

Yobe State, Nigeria as a Linguistic Area

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0. Introduction

In late summer 1969, I arrived in Potiskum, Nigeria for the first time. I was a Research Assistant gathering data on the Ngizim language for a comparative Chadic syntax project¹ and for my dissertation. I could not have imagined that 30 years later I would be returning to Potiskum, essentially to pick up where I left off.

From 2001-2004, I worked in collaboration with Dr. Alhaji Maina Gimba of the University of Maiduguri and speakers of five languages of Yobe State, Nigeria to document these languages. The primary focus was lexical and morphological documentation and collection of texts. An important aspect of the project was to have native-speaking participants do most of the data collection, and resulting documents have been printed and distributed locally as a stimulus for members of the respective communities to continue adding to the documentation after the end of the project.

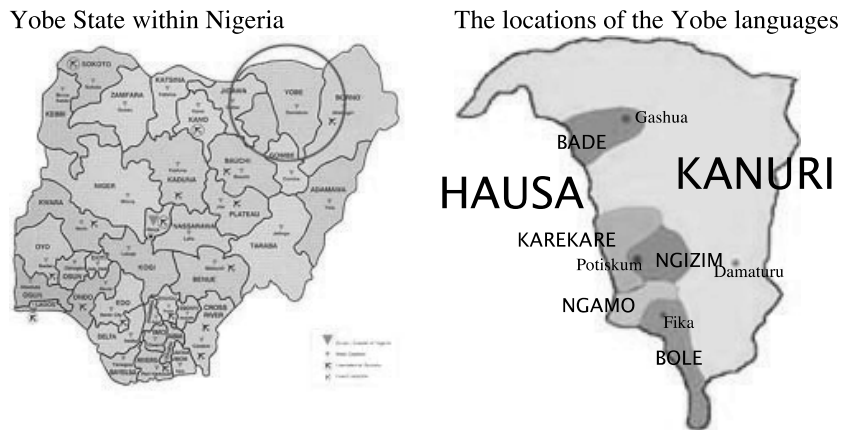
Though the Nigerian states are somewhat artificial political creations, Yobe State, fortuitously, has an interesting linguistic composition. There are six distinct modern languages that are indigenous to the area that is now Yobe State—Duwai, Ngizim, Bade, Karekare, Bole, Ngamo—and with the exception of Bole, these languages are spoken almost entirely within the confines of Yobe State (Bole has a large number of speakers to the south, in Gombe State). The other three languages with large resident populations in Yobe State are Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulfulde, all of which have spread into Yobe State area from elsewhere, though

¹ US National Science Foundation Award #2279, Paul Newman, Principal Investigator. This was the first of several National Science Foundation awards that have supported work in this area. Work on an Ngizim dictionary and descriptive work on Bade in 1979-1981 was supported by NSF award #BNS79-10366 (Russell G. Schuh, Principal Investigator). Work on Bole in 1999-2000 was supported by NSF award #BCS-9905180 (Russell G. Schuh, Principal Investigator). Most of the work that serves as the basis for the current paper was done in 2001-2004, supported by NSF award #BCS-0111289 (Russell G. Schuh, Principal Investigator, Alhaji Maina Gimba, In-Country Director). I am grateful to the scores of people who have been friends, collaborators, and facilitators over the past 35 years, especially Paul Newman and Alhaji Maina Gimba. Further information about the last mentioned project, including downloadable papers, is available at <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/Yobe/>.

the eastern and far northern parts of the state have been Kanuri-speaking for several centuries. Figure 1 locates the languages discussed in this paper.

The Yobe languages project has revealed yet another unifying linguistic trait of Yobe State, namely the indigenous languages in this state form a *Sprachbund*—an area in which languages share a cluster of typologies that are absent, at least as a cluster, outside the area. Although the indigenous languages of Yobe State are all members of the West Branch of the Chadic family, they fall into two distinct groups. Karekare, Bole, and Ngamo are members of the “A” group of West Chadic, whereas Duwai, Ngizim, and Bade are members of the “B” group.² These two language groups, however, share properties that must result from areal diffusion rather than inheritance from ancestral languages of the respective subgroups or from a common ancestral language. This paper describes areal lexical features, one areal feature from morphology, and one from syntax.

Figure 1: Yobe State, Nigeria and the Yobe languages



In order to discuss the nature of Yobe State as a linguistic area, some additional information about the linguistic situation is necessary. The map in Figure 1 shows that Ngizim, Karekare, Ngamo, and Bole are geographically contiguous whereas Bade and Duwai³ are geographically separated from this

² See Newman (1977) for the classification of the Chadic languages. Dialectally, Ngizim and Karekare are relatively uniform. Bole has a major dialect split, roughly defined by the Gongola River that forms part of the southwestern border between Yobe and Bauchi States. This paper considers only the Fika dialect, which is that of Yobe State. Ngamo has a major split between the Gudi dialect to the east, indicated Ngamo (G) here, and the Yaya dialect, to the west, indicated Ngamo (Y) here. Bade is dialectally so diverse that it might be considered a group of closely related languages (Schuh 1981). This paper has data from the Western variety, Bade (W), and the Gashua variety, Bade (G).

³ The Duwai area, which is not separately designated on the map, is contiguous to the Bade area, east and southeast of Gashua. Study of Duwai was not part of the Yobe languages project. While

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group by a Kanuri/Hausa speaking zone.⁴ I will refer to the former group as the “Potiskum area” languages since Potiskum is the largest city in the vicinity and many speakers of all the languages live in Potiskum. I will refer to the latter group as the “Bade-Duwai area” languages. In fact, each of these areas comprises its own *Sprachbund*. In this paper I will focus on the Potiskum area.

Although Ngizim is clearly more closely related to Bade than either of those languages is to Duwai, Bade and Duwai share certain properties not found in Ngizim and vice versa. Some of these properties must be inherited from the common ancestral language but have been lost in Ngizim, e.g. ‘nine’ is Duwai *wàarìyà*, Bade (Gashua) *wuliyà*, Bade (Western) *wurayà*, but Ngizim *kud’kùvdà*. Others are a result of diffusion within the Bade-Duwai area that must have taken place after their geographical separation from Ngizim, e.g. a change of original initial CəCV to əCCV as in the word for ‘thirst’: Duwai *əgǐ̀*, Bade (Gashua) *əgǐ̀*, Bade (Western) *əgjaan*, but Ngizim *gə̀ǐ̀* (Schuh 1978a, 1981). Bade-Duwai thus provide a way to identify properties in Ngizim that result from areal diffusion within the Potiskum area, i.e., where Bade-Duwai share features not found in Ngizim or Ngizim-Karekare-Bole-Ngamo share features not found in Bade-Duwai, a likely explanation is diffusion of those features in the respective areas.

All of the existing close linguistic relatives of Karekare, Ngamo, and Bole lie to the south, in Gombe and Bauchi states. Two of the better known and better documented languages are Tangale and Kanakuru. Others are Kirfi, Galambu, Gera, Kwami, and Pero.⁵ These languages can provide evidence regarding features that seem special to the Yobe State languages, and more specifically, the Potiskum area languages, such as words like Ngizim *buucí*, Karekare *buucì*, Ngamo *bùushí*, Bole *buushì* all meaning ‘palm leaf mat’ (an old loanword from Kanuri), which does not seem to be found in West Chadic languages outside Yobe State.

1. Lexicon

1.1. Shared Lexicon in the Potiskum Area

The most readily visible (or better, audible) criterion for believing that the Yobe area is a *Sprachbund* is a large number of shared lexical items that have probably

working on Duwai in 1973-75, I had the impression that it was in the process of being replaced by Bade and Hausa, or, at its eastern extremities, by Kanuri. However, during the Yobe project I discovered that my prediction of Duwai’s demise was premature! It still seems to be actively spoken by a significant population.

⁴ Fulfulde is spoken throughout northern Nigeria by nomadic herders and in Fulfulde-speaking villages and neighborhoods of larger towns. In Yobe State and contiguous areas, Fulfulde has exerted virtually no linguistic influence on the languages with which Fulfulde speakers come in contact. Though the Fulb’e retain a strong cultural identity and typically speak Fulfulde within their own communities, they all become fluent speakers of one or more of the local languages, whereas it is rare to find speakers of other languages who acquire speaking ability in Fulfulde.

⁵ The largest Chadic language speaking group immediately south of Bole is Tera, with whom the Boles have a special historical connection (Newman 1969/70). Tera belongs to the Biu-Mandara Branch of Chadic and is typologically quite different from the West Chadic languages.

not been inherited directly from a Chadic ancestor language but where the original source cannot be pinpointed with certainty, as would be the case of obvious loanwords (see below). More specifically the languages of the Potiskum area (Karekare, Ngamo, Bole, and Ngizim) share many words that are apparently not shared by Bade nor are they obvious loanwords from outside the Yobe area.⁶ Particularly significant is the fact that such words are shared between Ngizim and the other three languages, to which Ngizim is not closely related, but not between Ngizim and its close cousin, Bade. Also significant are words where Karekare is phonologically nearly identical to Bole and Ngamo. Though all three languages are in the Bole-Tangale group, Karekare is not closely related to Bole and Ngamo within that group.

The tables in (1) present some examples, roughly grouped into social/semantic categories. All items include Ngizim and at least one of the Bole-Tangale languages. The fact that items are missing for particular languages means only that those words did not come up in the current project. In most cases, corresponding words probably do exist in those languages. In fact the significance of these lists is that the words came up with no expectation on my part of which items WOULD be shared across languages. Ngamo examples are from the Gudi dialect unless otherwise noted.

(1) Examples of Yobe areal words

	KAREKARE	NGAMO (G)	BOLE	NGIZIM
Shared material culture (foods, clothes, household items)				
‘steamed cake’		làmbà	làmbà	làmbà
‘locust bean cake’			gìskirmi	gèskèrmi
‘woman’s loincloth’	diidàm	diidàm	diidàm	diidàm
‘basket’	dààfir	dàa’ùr	dààbur	dààbōr
‘stalk door panel’	gwamper		gompōr	gwampèr
Animals and birds				
‘baboon’	bangài	bàngèi	bangè	bangài
‘hairy goat or sheep’	bàzaa	bàzâ	bàza	bàzà
‘domestic pigeon’	bàru	bàrù	bàru	bàri
‘grey hornbill’	tiilaakò	tilàakō		tiilaakòk
Farming				
‘type of sorghum’	dàashàa	dàashà (Y)	dàashà	dàashà
‘young corn’	kuncàu	kùnshô	kunsho	kunco
‘buried granary’		daadàfiidà	daadafiidà	daatəfiid’òk

⁶ Some of these items do have counterparts outside the Yobe region. For example, the word defined as ‘locust-bean cake’ in the first group below was identified by Yobe speakers as Hausa *gàskamii*, defined by Bargery (1934) as ‘the mealy pulp from the inside of locust-bean pods’. Unlike typical loanwords, this word cannot be related phonologically in a straightforward way across languages, and indeed, the direction of borrowing itself is not obvious.

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	KAREKARE	NGAMO (G)	BOLE	NGIZIM
Shared aspects of culture (implements, customs, occupations)				
‘large pressure drum’		kànjâu	kanjàu	kanjàu
‘widow’		gudgùm	gudugùm	gudùgùm
Descriptive terms				
‘cold’	layi	leilei	lai	layi
‘sour’	zhiimu ‘smell sour’	shòmshòm	shòmshòm	còmçòm
Expressions and grammatical markers				
‘until; even’		kaba	kapa	kapa
‘that’s it, OK’	anyà	anyà	anyà	anyà

Shared lexical traits extend above the word level. These include idioms, such as Ngamo (Y) *fàna sàra*, Bole *’yùwa sara*, Ngizim *jàbà amài* ‘offer condolences’, all meaning “catch hand” in the respective languages, and many proverbs and riddles that seem to be regional rather than general to (West) Africa.

1.2. Kanuri as an Areal Force in the Yobe Languages

In northeastern Nigeria, Kanuri, a language of the Nilo-Saharan family, was the dominant cultural and linguistic force for centuries, extending into the 20th century. This is evident in the large number of Kanuri loanwords in the Yobe languages. Although it is possible to identify many loanwords introduced directly from Kanuri into one or more of the Yobe languages, there is an extensive group of words of Kanuri origin that typify the languages of the Yobe area but for which it is not possible to identify the language or languages that served as the path by which the words were introduced. Moreover, these words set the Yobe languages apart from related languages, such as Tangale and Kanakuru, which are outside the Yobe area. A few such words are the following:

(2) Some Kanuri loanwords shared across the Yobe languages

Kanuri	Bade (W)	Bade (G)	Ngizim	Karekare	Ngamo (G)	Bole	
jirè	jərén	jiĩrài	jiĩrèewa	jirè	jirè	jirè	‘truth’
karè	karen	kaĩrài	kaĩrè	karài	kàrèi	karài	‘stuff’
ngudì	ngudíin	ngudì	ngudì	ngudì	ngudí	ngudì	‘lazy p.’
ngalwò	ngalkò	ngalkò	ngalkò	ngalkò	ngalkò	ngalkò	‘better that...’

The influence of Kanuri has been much greater on Bade-Ngizim as a group than on the Bole-Tangale languages, suggesting that many of these words entered Bade-Ngizim while the languages of the group still occupied a contiguous geographical zone separate from the Bole-Tangale languages. (See Schuh 2003 for discussion of Kanuri loanwords in Bade-Ngizim.) The table below shows percentages of identified Kanuri loanwords in currently available lexicons:

Table 1: Percentages of Kanuri loanwords in the Yobe languages⁷

Western Bade:	12%	Karekare:	9%
Gashua Bade:	15%	Ngamo:	4.6%
Ngizim:	15.6%	Bole:	7%

There is evidence that Bole has borrowed directly from Kanuri rather than introducing Kanuri loanwords via the Bade-Ngizim languages. For example, Bade-Ngizim languages adapt Kanuri verbs by borrowing the Kanuri verbal noun, which has a *t* suffix, then adding their own inflections. Bole does not have a single pattern for borrowing Kanuri verbs, but the most common pattern is to add a suffix *n* to the root.⁸ Compare loans such as the following:

(3) Patterns of Kanuri loan verbs in Ngizim and Bole

Kanuri verbal noun	Ngizim verb	Bole verb	
njès-tə	ngèstu	ngèsunu	‘be late’
wàa-tə	wàakàatu	wàkàanu	‘happen’

Karekare and Ngamo, however, seem to have introduced most Kanuri loanwords via Ngizim and Bole respectively. Compare Karekare *ngèstu* ‘be late’, with *-t-* as the final consonant, as in Ngizim in (3), vs. Ngamo (G) *ngèsnâ* ‘be late’, with *-n-* as the final consonant, as in Bole in (3). Likewise, Karekare *bìlân* ‘beautiful’ < Kanuri *b̀̀lân* is shared with Ngizim and Bade but not with Bole or Ngamo, whereas Ngamo *gède* ‘different’ < Kanuri *gàde* is shared with Bole but not with Ngizim or Bade. The introduction of Kanuri loanwords into Karekare from Ngizim and into Ngamo from Bole is part of larger lexical and cultural borrowing patterns within the respective language pairs.

1.3. Hausa as a Recent Source of Loanwords

The influence of Hausa provides a useful contrast with Kanuri. The previous section argued that one of the *Sprachbund* aspects of the Yobe languages is the result of a long period of Kanuri influence. Though Hausa has had, and continues to have, massive influence on the Yobe languages, its influence cannot be viewed as *areal* in nature. As is the case throughout northern Nigeria, everyone in Yobe State, regardless of heritage language, speaks Hausa. Younger people, aside from those who have grown up in very rural areas, generally seem to feel more comfortable speaking Hausa than their heritage languages, and in conversations

⁷ The figures, esp. for the Bade-Ngizim languages, are probably too low, first, because I am not an authority on Kanuri and have certainly failed to identify many Kanuri loans, and second, because the currently available lexicons of Yobe languages do not include extensive numbers of items in lexical arenas which would consist largely of Kanuri loans, such as religious, legal, and philosophical concepts.

⁸ I do not know the source of the *n* suffix. There is no native verb derivational suffix of this form in Bole. It may come from one of the complex set of Kanuri inflectional suffixes.

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between speakers of any of the Yobe languages, code-switching between that language and Hausa is the standard mode of speech. Not surprisingly, all the Yobe languages have incorporated many Hausa loanwords. The table below shows percentages of identified Hausa loanwords in currently available lexicons:

Table 2: Percentages of Hausa loanwords in the Yobe languages

Western Bade:	3.8%	Karekare:	5.6%
Gashua Bade:	5%	Ngamo:	3.7%
Ngizim:	4.2%	Bole:	7.1%

These figures are surely on the low side for all the languages because at this stage of research, there has been no effort made to collect words in lexical arenas where virtually all words are Hausa loanwords, such as imported trade goods, modern occupations, modern media and communications, modern mechanical objects, and the like. Many Hausa loanwords, like Bole *àyàbà* ‘banana’ or *kèèke* ‘bicycle’, themselves originally loanwords into Hausa, refer to introduced items that would have not had traditional names, and in many cases where a Hausa loanword refers to something that would have preexisted contact with Hausa, it is hard to know whether it is really an integrated lexical item or a sort of code-switch, introducing a Hausa word even though a native word exists. For example, is Ngizim *kâr̄kudù* ‘sandhopper’ (Hausa *kâr̄kudùu*) the word that all Ngizims would now use for this insect or has the speaker who provided the word just forgotten (or never heard) the native word?

Even allowing for the fact that the figures in Table 2 would be larger with more complete lexicons, two facts of interest emerge: (1) the low numbers compared to the percentages of Kanuri loanwords seen in the previous section, especially in Bade-Ngizim, and (2) the uniformity of the percentages across the languages (the Bole number is skewed high because the currently available lexicon for this language is the largest). The relatively low numbers as a percentage of vocabulary must be a result of the lengths of the contact periods of the Yobe languages with Kanuri vs. Hausa. While continuous contact with Kanuri must have lasted over many centuries, intensive contact with Hausa probably does not extend back much more than a century, and the linguistic dominance that Hausa exerts today would extend over even less time. The uniformity of the percentages must have to do with the way Hausa loanwords are being introduced. Everyone speaks Hausa, and every language is independently introducing Hausa loanwords through the same processes, viz. frequent code-switching and the universal practice of using Hausa words when “native” words are not readily available, either because the concepts are new or because the speakers cannot immediately access existing native words.

In short, though the lexicons of Yobe languages have been and are being shaped by the introduction of loanwords from non-Yobe languages, the legacies are quite different. Kanuri loans have been, for the most part, integrated and

adapted such that they give the Yobe languages a regional flavor not found in related languages outside the region. Hausa loans are a recent and relatively superficial, albeit highly prominent part of the lexicon that does not differentiate the Yobe languages from virtually any other minority language of northern Nigeria.

2. Morphology: Gender and Feminine Gender as Default

Proto-Chadic inherited a three-way noun classification system from Proto-Afroasiatic: *masculine* singular, *feminine* singular, and common gender *plural*. At least some languages in all the major sub-branches of West Chadic retain this system. In Yobe State, gender remains a robust lexical feature of nouns in Western Bade and in Ngamo, as shown by the demonstrative agreement patterns in (4). Other gender/number sensitive morphemes in these languages are genitive linkers and personal pronouns.

(4) Grammatical gender agreement in Western Bade and Ngamo

	Bade (W)	Ngamo (G)	
masculine	gwàmaa- <u>mso</u>	gâm wòye'e	'this ram'
feminine	tàmàku- <u>mco</u>	tèmshi wònse'è	'this ewe'
plural	tàmàkùnâ- <u>mdu</u>	tèmkà màaye'è	'these sheep'

Gender as an idiosyncratic property of individual lexical items is in various states of decay in other Yobe languages. Gashua Bade still retains gender agreement in its demonstrative system, genitive linkers, and pronouns, but aside from nouns with inherent natural gender (humans, some domestic animals), choice of agreement is shifting toward predictability on the basis of phonological form of the noun—essentially, nouns ending in *-i*, *-u*, *-a* take feminine agreement and others take masculine, though there is fluctuation, especially in vowel-final nouns (Schuh 1977). Bole differentiates gender/number agreement forms in demonstratives and pronouns, though not genitive markers. Most nouns other than those with inherent natural gender take masculine agreement, but nouns in certain semantic groups have specific genders, e.g. fruit-bearing trees are feminine but the fruits are masculine (Gimba 2005). Karekare demonstratives are not gender sensitive, but Karekare does distinguish gender in personal pronouns and in genitive linkers used in N+N genitives, e.g. *mizi ma Jilwaye* 'the husband of Jilwaye' vs. *men ta idihu* 'the wife of the king'. More investigation is needed to discover whether there are consistent patterns of gender agreement, but for many nouns agreement fluctuates. Ngizim has lost gender as a lexical category. There is only one set of demonstratives, one paradigm for genitives, and pronoun agreement is like that of English, with regular masculine/feminine agreement only for referents with inherent natural gender.

Despite this range of systems related to gender, one striking Yobe areal feature emerges: THE DEFAULT GENDER IS FEMININE. This claim is supported by

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the languages where gender remains a robust lexical category and, ironically, by languages that are losing or have lost this lexical property.

Evidence for feminine as the default gender in Western Bade and Ngamo, the languages with robust systems of lexical gender, comes from loanwords. As noted in section 1.2, the most significant source for loanwords in Yobe languages until fairly recent times has been Kanuri. Kanuri does not have grammatical gender. Hence, languages that do categorize nouns for gender must have strategies for assigning gender to nouns borrowed from Kanuri. Semantic properties play a key role, in particular when the noun is human and hence has inherent natural gender. For example, Western Bade *kàadükùmaan* (m) ‘messenger’ (Kanuri *kàdùnomà*) would normally refer to a role played by a male whereas *duukèramón* (f) ‘pot maker’ (Kanuri *duwùrà̀m [njàmá]*) refers specifically to women who make pots. In Ngamo (G) *mà’ì* (m) ‘king’ (Kanuri *mái*) refers to a position always occupied by males whereas *kilaakì* (f) ‘prostitute’ would refer to a female (the latter is ultimately from English ‘clerk’ and may have come into Ngamo via Hausa, though it is also used in Kanuri). In Western Bade, all mass nouns take plural agreement (cf. *sàasáà-mdo* ‘this meat’ with the plural noun in the table above), and as expected, loanwords with mass referents fall into this category, e.g. *bàrbà̀rən* ‘dust’ (Kanuri *bàrbà̀r*). Sometimes gender has been assigned by semantic association with another noun, e.g. *zènaan* (m) ‘gourd ladle’ (Kanuri *jènyi*) may be masculine because of association with the native word *mad’akwáan* (m) ‘gourd cup’.⁹

For most borrowed nouns, however, natural gender, semantic association, and/or phonological form do not determine assignment of lexical gender. This is true both for loanwords from Kanuri, which does not have grammatical gender, and from Hausa, which does have grammatical gender. As might be expected, Hausa gender does sometimes coincide with gender assigned by the borrowing language, but it is just as often overridden, e.g. Hausa *goõ̀d* (m) ‘kola nut’ borrowed as Western Bade *goorón* and Ngamo (G) *goorò*, which are feminine in the respective languages. Overriding Hausa feminine with masculine in the borrowing language does take place, e.g. Hausa *maaraa* (f) ‘food scoop made of a calabash fragment’ borrowed as Western Bade *maaraan* (m), but this is less common than overriding masculine with feminine. Counts of borrowed nouns according to gender assignment clearly show the skewing of gender assignment toward feminine. In Table 3, the Bade figures exclude mass nouns (see above) and nouns with paired masculine and feminine counterparts, such as *àap̀non* ‘Hausa man’, *àap̀nàakon* ‘Hausa woman’ (Kanuri *àafùno* for either gender). The overall greater numbers in Bade reflect the fact that the currently available lexicon for Bade is about twice as big as that for Ngamo.

⁹ In providing gender for loanwords, Bala Dagona Wakili, the primary Western Bade speaking participant in this project, would often say something like, “It has to be masculine (or feminine) because X is masculine (or feminine).” Unfortunately, I seem not to have cited any such comments in my notes and cannot recall specific cases.

Table 3: Counts of gender assignment for loanwords

	Western Bade		Ngamo (G)	
	Kanuri	Hausa	Kanuri	Hausa
Masculine	58	28	15	13
Feminine	98	59	32	27

A few typical examples of borrowed nouns that have been assigned feminine lexical gender show that there is no obvious correlation between form or meaning and gender.

(5) Some loanwords classified as feminine in Western Bade and Ngamo (G)

Kanuri	Bade (W)		Kanuri	Ngamo (G)	
àshîr	àasirən	‘secret’	kàshaàr	kàskâr	‘sword’
bəndəgə	bəndəgín	‘gun’	ḵinadə	ḵinaadi	‘flint stone’
ṛiwà	riipan	‘carrion’	sərgə	sîrkâ	‘poison’
Hausa			Hausa		
dàliili (m)	dàliilín	‘reason’	hankàlii (m)	hànkali	‘sense’
goorò (m)	goorón	‘kola nut’	goorò (m)	goorò	‘kola nut’
makaranta (f)	makarantan	‘school’	àyàbà (f) ¹⁰	àyàbà	‘banana’

Evidence for the default nature of feminine gender in languages that have lost gender as an idiosyncratic feature of lexical items is more equivocal, but at the very least this evidence shows that the automatic default is not masculine. As languages lose a multi-parameter category such as gender, they must decide how to dispose of the marking system that they have inherited from the time when the category was active. In the case of Ngizim, we can see what decisions were made by comparing Ngizim and Gashua Bade, the Bade dialect that most closely resembles Ngizim. The demonstrative systems of Bade and Ngizim have three parameters comprising ‘near’ (= proximal), ‘far’ (= distal), and a third parameter, translatable as something like “that very one mentioned.” Comparing the forms in (6), it is evident that Ngizim, having lost lexical gender as an active category, has extended the original FEMININE forms to all nouns, including plurals. (We return to the fate of the original masculine forms in a later section.) It appears that as lexical gender began to shift to natural gender in Ngizim (as is now the case in pronoun agreement), nouns where gender was not an inherent feature were assigned what was felt to be the unmarked or default form—the feminine. Eventually, the erstwhile feminine became so overwhelmingly frequent that it was extended to nouns with referents of masculine natural gender and even plurals.

¹⁰ The word for ‘banana’ is borrowed into Western Bade as *àyàbaan*, which is categorized as a mass noun.

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(6) Bade and Ngizim evidence that Ngizim has extended feminine forms

	Gashua Bade			Ngizim		
	Near	Far	Mentioned	Near	Far	Mentioned
Masculine 'bull'	kwàm- aau	kwàm-áàni	kwàm-áànau	kwàm- tku	kwàm- tiiwú	kwàm-tənu
Feminine 'cow'	tlà-tku	tlà-tiiwú	tlà-tənáu	tlà-tku	tlà-tiiwú	tlà-tənu
Plural 'cattle'	ùkti- áàndau	ùkti-áàndiiwú	ùkti-áàndənáu	tlàadín- tku	tlàadín- tiiwú	tlàadín-tənu

With pronoun possessors, Bade has a three-way system for marking genitives, one for masculine and plural possessed nouns, one for feminine possessed nouns, and a non-gender marked form used with objects of nominalized verbs, prepositions, and a handful of “inalienable” nouns, such as *ɨgwa* ‘household’ (both languages have a single non-gender sensitive system for marking for N+N genitives). Ngizim has only one method of marking pronominal genitives. The table below shows 2nd feminine singular and 3rd masculine singular possessive pronouns, whose morphology is representative of other pronouns in the system.¹¹

(7) Extension of non-gender sensitive genitive to all nouns in Ngizim

Gashua Bade			Ngizim		
'son'	'daughter'	VN 'catching'	'son'	'daughter'	VN 'catching'
wun-n-əm	wunya-tk-əm	gəf-aa-gəm	wun-kəm	wuny-aa-kəm	gaf-aa-kəm
wul-ɿ /wun-ɿ/	wunya-tkə-ɿ	gəf-aa-ɿ	wùn-gəɽɿ	wunyà-gəɽɿ	gafa-gəɽɿ

A comparison of these paradigms shows that the Ngizim genitive most closely resembles the non-gender marked Gashua Bade forms, exemplified with the verbal noun+object. The 2nd feminine singular pronoun is virtually identical in the two languages, modulo some minor phonological differences, and both languages insert a long *-aa-*, rather than a gender-sensitive linker, when the first noun ends in a vowel. The 3rd masculine singular form in Ngizim has a formative *-gə-*, which is the common gender linker seen with nouns. Notably, Ngizim lacks either of the gender sensitive linkers *-n-* and *-tk-* seen in Gashua Bade. In short, in losing grammatical gender, Ngizim abandoned all erstwhile gender-sensitive genitive linkers.

Karekare has moved in a somewhat different direction with respect to its genitive linkers and demonstratives. As noted above, Karekare has linkers *ma* and *ta* in N+N genitive constructions that agree with at least referents having masculine and feminine natural gender, respectively. This agreement pattern is

¹¹ See Schuh (1977) for a description of genitive systems of languages of the Bade-Ngizim group.

inherited from Proto-Bole-Tangale and comparative evidence shows that at one time it also functioned in constructions with pronoun possessors, as it does today in a number of Bole-Tangale languages—cf. Kirfi *kayala mi-shi* ‘your (f) ram’ vs. *wùcci shi-shi* ‘your (f) female goat’ (Schuh 1978b:35). Karekare, however, has only a single paradigm of linked possessive pronouns for masculine, feminine, and plural referents.¹²

(8) Extension of feminine genitive pronoun forms to all nouns in Karekare

Possessor	‘husband’	‘wife’	‘wives’
1 sg.	mìzìi hño < *tino	mèn hño < *tino	mendèe hño < *tino
2 m. sg.		mèn tiko	mendèe tiko
2 f. sg.	mìzìi ci < *tici		

but cf. nominal genitives

mizi <u>ma</u> Jilwaye ‘the husband <u>of</u> Jilwaye’	men <u>ta</u> idihu ‘the wife <u>of</u> the king’
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On the other hand, independent genitive pronouns use the original MASCULINE forms, regardless of referent, viz. *mino* ‘mine’, *miko* ‘yours (m. possessor)’, *mici* ‘yours (f. possessor)’, etc.

Formatives **m*- masculine and **t*- feminine also served as bases for demonstratives in Proto-Bole-Tangle—cf. Kanakuru *lowòì me* ‘that boy’ vs. *gunyòì she* ‘that girl’ (Newman 1974:87). Karekare uses one gender/number neutral base *-m-*, undoubtedly from the original masculine, though in Karekare demonstratives have taken on a different appearance from those of Kanakuru, which probably looks more like the original:

(9) Karekare demonstratives

Near	Far		Forms with gender marked genitives
koor-aayam	kooroò àm	‘donkey’	cf. <i>kooro mà riyà</i> ‘donkey of the bush’
kwàr-àayam	kwàrà àm	‘house’	cf. <i>kwàr ta ba’ato</i> ‘house of her father’
kwarcin- àayam	kwarcinòò àm	‘houses’	

To summarize, the strongest claim would be that the default gender for Yobe languages is FEMININE, which runs against the more common tendency of languages with grammatical gender to take masculine as default. Evidence from

¹² By a regular phonological rule, the sequence *ti-* becomes a nasally released [tʰ] before *nV*. This is represented as *hn-* in the first person possessives (cf. *tì-kau* ‘he ate’ vs. */tinà/* → *hn-nà* ‘eating’). I describe this phenomenon in “Shooting through the nose in Karekare,” available for download at the website mentioned in footnote 1. Probably as part of the same phenomenon, the **ti-* of the possessive pronoun has disappeared when the consonant of the pronoun is a coronal—cf. *kaa tiko* ‘your (m) head’, *kàa ci* ‘your (f) head’, *kàa to* ‘her head’, *kàa tĩmu* ‘our head’, *kàa su* ‘their head’.

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languages that have lost grammatical gender as an active idiosyncratic lexical parameter shows that an absolute claim for feminine being default is probably too strong, but these languages have generalized originally feminine morphology in ways that clearly show that masculine is NOT the default.

3. Syntax

3.1. Marking of Conditional Clauses

The Potiskum area Yobe languages mark conditional clauses in the following ways (... = the position of the clausal proposition).

(10) Marking of “if/when” conditional clauses in Potiskum area languages

Bole: bàa...(ye)
Ngamo (G): na...(-i)
Karekare: ...ya/ye
Ngizim: ...-n/nən

That is, Bole and Ngamo have clause-initial markers translatable as ‘if/when’ and optional clause final markers. Karekare and Ngizim have only clause-final markers. The examples in (11) illustrate most of the options.¹³

(11) Conditional clauses in Potiskum area languages

Bole:

Bàa ka ngora sootà ye, ngòrii gà bòo pàtà zònge.
if you tie.FUT lie “if” tie on end tail hyena

‘If you are going to tie up a lie, tie on the end of a hyena’s tail.’ (because the hyena will run off to the bush with it)

Ngamo (G):

Ngoi na an-ko ta a go-nni d’ala dala-i ngap-ni hata-n-ni.
person if tell you quote AUX going-he swallow axe-“if” hold-for him handle-of-it

‘If a person says he is going to swallow an axe, hold its handle for him.’

Karekare:

Amu tafka ya, eko kuma bai.
water spill.CPL “if” do.CPL collecting not

‘If water spills, it can’t be collected back together.’

Ngizim:

Nən ma a ntana gawa-n, a-gaf-ici gəji-u.
person QUOTE AUX swallow.INCL axe-“if” hold.IMPER-for him handle-the

‘If a person says he is going to swallow an axe, hold its handle for him.’

¹³ For additional examples, see an extended version of this paper at the website mentioned in footnote 1.

The conditional clauses in (11) exemplify what I call *imperfective* discourse in Schuh (1998:165), i.e. discourse that refers either to events that have not yet taken place or that apply generically. Conditional clauses in imperfective discourse in Yobe languages, and Chadic languages in general, can be translated as English ‘if’ or ‘when’ depending on the certainty of the event’s taking place. There is no formal difference corresponding to the English translations.

“When” clauses also appear in *perfective discourse*, i.e. discourse which relates discrete completed events, as in a historical text, a story, or a report. These clauses use the markers in (12), illustrated in (13).

(12) “When” clauses in perfective discourse in Potiskum area languages

Bole: ...(ye)

Ngamo (G): No external marking of “when” clauses in perfective discourse.

Karekare: ...(ma)

Ngizim: ...(tənu/ngum)

(13) “When” clauses in perfective discourse

Bole

Kòbám màala ye, ita bòli adà à gàa mòcci.
 head to.CPL bush “when” she find.SJN dog at inside locust bean
 ‘When she headed to the bush, she found the dog up in a locust bean tree.’

Ngamo (G)

Turum ha’ako, sai a-goptu bo gaba sot!
 lion eat.CPL then beat.SJN-VENT cough sot
 ‘When the lion had eaten (the medicine), then he emitted a cough sot!’

Karekare

Fati ngataka min tan wad’a ma, sai rasu a benu tid’su.
 sun fall.CPL people eat.CPL food “when” then enter.SJN in house lie.SJN
 ‘When the sun had gone and the people had eaten, then they entered the house and lay down.’

Ngizim

Da tlanu tənu, ja da nai.
 town dawn.CPL “when” dog AUX come.SJN
 ‘When the area dawned, the dog came.’

That is, “when” clauses in perfective discourse either have no overt marking at all or have a clause-final marker. The principal marking of clausal relations is in the verb aspect choice. Sequential clauses in all these languages use the subjunctive (SJN) in both perfective and imperfective discourse. The completive (CPL) conveys posteriority. Note in the examples in (13), the “when” clauses all have a completive verb whereas the “main” clauses have a subjunctive. The effect of the completive is to take a step back in the sequence, often repeating the immediately preceding action, while the subjunctive in the main clause is the next

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event in the story sequence. A translation closer to the Yobe structure would thus be (illustrating with the Bole example), “She had headed to the bush (and) she found the dog up in a locust bean tree,” where the pluperfect (“when”) clause sets up a context for the next event in the sequence in the same way that a conditional clause in imperfective discourse sets up a context for the consequent clause.

Summarizing the situation for “conditional” clauses in perfective and imperfective discourse, all the Yobe languages utilize at least a clause-final marker (with the apparent exception of Ngamo in perfective discourse “when” clauses, where sequence of tenses is enough),¹⁴ some require a clause-initial marker in “if/when” clauses in imperfective discourse, and none use a clause-initial marker in “when” sentences in perfective discourse (again, with the exception of Ngamo, perhaps dialectally—see footnote 14).

Other types of subordinate clauses in these languages all use clause-initial conjunctions, e.g. “before” and “after” clauses, “purpose” and “reason” clauses, and relative clauses. One thus wonders what the source of the POST-clausal markers in conditional clauses is. The answer is that all the post-clausal markers come from definite determiners, some of which are still in use in the respective languages, and some of which are no longer used as definite determiners, but which comparative evidence, even at a shallow level, reveals the source to be definite determiners.

(14) Definite determiners as the source of clause final conditional markers

	Clause type	Clause marking	Determiner source
Bole	‘if/when’ ‘when’	bàa...(ye) ...(ye)	Definite article: <i>tèmshi yê</i> ‘the sheep’ (same)
Ngamo (G)	‘if/when’ ‘when’	na...(-i) (no marking)	Definite article: <i>tèmshis’è</i> ‘the sheep’ (cf. <i>-i</i> in Yaya <i>tèmshì’i</i> ‘the sheep’)
Karekare	‘if/when’ ‘when’	...ye/ya ...(ma)	Definite article: <i>lo-yi</i> ‘the meat’ Demonstrative: <i>kwàrà ’âm</i> ‘that house’ (cf. Kanakuru <i>gamii mè</i> ‘this ram’)
Ngizim	‘if/when’ ‘when’	...-n/nən ...(tənu/ngum)	< Masculine proximal demonstrative: cf. Bade (G): <i>kwàm-áani</i> ‘that bull’ “Known” dem.: <i>tlà tənū</i> ‘that cow’ cf. definite article: <i>soonò-gu</i> ‘the shoe’

The Yobe languages have grammatically instantiated a semantic connection discussed in Schlenker (2004) between definite descriptions and conditionals. Schlenker says (p. 448), “*If* [and *when* as a marker of conditionals—RGS] is

¹⁴ This is the case in several dozen examples drawn from folktale texts in the Gudi dialect of Ngamo. The Yaya dialect consistently uses a clause initial maker *ido*, e.g. Ngamo (Y) *Ido Ba Zenge nduno’o, nzuba sai fani-ni*. ‘When Brother Hyena came(PF), fear then overcame-him(SJN).’ Elicited data that I collected in the mid-1970’s, and which I believe was from the Gudi dialect (I knew nothing about Ngamo dialect distinctions at the time), also shows clause-initial *ido*, e.g. *ido ndano, yak nzi nam ula-su* ‘when (they) came(PF), then they collected(SJN) their-goods’.

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Ngamo (G)

Sauna kaja miya?	‘What did Sauna buy?’
Sauna buy.CPL what	
Bo’ota soto ki Sauna ^ɪ lo?	‘Who sold bean cakes to Sauna?’
sell.CPL bean cake to Sauna-Q-SBJ who	

Karekare

Na ’yu miya?	‘What have I done?’
I do.CPL what	
Tukà wàd’a-yì nà láà?	‘Who ate the food?’
eat.CPL food-the Q-SBJ who	

Ngizim

Sauna mase tam?	‘What did Sauna buy?’
Sauna buy.CPL what	
Dəbɔfə are i Sauna ⁿ tai?	‘Who sold bean cakes to Sauna?’
sell.CPL bean cakes to Sauna-Q-SBJ who	

This syntactic pattern, with in situ questioned non-subjects but post-VP questioned subjects, is not unique to the Yobe languages. It extends along the entire eastern edge of the West Chadic speaking region, from Bade and Duwai in the north to Tangale and Kanakuru in the south. Within Yobe State, the language to the immediate west of the Yobe languages is Hausa, which fronts all WH question words. Further south, the Chadic languages west of “post-VP subject” languages, such as Kirfi and Galambu of the Bole-Tangale group (Schuh 1978b), have in situ order for all WH questions including subjects.

Although the word order pattern illustrated above is not unique to the languages of Yobe State, there is a feature that is unique to the Potiskum area languages, namely morphological markers (boxed in the examples) of postverbal questioned subjects. Kanakuru (Newman 1974) and Tangale (Jungraithmayr 2002), for example, have postverbal questioned subjects but no marking other than position, e.g. Tangale *poduk sɔ́bɔ́k-no nɔ̀n?* ‘who has taken my slaves out?’, lit. ‘removed slaves-my who’ (Jungraithmayr 2002:14).

The resemblance of the post-VP subject makers to the markers of conditional clauses discussed in §4.1 is immediately obvious. Only Karekare departs from the pattern. Assuming that conditional markers and post-VP subject markers all have their source in definite determiners, the semantic motivation for using these markers with questioned and focused subjects emerges. The post-VP subject marker is actually in constituency with the clausal material that precedes it, and that material refers to a *presupposed proposition* that is relevant to the variable expressed by the WH word or to the value assigned in place of the variable, i.e. the referent that answers the WH question or a subject that takes pragmatic focus.

The source of the Karekare post-VP subject marker *na* is not clear at the moment. A definite determiner of the form “*n*” is widespread in West Chadic, but not in the Bole-Tangale languages. It is possible that the Karekare *na* derives from *ma* (see the data on “when” clauses above) or, alternatively, it may be borrowed

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from the formative *-n/nən* of Ngizim, which has heavily influenced Karekare in other ways.

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