




## AFRIKA UND ÜBERSEE

Trilingual Journal of African Languages and Cultures  
Revue trilingue des langues et cultures africaines  
Dreisprachige Zeitschrift für afrikanische Sprachen und Kulturen

Volume 93

### The East Kainji languages of Central Nigeria

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DOI: 10.15460/auue.2021.93.1.210

Peer-reviewed article  
Submitted: 22.10.2004  
Accepted: 2.11.2007  
Published: 31.12.2020

Recommended citation:  
Blench, Roger. 2020. The East Kainji languages of Central  
Nigeria. *Afrika und Übersee* 93. 45–67.

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Published by Hamburg University Press

# The East Kainji languages of Central Nigeria

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## **Abstract:**

The paper is an overview of current scholarship on the East Kainji language group of Central Nigeria. It reviews the existing published and manuscript sources and describes recent research, as well as the development of orthographies for some languages. Many East Kainji languages are severely threatened and some have gone extinct within the period under review. The paper presents an internal classification of the group and briefly discusses the external relationships of these languages. On the basis of existing data, a review of the basic phonology and noun class prefix systems is given.

**Keywords:** East Kainji languages, classification, status, Nigeria

## **1 Introduction: the identification of an East Kainji group**

The East Kainji languages are a poorly studied group of some 38 languages spoken north and west of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria. This paper<sup>1</sup> presents an overview of the group as a whole, including the status of the languages included in East Kainji, their endangerment and likely classification. Some interest has recently been shown in writing these languages and these are discussed. Although descriptive work remains extremely weak, it presents some examples of the phonology and the system of noun classes.

The first record of East Kainji is in Gowers (1907), a set of unpublished but widely circulated wordlists which includes the languages

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1 The paper was first presented at the Hamburg meeting to mark the retirement of Professor Ludwig Gerhardt, March 2004, but has subsequently undergone major revision. I would like to thank the reviewers for *Afrika und Übersee* for their attention to detail.

‘Rebinawa’ (= Ribina, correct name Ibunu<sup>2</sup>), ‘Naraguta’ (= Anaguta correct name Iguta), ‘Buji’ and ‘Guram’ (correct name εBoze), ‘Jere’ (correct name iZeLe), ‘Butawa’ (correct name Gamo-Ningi), ‘Gyem’ and ‘Taurawa’ (correct name Takaya). A more extensive listing of language names is in Meek (1925, II: 137), where the classification (contributed by N.W. Thomas) lists them under ‘Nigerian Semi-Bantu’ along with Plateau and Jukunoid. Meek (1931, II: 129-218) collected wordlists of Bishi, Tsam (formerly Chawai), Kurama, Janji, Gbiri and Niragu which have remained the basis for many later analyses. Westermann and Bryan (1952: 106-108) list some of these languages (Tsam, Kurama, Janji, Bishi, Jere) as ‘isolated language groups’ but classify them together with other ‘class languages’, although noting that Tsam (i.e. Chawai) has ‘no noun classes’<sup>3</sup>. The group was originally designated as Plateau 1b by Greenberg (1955), where Plateau 1a was the geographically separate West Kainji, which includes such languages as cLela and Kambari. Williamson (1971) followed Greenberg’s terminology while adding the languages that were then being included in the Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist (BCCW). Table 1 shows a complete list of East Kainji languages with modern names and a listing of sources.

Rowlands (1962) seems to have rediscovered the link between the two branches of Kainji without reference to Greenberg, and argued that East Kainji should be treated as distinct from Plateau. The idea that Kainji languages were co-ordinate with Plateau rather than simply to be included within it seems to have surfaced in the Benue-Congo Working Group, an informal group established at the University of Ibadan in the late 1960s, which included Kay Williamson and Larry Hyman as members. The renaming of Plateau 1 as Kainji took place following the creation of Lake Kainji in 1974, but Hoffmann (in Hansford et al. 1976) still called this group ‘Western Plateau’ in the *Index of Nigerian Languages*. The term ‘Kainji’ seems to have only been formally recognised in print by Gerhardt (1989) and Williamson (1989). Shimizu (1982b), the most complete listing of these languages in print, refers to them as Western Plateau b. and his

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2 Modern names are used in the body of the paper, but without the noun class prefixes. Thus the Chawai people, correctly called Atsam, are referred to as Tsam.

3 This is completely false as more recent data shows.

classification is reproduced in Gerhardt (1989) and Crozier & Blench (1992).

Published evidence for the unity of East Kainji as a group and for its subclassification is non-existent, as is any coherent account of its relation to West Kainji. Scattered wordlists, some very short, are found in Gowers (1907), Rowlands (1962), the BCCW (Williamson & Shimizu 1968; Williamson 1972) and in the publications of Shimizu (1979, 1982a). Many languages, especially of the Western branch appear to have no material available at all. Shimizu (1968) is the earliest study of a grammatical topic, the noun classes of iBunu. Di Luzio (1972) is the only published grammar sketch of an East Kainji language, tiMap (= Amo), while Anderson (1980) presented a more complete account of the noun classes of the same language. Otherwise there are only the morphological notes prefacing the fifteen Shimizu wordlists.

Since the field trips conducted by Shimizu in the 1970s, virtually no new materials have been published on East Kainji languages. Some ethnographic material has been collected (Gunn 1956; Nengel 1999; CAPRO 2004) but this throws little light on linguistic relations. As a consequence, from 2003 onwards, a survey of East Kainji communities has been undertaken, especially in the Jos area, focusing on languages reported by Shimizu as severely threatened.<sup>4</sup> So far data has been collected on the Bin (= Binawa), Bishi (= Piti), Boze (= Buji), Loro, Nu (= Kinuku), Panawa, Sheni, Tunzu, Vori (= Srubu), Ziriya and Zora (= Cokobo) languages and the survey project will try and visit the remainder in the coming years. In Table 1, the data from the surveys that has been transcribed and made available to other researchers is found under Blench (2016).

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4 I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of the late Professor John Nengel, University of Jos, who studied some East Kainji communities in the 1980s (Nengel 1999) and accompanied me on most of the field trips. Luther Hon, head of survey within SIL, Jos, also worked with me on the 2016 surveys, and has also made available field recordings from survey visits where I was not present. Thanks to Rachelle Wenger for information on Gbiri, and Sunday Sarki and Saleh Libisan for collaboration with the Boze community.

## 2 The status of East Kainji languages today

### 2.1 Numbers and location

No reliable or even unreliable figures are available for the number of speakers of East Kainji languages today, but most groups are very small. It is unlikely that there are more than 100,000 speakers of all East Kainji languages. Table 1 presents an overview of the East Kainji languages, with a summary of what information is available. It is arranged according to known subgroups; how these fit together is still uncertain but Figure 5 presents a tentative tree of East Kainji showing where these subgroups might fit. Red shading represents a field visit or discussions with a community group while written sources are in the reference list. ? signifies no information.

Table 1. Status of East Kainji languages

Subgroup	Language	Status	Source
Tsamic	Bishi	Vigorous	Ajaegbu et al. (2013)
	Ngmbam	Vigorous	Ajaegbu et al. (2013)
	Tsam	Vigorous	Ajaegbu et al. (2013)
Amic	Map	Vigorous	Blench (2016)
Western	Gbiri	Vigorous	Wenger (2016)
	Niragu	Vigorous	Wenger (2016)
	Vori	Vigorous	Blench (2016)
	Kurama	Vigorous	Harley (2016)
	Mala	?	
	Ruma	?	
	Bin	Vigorous	Blench (2016)
	Kono	?	
	Kaivi	?	
	Vono	?	
Tumi	?		
	Nu	Vigorous	Blench (2016)

	Dungu	?	
	Shuwa-Zamani	?	
Northern	Kudu	Probably extinct	Shimizu (1982)
	Camo	Probably extinct	
	Gamo	Probably extinct	Gowers (1907), Shimizu (1982)
North-Eastern	Ningi	Probably extinct	
	Gyem	Vigorous	Gowers (1907), Danladi et al. (2015)
	Shau (†)	Extinct	Shimizu (1982), Danladi et al. (2015)
	Si	Probably extinct	Shimizu (1982)
	Gana	Possibly spoken	Shimizu (1982)
Central	Takaya	Probably extinct	Gowers (1907), Shimizu (1982)
	Ziriya (†)	Extinct	Shimizu (1982), Blench (2004)
	Seni	Moribund	Shimizu (1982), Blench (2004)
	Janji	?	
	Zora	Moribund	Danladi et al. (2015), Blench (2016)
	Lemoro	Vigorous	Blench (2016)
	Sanga	Vigorous	
	Boze	Vigorous	Gowers (1907), Blench (2016)
	Gusu	?	
	Jere	Vigorous	Gowers (1907)
Bunu	Vigorous	Gowers (1907), Shimizu (1968)	
Guta	Vigorous	Gowers (1907), Shimizu (1979)	
	Tunzu	Vigorous	Blench (2004)

Population figures are a hostage to fortune, since none have been collected in decades. Blench & Nengel, in an informal survey of Boze villages, concluded that there were likely to be 8-10,000 speakers. Zora, which was still commonly spoken in 1969, when Shimizu visited, was down to 19 speakers in 2016. None of these populations are large and all can be regarded as ‘threatened’ due to their size. However, within that framework, where the community has been visited and there is evidence for transmission to children, these are marked ‘vigorous’ in Table 1.

Figure 1 shows the approximate locations of the East Kainji. As the populations are extremely small, the size of the captions may unintentionally exaggerate their size.



Figure 1. The East Kainji languages

## 2.2 Language endangerment

Almost all East Kainji languages are threatened, except perhaps Map (Amo) and Tsam (= Chawai), and many reported to exist may well now be extinct in 2021. The main sources of endangerment are a combination of the spread of Hausa and the small size of communities. East Kainji languages abut the Hausa-speaking area to the north and their speakers tend to be fluent in Hausa, which is responsible

for the declining competence of younger speakers. Although there is now some energy to protect larger languages like Boze, Jere and Map, isolated lects encapsulated among the Hausa, such as Kuda-Camo, are probably by now gone.

As an example of the type of loss since the period when Shimizu surveyed the region, the Ziriya language is completely dead. Ziriya is first referred to in Shimizu (1982: 108 ff.) where a brief wordlist is given. A field visit was made to Ziriya on 30th December 2003 and the Sarki, Abubakar Yakubu, was interviewed, probably the last person with any recall of the language (on the left in Figure 2). Ziriya village is situated at N10° 22.6, E 8° 50. It was originally divided into a number of wards as follows: Salingo, Kajakana, Wurno, Ungwar Marika, Funka and Farin Dutse. The language has definitively disappeared, and even Sarkin Yakubu only spoke it as a child, some sixty years ago, i.e. in the 1940s. He could recall some greetings and some numbers, all of which corresponded to Seni, suggesting that Ziriya was either the same or a very similar language. Ziriya was also originally spoken in a third village, Kere, somewhat further north, but it was dropped even longer ago.

Another language, Seni, had just six speakers when the community was interviewed in 2003. More recently, Zora (Cokobo), which was flourishing when Shimizu surveyed in 1969 had just 19 speakers in 2016. The two figures in the centre of Figure 3 are Mr. Adamu Jubril, 65, and Sarki Umaru Adamu, 71,



Figure 2. The last person to remember the Ziriya language. Source: author.



Figure 3. Remaining speakers of Zora. Source: author.



who were the main informants for language data.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since the speakers were dispersed and did not converse regularly, much of the morphology, such as the nominal prefix system, has disappeared.

It is unlikely these trends will be easily reversed, but with larger speech communities such as the Boze, where there is an articulate older generation with an interest in language development, revitalisation programmes are a more realistic proposition.

A Boze reader was launched in 2018 (Figure 4) and further preparations are being made,

including a dictionary for Android phones. Literacy projects associated with Bible translation have begun in several East Kainji languages, including Map and Kurama. However, although these are also driven by community enthusiasm, the technical backup required to construct effective orthographies is so far lacking. East Kainji languages have no profile in media such as radio and television.



Figure 4. Launch of Boze reader, 2018. Source: author.

### 2.3 Classification of East Kainji

As emphasised above, it has not been formally demonstrated that East Kainji constitutes a coherent group. Nonetheless, the vocabulary exhibits a high degree of lexical similarity. Table 1 presents the languages and subgroups of East Kainji as far as can be gauged from existing data. Figure 5 represents this as a tentative tree of the East Kainji languages. It will no doubt be subject to modification as more material becomes available.

Compared with West Kainji, which has undergone a wide variety of morphological changes that makes its individual branches look very diverse, the East Kainji languages for which data exist are comparatively similar. Impressionistically, Tsam (Chawai) and Bishi are somewhat different from the others, but the remainder form a contin-

<sup>5</sup> The two other men shown were not speakers, but it was felt appropriate they be in the photograph.

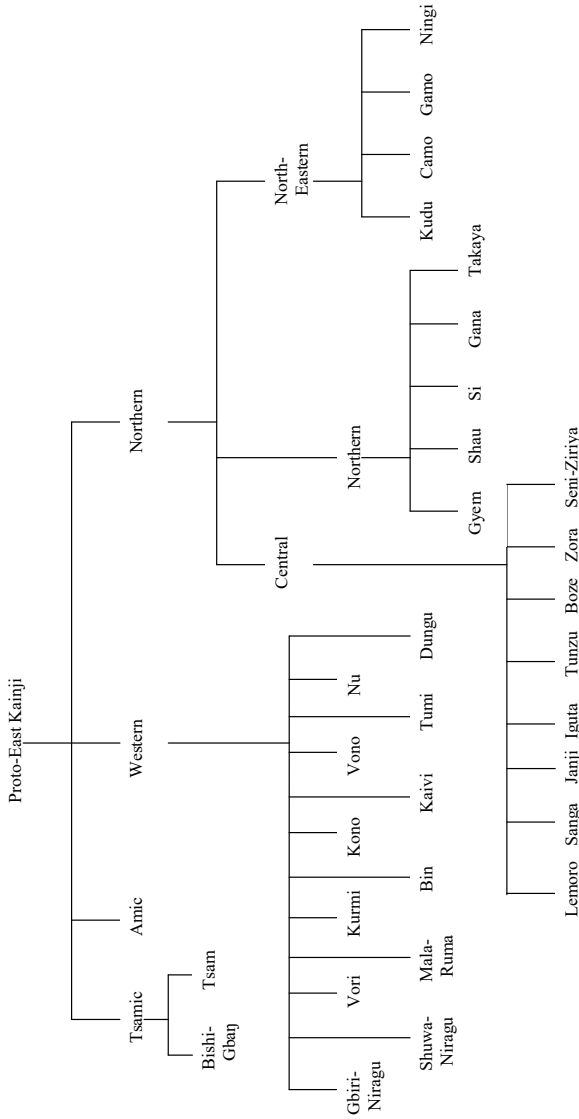


Figure 5. Tentative ‘tree’ of East Kainji languages

uous chain, although the Kuda-Camo languages were transformed under the influence of the surrounding Chadic languages.

### 3 Linguistic features of East Kainji

#### 3.1 Phonology

All East Kainji languages so far studied have a relatively simple phonology and broadly resemble one another. The system of εBoze is given as an example of a system studied in some detail.

##### Consonants

Boze consonants are shown in Table 2.

[ʃ] and [ʒ] are probably not independent phonemes but allophones or free variants of /s/ and /z/ before front vowels. The labial-velar /gb/ seems to alternate freely with /gw/ in many speakers; this occasionally surfaces with non-contrastive labialisation as [gbw]. However, voiceless counterpart /kp/ is not heard and is apparently always realised as /kw/. Boze has no palatalised consonants, except for /ɲ/ which is a separate phoneme. However, non-phonemic palatalisation can be heard before front vowels, /i/, /e/ and /ɛ/. Similarly, there are no labialised consonants except for /kw/, but non-phonemic labialisation can be heard before back vowels, /u/, /o/ and /ɔ/. The reconstructed North Jos consonant system in Shimizu (1982b: 172) does not include labial-velars but records more palatalised consonants than in Boze, as well as a phonemic glottal stop.

Nasal prefixes in Boze are quite rare and are shifting to *i-* prefixes in some speakers; however, they do occur and are tone-bearing. These prefixed nasals, N-, are mostly homorganic with the following consonant. Boze words usually end in a vowel, but can end in approximants (*w* or *y*) or a nasal, always realised as *ŋ*.

Table 2. Boze consonant inventory

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			k g	[k <sup>w</sup> ] gb	
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ		
Trill			r					
Fricative		f v	s z	[ʃ ʒ]				h
Affricate					tʃ ɟʃ			
Approximant					j		w	
Lateral								
Approximant			l					

Boze has medial doubled consonants as a consequence of compounding. Compounds in which the first element originally ended with a nasal, followed by a consonant of similar type (*-n*, *-l*, and *-r*), result in geminated laterals, via nasal assimilation.<sup>6</sup> Hence:

‘wing’	<i>ùgàllùn</i>
‘ground squirrel’	<i>bigèllē</i>
‘sleep’	<i>ìrrō</i>

The first consonant of the two bears a tone, which is presumably the tone of the deleted prefix in the second element of the compound. The tone on the assimilated laterals can only be detected when the informant whistles the word; in ‘wing’ where the whole word is low tone, it is not apparent in elicitation. The etymology of ‘wing’ and ‘squirrel’ are unclear but in the case of ‘sleep’, this is an abstract noun derived from the verbal noun *ñrō* ‘sleeping’ with a new prefix added.

### Vowels

There are eight phonemic vowels in εBoze and all occur in long and short form; there are no nasalised vowels (Table 3).

Table 3. Boze vowel inventory

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i, i:		u, u:
Close-Mid	e, e:	ə, ə:	o, o:
Open-Mid	ɛ, ɛ:		ɔ, ɔ:
Open		a, a:	

εBoze has no true diphthongs, that is, sequences of dissimilar vowels. Vy and Vw sequences occur and are usually written Vi and Vu by speakers familiar with Hausa orthography. However, the vowel usually bears a single tone. Sequences of long vowel plus semi-vowel are extremely rare. In Table 4, some lexemes with Vy and Vw sequences are presented.

<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, when speakers attempt to write a word such as *ùgàllùn* ‘wing’, they often produce *uganlung*.

Table 4. Vy and Vw sequences in εBoze

	εBoze	gloss
ay	<i>bìgày</i>	‘mushroom’
	<i>rìwày</i>	‘year’
oy	<i>cǒy</i>	‘to drop’ PL
	<i>sòòy</i>	‘to put on (clothes)’ PL
aw	<i>ísáw</i>	‘grave’
	<i>udàkárjkâw</i>	‘tree (sp.)’
ew	<i>ùgēw</i>	‘hole in ground’
əw	<i>ùdântāw</i>	‘tree (sp.)’

### Vowel harmony

Boze exhibits residual ATR-vowel-harmony in the stem, marked only by the opposition between open and close mid-vowels. There are two sets as shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Boze vowel harmony sets

Sets	I			II		
	Front	Central	Back	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u	i		u
Close-Mid				e	ə	o
Open-Mid	ɛ		ɔ			
Open		a			a	

The low central vowel can harmonise with either set, but the central vowel /ə/ cannot co-occur with /a/ and is only found with harmony set II. Prefixes do not underlyingly harmonise with the stem, but some speakers show a tendency to regularise the system. So, with the same stem, one speaker may use a *ri-* or *ti-* prefix, while another member of the same community will use *rɛ-* or *tɛ-*.

### Tones

Boze has four level tones as well as rising and falling tones.<sup>7</sup> The fourth tone, a superhigh, arises from a tone rule which requires all

7 The mid-tone is unmarked in practical transcriptions.

tones in singular nouns to be raised one level in the plural. Normally, the superhigh tone therefore appears only in plurals (Table 6).

Table 6. Genesis of superhigh tones in *ε*Boze

Gloss	SG	PL
guest/stranger	ógèn	ǎgēn
doctor	óbèrè	ǎbērē
grave	ísáw	ńsáw

At least one word has been identified with four tone levels – *bìshēshéně*, ‘tree sp.’ – which may have arisen from compounding.

A variety of glide tones occur in Boze, e.g. *cǒy* ‘to drop’, *ípôŋ* ‘baboons’. Glides can occur between almost any two adjacent tone-heights. Some of the glide tones arise from long vowels and VV sequences in compounds, but others occur on single vowels. In addition, when tones are raised in plural formation, the glides are raised in analogous fashion. Thus, a glide tone in a plural is usually one level higher than in the singular.

Boze and the related languages in its subgroup of East Kainji are exceptional in respect of their tonal system, which effectively constitutes double-marking of number. Tone-raising rules of this type are common in Plateau (see Blench 2000 for an example from Izere) and this may therefore be an effect of contact. Other East Kainji languages have much reduced systems. For example, tiMap (= Amo), appears to have two tones plus a rising tone in the account of Anderson (1980). Shimizu (1979, 1982a) usually transcribes the tonal systems in his lists as High and Low or High, Low and Downstep and he reconstructs the latter for his ‘Proto-North-Jos’.

### 3.2 Nominal morphology

The nominal morphology of East Kainji languages exhibits regular affix alternations marking number, transparent concord and usually CV(CV) syllable structures in the root. Anderson’s (1980) description of tiMap is the only comprehensive analysis of such a system. Shimizu (1968, 1979, 1982a) includes summaries of noun-class pairings he deduces from his individual wordlists, but these are far from complete, and in many languages the plurals were not recorded. Shimizu (1982b: 178) also reconstructed a ‘Proto-North-Jos’ noun-affix system and proposed reconstructions based on common lexemes.

The prefix system of Boze described below gives an example of an East Kainji noun-class system. An intriguing feature of Boze and its immediate relatives is the wide variety of allomorphs that individual stems can support (Table 7).

Table 7. Singular prefixes of εBoze nouns

Prefix	Allomorphs	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss
∅-		kwāy	suffering	ńọḡḡnḡ	grand-father
A-	a-, ə-	àtíyé	day	ə̀d̀ə̀sh̀èrì	sky
bV-	bi-, bu-	bìkà̀nà̀	thorn	bùrà̀	rain
ε-		ēēyō	length		
i-		íwì	fear		
ka-		kārūnā	path		
m-	ma-, mə-	màgà̀gara	branch	mā̀d̀ə̀r̀ə̀s̀ēw	eczema
n-		̀̀ǹt̀	ashes		
OnO-	ono-, ɔnɔ-, unu-	̀̀ǹū̀ bārō	hunter	̀̀ǹṑ r̀ṑm̀ḕ	man
O-	o-, ɔ-	̀̀d̀m̄	grass	̀̀v̀k̀l̀l̀	bark of tree
rV-	ri-, re-, rɛ-	rìjì	root	rèkoze	rainy season
				rènó	relations
tE-	te-, tɛ-	tèēnē	charcoal	tér̀d̀ṑm̀ḕ	courage
u-		̀̀t̀t̀í̀	tree		

The permissible vowels in the allomorphs of the prefixes do not seem entirely consistent and it may be that lengthier vocabulary lists will produce more complete sets. *ka-* does not appear in an affix pairing and it might be that words with this initial syllable have a zero prefix. However, the word *ù-rùnà* ‘road’, PL *tì-runa*, has a diminutive, *kā-rūnā* ‘path’, which shows that *ka-* can be applied to a variety of nominal stems. This prefix may well be cognate with the *ko-* diminutive found in some Plateau languages, such as Berom. The word *tū-kā* ‘medicine’ may well also incorporate a *tu-* allophone of the *tV-* prefix set, since



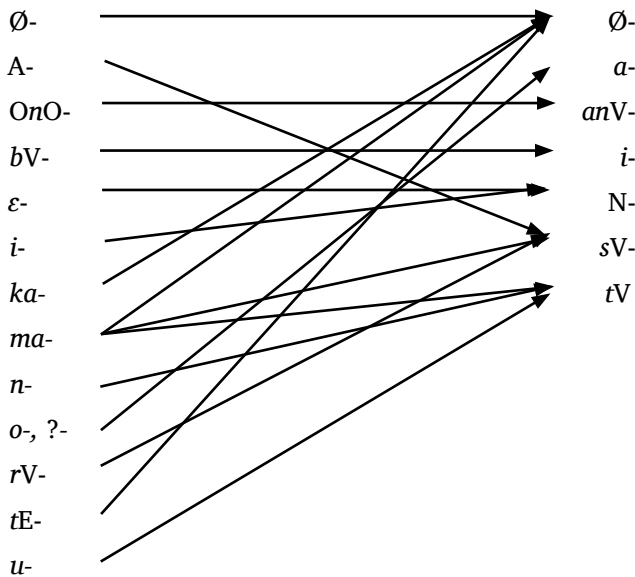
*kal* is a widespread root for ‘medicine’ in the Plateau area. In Table 8, the plural prefixes of εBoze nouns are shown.

Table 8. Plural prefixes of εBoze nouns

Prefix	Allomorphs	εBoze	Gloss	εBoze	Gloss
<i>a-</i>		<i>ázūwā</i>	stones		
<i>anV-</i>	<i>ana-</i> , <i>ano-</i>	<i>āná rǒómē</i>	men	<i>ānó társé</i>	younger brother
<i>ε-</i>		<i>ērǒ</i>	elephants		
<i>i-</i>		<i>íkáná</i>	thorns		
<i>N-</i>	<i>n-</i> , <i>ŋ-</i>	<i>ńsáw</i>	graves	<i>ńkézé</i>	corpses
<i>sV-</i>	<i>si-</i> , <i>sE-</i>	<i>sǐjǐ</i>	roots	<i>sékózé</i>	rainy seasons
<i>tV-</i>	<i>tε-</i> , <i>tí-</i> , <i>tu-</i>	<i>títǒǒ</i>	swamps	<i>tēshǒǒrǒ</i>	uncircumcised people

Table 9 shows noun-class pairings in εBoze represented as a conventional affix net:

Table 9. Noun-class pairings in εBoze



Data are too preliminary to attempt complete semantic assignments as yet, but the associations shown in Table 10 are evident:<sup>8</sup>

Table 10. Boze nominal affixes: semantic assignments

Singular	Plural	Semantics
<i>VnV-</i>	<i>anV-</i>	persons
<i>bi-</i>	<i>i-</i>	most animals, some plants
<i>u-</i>	<i>tV-</i>	remaining animals, most plants

At least one language, tiSeni, has a radically different system of marking plurals. Instead of, or in addition to, affix alternation, tiSeni reduplicates the first syllable of the stem. Thus, the prefix is sometimes retained and can combine with root reduplication. This phenomenon is not recorded in neighbouring languages and Shimizu (1982a: 104) did not note it. Table 11 gives some examples of tiSeni nominal pluralisation strategies.

Table 11. TiSeni nominal plurals

Gloss	Sg	Pl
seed	<i>ùgbérù</i>	<i>ùgbégbérù</i>
forest	<i>ùshírím</i>	<i>ùshíríshím</i>
neck	<i>iyâw</i>	<i>iyâwyâw</i>
ear	<i>ùtùway</i>	<i>tutuway</i>

This suggests influence from non-Hausa Chadic languages; although there are no such languages in the area today. Hasha, a rather remote Plateau language, has undergone a similar development under the influence of the Chadic language Sha. Despite this, tiSeni has lexically much in common with other North Jos languages.

Anderson (1980: 174) gives the singular/plural pairings of tiMap as follows (Table 12):

<sup>8</sup> Data are drawn from the preliminary dictionary of εBoze, which has been circulated in the community (Blench et al. 2021).

Table 12. Noun-class prefix pairings in tiMap

Singular	Plural		
<i>u-</i>	1	2	<i>a-</i>
<i>ku-</i>	3	4	<i>te-</i>
<i>le-</i>	5	6	N-
N-	6		
<i>ki-</i>	7	8	<i>ni-</i>
<i>fe-</i>	9	10	<i>i-</i>
<i>ka-</i>	11	12	<i>ma-</i>

The numbers are those given by Anderson and are not intended to correspond to traditional Bantu noun-classes. Although there are clear resemblances to εBoze, the widespread allomorphy of εBoze is not represented here and the system seems much more regular.

#### 4 The position of East Kainji within Kainji

The opposition between East and West Kainji is enshrined in the literature as a primary split of the Kainji language group. Yet no arguments in print support this division. The geographical separation of East Kainji by Greenberg (1955) and Rowlands (1962) seems to have been the main motivation for the classification rather than any linguistic evidence. Survey work among the West Kainji languages increasingly points to this division being spurious. Within West Kainji, there are very deep divisions, and despite the numerous languages of East Kainji, they almost certainly constitute a single branch of the larger Kainji unit. Morphologically, East Kainji most closely resembles the West Kainji language Basa, with its conservation of classic (C)V-CVCV structures, although detailed proof of such a relationship is lacking. Almost certainly, the West Kainji ‘Lake’ subgroup (consisting of Reshe, Shen (=Laru) and the two Reraŋ (=Lopa) languages) represent a primary split, while East Kainji is among the descendant groups of the remainder. In the light of this, Figure 6 presents a revised overview of the structure of the Kainji languages proposed in Blench (2018), where East Kainji is treated as co-ordinate with Basa. Further work is clearly needed to refine this hypothesis.

### 5 Conclusions

This overview makes it evident that the East Kainji languages are a relatively large group of languages in Central Nigeria which have been overlooked by linguists. They should be of particular interest to students of noun-class languages because they conserve a rich affix system, unlike many related languages. They are extremely threatened and some have gone extinct during the period of survey. In the light of this, further survey and descriptive work is a high priority.

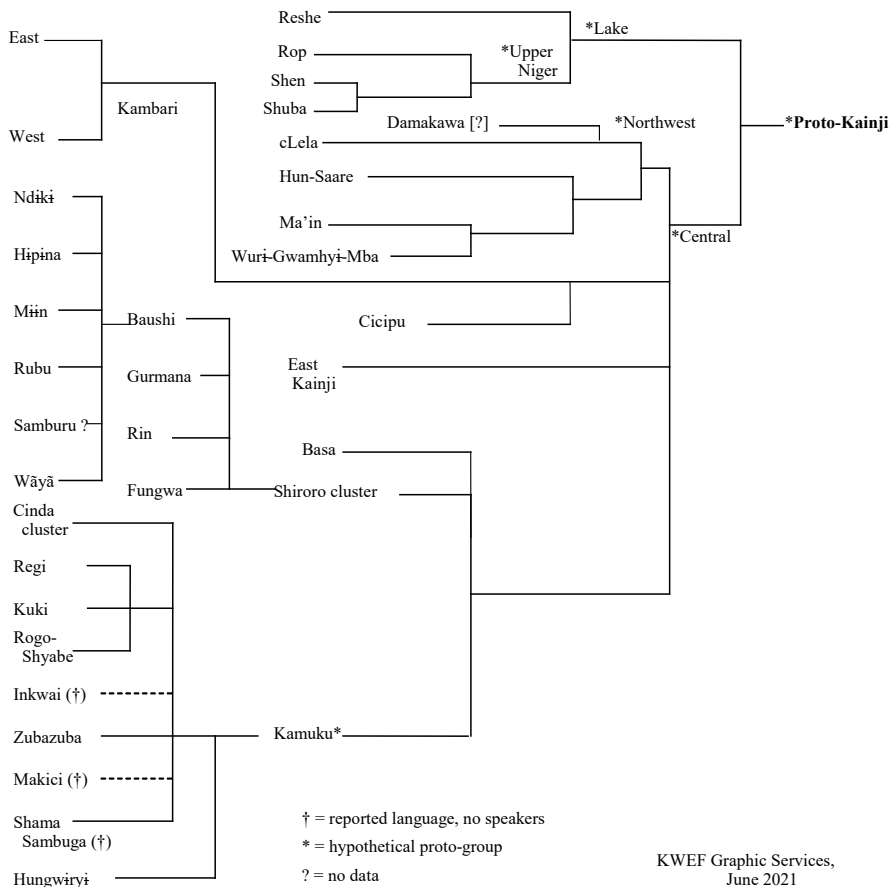


Figure 6. Revised subclassification of Kainji Languages

## Conventions

∅	zero (prefix)
A	any central vowel (here a ~ ə)
BCCW	Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist
V	underspecified vowel
O	underspecified back mid vowel (here o ~ ɔ)
E	underspecified front mid vowel (here e ~ ε)
N	any nasal

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## Appendix

**East Kainji ‘arm, hand’**

Table 12 shows for the word ‘arm, hand’ in East Kainji, combining entries from the BCCW, Shimizu (1979, 1982) and the present author’s fieldwork. Languages for which no data exists are not listed. The column headed BCCW cross-references the language names against that source.

Table 12. East Kainji glosses for ‘arm, hand’

Language	Singular	Plural	BCCW
<b>Southern</b>			
Bishi	<i>mo-ɔk</i>		Piti
Tsam	<i>wɔk</i>		Chaw
<b>Northern</b>			
<b>Ningi cluster</b>			
Kudu	<i>mò-ri</i>		Kuda
Camo	<i>ùkérí</i>		Cham
Gamo	<i>ù-ʔára</i>	<i>à-ʔára</i>	Buta
<b>Lame cluster</b>			
Gyem	<i>ò-me<sup>k</sup></i>	<i>cè-rèèku</i>	Gyem
Shau	<i>u-ʔara</i>	<i>tu-ʔara</i>	
<b>Lere cluster</b>			
Si	<i>àya</i>		
Gana	<i>ù-ʔaya</i>		
Takaya	<i>àyà</i>		Taur
<b>North-central cluster</b>			
Izora	<i>ù-ʔara</i>	<i>tààra</i>	
eMoro	<i>wàʔara</i>	<i>tàara</i>	
Sanga	<i>ò-ʔàra</i>	<i>tà-ʔàra</i>	
Janji	<i>tààre</i>		Janj
εBoze	<i>ò-wàrè</i>	<i>tàre</i>	Buji
iZeLe	<i>ò-warè</i>	<i>tà-are</i>	

Language	Singular	Plural	BCCW
iBunu	ù-wáré	tà-áré	Rìbn
iPanawa	ù-wáré	tì-wáré	
iLoro	ù-wáré	tàáré	
iGuta	ù-wìri	tì-ìri	
tiMap	ù-càrà	à-càrà	Amo
<b>Seni cluster</b>			
Ziriya (†)	àyí		
Seni	taya	uta-taya	Shen
<b>Kauru cluster</b>			
Gbiri	ka-kyara	na-	
Niragu	ka-tfara		Kahu
Surubu	ka-tfara	na-	Surb
Kurama	tá-áré	tí-	Krma
Kono	u-tfara	i-tfara	

As far as can be gauged, all East Kainji languages have the same root except Bishi and Tsam, which have weakened reflexes of the common Niger-Congo root #-*bok*. This root can be tentatively reconstructed as \**CV-tfara*. In the North-Central cluster the initial /tʃ-/ of the root weakens first to a glottal stop (as in Zora) and then /w-/ presumably under the influence of the *u-* prefix. In the Lere cluster the *C*<sub>2</sub> /-r-/ weakens to /-y-/. The prefix is hard to reconstruct with certainty. In the majority of cases it is *u-*, but in some Kauru cluster languages, it is replaced with *ka-*, which is probably a later innovation. Si and Takaya have lost all trace of a prefix, which is consistent with the breakdown of number marking through affix alternation in these languages.