Reconstructing the Proto-NW-Kainji languages of Nigeria: Adnominal marking

Rebecca Paterson
Princeton University & SIL

Comparative Niger-Congo Workshop, LLACAN-CNRS, Villejuif, France

22-23 May 2025

Abstract

The Kainji languages are the northwestern most of all East Benue-Congo languages. Their lexical, phonological and morphological diversity is reminiscent of the complexity across Benue-Congo, including the entire Bantu domain stretching into Southern Africa (see McGill 2009; McGill & Blench 2012; Harley 2012; Mort 2012; Paterson 2019; Blench 2018). However, Kainji languages are wholly contained within Nigeria and surrounded by languages of other stock. The currently available data show that Kainji displays great internal diversity; their lexical similarity is as low as 20% based on cognates from a 200 wordlist (McGill & Blench 2012). In this talk I present developing work on a historical-comparative reconstruction of the sound system and noun class affixes of Northwest Kainji (NWK), a low-level group within Kainji, based on published sources, unpublished manuscripts sources, and data from fieldwork conducted since 2005.

Despite poor knowledge and the unpublished state of most data, assertions have been made about how Kainji fits into our collective understanding of Benue-Congo, particularly regarding noun classification systems. De Wolf (1971) reconstructs Proto-Benue-Congo noun classes but only includes data from two Kainji languages; Hepburn-Gray (2020) reconstructs Proto-NigerCongo noun classes but only discusses Kainji data from two other Kainji languages. Making claims based on such limited amounts of data from a key subgroup within Benue-Congo hinders our understanding of Niger-Congo's internal structure (which is at present (a) still largely unknown and/or (b) groups are not supported by historical-comparative evidence).

Several researchers have approached Kainji languages from a comparative or historical-comparative perspective (e.g., Regnier 1992/2003; McGill 2009; McGill 2012; Bacon & Bird 2016; Bacon 2016). However, these preliminary results have not been systematically published, and they do not include data from all Kainji languages for which data now exists. The most comprehensive and ongoing effort to date is Blench's (2012-2020; updated 2025) unpublished manuscript (443 pages) which organizes lexical data from across all Kainji subgroups and includes many terms for flora and fauna in the region with data from distributed sources. Pozdniakov (2018) provides a reconstruction of Proto-Kainji numerals.

Abstract cont.

The NW Kainji languages, currently identified as əd-Gwamhyə [bga], əd-Wuri [bga], d-Mba [bga], and Tidama'un [dam, moribund], C'Lela [four varieties under the ISO 639-3, dri], Ut-Ma'in [seven varieties with internal diversity under the ISO 639-3, gel], u̱s-Saare [uss], and u̱t-Hun [uth], are unified by their characteristic use of consonant (only) noun class prefixes, featuring a transitional central vowel to ease pronunciation (Blench 2020). For example, as shown below, all extant NWK languages have a noun class prefix likely cognate with the Proto-Benue-Congo *li- (de Wolf 1971) and the Proto-Bantu agreement marker *dí (Meeussen 1967).

Code	Autonym	Class 5	Agreement	Example	Gloss
gel	U̱t-Ma'in (Ror)	*ɡrˤ-*	*dɛ*	*ɡrˤ-íːs*	'CM-eye'
dri	C'Lela (Dabai)	*dˤ-*	*dɞ*	*d-ìsɞ́*	'CM-eye'
uth	u̱t-Hun (Rijau)	*iɾ-*	*de*	*irˤ-jíʃ*	'CM-eye'
uss	u̱s-Saare (Dukku)	*iɾ-*	*de*	*irˤ-íːs*	'CM-eye'
bga	əd-Gwamhyə	*əl-*	?	*əl-iʃi*	'CM-eye'

Where and what are the Kainji languages?

- **Koelle's** (1854) **Polyglotta Africana** contains the first known transcriptions of Kainji data – for Kamuku and Basa classified together, and Kambali (i.e., Kambari) classified as an isolate.

- **Greenberg** (1963: 8) classifies the Kainji languages within Benue-Congo on the basis of their geographical distribution as **Plateau 1a** – western – and **1b** – eastern – (McGill 2012; McGill & Blench 2012; Blench 2018: 61-62). However, there appears to be no linguistic basis for such a split (Blench in press; 2020a), despite the geographic separation between eastern and western languages.

- **Gerhardt** (1989) is the first to publish the label **Kainji**. He provides an overview of classification hypotheses from 1963-1989 and the various labels applied to "Kainji" languages across that time period. He proposes seven West Kainji groups and five East Kainji groups based on his own lexicostatistical study and two others (Shimizu 1975; Bennett & Sterk 1977).

Kainji Languages

Location and classification within East Benue-Congo

Watters (2018: 3,5); Gerhardt (1989)

- Most northwest of all East Benue Congo languages.
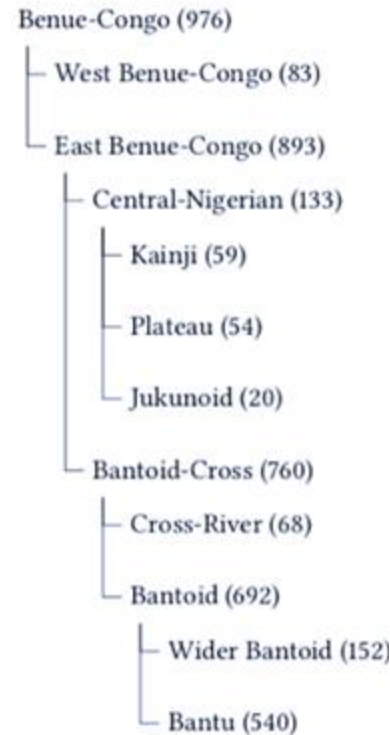- Number of distinct varieties from 59, perhaps up to 80.

Benue-Congo (976)
- West Benue-Congo (83)
- East Benue-Congo (893)
  - Central-Nigerian (133)
    - Kainji (59)
    - Plateau (54)
    - Jukunoid (20)
  - Bantoid-Cross (760)
    - Cross-River (68)
    - Bantoid (692)
      - Wider Bantoid (152)
      - Bantu (540)

Figure 2: The external and internal classification of E

1. Kainji
2. Platoid
3. Jukunoid
4. Cross River
5. Bantoid (Nigeria-Cameroon
6. Bantoid (Bantu)

1000mi
1000km
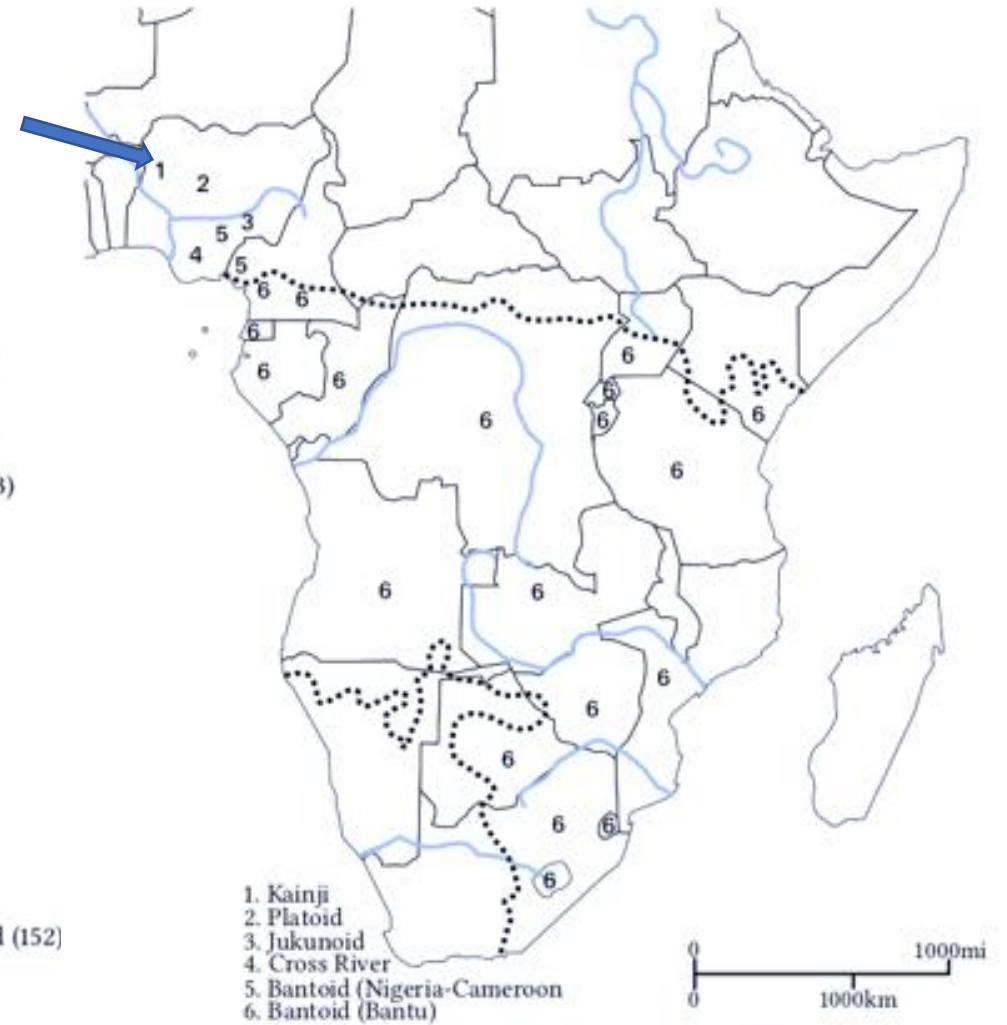
Figure 1: The locations of the five branches of EBC

What are the NW Kainji languages?

Map image credit: CC BY-SA 4.0; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kainji_languages#/media/File:Map_of_the_Kainji_languages.svg
By User:SUM1 - Used in background Map Library satellite imagery and SRTM relief data from maps-for-free.com. Used international borders from File:Nigeria location map.svg by User:Uwe_Dedering. Used in zoom map File:Africa_map_blank.svg by User:Sting. Based design on File:Map_of_the_Niger-Congo_and_Khoisan_languages.svg by User:Alphathon.Language info: Ethnologue, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=61250956
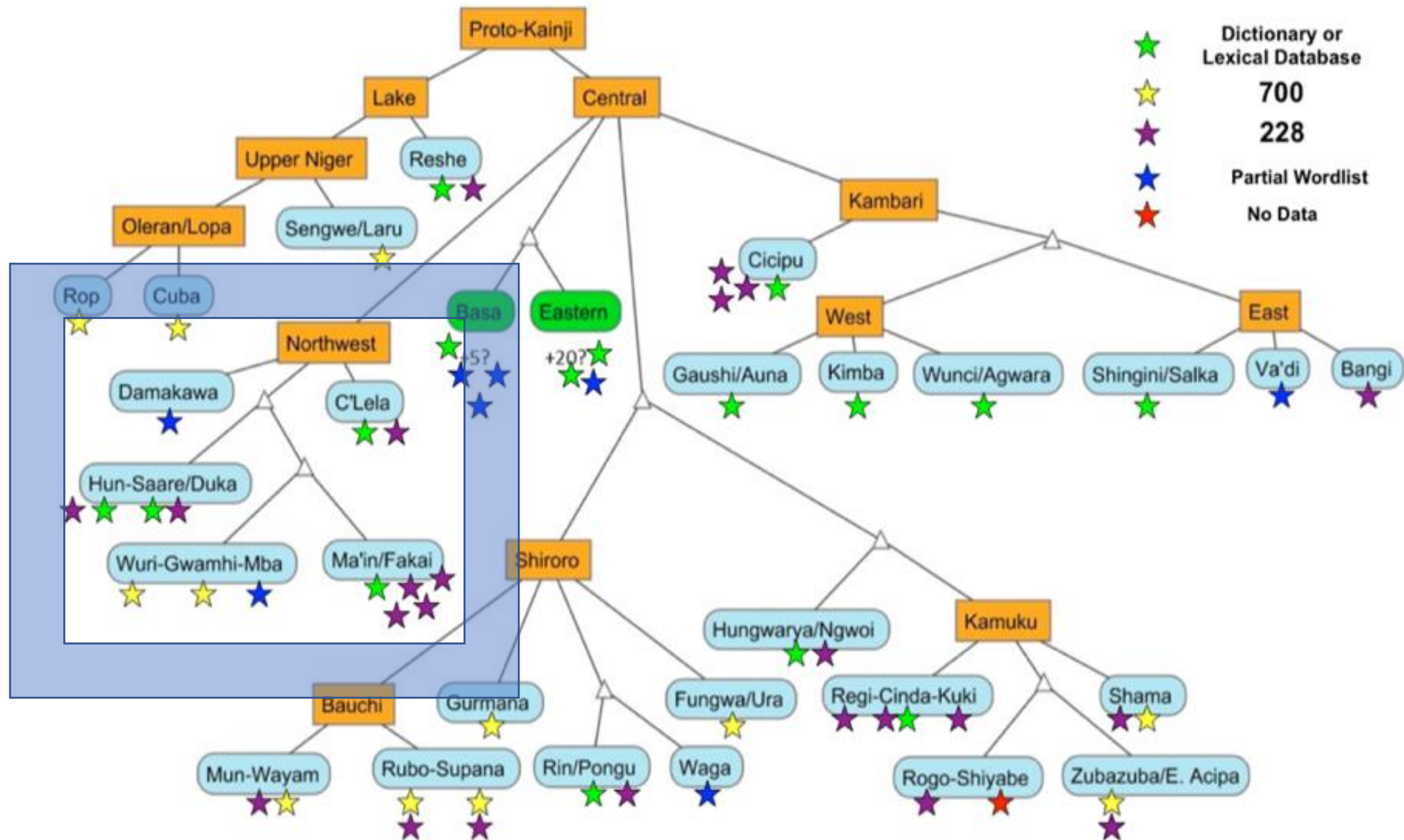
Northwest Kainji
(McGill & Blench 2012 and Blench 2018; cf. Gerhardt 1989)

- **Ut-Ma'in [gel]** (aka Kag-Fer-Jiir-Koor-Ror-Us-Zuksun)
  - Smith 2007; Paterson 2019 et al.
- **C'Lela [dri]** (aka Dakkarkari)
  - Dettweiler 2015
- **ụt-Hun [uth]** (aka Duka West)
  - Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973
- **ụs-Saarẹ [uss]** (aka Duka East)
  - D. Heath 2020
- **Gwamhi**-Wuri-Mba [bga]
  - Rowlands 1962
- **Damakawa** (moribund) **[dam]**
  - McGill 2008

6

Available lexical data

Available lexical data across Kainji (tree from McGill (2012), star annotations added)
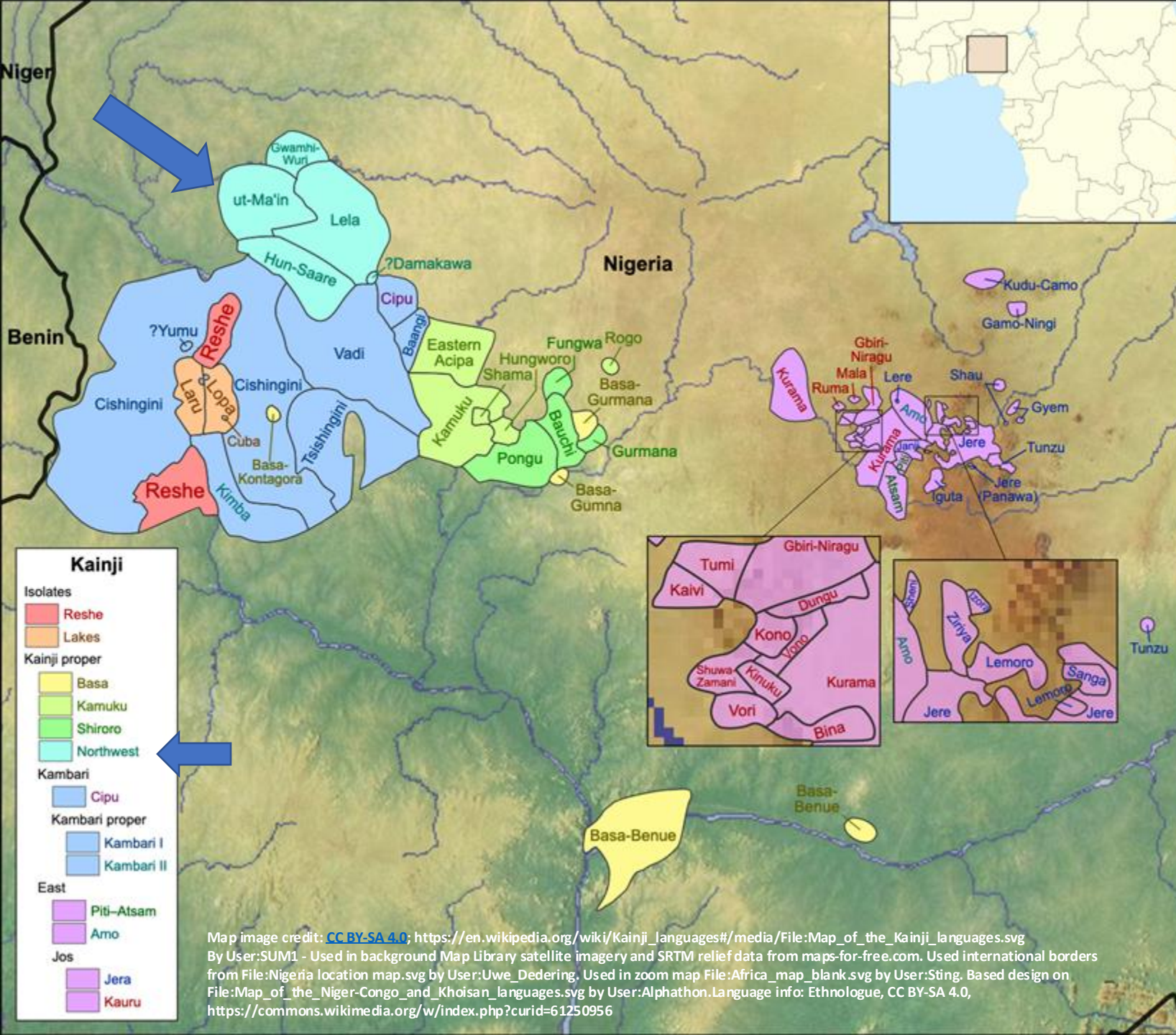
		'eye' sg	'eyes' pl	'egg' sg	'egg' pl	'fire' sg	'fire' pl
[gel]	Ụt-Ma'Rọr	ə̄rˤ-ís	ə̄tʰ-ís	ə̄rˤ-gɛ̄ (iri-gje)	ə̄tʰ-gɛ̄	ū-ɾā	ə̄tʰ-ɾā
Ụt-Ma**'in**	Ụt-Ma'Jiir	ər-iss	--	ər-gjɛ	--	u-ɾa	--
	Ụt-Fer	∅-is	--	ər-gjɛ	--	wu-ɾa	--
	Ụs-Us	ər-is	--	ər-gɛ	--	u-ɾa	--
	Ụt-Kag	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Ụt-Zuksun	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Ụt-Ma'Kụur	ə̄rˤ-iś	ə̄tʰ-íś	ər-gjə	--	u-ɾa	--
[dri]	C'Lela (Dabai/Zuru)	d-ìsɔ́	tʃ-ìsɔ́	dˤ-gjàn (ədə-gjən)	tʃˤ-gjàn	hwɛ̀lá	hwɛ̀lána
C'Lela	C'Lela (Senchi)	d-isə	∅-isə	əri-gjən	tʃi-gjən	hwela	--
	C'Lela (Ribah)	d-isə	?	də-gjən		hwela	--
	C'Lela (Rade)	əd-isə	ətʃ͡-isə	ədə-gjan	ətʃ-dʒan	hwela	--
[uth]	ụt-Hun (Rijau)	o-iiʃ	∅-iiʃ	ò-gὲ (əd-gjɛ)	ə̀r-gὲ	o-ɾa	--
ụt-Hun	ụt-Hun (Darangi)	∅-is	--	ət-gɛ	--	o-ɾa	--
[uss]	ụs-Saare (Dukku)	ìr-íís	∅-íís	ə̀r-gɛ́ (ərgjɛ)	--	ɾa	--
ụs-Saare	ụs-Saare (Iri)	ər-is	--	ər-gjɛ	--	ɾa	--
	ụs-Saare (Giro)	ər-ʔis	--	ər-gjɛ	--	ɾa	--
	ụs-Saare (T. Bunu)	ər-ʔiz	--	ər-ge	--	o-ɾa	--
[bga]	əd-Gwamhyə	əl-iʃi	əd-iʃi	--	--	u-la	--
	əd-Wuri	--	--	--	--	--	--
	d-Mba	--	--	--		--	--
[dam]	Tidama'un	--	--	--	--	hì-rá/wù-láa	--

Some cognates across purported NW Kainji

Note: 6 language codes are used for 20+ varieties with unique autonyms. Also, until 2019, [uss] and [uth] were subsumed under the code [dud], and considered dialects of one language.

8

Preliminary Comparison

NW Kainji Adnominal Markers and Agreement Forms

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	WA	
	Ø-/ -NƐ	2		YƐ
U-		3	Ɔ	
	S-	4		SƐ
D-		5	DƐ	
	T-	6		TƆ
JU-		7	JA	
	M-	8		MƆ
I-		9	I	
	A-	10		A
B-		11	BƆ	
K-		13	KƆ	
A-		15	A	

NW Kainji adnominal marking (left) vs. agreement system (right)

NW Kainji

- Abstractions based mostly on comparison of [gel], [dri], [uss], and [uth].
- Very few words available for [bga] and [dam]. Data available for [bga] in ELAR will be incorporated summer 2025.
- Note: < j > is [j] the palatal approximant.
- Note: Numbering is specific to NWK and not aligned to any higher branch of Benue-Congo or Niger-Congo. Patterns of odd (singular) and even (plural) are maintained, and 1/2 is typically used for humans.

NW Kainji Adnominal Markers and Agreement Forms

- In this section, the (prefixing) adnominal marking and schematic agreement forms are shown in their separate systems for four of the five extant NW Kainji languages.

- Pairings of classes are depicted as described in the listed resource; numbering is my attempt at aligning and does not reflect original numbering of sources.

- These displays follow Güldemann & Fiedler (2019) separating the adnominal system from the agreement/gender system.

Number		[gel] N form I	[uss] N form I	[uth] N form I	[dri] N form I
SG	WA	ū-N	ò-N	--	--
SG	WA	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N
SG	WA	wá-(cl)-N	wán-N	--	ká-/kán-N
PL	JƐ	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N
PL	JƐ	∅-N-nè	∅-N-né	∅-N-nè	∅-N-nVᴸ
PL	JƐ	á-(cl)-N-nè	ján-N-né	--	ʔá-/ʔán-N
PL	JƐ	í-A-ὲ			
PL	JƐ	--		ēgē-N (JBS 153)	--
SG	U	ū-N	ò-N	o-N	ù-N
SG	U	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N	∅-N
SG	U	--		ògò-N (JBS 153)	--
PL	SƐ	ōs-N	ès-N	ōs-N	s-N
SG	DƐ	ōr/-N	èr-/èt-/èd-/èn-N	ōr-N	d-N
PL	TƆ	ōt-N	èr-/èt-/èd-/èn-N	ōt-N	tʃ-N
SG	JU	ū-N	ò-N	o-N	i-N
SG	JU	∅-N		∅-N	--
SG	JA	jɔ́-A-jà		jà-(cl)N-jō	--
MASS	MƆ	ōm-N	èm-N	ōm-N	m-N
SG	I	í-N		--	--
PL	A	ā-N		--	--
SG	BƆ	ōb-N		--	v-N
SG	KƆ	--	kò-N	kó-N	k-N
SG	A	--		--	a-N

NW Kainji Adnominal Marking

- Citation forms of NW Kainji nouns bear class prefixes. In this presentation, these are labeled Noun Form I.
- This display also contains word formation processes that result in words within particular classes, particularly WA and JA used commonly for human singulars and JƐ forms used commonly for animate (including human) plurals.
- Notice also the use of the –NƐ suffix in the JƐ for human plurals

12

C'Lela [dri]

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	wɜ̀	
	Ø-	2		à/nɜ̀
ù-		3	ò	
	s-	4		sɜ̀
d-		5	dɛ́	
	tʃ-	6		tʃɜ̀
ì-		7	í/è/jɜ̀	
	m-	8		mɜ̀
v-		11	vɜ̀	
k-		13	kɜ̀	
à-		15	á/nà	

C'lela [dri] adnominal prefixes (left) vs. agreement system (right)

(based on Dettweiler 2015; numbering adjusted)

u̱s-Saare̱ [uss]

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	wɔ́	
	Ø-	2		jɛ́
ò-		3	ɔ́	
	ɔ̄s-	4		sé
ɔ̀r-		5	dɛ́	
	ɔ̀r-	6		dɔ́
		7	jó	
ɔ̄m-		8	mɔ́	

u̱s-Saare [uss] adnominal prefixes (left) vs. agreement system (right)

(based on D. Heath 2020 ; numbering adjusted)

uͺt-Hun [uth]

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	wɔ́	
	Ø-/jɛ̀gɛ̀-	2		jɛ́
ò-		3	ɔ́	
	�͞s-	4		sé
ɜ̀r-		5	dé	
	ɜ̀t-	6		tɔ́
		7	jó	
to͞m-		8		mɔ́

uͺt-Hun [uth] adnominal prefixes (left) vs.
agreement system (right)

(based on Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973; numbering adjusted)

U̱t-Ma'in [gel]

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	wá	
	Ø-	2		(j)έ
ū-		3	ɔ́	
	ɟ̄s-	4		sέ
ɟ̄r-		5	dέ	
	ɟ̄t-	6		tɔ́
		7	já	
	ɟ̄m-	8		mɔ́
ī-		9	í	
	ā-	10		á
ɟ̄b-		11	bɔ́	

U̱t-Ma'in [gel] adnominal prefixes (left) vs. agreement system (right)

(Based on Smith 2007 & Paterson fieldwork)

16

How do speakers use all of these morphemes?

- All NW Kainji languages show four distinct word forms (herein labelled Noun forms I, II, III, and IV).

- Noun form III is dedicated to marking certain subjects.

- Noun Form IV is the bare noun root for which class is typically retrievable from some other element within the NP or wider context.

- The next three slides give an overview of the complexities of the [gel] system including the agreement forms on various agreement targets. Of note, is that no agreement marking is found on the [gel] verb.

U̲t-Ma'in [gel]

SG	PL	AG	SG	PL
Ø-		1	wá	
	Ø-	2		(j)ɛ́
ū-		3	ɔ́	
	ɜ̄s-	4		sɛ́
ɜ̄r-		5	dɛ́	
	ɜ̄t-	6		tɔ́
		7	já	
	ɜ̄m-	8		mɔ́
ī-		9	í	
	ā-	10		á
ɜ̄b-		11	bɔ́	

U̲t-Ma'in [gel] adnominal marking (left) vs.
agreement system (right)

U̱t-Ma'in [gel] Agreement Targets

- [gel] agreement targets are of two types: those that take an agreement form that maintains its thematic vowel and those that do not maintain the thematic vowel.

- When no thematic vowel is present, either an adjacent vowel supports tones associated with a given construction or an epenthetic central vowel [ə] is supplied to meet syllable structure requirements and to support tones.

Table 9: Agreement (AG) targets with thematic vowel

U̲t-Ma'in [gel]

Extracted from Paterson (forthcoming).

Class Label	OBJ pronoun	SUBJ pronoun	DEF marker	ADJ suffix	What?	DEM	INDEFSPEC[††] 'certain/some'
CL1	wá	wā	wá	A-wà	//[†]	únwā	wákɔ̄n N=wā
CL2	ɛ́	ɛ̄	ɛ́	A-ɛ̀	jānɛ́[‡]	ínē	ɛ́kɛ̄n N=ɛ̄
CL3	ɔ́	ɔ̄	ɔ́	A-ɔ̀	jānɔ́	únɔ̄	ɔ́kɔ̄n N=ɔ̄
CL4	sɛ́	sɛ̄	sɛ́	A-sɛ̀	jānsɛ́	sínsɛ̄	sɛ́kɛ̄n N=sɛ̄
CL5	dɛ́	dɛ̄	dɛ́	A-dɛ̀	jāndɛ́	díndɛ̄	dɛ́kɛ̄n N=dɛ̄
CL6	tɔ́	tɔ̄	tɔ́	A-tɔ̀	jāntɔ́	túntɔ̄	tɔ́kɔ̄n N=tɔ̄
CL7	já	jā	já	A-jà	jānjá	ínjā	jákɔ̄n N=jā
CL8	mɔ́	mɔ̄	mɔ́	A-mɔ̀	jānɔ́	múmːɔ́	mɔ́kɔ̄n N=mɔ̄
CL9	í	ī	í	A-ì	jānɛ́	--	ɛ́kɛ̄n N=ɛ̄
CL10	á	ā	á	A-à	jāná	--	àkɔ̄n N=ā

[†]Cells marked as < -- > are unattested but assumed to possibly exist; cells marked with < // > are empty and deemed impossible.

[††] The INDEF-SPEC can encompass either a Noun Form IV or an expanded NP.

[‡] Only compatible with class 2 for nonhuman referents (i.e., animals). The question *jān* 'what?' is incompatible with items in class 1 which always has a singular human referent. *wáná* 'who' is the appropriate question word with similar function that marks class 1.

20

Table 10: Agreement (AG) targets with no thematic vowel

U̱t-Ma'in
[gel]

Extracted from Paterson (forthcoming).

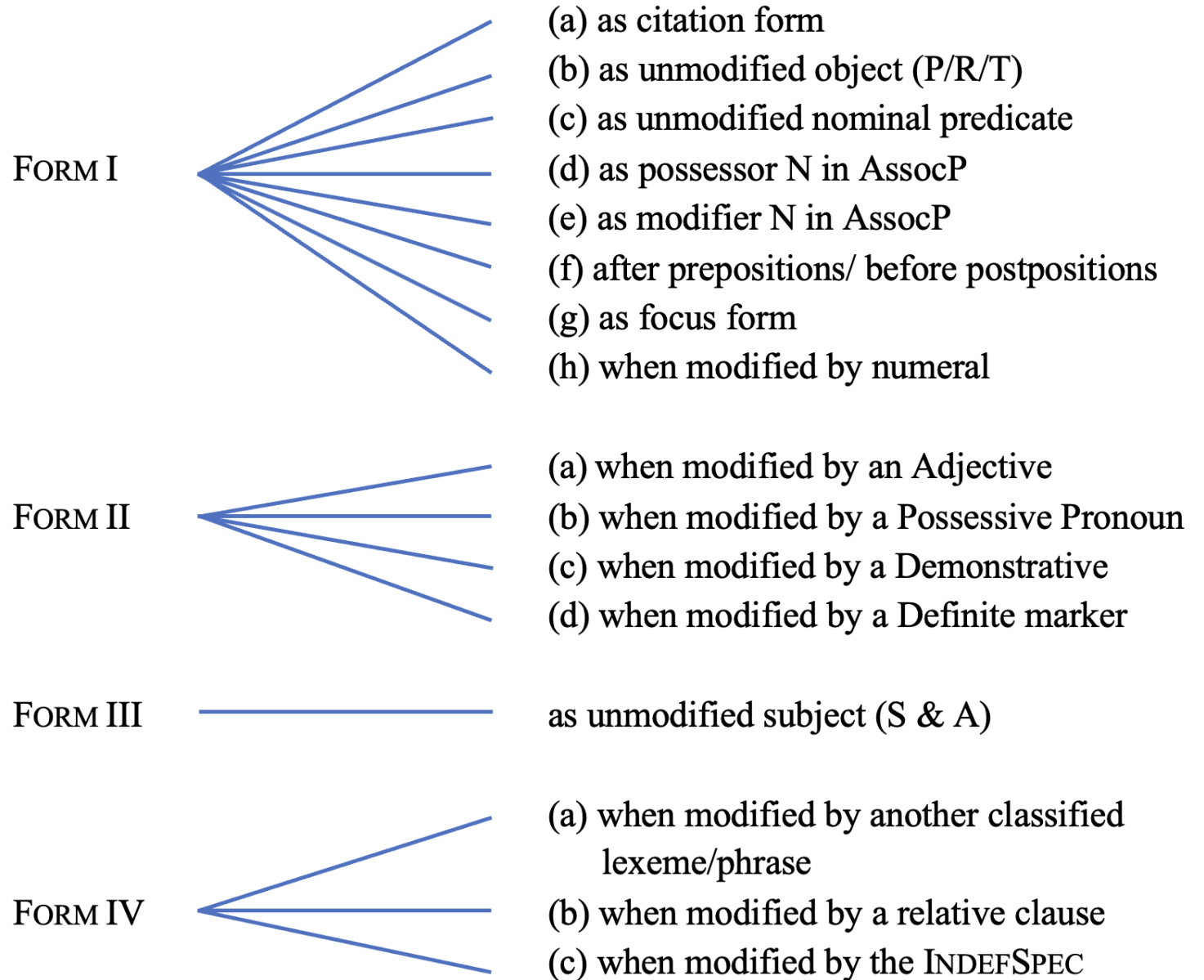| Class Label	ASSOCIATIVE	RELATIVIZER	'which?'	'any other___'
CL1	$\varnothing^{\text{L}} =$	$w^{\text{L}} =$	wɔ̀hɛ̀	kɔ́wɔ̀hɛ̀ N=wā
CL2	$\varnothing^{\text{L}} =$	$\varnothing^{\text{L}} =$	ɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL3	$\varnothing^{\text{L}} =$	$\varnothing^{\text{L}} =$	ɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL4	$s^{\text{L}} =$	$s^{\text{L}} =$	sɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL5	$d^{\text{L}} =$	$d^{\text{L}} =$	dɔ̀hɛ̀	kɔ́dɔ̀hɛ̀ N=dɛ̄
CL6	$t^{\text{L}} =$	$t^{\text{L}} =$	tɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL7	$j^{\text{L}} =$	$j^{\text{L}} =$	jɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL8	$m^{\text{L}} =$	$m^{\text{L}} =$	mɔ̀hɛ̀	--
CL9	$i^{\text{L}} =$	$i^{\text{L}} =$	ìhɛ̀	--
CL10	$a^{\text{L}} =$	$a^{\text{L}} =$	àhɛ̀	--

U̱t-Maꞌin [gel]
Noun Forms I-IV

When NW Kainji language speakers deploy nouns with noun modifiers, particular noun forms are obligatory based on the particular morphosyntactic configuration.

Noun "Word" Forms in Ʋt-Maˈin [gel]

Number	Class Label	Noun Form I [cl^M-N]	Noun Form II [N-cl]	Noun Form III [N-cl^L]	Noun Form IV [N]	AG schema
SG	CL1	*ū*-N ∅-N	N-*u*	N-ə̀	N	*wa*
PL	CL2	∅-N	N-ə	N-ə̀	N	*ɛ*
SG	CL3	*ū*-N ∅-N	N-*u*	N-ə̀	N	*ɔ*
PL	CL4	*ə̄s*-N	N-ə*s*	N-*s*ə̀	N	*sɛ*
SG	CL5	*ə̄r*-N	N-ə*r*	N-*d*ə̀	N	*dɛ*
PL	CL6	*ə̄t*-N	N-ə*t*	N-*t*ə̀	N	*tɔ*
SG	CL7	*ū*-N ∅-N	N-*u*	N-*j*ə̀	N	*ja*
MASS	CL8	*ə̄m*-N	N-ə*m*	N-*m*ə̀	N	*mɔ*
SG	CL9	*ī*-N	N-*ɛ*	N-*ì*	N	*i*
PL	CL10	*ā*-N	N-*a*	N-*à*	N	*a*

Referential functions of Noun Forms I-IV in Ṷt-Ma'in

Note: Forms I and IV are also used in predicative function when TAMP Auxiliaries require a nominal complement to express an event predicate (Paterson 2019a,b; forthcoming). Forms II and III are not attested in (event) predicative function.

FORM I
- (a) as citation form
- (b) as unmodified object (P/R/T)
- (c) as unmodified nominal predicate
- (d) as possessor N in AssocP
- (e) as modifier N in AssocP
- (f) after prepositions/ before postpositions
- (g) as focus form
- (h) when modified by numeral

FORM II
- (a) when modified by an Adjective
- (b) when modified by a Possessive Pronoun
- (c) when modified by a Demonstrative
- (d) when modified by a Definite marker

FORM III
- as unmodified subject (S & A)

FORM IV
- (a) when modified by another classified lexeme/phrase
- (b) when modified by a relative clause
- (c) when modified by the INDEFSPEC

CL7

Ut-Ma'in
[gel]

Forms I-IV: Reference								
a.	Form I [CL^M-Root]	*àp* meat	*m-^{L}=[**u-ɔ́ʔ**]*$_I$ AG8-ASSOC=**CL7-dog**		*ɔ́:ʔ* COP	*ɔ́mɛ́* inside		*ɔ̄t-tʃwà* CL6-soup
		'Meat of a dog is inside the soup.'						
b.	Form II [Root=CL]	**[ɔ̄ʔ-ū]**$_{II}$ **dog-CL7**	*īnjā* DEM.AG7		*gʲēr-∅* fear-BV		*∅-jā:g* C2-children	
		'This dog is afraid of children.'						
c.	Form III [Root=CL^L]	**[ɔ́ʔ-jɔ̀]**$_{III}$ **dog-CL7**.SUBJ	*tɔ̄:stɛ̄* chew.PRF		*ɔ̄m-àp* CL8-meat			
		'A dog has chewed the meat.'						
d.	Form IV [Root]	*nā* NSPEC	*wɔ̄-∅* put-BV	**[ɔ́ʔ]**$_{IV}$=*j-ɔ̀*=*r-dɔ̀g*]$_{IV}$ ... **dog**=AG7-ASSOC-C5-wilderness				
		'They chose wild dog (to give the invitation).'						

CL2

U̲t-Ma'in [gel]

Note: Form I in (a) here is immediately followed by a numeral, which does not show agreement. Only numerals up to 19 reflect agreement with the enumerated noun.

		Forms I-IV: Reference			
a.	Form I [CL^M-Root]	ɛ̄ AG2.SUBJ	tɛ̀:stɛ̀ reach.PRF	**[Ø-kwàrɔ̀g]$_I$ CL2-bush.fowl**	ɔ̄r-kwāz ɔ́ʔɔ́p ɔ́tán CL5-twenty ten five
		'They added up to thirty five bush fowl.' (BK_IT_2007:57)			
b.	Form II [Root=CL]	á=wā when=AG1	mɔ́:tɛ̀ return.PRF	**[kwàrg-ɔ̀]$_{II}$ bush.fowl-CL2**	wá=H 3SG.POSS=DEP
		'When he had returned (with) his bush fowl,...' (BK_IT_2007:59)			
c.	Form III [Root=CL^L]	**[kwàrɔ̀g-ɔ̀]$_{III}$ bush.fowl-CL2.SUBJ**		H-*m-tɔ̄-:n=é* PROG-arrive-DIST=DEP	
		'As bush fowl were flying in (to the place he was),...' (BK_IT_2007:53)			
d.	Form IV [Root]	ɔ̄m 1SG.SUBJ	hjáŋ see.PST	ɛ̀-kɛ̄n AG2-INDEF	**[kwàrɔ̀g]$_{IV}$=ɛ̄ bush.fowl=AG2.INDEF**
		'I saw some bush fowl.'			

CL8

Ṵt-Ma'in
[gel]

a. Form I [CL^M-N]

wā   kábɔ̄n   **[ɔ̄m-bɔ̄]**ₙₚ wā   dʒāːs

AG1.SUBJ take.DIST   C6B-water 3SG.SUBJ wash

'He took water (from somewhere). He washed (his eyes).'

b. Form II [N-CL]

ɛ̄   kúm   **[bɔ̄-ɔ̄m**   sɔ̀-mɔ̀]**ₙₚ

AG2.SUBJ   get water-CL8 good-AG8

'They got fresh water'

c. Form III [N-CL^L]

[bɔ̄-mɔ̀]ₙₚ   táːs-tɛ̀

water-CL8.SUBJ finish-PRF

'We have run out of water.

d. Form IV [N]

[mɔ̀kɔ̄n   **bɔ̄=mɔ̄]** ₙₚ   nāːg

AG8.INDEF.SPEC   water=INDEF.SPEC spoil.PST

'Some water spoiled.'

Ṵt-Ma'in [gel] Noun Forms

gòròp 'dove'

	[(pre-MOD)	N	(post-MOD)]
I: [CL$^{(M)}$-N]		**ə̄r**-*gòròp*	(**ə̄r**-Num)
II: [N-CL^{C}]		*gòròp*-**ə̀r**	*([A/Dem/D/Poss])
III: [N-CL^{L}]		*gòròp*-**də̀**	*(VP)
IVa: [N]	INDEF-SPEC	*gòròp*	=**də̄**
IVb: [N]		*gòròp*	=**də̀**= *([NP$_{MOD}$/ RelC])

Note: Superscript ^{C} indicates a tonal value copied from the final syllable of the stem.
$^{(M)}$ indicates that the tone optionally occurs if no other tone is required for the construction. The morpheme is toneless or otherwise tone is overwritten.

Noun "Word" Forms II & III across NW Kainji

Note: [dri] exhibits class specific behavioral differences with regard to Forms II and III. [uss] shows no distinction between Forms II and III, so only [uss] form II is shown here.

Number		GEL N form II	UTH N form II	USS N form II	DRI form II = AG	GEL N form III	UTH N form III	DRI form III = AG-VP
sg	WA	N-ə	--	N-ò	--	N-ə̀ VP	--	--
sg	WA	N-ə	N-∅	N-∅	N ə̀v-	N-ə̀ VP	N-∅ VP	N ∅-V
sg	WA	wá-(cl)-N	--		--	wá-(cl)-N VP	--	--
pl	JƐ	N-ə	N-∅	N-ɛ̀	N í-	N-ə̀ VP	N-∅ VP	N í-V
pl	JƐ	N(-nɛ̀)	N(-nɛ̀)	N-nɛ́-∅	N í-	N-nɛ̀ VP	N-nɛ̀ VP	N í-V
pl	JƐ	á-(cl)-N-nɛ̀	--	--	--	á-(cl)-N-nɛ̀ VP	--	--
pl	JƐ	í-A-ɛ̀	--	--	--	í-A-ɛ̀	--	--
sg	U	N-u	N-o	N-ò	N ù-	N-ə̀ VP	N-ō VP	N ù-V
sg	U	N-u	N-o	N-∅	N ù-	N-ə̀ VP	N-ō VP	N ù-V
sg	U	--	ògò-N-ō		--	--	--	--
pl	U	N-əs	N-əs	N-ə̀s	N s-	N-sə̀ VP	N-ə̄s VP	N s-V
sg	DƐ	N-ər	N-ər	N-ùr	N d-	N-də̀ VP	N-ə̄r VP	N d-V
pl	TƆ	N-ət	N-ət	N-ùr	N tʃ-	N-tə̀ VP	N-ə̄t VP	N tʃ-V
sg	JA	N-u	N-o	N-o/N-jo	N í-	N-jə̀ VP	N-ō VP	N í-V
sg	JA	--	N-o		--	N-jə̀ VP	N-ō VP	--
sg	JA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
mass	MƆ	N-əm	N-əm Poss	N-ə̀m	N m-	N-mə̀ VP	N-ə̄m VP	N m-V
sg	I	N-ɛ	--	--	--	N-ì VP	--	--
pl	A	N-a	--	--	--	N-à VP	--	--
sg	BƆ	--	--	--	N v-	--	--	N v-V
sg	KƆ	--	--	--	N k-	--	--	N k-V
sg	A?	--	--	--	N à-	--	--	N à-V

NWK Noun Form I [CL N]

1) *yá*   *mɛ̄*   **ə̄m**-*hɔ̄*   *ə́m*   *sɔ̄*   u̱t-Hun [uth]

    give   1SG.OBJ   CL8-water   1SG.SUBJ   drink

   'Give me water to drink.' (Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973: 36)

2) *dɔ*   *rɔ*   *dɔr*   **m**-*mi*   u̱s-Saare̱ [uss]

    AG6   COP   follow   CL8-water

   '(Utensils, plates, mats,…) they are following (flood) water' (Heath 2020: 192)

3) *ù-sɔ̀ː-k*   **(ə́)m**-*hɔ̀ː*   C'Lela [dri]

   3SG-drink-PFV1   CL8-water

   'S/he drank water.' (Dettweiler 2015: 90)

NW Kainji Noun Form II

- In the following examples, Noun Form II is shown for [uth], [uss], and [dri].
- It takes the obligatory form [N CL] and occurs before modifiers such as Adjectives, Demonstratives, and Possessive Pronouns.
- In [gel], [uth], and [uss], the CL is suffixed to the N. In [dri], the CL is prefixed to the modifier.

NWK Noun Form II [N CL]

5) *ā yāāsərə́ wə́ hɔ̄-ə̄m pūs mɔ̄* u̱t-Hun [uth]
   one gave AG1 water-CL8 white AG8

   'He was given white water.' (Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973: 144)

4) a. *mi-mɔ wà*   b. *mi-mɔ wá* u̱s-Saare̱[uss]
   water-CL8 DEM.NEAR   water-CL8 DEM.FAR

   'this water'   'that water' (Heath 2020: 192)

6) *hɔ̀: m-rí ʔèl ló*   C'Lela [dri]
   water AG8M-1SG.POSS COP there

   'It is my responsibility.' Lit: 'My water is there.' (Dettweiler 2015:42)

NW Kainji Noun Form III

- In the following examples, NW Kainji Noun Form III is shown for [uth], [uss], and [dri].
- It takes the obligatory form [N-CL] for [uth] and [uss], where it must be the form used for an unmodified N in subject position.
- In the [gel] examples, shown above, the form is syllabically and tonally distinct from Form II; tonal information is not available for [uss], so it may be that Form II and III are not distinct in [uss].
- For [dri], it takes the obligatory form [N CL-V], where it must attach to the first element of the immediately following VP; no adverbials or other elements are known to intervene.

NWK Noun Form III [N CL]

7) *ɘ̀rēgɛ́ ɕ́nɛ̄   hɔ̄-ɘ̄m   táágɘ̀tɛ̀   ò-hūr   é…* u̲t-Hun [uth]

    if   water-CL8   has.finished   CL3-home   DEP

    'If water has finished at home/If there is a lack of water …'(Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973: 43)

8) *be   mi-m   esːɛ   o-hur=à…*   u̲s-Saare̲ [uss]

    as   water-CL8   hold   CL3-house=DEP

    'As water covered the house, …' (Heath 2020: 192)

9) *hɔ̀ː   m-táː-kà*   C'Lela [dri]

    water AG8M-finish-PFV1

    'The water is finished.' (Dettweiler 2015: 90)

NW Kainji Noun Forms I-IV

- Synchronically, NW Kainji nouns maintain a fairly consistent and identifiable root shape (with some exceptions for C'Lela [dri] plurals not discussed herein), whereas the obligatory class marking varies in its morphological shape, including tonal quality, and in its syntactic location with regard to the root.

- This is discussed in detail for [gel] in Paterson (forthcoming).

- The clitic-like nature of NW Kainji adnominal marking is discussed in Güldemann & Fiedler (forthcoming), with evidence from [gel].

- Each construction is used to accomplish particular morphosyntactic ends.

- For Proto-NWK, adnominal class prefixes and adnominal class suffixes can be reconstructed.

- Perhaps better, we can reconstruct the "constructions" within which Proto-NW-Kainji adnominal marking occurs in diverse, and yet, obligatory positions, aligned with their specific morphosyntactic purposes.

Data sources for NW Kainji

Bendor-Samuel, John, Esther Cressman, Donna Skitch. 1971. The nominal phrase in Duka. *Journal of West African Languages* 8 2. Available online: https://journalofwestafricanlanguages.org/downloads/download/23-volume0802/104-the-nominal-phrase-in-duka

Bendor-Samuel, John, Donna Skitch and Esther Cressman. 1973. Duka sentence, clause and phrase. *Studies in Nigeria Languages 3*. Zaria, Nigeria: Institute of Linguistics. Available online: https://archive.org/details/dukasentenceclau0000bend

Blench, R. 2025. The Kainji languages of Northwestern and Central Nigeria. Electronic Manuscript. https://www.academia.edu/3357056/The_Kainji_Languages_of_Northwestern_and_Central_Nigeria.

Dettweiler, Stephen. 2015. C'Lela Grammar Portrait. Electronic Manuscript. Available online: https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/63135.

Heath, David M. 2020. ụs-Saarẹ Phonological and Grammar Sketch. Electronic Manuscript. Dukku Local Government, Niger State, Nigeria. SIL International Language & Culture Archive. https://www.sil.org/resources/archives/87200.

McGill, S.J. 2008. The Damakawa language. Electronic ms. http://www.cicipu.org/papers/damakawa.pdf.

Paterson, R. 2019a. Nominalization and predication in Ụt-Ma'in. PhD Dissertation. Eugene: University of Oregon. http://hdl.handle.net/1794/25259.

Paterson, R. 2019b. On the development of two progressive constructions in Ụt-Ma'in. *Folia Linguistica Historica*, 40(2), 509–554. https://doi.org/10.1515/flih-2019-0020.

Paterson, R. Forthcoming. Nouns are everywhere and do everything: Towards an understanding of the classification of lexemes and the categorization of words in Ụt-Ma'in (Kainji, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo).

Smith, Rebecca Dow [Paterson]. 2007. The noun class system of ụt-Ma'in, a West Kainji language of Northwestern Nigeria. MA thesis, University of North Dakota. Available online: https://commons.und.edu/theses/4476/.

Other resources concerning NW Kainji languages

Babaev, K. V. 2010. Reconstructing Benue-Congo person marking II. Вопросы Языкового Родства // Journal of Language Relationship, 4, 1–45.

Bacon, G. 2016. The internal structure of Kainji. Electronic Manuscript.

Bacon, G. & S. Bird. 2016. Bayesian phylogenetics, sequence alignment and the internal classification of Kainji. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of Australia.

Blench, R. 2012. Research and development of Nigerian minority languages. In R. Blench & S. McGill (eds.), *Advances in minority language research in Nigeria*, vol. 1, 1–18. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

Blench, R. 2018a. Nominal Affixing in the Kainji languages of Northwestern and Central Nigeria. In John Robert Watters (ed.), *East Benue-Congo: Nouns, Pronouns, And Verbs* (Niger-Congo Comparative Studies 1), 59–106. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Blench, R. 2020a. An Atlas of Nigerian languages. https://bit.ly/BlenchNigerianAtlas2020

Blench, Roger. 2020b. The East Kainji languages of Central Nigeria. *Afrika und Übersee* 93. 45–67. https://doi.org/10.15460/auue.2020.93.1.210.

Blench, R. & S. McGill. (May) 2012. The Kainji languages of Northwestern and Central Nigeria. Electronic ms.

De Wolf, P. 1971. *The Noun-Class system of Proto-Benue-Congo* (Janua Linguarum. Series Practica 167). The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton.

Gerhardt, L. 1989. Kainji and Platoid. In J. Bendor-Samuel & R.L. Hartell (eds.), *The Niger-Congo languages: A classification and description of Africa's largest language family*, 359–376. Lanham: University Press of America.

Greenberg, J.H. 1963. *The Languages of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Gunn, H.D. & F.P. Conant. 1960. Peoples of the Middle Niger Region of Northern Nigeria. IAI, London.

Harley, Matthew. 2012. Unusual sounds in Nigerian languages. In Roger Blench and Stuart McGill (ed.), Advances in Minority Language Research in Nigeria (Kay Williamson Educational Foundation: African Languages Monographs 5), vol. 1, 38–65. Köln, Germany: Köppe.

Hepburn-Gray, R. 2020. Niger-Congo noun classes: Reconstruction, historical implications, and morphosyntactic theory. PhD Dissertation. Buffalo: The State University of New York.

Other resources cont.

Koelle, S.W. 1854. *Polyglotta Africana*. London: Church Missionary House.

McGill, S.J. 2009. The genetic classification of Cicipu. Electronic ms. http://www.cicipu.org/papers/2009-05-06_classification_cicipu_working.pdf.

McGill, S. J. 2009. Gender and person agreement in Cicipu discourse. PhD Dissertation. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Department of Linguistics, London, UK.

McGill, S. J. 2012. The Kainji languages. Presented at the International congress: Towards Proto-Niger-Reconstruction: Comparison and reconstruction, Paris, France.

McGill, S. & R. Blench. 2012. Documentation, development, and ideology in the northwestern Kainji languages. In S. McGill & P.K. Austin (eds.) Language Documentation and Description, vol 11. London: SOAS. pp. 90-135.

Meeussen, A.E. 1967. Bantu grammatical reconstructions. Africana Linguistica. Persée - Portail des revues scientifiques en SHS 3(1). 79–121.

Mort, K. 2012. A phonological description of the Cinda [tʃìndə] dialect of the Kamuku language. Electronic ms.

Pozdniakov, K. 2018. *The numeral system of Proto-Niger-Congo: A step-by-step reconstruction Niger-Congo* (Niger-Congo Comparative Studies 2). Berlin: Language Science Press.

Regnier, C.D. 1992. A sociolinguistic survey of the people of Fakai District. Mimeographed report. Ilorin, Nigeria: United Missionary Church of Africa.

Shimizu, K. 1975. A lexicostatistical study of Plateau languages and Jukun. Anthropological Linguistics 17(8). 413–418.

Bennett, P.R. & J.P. Sterk. 1977. South-Central Niger-Congo: a reclassification. Studies in African linguistics. 8(3). 241–273.

Watters, J.R. 2018. East Benue-Congo. In J.R. Watters (ed.), East Benue-Congo: Nouns, pronouns, and verbs (Niger-Congo Comparative Studies 1), 1–25. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Williamson, K. 1993. The noun prefixes of New Benue-Congo. Journal of African Languages and Linguistics 14(1). https://doi.org/10.1515/jall.1993.14.1.29.

Williamson, K. & R.M. Blench. 2000. Niger-Congo. In B. Heine & D. Nurse (eds.), African languages: an introduction, 11–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williamson, K. & K. Shimizu. 1973. Benue-Congo comparative wordlist. Vol. 2. West African Linguistic Society, University of Ibadan.

Thank you