

THE WAN LANGUAGE

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The data presented herein were gathered during a two year (1972 – 74) research project among the Wan. This research will be presented to the New School for Social Research (New York) as a doctoral thesis in Anthropology tentatively entitled «The social organization of the Wan (Ivory Coast)». We would like to express thanks to the National Institutes of Mental Health for their support of this research by their grant MH53622-01.

Part 1 (demographic)

WAN

The original administrative orthography was Noua, but this has since been replaced by Ouan. Prost (in his book cited below) uses Nwā, and Welmers (cited below) uses Nwa. We believe Wan is the best orthography since it is the closest romanized form without diacritics to what the people themselves say, viz. /wã/. Phonetically this is [wã̃] but we think it is erroneous to consider it pre-nasalised.

The Wan straddle the border of the sub-prefectures of Béoumi and Mankono in central Ivory Coast. They are bounded to the east by the Baule (Baoulé), to the south by the Guro (Gouro) , to the west by the Mwa (Mouan, or Mona) , and to the north by the Malinké.

There are two dialects of Wan: Kemmu (kéǰmǔ) and Myamu (myàmǔ). These dialects are completely mutually intelligible, having only minor lexical and phonetic differences. The Kemmu are located in the sub-prefecture of Béoumi and number some 3 750 (according to Ministère du Plan, Barrage du Bandama: Recensement Foncier, Juin 1971). The Myamu are located in the sub-prefecture of Mankono and number some 12 750 (according to the official lists in the sub-prefecture). The total population is thus 16 500.

According to Welmers ("*Niger Congo, Mande*» in *Current*

Trends in Linguistics, vol. 7, *Linguistics in sub-Saharan Africa*, The Hague, Mouton, 1971) Wan is the Southeren group of the Southeren Eastern division of the Mande family of the Niger-Congo languages.

Bibliography

- Prost, R. P. A., 1953 *Les Langues Mandé–Sud du groupe Mana-Busa* Dakar, IFAN (mémoire # 26)
– gives a small «esquisse grammaticale» (pp. 21–25) and comparative word list of some 400 items.
- La Saout, J., 1971 «Alternance consanatique et vocalique en gbā, guro et ηwā» *Annales de l'université d'Abidjan* Série H (Linguistique), Tome IV, fasc. 1 (pp. 73–87).
– his gbā and nwā are more commonly known as Gagou and Wan respectively. His data on Wan relate to the alternation of vowels in ideophones.

Part II (linguistic)

The data are taken from the Kemmu dialect. In the transcription of tone high tone is marked with an acut accente (é), mid tone is unmarked, and low tone is marked with a grave accent (è).

Wordlist:	sg.	pl.
1. woman	le	lemū
2. man	kɔle	kɔlomū
3. head	ɓóńglō	ɓóńglòmù
4. ear	péńnàṅ	péńnàṅmù
5. eye	lónṅ	lónṅmù
6. nose	yěé	yěmú
7. mouth	lagá	lagamú
8. tooth	sɔṅ	sɔṅmú
9. tongue	lenĩ	lenĩmū
10. foot	kyé	kyémù
11. knee	kpóńgbolí	kpońgbolimú
12. hand	ɔlaṅ	ɔlaṅmú
13. belly	káblu	káblumū
14. bone	kɔṅgló	kɔṅglómú
15. blood	yěmĩ	yěmĩmù

16. skin	kléé	klēmú
17. name	tó	tómú
18. dog	gbālě	gbālēmú
19. fish	kpó	kpómú
20. snake	ɓlè	ɓlèmú
21. goat	ɓólì	ɓólìmú
22. horse	sógò	sógòmú
23. fowl	se	semú
24. egg	se ɓη	se ɓηmú
25. tree	yreé	yremú
26. rope	bàlè	bàlèmú
27. stone	kléně	kléněmú
28. path	zi	zimú
29. ground	tróó	trómú
30. water	yí	yimú
31. fire	té	temú
32. sun	yeté	
33. moon	ɓoleη	
34. night	tre	
35. black	ti	
36. white	pú	
37. red	té	
38. eat	ló	
39. drink	yró	
40. swallow	ɓòñì	
41. see	e	
42. hear	mò	
43. know	tɔ	
44. sleep	yítè	
45. die	ká	
46. come	zò	
47. run	ɓlèkó	
48. stand	dìñà	
49. give	ké	
50. say	pé	

Numerals

one	do
two	pilɔŋ
three	ã
four	siiyá
five	sòòlú
six	wááń
seven	séa ã
eight	séńyãń
nine	sɔlá siyá
ten	sóńyɔlú
eleven	sóńyɔlu ta do
fifteen	sóńyɔlu ta sòòlú
twenty	mlĩŋ do
thirty	mlĩŋ do ɔŋ sóńyɔlú
forty	mlĩŋ pilɔŋ
fifty	mlĩŋ pilɔŋ ɔŋ sóńyɔlú
sixty	mlĩŋ ã
seventy	mlĩŋ ã ɔŋ sóńyɔlú
eighty	mlĩŋ siiyá
ninety	mlĩŋ siiya ɔŋ sóńyɔlú
one hundred	kēmẽ do
two hundred	kēmẽ pilɔŋ
four hundred	kēmẽ siiyá
one thousand	wagá do
two thousand	waga pilɔŋ

Phrases and sentences

1. one house	kú do
2. two houses	kú pilɔŋ
3. three houses	ku ã
4. four houses	ku siiyá
5. five houses	ku sɔɔlú
6. six houses	ku wááń
7. seven houses	ku séa ã
8. eight houses	ku séńyãń

9. nine houses ku sɔlá siyá
 10. ten houses ku sójyɔ́lú
 11. many houses ku tí, or kú bèbè
 12. all the houses kú tɛŋ sésé
 13. this man mĩ keé
 14. that man sání mĩé
 15. these men mĩ kemūé
 16. those men sání mĩmūé
 17. that tall man mĩ blòò keé
 18. that short man mĩ kpetekpe keé
 19. two short men mĩ kpetekpe pilɔŋ
 20. this tree yreé keé
 21. that tree sání yreé
 22. that big tree sání yre bálèé
 23. those big trees sání yre bálèmùé
 24. two big trees yre bálè pilɔŋ
 25. my head ò bójglò
 26. my child nàà nē
 27. my money nǎǎg̀ĺí
 28. your head la bójglò
 29. your child laa nē
 30. your money laa g̀ĺí
 31. his head à bójglò
 32. her head
 33. his child àà nē
 34. her child
 35. his money àà g̀ĺí
 36. her money
 37. our (dual) heads ko bójglò
 our (exclusive) heads kǎ bójglò
 our (inclusive) heads kà bójglò
 38. our (dual) children koo nē
 our (exclusive) children kǎà nē
 our (inclusive) children kàà nē
 39. our (dual) money kóó g̀ĺí
 our (exclusive) money kǎà g̀ĺí
 our (inclusive) money kàà g̀ĺí

75. he is not coming	yà á zòh wá
76. boys are not coming	kòlemū ã zòh wá
77. he is not drinking water	yà á yi yrón wá
78. boys are not drinking water	kòlemū ã yi yrón wá
79. he will not come	yà á zòh wá
80. boys will not come	kòlemū ǎ zòh wá
81. I saw you	h la e
82. I saw him	nà ǎ e
83. I saw you (pl.)	h ǎh e
84. I saw them (dogs)	nà ǎh e
85. I saw them (persons)	
86. I saw them (things)	
87. I saw it (dog)	nà ǎ e
88. I saw it (fire)	
89. I saw it (water)	
90. he saw me	è h e
91. he saw you	è la e
92. he saw us (dual)	è kó e
he saw us (exclusive)	è kǎh e
he saw us (inclusive)	è kà e
93. he saw you (pl.)	è ǎn e
94. he saw them	è ǎh e
95. boys saw them	kòlemūé ǎh e
96. did you see me?	la h èè?
97. did you see him?	la a èè?
98. he didn't see me	èè h e wá
99. I didn't see you	h la e wá
100. boys didn't see you	kòlemūé la e wá
101. has he come?	è zoò?
102. have they come?	ǎh zoò?
103. when did he come?	è zoá yeé dè góè?
104. who came?	dè e zo má ẽ?
105. where did he sit down?	è yaá mí ẽ?
106. who sat down?	dè ya má ẽ?
107. what did he see?	è mè e má ẽ?
108. he has been called	ǎ ǎ yro má
109. I've been called	ǎ h yro má

110. he brought water for me è zoá yié ya òlèh
 111. I brought water for him ò zoá yié ya àlèh
 112. this rope is longer than that bàlè keé blòò bɔ sání pɔé lèh
 113. he is taller than you à blòò bɔ la ta
 114. he has a farm àà ba bi
 115. I don't have a farm nǎǎ ba bi wá
 116. he's a farmer baalé yre lój yòh mǎ
 117. I am not a farmer baalé yre lój yòh ò ya á
 118. what is this? mǎǎ mǎ ǎ?
 119. this is my hut nǎǎ ku mǎ
 120. it's me míh mǎ, or mǎnǎ mǎ
 121. it's him èé mǎ
 122. it's you (sg.) bíla mǎ
 123. it's a dog gbǎlǎ mǎ
 124. it's a tree yre mǎ
 125. they are houses kumǎ mǎ
 126. he is in the house yà á kú wa
 127. they are at the market ǎ ǎ plɛé lé
 128. their children are at the market ǎǎ yrǎmǎ ǎ baa lé

Phonology

Chart of consonants

		bilabial	lab.-dent.	alveolar	palatal	velar	lab.-velar
PLOSIVES	vt.	p		t	ky	k	kp
	vd.	b		d	gy	g	gb
IMPLOSIVE	vd.	ɓ					
NASALS	vd			n		ŋ	
FRICATIVES	vt.		f	s			
	vd.		v	z			
SEMI-VOWELS					y	w	
LATERAL/FLAP				l/r			

1. /b/ is a voiced bilabial implosive with lenis articulation. It has an allophone [m] which occurs only preceding nasal vowels. (Note: in the words and phrases above we have used the phonetic forms of this phoneme).
2. /y/ is a non syllabic palatal approximant which cannot carry tone. In the context of nasalized vowels it is realised as [ỹ].
3. /w/ a non syllabic labio-velar approximant which cannot carry tone, has the following allophones:
 - [ɥ] a labio-palatal approximant which occurs
 - a) preceding high front vowels, and
 - b) following palatal stops
 - [w̃] which occurs preceding nasal vowels.
4. The phoneme /l/ when it occurs syllable initial or following labial, velar, and labial-velar consonants is realized as a lateral [l]. Following alveolar and palatal consonants it is realized as an alveolar flap [ɺ]. Thus if one were to use a feature system for phonemic description, the distribution of [l] and [ɺ] could be specified by the feature gravity. It should also be noted that the alveolar flap may be realized as an alveolar nasal flap [ɺ̃] when it precedes nasal vowels.

Vowels

There are two series of vowels, an oral series and a nasal series. The nasal series shows a neutralization of the open/close distinction for mid vowels, thus there is one mid, front nasal vowels /ẽ/, and one mid, back nasal vowel /õ/.

i		u		ĩ	ũ
e		o			
ɛ		ɔ		ẽ	õ
		a			ã

Vowel length is best considered in terms of geminate vowels, each of which is a tone-carrying segment. There are two reasons for this decision: first, vowels clusters are permissible sequences, and secondly, with geminate vowels we can interpret tone as sequences of level tones rather than glides.

Syllabic nasals

In addition to vowels, it must be noted that there are three nasal segments which carry tone.

The first of these is Ñ, a form of the first person pronoun, which assimilates to the point of articulation of the following consonant. For example:

[m̀b̀è̀ǹ]	my compatriot
[ǹd̀é̀]	my father
[ŋ̀gb̀è̀]	my son

Secondly, there is n, a verbal copula which marks the perfect sense:

è n zò	he has come
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Thirdly, there is a syllabic nasal segment which occurs as a nasal coda to other syllables. Though it is written herein as [ŋ] we would state that the greatest functional load is not on its point of articulation but rather on its features of nasality and syllabicity. Thus in fast speech all that one usually hears is tone-carrying nasality: it is only in carefully enunciated citation form that the point of articulation becomes evident.

This segment occurring in the environment CÑŋ provides interesting contrast with CÑ forms. Thus we have:

b̀ù	excrement	b̀w̄ (gouro)
b̀ù	pick up	
b̀ùŋ	mass of vines	
z̀ò	today	
z̀òŋ	owner	z̀ã (gouro)

The occurrence of this syllabic velar nasal is not, however, limited to the environment of nasal vowels. For example:

g̀õ	sell
g̀òŋ	vehicule
g̀õŋ	date palm

Futhermore it should be noted that there is contrast between the nasal coda and nasal vowels, thus:

yẽ́ŋ	oil
yẽ̀ẽ	nose

Syllable structure

The four syllable types are:

N	a syllabic nasal
V	any vowel, oral or nasal
CV	
CCV	where the second consonant is one of a small set of consonants consisting of /l/ (with its allophones) and the two semivowels /w/ and /y/.

It should also be noted that the syllabic nasal coda, discussed above, can occur after any syllable containing V.

Tonal structure

There three level tones in Wan: high, mid, and low. For example:

ně̃	child			kpó	fish	p̄	poisson (gouro)
nē̄	mother	nǎ́	épouse (gouro)	kp̄	hump		
nè̇	place	nǎ̀	endroit (gouro)	kp̄̀	road		

It is rare however to find complete series which contrast the three levels of tone. The more frequent case is to find sets with two may contrast.

di	cow	klá	pour	ɓlé	peanut
dì	spear	kla	behind	ɓlè	snake

As noted above in our discussion of vowel length, contour tones are best considered as sequences of level tones on geminate vowels.

fluú	bride-wealth
pléé	market

Pronominal system

	<u>ind.</u>	<u>subj.</u>	<u>obj.</u>	possession	
				<u>alienable</u>	<u>inalien.</u>
1 st singular	míŋ, mìnà	̀n, nà	̀n	nàà	̀n
2 nd singular	bíla	la	la	laa	la
3 rd singular	è	è	à	àà	à
1st dual	kó	kó	kó	kóó	kó
1st plural	kā	kā	kā	kāā	kā
exclusive					
1st plural	kà	kà	kà	kàà	kà
inclusive					
2nd plural	ãŋ	ãŋ	ãŋ	ãã	ãŋ
3rd plural	àŋ	àŋ	àŋ	àà	àŋ

Verbal affixes

Negation – usually signalled by the suffix -wá, which can also be realized as -á (see phrases 73,74).

Assertion - there is an assertive affix used as follows:

yre mǎ	it's a tree
è mā pɔ ló	he <u>did</u> eat
è pɔ lɔ mǎ	he <u>does</u> eat

Imperative – is the simplest form of the verb:

zò	come!
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Present continuous

yà á zò lé	he is coming	(ya e + a)
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Perfect –

è n zò	he has come
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Future –

yà á zòŋ	he will come
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Habitual –

è zo	he comes
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Past specific – an obligatory suffix when time is specified:

è zo á (knǒ)	he came (yesterday)
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Past continuous –

è biá zò lé	he was coming
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Past perfect –

è n zò bi he had come

It should also be noted that the verb "come" can be used as an auxiliary with the sense analogous to English "go".

yà á zòḡ zòḡ he is "going" to come

è biá zòḡ zòḡ he was "going" to come

Travaux de P.L. Ravenhill sur les Wans

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