the object.

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8 Dogon

John Bendor-Samuel, Elizabeth J.Olsen, and Ann R. White

The Dogon language is located in northeast Mali and in proximity to languages from widely different families: Gur, Mande and Atlantic (Fulfulde).

8.1 CLASSIFICATION

Previous classifications of Niger-Congo have placed Dogon within the Gur family of languages. In CTL7 it was included within Gur on the basis of lexico-statistical comparisons. It was stated that

> lexically, it is not close to any Gur language, but it does have some general lexical affinity to the group as a whole. Thus while the highest figure of cognates on the Swadesh first 100 is only 43% (with Fantera), when Dogon is compared with 40 other Gur languages, the percentages of cognates range from 25% upwards with an average of 33%. (p. 152)

Scholars working in Gur languages in the last two decades such as Manessy and Naden (pers. com.) however, do not find any convincing evidence, either in Dogon lexis or grammar, that would confirm its membership in the Gur family. There appears to be increasing agreement that Dogon should be excluded from Gur. It seems better, therefore, to treat Dogon as an isolate within Volta-Congo until further evidence clarifies its status.

In order to avoid a gap in this volume on Niger-Congo, a brief sketch of some of the outstanding characteristics of Dogon is given below. This is taken from the published literature and, in particular, from recent fieldwork by Olsen and White.[1]

[1]Elizabeth Olsen provided the details of the phonological characteristics and Ann R. White the details of the grammatical characteristics. From their materials Bendor-Samuel wrote up the chapter.