

THE VOCABULARY OF DEATH IN CHADIC AND HAMITO-SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Daniel BARRETEAU
Dymitr IBRISZIMOW
Herrmann JUNGRAITHMAYR

ABSTRACT

In this paper are discussed the reconstructions of the roots for the items "to die" and "corpse". In all the 150 Chadic languages, which are spoken in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, as well as in the whole Hamito-Semitic family, "to die" is reconstructed by one single root: *mwt. On the opposite, there are at least four roots in Chadic for the gloss "corpse": A *mwt, B bg-, C *bn and D kum, with some borrowings.

The comparison and the analyses of these two items give a sample of the complexity of the Chadic language history: on the one hand, a fundamental notion, "to die", which carries forms coming directly from the original Hamito-Semitic language cradle, on the other hand, a more "cultural" notion, "corpse", which has been considerably affected through the contacts in the new African home. This may indicate that the funeral rites have undergone more recent changes in the environment of Lake Chad Basin.

Keywords : Hamito-Semitic, Chadic, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, comparison, reconstruction, die, corpse

RÉSUMÉ

LE VOCABULAIRE DE LA "MORT" DANS LES LANGUES TCHADIQUES ET CHAMITO-SÉMITIQUES.

Dans cet article sont présentées et commentées les reconstructions pour les termes "mourir" et "cadavre". Dans les 150 langues tchadiques, qui sont parlées au Nigeria, au Cameroun et au Tchad, ainsi que dans l'ensemble du phylum chamito-sémitique, "mourir" est reconstruit avec une seule racine : *mwt. A l'opposé, dans les langues tchadiques, on relève au moins quatre racines pour le terme "cadavre" : *mwt, bg-, *bn et kum, dont certains emprunts.

La comparaison et l'analyse de ces deux items donne une idée sur la complexité de l'histoire des langues tchadiques : d'un côté, une notion fondamentale, "mourir", qui se traduit par des formes remontant directement à l'origine des langues chamito-sémitiques ; de l'autre côté, une notion plus "culturelle", le "cadavre", qui a été considérablement affectée par des contacts dans le nouvel environnement africain. Cela pourrait indiquer que les rites funéraires ont subi des changements récents dans l'environnement du bassin du lac Tchad.

Mots-clés : chamito-sémitique, tchadique, Nigeria, Cameroun, Tchad, comparaison, reconstruction, mourir, cadavre

*
* *

This paper is an enlarged version of a poster which was presented at the exhibition during the conference. A first study was conducted by Jungraithmayr (1990) on the problem of reconstructing the roots for "death" and "to die" in the Chadic languages. In the present article, the data

come mainly from the comparative work on Chadic languages by Jungraithmayr and Ibrizimow (in press). Some unpublished data come as well from personal materials on Cameroonian Chadic languages collected by Barreteau.

Here, only the roots for the items "to die" and "corpse" are discussed, both having been reconstructed by Jungraithmayr and Ibrizimow.

1. "To die"

There are only few glosses which are reconstructed with a single root for the whole Chadic family, such as: "to die", "to dream", "to drink", "eye", "finger", "fly", "four", "head", "neck", "nose", "to ripen", "sheep", "to swallow".

In all the 150 Chadic languages, which are spoken in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, "to die" is a representative of this group of glosses to be reconstructed by one single root. The proposals, up to now, were: *mεtε by Newman (1977), *mwt by Jungraithmayr & Shimizu (1981) and *mwt by Jungraithmayr & Ibrizimow (in press).

At the same time, this is the most fundamental Hamito-Semitic keyword in Chadic since it occurs in all families with the possible exception of Cushitic [which may be assumed as a secondary absence; cf. Murtonen 1989:256]. So, this root, *mwt "to die", would be attested with a history of approximately ten millenia, in Asia minor and in the whole of North Africa down to Lake Chad Basin. As far as the Hamito-Semitic languages in general are concerned, one can consult also the study of Vycichl (1983).

The importance of this word must be seen in the aspect of the genetic heritage which has been considerably shrunk due to the following facts:

- the Chadic languages were one of the first to separate from the common Hamito-Semitic ancestor;
- in their historical development, the Chadic speaking peoples had long and narrow contacts with the peoples of the Sudan area who speak "Nigritic" (i.e. non-Hamito-Semitic) languages;
- the 150 Chadic languages represent the most numerous and diversified linguistic unit within Hamito-Semitic as well as the widest geographical distribution if one does not count the more recent expansion of Arabic, after the VIIIth century A.D.

EGYPTIAN

Egyptian	mwt
Coptic	mu u

SEMITIC

Akkadian	ma a t
Ugaritic	mt
Phoenician	mt
Hebrew	mwt
Arameic	mwt, my t
Arabic	mwt

Mehri	mwt
Soqotri	mi i (t)
Ge'ez	mwt
Tigre	mwt

BERBER

Chleuh	mt a
Kabyle	əmmət
Tuareg	əmmət
Sus	mmət
Zenaga	ēmmwi, ēmmi

CUSHTIC

Rendille	a-mut!
Boni	-wud-
Somali	mōd

Due to the above mentioned facts, the present-day Chadic reflexes display sometimes an extreme "deformation" as a result of linguistic erosion, e.g.

*mwt > *mutu > *ntu > *tu > ru.

The first radical (R1) is for the most part preserved in its original quality:

*m > m in all branches, Western, Central and Eastern.

It has changed to n- in some Central Chadic languages and in Mokilko (Mokilko group) due to the loss of an internal vowel and therefore directly preceding a dental (partial regressive assimilation): *mwt > *mt > nt. See for example:

Ngwaxi	nti
Cibak	nti
Gud'e	ñtə́
Mokilko	? ñnd-

The nasal was weakened to w in some languages of the Central Branch:

Higi-Baza	wto
-----------	-----

or even disappeared totally:

Kilba	átū
Hizli	təw
Wandiu	tə-w
Tsuvan	zā
Gudu	rūu

As to the triradicality of the reconstruction for the Chadic languages - in spite of the obvious biradicality of most of the reflexes -, the argument derives from the fact that a number of the languages display reflexes with a long vowel, a possible sign of a lost (weak) consonant, e.g.:

Sura	mùùt
Karekare	meet
Boghom	mə:s
Migama	máató
Jegu	maat
Mubi	mààdé

The semi-vowel *w, in internal position, is a weak consonant. It seems that this consonant has been lost at an early stage of the Chadic language history. However, we may find some reflexes of *w as w or y. The interchange between w and y is probably due to the respective vocalisation, a fact well-known from the Semitic languages, e.g. Arabic "to die" *maata* (Perfect), *yamuutu* (Imperfect), *mayyitun* (Adjective).

The semi-vowel w is observed in a few languages such as:

Gerka	mwɔth
Siri	miwa
Kabalay	muwé

or in some specific verbal forms, e.g.

Mubi	maat (Perfective)
	muwaat (Imperfective)

We may find some traces of this semi-vowel in the quality of the internal vowels, which are most of the time close, -u- or -i-, as for example:

Hausa	mú t ùù
Angas	mù t
Kwami	mùd-
Hwona	mù r
Mbazla	muc
JimjimEn	mí t
Gavar	mí c í
Musey	mí t
Sokoro	mì t ē

In some languages of the Central Branch the first and the second radicals *mw have fallen together, being hardened to mb, which is a current phoneme in these groups:

Mwulyen	-mbú t ò
Njanyi	mbú t ə
Gbwata	mbə t ò
Bacama	m̄búr ō

The third radical (R3) has undergone regular changes either to **c**, **ts**, **s**, **y**, **l**, **r**, **d** and even to zero.

Generally, a trend towards palatalization - ***t > ty > c** - can be observed (mainly) in Central Chadic, e.g.

Zizilivəkən	mə c ə
Gəvoko	mə c ə (wé)
Southern-Mofu	mə c
Besleri	mə c

This development led to such forms like Fali-Mucella mɪkyɪ̄ and even Kiria wɪkɪ̄.

A more fronted development, i.e. to an alveolar fricative (with further palatalization) or to an affricate, is found in languages of the Northern and Southern Bauchi group, as well as in Central Chadic, e.g.

Tsagu	mōōsən
Gurɗung	masse / mɪs
Geji	mɪsh
Buli	masshi / məshū / mɪsh
Tule	məshì
Zaar	mɪshī / mɪs
Wandala	mɪs-a / əmɪsámɪsá
Pəlasla	mətsá
Buwal	màts

Examples of ***t > y**:

Warji	miy-
Kariya	míyà
Miya	miy-
Pa'a	mìyà / miya / miyà

In the following examples it can not be definitely established whether **y** is a reflex of the second (***w**) or the third (***t**) radical, or even represents a fusion of both:

Siri	miwa / míyù / mīyū
Mburku	miy-
Kwang	māyé
Ndam	míyâ

Examples of *t > l :

Bole	màló
Jimbi	mul-

Examples of *t > r :

Bacama	m̀búrō
Dera	mur-
Hwona	m̀ur
Ga'anda	-m̀eri
Gabin	m̀iri
Boka	m̀eri
Gudu	r̀u
Musgu	m̀ara
Munjuk	m̀iri
Majəra	m̀ari
Jina	m̀ara
Sibine	m̀ar
Tobanga	m̀arē, mā, m̀arā

Examples of *t > d

Tangale	m̀udə
Kwami	m̀ud-
Gera	mudu-
Afadə	m̀edi
Maslam	m̀di
Malgbe	m̀di
Mpadə	m̀di
Mokilko	ʔ̀ind-

Examples of *t > d̥ :

Tera	m̥di, VN m̥tá
Mbara	m̥d̥iŋ

A total loss of the third radical (R3) is attested in some eastern languages:

Kera	m̥ / m̥á-
Kabalay	muw̥á
Lele	m̥á
Tumak	m̥á

Cases in which only R3 has been preserved exist but are rare (in the Central Branch):

Gudu	ru
Tsuvan	z̥á

The form w̥k̥i in Kiria is an interesting example of how assimilation and metathesis have been at work as it often occurs in Bura-Margi and in Higi groups: *mwt > *mwki > *wmki > w̥k̥i.

CHADIC

Western Branch

Hausa group

Hausa

mùtùu

Gwandara

mùtù

Sura-Gerka group

Sura

mùut, pl. murap

Angas

mùt

Cip

mut

Ankwe

mùt

Tal

mū:t

Gerka

mwōth

Ron group

Fyer

mot

Daffo

mot

Bokkos

mot

Kulere

mot / mwōth

Sha

môt

Bole-Tangale group

Karekare

meet- / metaw

Bole

mâlô / mot-

Ngamo

mato

Maha

muto

Tangale

mudę

Kwami

mùd-

Kupto

mùt-

Pero

mùtù

Dera

mur-

Kirifi

mutto / múk-kò, VN mùtó

Gera

mudu-

Gerumawa

mutalla

Northern Bauchi group

Warji

mì- / míyāuŋ / miy-

Tsagu

mōōsēn

Kariya

míyā

Miya

miy-

Pa'a

míyā / miya / miyā

Siri

miwa / míyū / míyū

Mburku

miy-

Jimbi

mul-

Diri

mōtú / matu

Dira

mùsi

Burma

mìsè

Southern Bauchi group

Boghom

mas

Kir

muse, mēs!

Tala

mēs-

Jimi	mache
Gurdung	masse / mis
Geji	mish
Buli	masshi / mǎshū / mish
Tule	mǎshì
Wang	məs / mis
Zaar	mīshī / mis
Seya	mīsi
Dwot	mus
Pəlci	misi
Bade-Ngizim group	
Ngizim	mǎtə / mutu
Bade	mútù
<i>Central Branch</i>	
Tera group	
Tera	mədi, VN mǎtá
Hwona	mūr
Ga'anda	-meri
Gabin	mīri
Boka	mēri
Ngwaxi	nti
Bura-Margi group	
Bura	mtì
Cibak	nti
West-Margyi	mtə
North-Margyi	mtu
Kilba	átū
Hizli	təw
Wandiu	tə-w
Kiria	wɔkì
Mwulyen	-mbútò
Bana	mǎtí
Higi group	
Higi-Nkafa	mtɛ
Higi-Futu	mtɔ
Higi-Baza	wɔɔ
Psikye	mtǎ
Hya	ntǎ
Gbwata group	
Tsuvan	zǎ
Sharwa	mǎtǎ
Zizilivɛkɛn	mǎcǎ
Jimjimɛn	mít
Gudɛ	ntǎ
Njanya	mbútǎ
Gbwata	mbǎtò
Bacama	mbúrò

Gudu	rù
Fali-Mucella	míkyì
Fali-Bwagira	mti
Gava	mtsìgànà
Nakatsa	ms
Laamang group	
Laamang	mt-
Wandala group	
Wandala	mts-a / əmtsámtsá
Gəlvaxdaxa	mts-
Guduf	mts'(ə)gànà
Dghwede	mcà / mtsáyà
Gəvoko	mécà(wé)
Xədi	mət̀
Mabas	mət̀(ũkũ)
Sakun group	
Sakun	-āngwus
Mafa group	
Mafa	mətsa
Mefele	mətsā(y)
Cuvok	mətsa
Southern Mofu	ˈmɛc̀
Northern Mofu	mɛc
Southern Giziga	mũc
Northern Giziga	mōc
Mbazla	muc
Merey	mút
Dugwor	mótá
Zəlgwa	mūt̀
Məlokwo	mút
Mad'a	māt
Muyang	mət
Wuzlam	ˈmút̀
Matal	ˈmɛts̀
Mbuko	màts
Pəlasla	mótśá
Daba group	
Daba	mɛc
Besleri (= Hina)	mɛc
Mbədam	məts
Gavar	míci
Buwal	màts
Kad'a-Munjuk group	
Kad'a (= Gidar)	mtá
Musgu	mára
Mbara	mídíŋ
Munjuk	mírí

Mida'a group	
Majəra	má r í
Jina	mà r à
Kotoko group	
Lagwan	mə t ì
Msər	nt ì
Afaǰə	méd ì
Maslam	m̄ d i
Malgbe	mād ì
Mpadə	mād í
Yedina	mà t ə
Masa group	
Masa	m í t-
Musey	m í t-
Lame	má t á
Zime	má t
<i>Eastern Branch</i>	
Kwang-Kera group	
Kwang	mā y é
Kera	mé / máa-
Lele group	
Kabalay	muw ə
Lele	mā
Sibine group	
Sibine	mā r
Ndam	mí y â
Tumak	mā
Tobanga	mā r ē, mā, mā r ā
Sokoro group	
Sokoro	mì t ē
Dangla group	
Dangla	mà t è
Migama	mā a t ó
Bidiya	muut
Mokilko group	
Mokilko	ʔ ì nd-
Mubi-Toram group	
Jegu	maat
Birgit	mā à t í
Mubi	mā à t / mù wá a t / maade

2. "Corpse"

There are at least four roots in Chadic for the gloss "corpse": A *mwt, B bg-, C *bn and D kum. They are reconstructed roots, with an asterix, or possibly reconstructed roots, without any asterix. There are also some forms which still expect explanation: these are marked in the list below with a dash.

"Corpse" can be circumscribed and rendered by "dead (person)". Thus the various reflexes which are put together under root A, *mwt, are undoubtedly based on the root for "to die", *mwt; cf. e.g.

	"to die"	"corpse"
Boghom	mas	masáw
Masa	mít	mìtnà
Lele	mā	tūmādū

All the reflexes for which root B, **bg-**, has been reconstructed are only tentatively assumed to go back to one single root, therefore it is presented without an asterisk. We are possibly dealing here with forms related to that of the root ***bg** reconstructed for "body". Still unexplained remains the co-existence in Southern Mofu (Mafa group) of *vāw* "body" and *vāgāy* "corpse". As to Hausa (Hausa group) *gááwáá* and Ngizim (Bade-Ngizim group) *gūvū*, both tentatively considered for this root, a metathesis is assumed. The fact that neighbouring Benue-Congo languages have *-vāgā* (Menemo) and *u--:kwē* (Kambari) for "corpse" makes the Chadic reflexes of the B root appear to be Niger-Congo loans. On the other hand, the borrowing may have, in individual cases, also gone later in the reverse direction, cf. *i-gāawà* (Ura) which is probably of Hausa origin.

Roots C, ***bn**, and D, **kum** (including the similar forms marked with D in the list below), also have obvious cognates in Benue-Congo; cf. Kwanka **pun**, Birom **vin**, Legbo ***ε-bono**, etc. and Chori, Kenyi **kom**, Yashi **kum**, etc. Still the reflexes of root C ***bn** show regular sound correspondences.

The ungraded Yedina (Kotoko group) reflex **bin** seems not to be related with the C root, but would come from Kanuri *kawīn*.

The unmarked reflex in Diri (Northern Bauchi group) **aru** may be related to the root ***wr** for "fetish".

Western Branch	Roots	
Hausa group		
Hausa	B?	<i>gááwáá</i>
Gwandara	B	<i>gā</i>
Sura-Gerka group		
Sura	D	<i>kúm</i>
Kofyar	D	<i>kum</i>
Goemai	D	<i>k'um</i>
Ron group		
Daffo	C	<i>fun</i>
Bokkos	C	<i>fun</i>
Bole-Tangale group		
Karekare	B?	<i>gūbū</i>
Tangale	-	<i>dopok</i>
Kupto	-	<i>túbóŋ m., túttúshé f.</i>
Dera	A	<i>múɽ pl. mùjúŋ</i>
Galembi	C	<i>bēnā</i>

Northern Bauchi group

Warji	B	vīwái
Tsagu	C	vúnē
Kariya	B	vīyù
Miya	B	vīyàù
Pa'a	B	vīyá
Siri	B	vīīyī
Mburku	B	vīíhù
Jimbi	B	vīlùwá
Diri	-	aru

Southern Bauchi group

Boghom	A	masáw
Zaar	A	mor ki mis-kinì

Bade-Ngizim group

Ngizim	B	gùvù
--------	---	------

Central Branch

Tera group

Tera	A	mēdi
------	---	------

Gbwata group

Bacama	-	wée
--------	---	-----

Wandala group

Dghwed'e	-	kwàpàkà
----------	---	---------

Mafa group

Mofu-Gudur	B	vāgāy
Giziga	A/A	mamcaŋ / mumucaŋ
	B	vagay

Daba group

Daba	A	mēmīcī
Kola	A	mímtyí

Kad'a-Munjuk group

Munjuk	A	dif zí miri, dif zi pi
--------	---	------------------------

Kotoko group

Yedina	-	bin (cf. kàvîn, kàbín in Kanuri)
Kotoko	A	bèlò nàmàrè
	-	faadíse

Masa group

Masa	A	mìtnà
Zime	A/A	mát /māt

Eastern Branch

Kwang-Kera group

Kwang	A	bámātīī
Kera	-	títí

Lele group

Kabalay	-	kùmă muwé
Lele	A	tūmādū

Sibine group		
Sibine	A	mādē
Ndam	A	māát'
Sokoro group		
Sokoro	B	goi
Dangla-Migama group		
Dangla		māytīnē (Dajo-Arabic)
Migama	-/A	gímú kà máàtētà
Mokilko group		
Mokilko	-	púútē
Mubi-Toram group		
Jegu	A	moot
Birgit	A	gá mää́tí
Mubi		rímme (Arabic)

CONCLUSION

The comparison and the analyses of the two items "to die" and "corpse" are a sample of the Chadic language history: on the one hand, a notion which carries forms coming directly from the original Hamito-Semitic language cradle, on the other hand, a notion which has been considerably affected through the contacts in the new African home.

In addition there is a great diversity of forms for other notions connected with "death", such as "grave" or "funerals". They are rendered through various innovations like semantic analogy ("hole" for "grave"), derivation, compound words and loan words. This may indicate that the funeral rites have undergone more recent changes in the environment of Lake Chad Basin.

ORSTOM, LATAH, Bondy, France
University of Frankfurt-Am-Main, Allemagne

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An extended bibliography is not given in this paper: for additional information one may consult the sources mentioned below. Maps of Hamito-Semitic and Chadic languages may be found in Jungraithmayr (1981), Dieu & Renaud (1983).

BARRETEAU D. & D. JUNGRAITHMAYR, 1989. "Chadic lexical roots: Nombre de racines reconstruites pour chaque item", *Langues et cultures dans le bassin du lac Tchad* (Barreteau éd.), Paris, ORSTOM (Coll. Colloques et Séminaires) : 145-148.

DIEU M. & P. RENAUD (dir.), 1983. *Situation linguistique en Afrique Centrale, Inventaire préliminaire : Le Cameroun*, Paris-Yaoundé, ACCT-CERDOTOLA-DGRST (Atlas linguistique de l'Afrique Centrale : Atlas linguistique du Cameroun), 475 p., maps.

- JUNGRAITHMAYR H., 1981. "Inventaire des langues tchadiques", *Les langues dans le monde ancien et moderne* (J. Perrot dir.), vol.1: *Afrique subsaharienne. Pidgins et créoles*, Paris, CNRS : 408-413, 1 map.
- JUNGRAITHMAYR H., 1990. "«Tod» und «Sterben» im Tschadischen", *Proceedings of the fifth international Hamito-Semitic Congress* (Mukarovsky ed.), vol.1 : Hamito-Semitic, Berber, Chadic, Veröffentlichungen der Institute für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie der Universität Wien n°56 (Beiträge zur Afrikanistik 40) : 235-247.
- JUNGRAITHMAYR H. & D. IBRISZIMOW, 1994. *Chadic Lexical Roots*, Berlin, D. Reimer, 2 vol., XLIV + 193 p., XX + 347 p.
- JUNGRAITHMAYR H. & K. SHIMIZU, 1981. *Chadic Lexical Roots*, vol. 2 : Tentative reconstruction, grading and distribution, Berlin, D. Reimer (Marburger Studien zur Afrika- und Asienkunde A 26), 315 p.
- MURTONEN A., 1989. *Hebrew in its West Semitic Setting. A comparative survey on non-Masoretic Hebrew dialects and traditions*, Part 1: A comparative lexicon, Leiden, New-York, København, Köln, E.J. Brill, 516 p.
- NEWMAN P., 1977. "Chadic classification and reconstructions", *Afroasiatic Linguistics* 5(1), Malibu, Undena Publications : 1-42.
- VYCICHL W., 1983. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven, Peeters, XXVIII-520 p.