



**HAL**  
open science

**Review of "arawa lexicon: a wordlist of eight South  
Bauchi (West Chadic) languages: Boghom, Buli, Dott,  
Geji, Sayanci and Zul" by Ronald Cosper, Munich:  
LINCOM EUROPA, 1999**

Bernard Caron

► **To cite this version:**

Bernard Caron. Review of "arawa lexicon: a wordlist of eight South Bauchi (West Chadic) languages: Boghom, Buli, Dott, Geji, Sayanci and Zul" by Ronald Cosper, Munich: LINCOM EUROPA, 1999. Chadic Newsletter, 2002, 23, pp.46-80. halshs-00644636

**HAL Id: halshs-00644636**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00644636>**

Submitted on 28 Nov 2011

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

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

*Bernard CARON*

Review of *Barawa Lexicon: a wordlist of eight South Bauchi (West Chadic) languages: Boghom, Buli, Dott, Geji, Sayanci and Zul'* by Ronald Cosper, Munich: LINCUM EUROPA, 1999

The publication of new data on little documented Chadic languages is rare enough an event for any linguist to be enthusiastic when they hear the news. So was I when Ronald Cosper's *Barawa Lexicon* was announced and published by Lincom Europa. Before this, the main reference on the topic was (Shimizu, 1978).

Shimizu's work, written after a survey carried out in 1974 and 1975, comprises wordlists covering 108 items on 32 languages, map, subclassification, cognate percentages, and sound correspondences. 'Barawa' is a term chosen by Shimizu to name the speakers of these 32 languages, which he considers to be a dialect continuum. He adds that « the use of the term 'Barawa' to denote this group was confirmed both in the Dass district generally and by the Chief of Boot » (*op.cit.*, p. 7). In the various trips I did to the Dass area, Boot, Sigidi and during my fieldwork in the Sayanci area over the past decade, the term Barawa was accepted by all speakers except those of Sigidi and Zaar who don't know the word.

Cosper's *Barawa Lexicon* covers 915 lexical items for 8 languages : Jimi, Zul, Geji, Polci, Dott, Sayanci, Buli and Boghom. In the introduction, he gives the chart of phonemes for the eight languages. The main interest of this work lies then in the increase in the number of lexical items documented. Unfortunately, from what I can judge, the quality of the data is far from satisfactory. I will give a few examples where I will compare Cosper's data with the one I collected on two of these languages : Zaar (Cosper's Sayanci) on which I have been working regularly since 1991, and Zodi (Cosper's Dott) on which I did 2 weeks' fieldwork in 1999.

## Zaar

Cosper marks two tones for Zaar, although he says « Some of these languages, e.g., Sayanci, may in fact have three phonetic levels of tone, but as Schneeberg points out, they are phonologically analyzable as two-level systems. » Sayanci does have a three-level phonetic tone system. The phonological two-level system can only be the result of a phonological analysis involving a very elaborate system of rules (cf. Schneeberg 74). Failing that, we are left, in the case of Cosper's work, with a two-level phonetic transcription, which in the case of Saya, is simply wrong.<sup>1</sup>

We will just mention a few cases of plain mistakes in marking the tones :

number	gloss	Cosper	Own data
2	woman, female	<b>gât</b>	<b>gət</b>
124	compound	<b>dên</b>	<b>dèn</b>
146	grindstone	<b>vúun</b>	<b>vuun</b>
148	hut	<b>vîin</b>	<b>vìn</b>
448	war	<b>máàndə</b>	<b>maandə</b>
664	fight	<b>máàndó</b>	<b>maandə</b>
294	insect	<b>zhíbar</b>	<b>???</b>

<sup>1</sup> When quoting my own data, I will use a three-level (phonetic) transcription (H= acute ; L = grave ; M = unmarked ; long vowels will be marked with double letter, each one bearing a tone).

304 worm **zhibər** **zibər**

Some cases of strange translations or notations :

number	gloss	Cosper	Own data
5	girl	<b>ɲaayət</b> ( <i>sic</i> !)	<b>ɲaa-gət</b>
7	daughter	<b>nyíi, ɲáagət</b>	<b>ɲíi</b>
688	walk, wander	<b>nyalán</b>	<b>ɲgelán [ɲgyelán]</b>
453	conversation	<b>ɲgáaghənlaa</b>	<b>???</b> <sup>2</sup>
508	short	<b>afúbm</b>	<b>àà fúpm hǵ</b> <sup>3</sup>

Items 477, 495, 595 and 596 concern the ‘indefinite’ [cf. Hausa *wani* (sing.) /*wasu* (pl.)]. As a determiner, it is postposed to the noun and appears as **wón / gón [gwón]**. As a pronoun, it has two forms : **gón** (sing.) **gyaa gón** (pl.) resp. **[gwón]** and **[gyaa gwón]**.

number	gloss	Cosper	Own data
477	most	<b>gyaagwón</b>	<b>???</b>
495	some (wasu)	<b>gyaagwón</b>	<b>gyaa gón</b>
595	one (wani)	<b>gwán</b>	<b>gón</b>
596	some (wasu)	<b>gyaagwán</b>	<b>gyaa gón</b>

A cursory look at the items concerning demonstratives is sufficient to wonder whether the author has taken the care of reading his manuscript before sending it to the printer. The same translation (*gíi*) is given for (601) *this* and (602) *that*, which should be resp. *gín/giní* and *gíi*, whereas (597) *this* is given as *gíin* and (598) *that* as *gii* !

Generally, what strikes the reader when having a cursory look at Cosper’s lexicon is the absence of a minimum analysis of the data, which leads the author to mistaking syntagms for lexical items, or being inconsistent in his use of verbs or verbal nouns in the translations.

Let’s take the following items :

number	gloss	Cosper	Own data
734	fart	<b>tuurgunyoghən</b>	<b>túúryə̀n ɲôyɲ</b> <sup>4</sup>
748	smell <sup>5</sup>	<b>ɖuughə̀nzhóghɲ</b>	<b>wúmgə̀n zòyɲ</b> <sup>6</sup>
75	mouth	<b>vii</b>	<b>vii</b>
704	shout	<b>dláarvi</b>	<b>ɖááryə̀n vii</b> <sup>7</sup>
706	speak	<b>wúlvii</b>	<b>wúlyə̀n vii</b> <sup>8</sup>

Likewise, (30), *saghátkən* (*sayátkən*) is the verbal noun of *sayát* *to be intelligent* ; *intelligent person* should be **mur yé sayátkən**

The mistakes are too numerous for me to go on listing them. To conclude this passage concerning Zaar, I will just give the list of independant pronouns :

number	gloss	Cosper	Own data
608	I	<b>myán</b>	<b>myááni / myáàn</b>

<sup>2</sup> I have no translation for the word *conversation*. **ɲgááyə̀n laa** means *to rest*, lit. *to take work* (?!?!).

<sup>3</sup> Lit. : *it is not far/long/tall* (**àà** = 3s. Perf.); the negation (**hǵ**) is missing in Cosper’s translation. The adjectives **ndóngat** or **ndúm□i** are a good translation. So is the verb **ɖat**, to be short. The adjective **ndúuri** is used to qualify something that has been shortened.

<sup>4</sup> Lit : to cook shit ; **[ɲôghɲ]** is in fact /ɲôkn/.

<sup>5</sup> From the Hausa *sansana*, one guesses the English verb is supposed to be transitive.

<sup>6</sup> Lit : *hear/feel a smell*. **ɖúghə̀n** is the noun verb of the verb **ɖu**, to beat. The expression **ɖu zhòghɲ** may mean « to have a strong smell »

<sup>7</sup> lit. : *cut mouth* ; NB : **riiɲ** = a shout. **ɖiyá** (3s. Continuous) **riiɲ** = *he is shouting*

<sup>8</sup> lit. : *say mouth*.

609	thou	<b>kyan</b>	<b>kyááni / kyààn</b>
610	he, she, it	<b>yân</b>	<b>yááni / yààn</b>
611	we	<b>myâni</b>	<b>myààní / myàán</b>
612	you	<b>kyáâni</b>	<b>kyààní / kyàán</b>
613	they	<b>yaashi</b>	<b>yààshí</b>

## Zodî

The same problems appear in the work on zodî. The general impression is that of a sloppy work due to lack of analysis.

If one looks at the list of verbs given by Cospér, it is obvious that some suffixes have not been properly identified.

The suffix **-ti** is used in zodî to form verbal nouns. On the forms given by Cospér, the suffix appears haphazardly :

number	gloss	Cospér	Own data <sup>9</sup>
715	peep at	<b>yéli</b>	<b>yeli, yeliti</b>
716	see	<b>yeli</b>	<b>yeli, yeliti</b>
717	watch	<b>yeliti</b>	<b>yeli, yeliti</b>
762	blow (of wind)	<b>bakti</b>	<b>fwat; fwatti</b>
763	burn (of fire)	<b>bak</b>	<b>bàk; bàktî</b>
730	desire	<b>ndakti</b>	<b>ndákè; ndákèti</b>
739	hear, feel	<b>wom</b>	<b>wóm, womti</b>

Likewise, a **-tiya** suffix (secondary verbal noun ?) appears in his data, which has not been properly analysed :

number	gloss	Cospér	Own data
675	return	<b>doŋtíya</b>	<b>dòŋ, dòŋtî</b>
774	break (in pieces)	<b>tlaartíya</b>	<b>ɬar, ɬarti</b>
885	be suitable ( ?)	<b>taatita, taatíya</b>	<b>taa, taati<sup>10</sup></b>

The perfect/accomplished in zodî is formed with **-ak** suffixed to the verb :

number	gloss	Cospér	Own data
788	fill	<b>zuwak</b>	<b>dzù, dzùtî</b>
724	be tired	<b>kəmmak</b>	<b>kém, kəmti</b>
691	agree to	<b>kappák</b>	<b>kap, kapti</b>

As a conclusion, I can only say that this work is seriously questionable, and should never have been accepted for a publication. It is not a reliable source, and I would not advise anyone to use it for comparative work.

As matters stand, (Shimizu, 1978) and (Kraft, 1981) remain the only reliable sources.

<sup>9</sup> My own data comes directly from my field notes, and needs to be further analysed, specially concerning tone : I have heard and marked three tones, which may eventually be reduced to two. For each verb, I give the lexical form, followed by the verbal noun.

<sup>10</sup> For this verb, I have been given the meaning *to look like, to resemble*.

## References

Kraft, Charles H. *Chadic Wordlists*. Berlin : Dietrich Reimer, 1981. Coll. Marburger Studien zur Afrika und Asienkunde ; n° 23-25.

Schneeberg, Nan. *Sayanci Phonology*. Ph.D. : Indiana University. 1974.

Shimizu, Kiyoshi. The Southern Bauchi Group of Chadic Languages. A survey report. *Africana Marburgensia*, 1978, Special Issue 2, p. 50.