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Documenting Bure, a Chadic Language of Northern Nigeria:
the Clause Structure

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1. Introduction

Bure is an Afro-Asiatic language belonging to the West branch of the Chadic family (Bole-Tangale group, Bole proper). The language is spoken in the village of Bure by 20-30 speakers of great-grand parental generation, the total population of the settlement being about 500 units.

Name:	'Bure language' *bùbbúrè*, 'Bure person' *nò Búrè*, 'Bure people' *mà Búrè*
Classification:	Chadic, West, A.2, Bole-Tangale, Bole proper.
ISO code:	639-3 bvh
Place:	Bure village (10°31'26.87''N 10°19'46.40''E) and small settlements nearby (Kirfi Local Government Area, Kirfi District, Bauchi State, Nigeria)
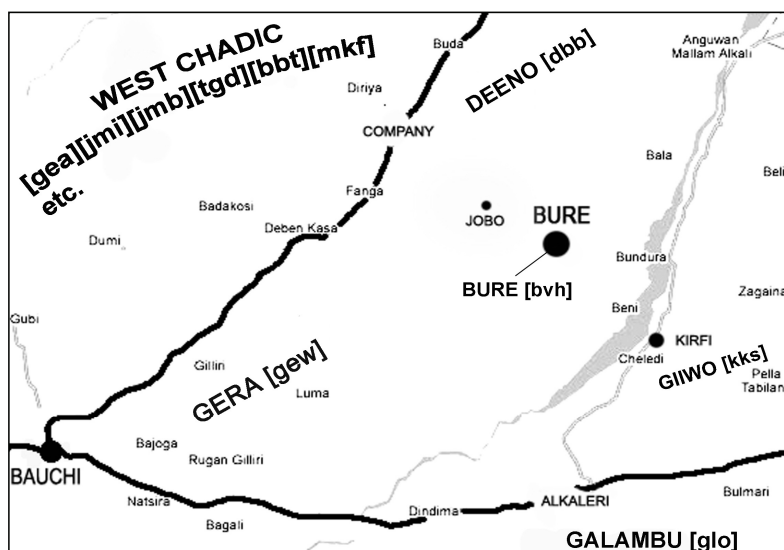
Fig. 1. The Bure area

A few scholars worked on Bure producing published and unpublished material. Andrew Haruna provided a full account on the causes that led the community to the language shift from Bure to Hausa (Haruna 2000, but see also Haruna 1993, 1996).

2. Assessment of vitality

Bure is seldom used in everyday linguistic exchange even by those elders who can still speak the language. The *sarki* (Hausa for 'Emir') of the village does not employ Bubbure to address his coevals and only a few of them are keen to use the language and see the fact that the language will be gone once they will pass away as an important loss.

The language can be labelled as critically endangered, but the term muribund seems more appropriate to me. The proportion of speakers within the total population is very thin: within a community of about 500 people, the speakers of Bubbure are between 20 and 30 units, that is 4-6% of the total.

The cultural shift that took place some decades ago, of which Islamisation was perhaps the most powerful agent of change (followed by Hausaisation), caused the abandonment of some practices. The disappearing of old customs and way of life is mirrored in Bubbure, since its lexicon preserves only a few traces of cultural domains no longer productive in the community's life. Brewery domain, hunting and gathering, the botanical vocabulary, pre-Islamic beliefs: of all this, not many lexical items have survived the cultural shift. On the other hand, Bubbure is not employed in any new domain: the shift to Hausa, the former vehicular language, is almost complete and Bubbure has already been cut from the multilingual context. No ortography is available to the community, and the language does not enjoy any form of official recognition or protection. As for the community member's attitude towards the language, there is no general concern about the linguistic loss.

An assessment of vitality of Bubbure is provided in Table 1. The criteria are those adopted by the UNESCO Expert Group on Safeguarding Endangered Languages (Brenzinger et al. 2003).

The numbers in the grade column indicate to the safety of the language. They range from 0 (extinct/unactive) to 5 (safe/active). The quality column gives a 'reliability score' based on a scale ranging from 0 (no data available) to 3 (evidence from fieldwork and direct observation; unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00144).

Criteria		Grade	Quality
1.	Intergenerational language transmission	1	3
2.	Absolute numbers of speakers	-	3
3.	Proportion of speakers within the total populationLoss of	1	3
4.	existing language domains	1	3
5.	Response to new domains and media	0	3
6.	Materials for language education and literacy	0	3
7.	Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies	1	3
8.	Community members' attitudes towards their own language	0	3
9.	Amount and quality of documentation	0/1	3

Tab. 1. Profile of endangerment/extinction (Brenzinger *et al.* 2003)

Compared to the other languages of the Bole-Tangale group, the endangerment of Bure is by far the most critical.

The languages encountered by a typical member of the community in everyday life are: Hausa (mother tongue to the majority of members), Fulfulde and English (by radio broadcasting, e.g. BBC). Other surrounding Chadic languages are also found, but they do not play a major role in everyday linguistic exchange. They are Gera and Deeno, spoken southwest and west of Bure respectively. Deeno, whose endangerment profile does not differ too much from that of Bure, is seen by the community members as the language closest to Bure. The speakers of Deeno are slightly superior in number and the language is spoken on a wider area, but also in this case the chain of inter-generational transmission has been broken and Deeno is now used or remembered by a limited number of elders (and understood, but not spoken, by members of the parental generation).

3. Typological profile

3.1. Word classes

Bure has nouns, verbs and adjectives. Verbal nouns exist and function as nouns, not having any role in the TAM system, as it is for example in Hausa where the verbal noun is used in the perfective.

Not surprisingly, the adjective class is rather small. The adjectival function is often realised periphrastically by juxtaposing an indicator of possession with a noun ('owner of' + noun). Mere juxtaposition of a noun with an attributive noun also exists ('man' + 'height' = tall man).

3.2. Gender

Bure has two genders: masculine and feminine. At pronominal level the distinction follow a well-known pattern across the Chadic languages: there is a gender distinction for the second and the third-person singular, whereas gender is neutralised in the plural. Nouns have a gender; it can be grammatical or sexual depending on the nature of the lexeme. Grammatical gender distinction underwent a process of partial gender deletion, and such distinction seems to have lost importance. An explanation could be that since the language does not require a subject pronoun when the subject slot is already occupied by a noun, grammatical gender is expressed only indirectly when the noun is replaced by a pronoun (e.g. 'have you seen my *X*?', 'Yes, I've seen *it*', where '*it*' must be either masculine or feminine). Moreover, gender is not overtly characterised at morphological level. Most of the speakers I worked with used to consider the gender of a large number of lexical items in free variation.

3.3. Number

Singular and plural are active categories at pronominal, lexical and verbal level. Noun plurals are overtly realised by (1) suffixation plus apothony, (2) gemination of the second consonant plus final vowel -a (in trisyllabic nouns), and (3) gemination of the second consonant plus apothony (Batic 2011).

3.4. Syntax

Bure is a Subject-Verb-Object language. The verb is always preceded by a subject which can be either a pronoun or a noun. If the subject is a noun, generally this is directly followed by the verb, that is with no need to express the relevant subject pronoun. Noun object follow the verb, whereas pronominal objects are infixed into the verb. In a few cases indirect pronominal objects precede the verb, but the great majority of verbs takes a direct object argument.

4. Phonology

4.1. Consonants

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d	c ɟ	k g	kw gw	ʔ
Implosive	ɓ		ɗ				
Nasal	m		n	ɲ	ŋ		
Prenasal	mb		nd	nj	nk ng		
Fricative		(f)	s				
Approximant			(ɾ)	y		w	
Trill			r				
Lateral			l				
Affricate			(ts)				

Tab. 2. Consonant inventory

4.2. Vowels

The vowel inventory is made up of 5 phonemes plus schwa. All the vowels exist in long/short forms. Vowel length is phonemic.

/i/, /ii/		/u/, /uu/
/e/, /ee/	[ə]	/o/, /oo/
	/a/, /aa/	

Tab. 3. Vowel inventory

4.3. Tones

Two tones have been detected, high (H) and low (L), with the possibility of a modulated falling tone (HL).

1.   H   *sàrá̱*   'arm'
      L   *mà̱ló*   'two'
      HL   *máà*   negative particle
      gó̱ò̱jèrè 'throat'

5. Clause structure[1]

5.1. Verbless Clause

5.1.1. Identity

To express a relation of identity of type 'X is Y' (where X and Y are nouns and no adjectival function is involved) the verbless copula subject must be followed by the relational particle *ì/gí*.

• *ì*
  2.a.   *[Áw   Búrè]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[báásò̱r-mìndè]*_{VCO}
         chief   Bure   RP   friend-POS:3SG:M
         'The Emir of Bure is his friend'

  2.b.   *[Mìm   níígènnì]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[bàb-mùmò]*_{VCO}
         man   this.DEM:SG:M   RP   father-POS:1PL
         'This man is our father'

- *gí*

3.a. *[Mìm   níígènnì]*_{VCS}   *gí*   *[báásòr-mìnò]*_{VCO}
man   this.DEM:1SG:M   RP   friend-POS:1SG
'This man is my friend'

3.b. *[níígènnì]*_{VCS}   *gí*   *[báásòr-mìkò]*_{VCO}
this.DEM:SG:M   RP   friend-POS:2SG:M
'This   (man) is your friend'

The two particles are gender and number-independent, as shown in examples 4-5 and 6 respectively:

4.a. *[Mán sígààtíyò]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[nàn-sùmò]*_{VCO}
woman that.DEM:SG:F   RP   mother-POS:1PL
'That woman is our mother'

4.b. *[Mìm níígènnì]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[bàb-mùmò]*_{VCO}
man this.DEM:SG:M   RP   father-POS:1PL
'This man is our father'

5.a. *[sì]*_{VCS}   *gí*   *[báásòr-mìkò]*_{VCO}
PER:3SG:M   RP   friend-POS:2SG:M
'He is your friend'

5.b. *[tà]*_{VCS}   *gí*   *[báásòr-sìkò]*_{VCO}
PER:3SG:F   RP   friend-POS:2SG:M
'She is your friend'

6.a. *[Mìmmíŋ   nígàmnì]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[mà   máárà]*_{VCO}
men   these.DEM:PL:M   RP   owner   field
'These men are farmers'

6.b. *[Mìmmíŋ   nígàmnì]*_{VCS}   *gí*   *[mà   máárà]*_{VCO}
men   these.DEM:PL:M   RP   owner   field
'These men are farmers'

If the first term of the relation is a noun or a demonstrative pronoun, the two particles are interchangeable. When the first term slot is taken by an independent pronoun, such as in examples 7a, the relational particle is *ì* (ex. 7a). As for *gí*, it follows the perfective pronoun: the use of *gí* after the independent pronoun is not admitted (7b-c).

7.a. *[tà'á]*_{VCS}   *ì*   *[báásòr-sìkò]*_{VCO}
IP:3SG:F   RP   friend-POS:2SG:F
'He is your friend'

7.b. $[kà]_{VCS}$ gí $[báásòr$-$mìkò]_{VCO}$
       PER:3SG:F   RP   friend-POS:2SG:M
       'She is your friend'

7.c.   *$[sè'é]_{VCS}$ gí $[báásòr$-$mìkò]_{VCO}$
       IP:3SG:M   RP   friend-POS:2SG:M
       'He is your friend'

5.1.2. Attribution

Attribution is realised by juxtaposing the verbless copula subject with the verbless copula object:

8.a. $[báásòr$-$mìnò]_{VCS}$ $[nò$ $méɗɗè]_{VCO}$
       friend-POS:1SG   owner   height
       'My friend is tall'

8.b.   jàkkínè $[(sù)$ ì $néésè]_{VCO}$
       donkeys   PER:3PL   with   strenght
       'Donkeys are strong'

The adjectival function is rendered through periphrasis involving the ideas '[to be] with *x*' (8a) or 'having *x*' (b8). Mere juxtaposition is also possible, as shown in exampe 9b.

9.a. $[sóppiŋ$ $nígèènnì]_{VCS}$ $[(sì)$ ì $[méɗɗè]_{VCO}$
       tree   this.DEM:1SG:M   PER:3SG:M   with   height
9.b. $[sóppiŋ$ $níígènnì]_{VCS}$ $[méɗɗè]_{VCO}$
       tree   this.DEM:1SG:M   height
       'This tree is tall'

5.1.3. Location

Locative relations of type '*x* is in *y*' do not behave too differently from the attributive ones in terms of copula subject and object: they are both verbless and follow the usual SO order. The verbless copula object consists of a prepositional phrase. The noun following the preposition can be either simple (as in ex. 10a) or adverbial (10b).

10.a. $[báásòr$-$mìnò]_{VCS}$ máá $[à$ $bán$-$súmò]_{VCO}$ rù
       friend-POS:1SG   NEG   in   house-POS:1PL   NEG
       'My friend is not in our house'

10.b. $[káándìyè]_{VCS}$ $[à$ $gùlgá]_{VCO}$
       mat   in   outside
       'The mat is outside'

In non-interrogative clauses with non-nominal subject, the subject slot is always occupied by a perfective pronoun (or, in interrogative clauses, by an indefinite interrogative pronoun):

11.a. *mùndé   [mù]*_{VCS}   *[à   àw-sì   sòò'ó]*_{VCO}
     IP:1PL   PER:1PL   in   stomach-of   room
     'We, we are in the room'

11.b. *lèè*_O   *[à   àw-sì   gúúrò]*_{SPATIAL.PP}]_O?
     who   in   stomach-of   town?
     'Who is in town?'

5.2. Complement clause

Sentences of type AGENT-VERB-COMPLEMENT CLAUSE where the agent/subject of the complement clause is a noun or a demonstrative pronoun do not require any complement marker. From a syntactic point of view, in this case the complement clause is defined by its position within the sentence. Consider the following example:

12.a. *nà*_A   *sììmbíyò   [mágàmnì   yóó'à(l)   Gáárò]*_{O:CoCL}
     PER:1SG   remember   these.DEM:PL   go   Bauchi
     'I remember that these (men) went to Bauchi'

12.b. *mù*_A   *kòòlínkò   [báásòr-míkò   máád'in   sáát   máádùkó]*_{O:CoCL}
     PER:1PL   hear   friend-POS:2SG:M   come   week   coming
'We heard that your friend will come the next week'

In the case in which the agent/subject of the complemente clause is a pronoun, then the complement clause is introduced by the complement marker *ká*, as shown in 13:

13.a. *sì*_A   *mùùníyò   [ká   s   bá-n   kúrdí-sínò]*_{O:CoCL}
     PER:3SG:M   forget   CM   3SG:M   give-O:1SG   money-POS:1SG
'He forgot to give me my money'

13.b. *ná   kù   dállà   ká   m   yóó'a(l)   báándè*
     1SG   PER   want   CM   1PL   go   home
     'He forgot to give me my money'

5.3. Relative clause

The relative clause is introduced by a relative pronoun which can be singular masculine, singular feminine or plural. Interestingly enough, two sets of relative pronouns have been detected. The first set seems to be built on standard pronominal stems with the addition of a morpheme *-nti*, as it happens in Kirfi (Stolbova, personal communication). Consider the following example:

14.a. *nà   néé mán <u>síntì</u> làà à gíssè*
      PER:1SG   see   woman   REL:SG:M stand up in here
‘I saw the woman who stood up here’

14.b. *mù   séé   ámmà à gíssè <u>níntì</u>   mán   sígèssí   náásù-mùŋ-kò*
      PER:1PL drink water in here REL:SG:M woman det:1SG:F bring-IO:1PL
      ‘We drunk the water here that the woman brought us’

14.c. *Mìmmíŋ gààmnì   yárdì ì   sùndè <u>súntì</u> yóó ì   búújúnè*
      men   DET:PL:M agree with IP:3PL REL:3PL   go   at   after-noon
       ‘These men agree with them who left in the afternoon’

The second set of relative pronouns consists of three gender-number markers (*na-, si-, ma-* for singular masculine, singular feminine and plural respectively) followed by the morpheme *-gaa (-gamni* in the plural form), which is also found in the demonstrative sets of pronouns and adjectivs.

15.a. *nà   yárdì ì   sé'è   <u>nágàà</u>   yóó búújúnè*
      PER:1SG:M agree with IP:3SG:M REL:3SG:M go   afternoon
      ‘I agree with him who left in the afternoon’

15.b. *sù   yárdì ì   tá'à   <u>sígàà</u>   ì   yóó d̆ááfé*
      PER:3PL agree with IP:3SG:F REL:3SG:F at go   morning
      ‘They agree with her who left in the morning’

15.c. *Mù   yárdì ì   sùŋdè <u>mágàmnì</u> yóó'álò ì   búújúnè*
      PER:1PL agree with IP:3PL REL:PL   go   at afternoon
      ‘We agree with them who left in the afternoon’

6. Semantic types

In this paragraph I will consider the subject and the agent as thematic

roles referring to basic-level semantic types such as giving, affect, speaking, thinking, and liking.

Type	Thematic role
giving	DONOR, RECIPIENT, GIFT
affect	AGENT, TARGET, MANIPULATED THING
speaking	SPEAKER, ADDRESSE, MESSAGE, MEDIUM
thinking	COGITATOR, THOUGHT
liking	EXPERIENCE, STIMULUS

Table 4. *Thematic roles*

Apart from the double accusative in the 'giving' type (a feature common to other Chadic languages), arguments other than the direct object are introduced by the preposition *ì* 'with', one of the few pure prepositions found in Chadic.

6.1. Giving

DONOR/RECIPIENT/GIFT

16.a. *[nà]*_{DONOR} *bà-[nní]*_{RECIPIENT} *[kúɾdě]*_{GIFT}
      PER:1SG   give-O:3SG   money
      'I gave him money'

16.b. *[sì]*_{DONOR}   *bàà-[nì]*_{RECIPIENT} *[káánkè   ì ì   órgìì-sì   kússá]*_{GIFT}
      PER:3SG:M   give-O:1SG   *tuwo*   with   soup-of   baobab
      'He gave me *tuwo* with baobab soup'

16.c. *[kù]*_{DONOR} *bàà*   k   *[móóɗdò]*_{GIFT}
      PER:2PL   give   CM   millet
      'You gave millet'

6.2. Affect

AGENT/TARGET/MANIPULATED THING

17.a. *[nò   móóɗá]*_{AGENT} *dúú   lááwò]*_{TARGET} *ì*   *[jùddùwá]*_{MANIP.}
      owner   one   beat   boy   with   stick
      'A man beat the boy with a stick'

17.b. *[máálù-mìndè]* _{AGENT} dúú-[sí]_{TARGET}   ì   [jùddùwá]_{MANIP.}
teacher-POS:3SG:M   beat-O:3SG:M   with   stick
'The teacher beat him with the stick'

17.c. [nò   lóó'ò] _{AGENT} séék   [kànl]_{TARGET} ì   [dáásà]_{MANIP.}
owner   meat   slaughter   sheep   with   knife
'The butcher slaughtered the sheep with a knife'

6.3. Speaking

SPEAKER/ADDRESSEE/MESSAGE/MEDIUM

18.a. *[báásòɾ-mìnò]*_{SPEAKER} *(sì)*   *bót-[nì]*_{ADDRESS} *[láábár d̶àkkà]*_{MESSAGE}
friend-POS:1SG   PER:3SG:M tell-O:3SG:M news   marriage
'My friend told him the news of the marriage'

18.b. *[mù]*_{SPEAKER}   *íí*   *dámbúúyè* *[ì   sé'è]*_{ADDRESS.} *[ì   búúyààjè]*_{MED.}
PER:1PL   do   talking   with IP:3SG:M   with Hausa
'We talked to him in Hausa'

18.c. *[máálùmè]*_{SPEAKER} *bótti* *[ngùsbáá]*_{ADDRESS.} *[kálmíí bárbád̶è]*_{MESSAGE} *[ì bùbbúrè]*_{MEDIUM}
teacher   tell stranger   word   ten   with Bure language
'The teacher told the stranger ten words in Bure language'

6.4. Thinking

COGITATOR/THOUGHT

19.a. *[nà]*_{COGITATOR}   *mùn*   *[jóó   ntì   nà   bót-kí-yò]*_{THOUGHT}
PER:1SG   forget   thing   REL   PER:1SG   tell-O:2SG:M-PER
'I forgot what I told you'

19.b. *[kà]*_{COGITATOR}   *símbíyò*   *[ì   sé'è]*_{THOUGHT}?
PER:2SG:M   remember   with   IP:3SG:M
'Do you remember him?'

19.c. *[mìmmíŋè]*_{COGITATOR}   *sù*   *sìmbíí*   *[báásòɾ-mìkò]*_{THOUGHT}
men   PER:3PL remember   friend-POS:2SG:M
'The men remember your friend'

6.5. Liking

EXPERIENCER/STIMULUS

20.a. *[tákù]*_{EXPERIENCER}   *dál*   *[mìm   gàànínò]*_{STIMULUS}
      IMP:3SG:F   want   man   that.DEM:SG
      'She likes that man'

20.b. *[mágàmnì]*_{EXPERIENCER}   *súkù*   *dál*   *[mìm   nígèènnì]*_{STIMULUS}
      These(men).DEM:PL   IMP:3PL   like   man   that.DEM:SG
      'These men like that man'

20.c. *[nákù]*_{EXPERIENCER}   *dál*   *sígèèssí,   máá   nígèènn   rù*
      IMP:1SG   want   DEM:SG:F   NEG   DEM:SG:M   NEG
      'I like this (f.), not this one (m.)'

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