Gizey (Cameroon and Chad) - Language Snapshot

GUILLAUME GUITANG

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Gizey (Cameroon and Chad) – Language Snapshot

Guillaume Guitang
Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Language Name:	Gizey (ɦùn gìzéjnà), Guissey, Guisseye
Language Family:	Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, Masa
ISO 639-3 Code:	no code
Glottolog Code:	gize1234
Population:	11,988 (Seignobos 2005)
Location:	10°01'N, 15°16'E; 10.02, 15.27
Vitality:	not endangered (Hammarström et al. 2021)

Summary

Gizey is a Masa languoid spoken in Cameroon and Chad. It has often been described as a dialect of Masana (ISO 639-3: mcn), however, recent findings have highlighted several linguistic features which may warrant its classification as a distinct language within Masa. So far, there has been only a fragmentary attempt at a description of Gizey. The languoid is currently under active description and aspects of the language practices of its speakers are being documented.

Français

Le gizey est un parler masa du Cameroun et du Tchad souvent décrit comme un dialecte de la langue masa (ISO 639-3 : mcn). Néanmoins, de nouveaux travaux ont mis en évidence plusieurs traits linguistiques qui pourraient justifier la classification du gizey comme une langue distincte au sein de la branche masa. Il n'y a eu jusqu'ici que des bribes de description du gizey. Une description plus complète de ce parler est en cours et des pans des pratiques linguistiques de ses locuteurs sont documentés.

1. Overview

Gizey (Gizayna, Guissey or Guisseye in the French literature) is spoken in a territory of 120 square kilometers spanning North-Eastern Cameroon and South-Western Chad (Gaffuri & Melis 2018). This comprises 23 villages (Figure 2), three of which span the Cameroon-Chad border and one of which is within Chad. Data from Cameroon's 1987 population census indicate that the Gizey population was roughly around 11,988 (Seignobos 2005). Gaffuri (2019) estimates this population might have increased to 19,000.

The first proposal to individuate the Gizey (or the Gizey-Wina[1] ethno-linguistic continuum) came from Melis (1999), who observed that many linguistic and ethnological facts conspired to exclude them from the realm of the Masa (speaking Masana, ISO 639-3: mcn). Research by Melis (2002) on the lineages of the Masa group established six main subgroups: the Gumay, Daŋay, Haara, and Gire in Chad, and the Walya and Bugudum in Cameroon. These subgroups generally correspond to federations of patrilineal lineages. Gizey clans and lineages do not intersect with any of the Masa lineages. Amongst the Masa subgroups, the closest (geographically) to the Gizey are the Walya, who the Gizey call 'Sumoyna' (Melis 1999).

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[1] The Wina have been described as a transition group between the Tupuri, the Kera and the Masa (Seignobos & Tourneux 2002)
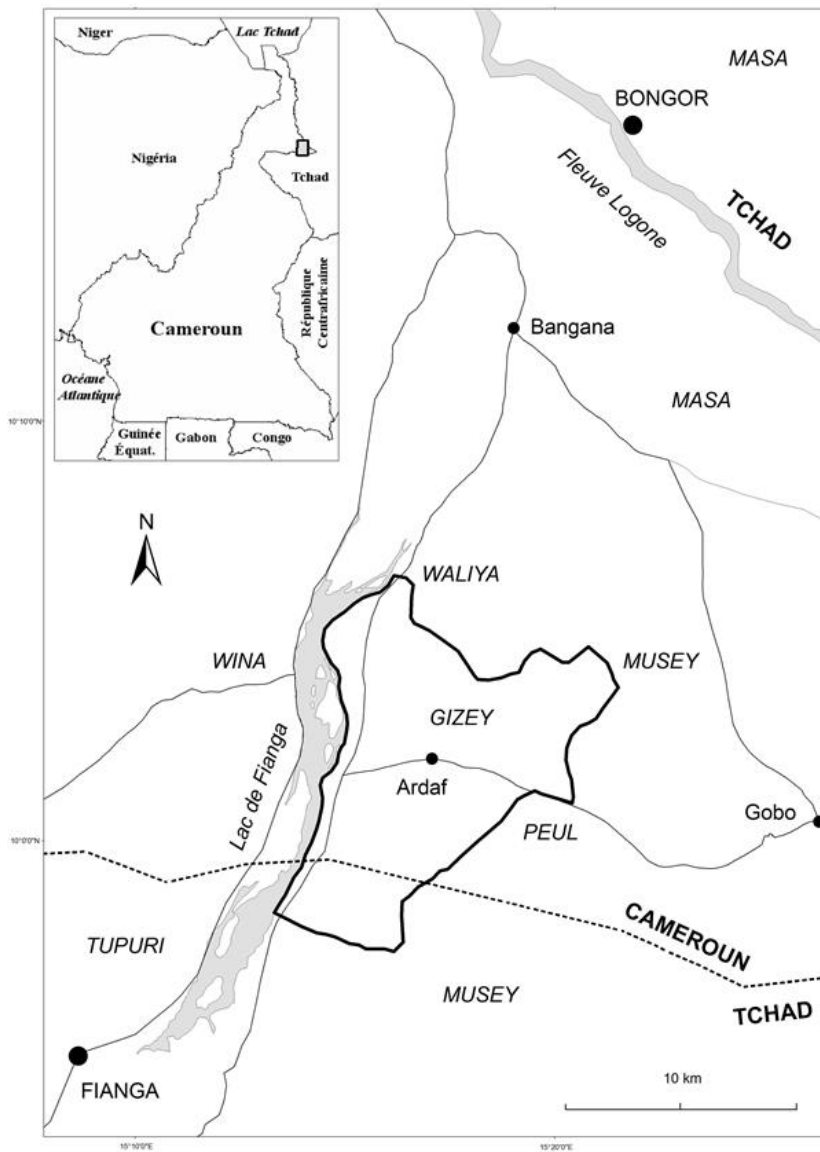
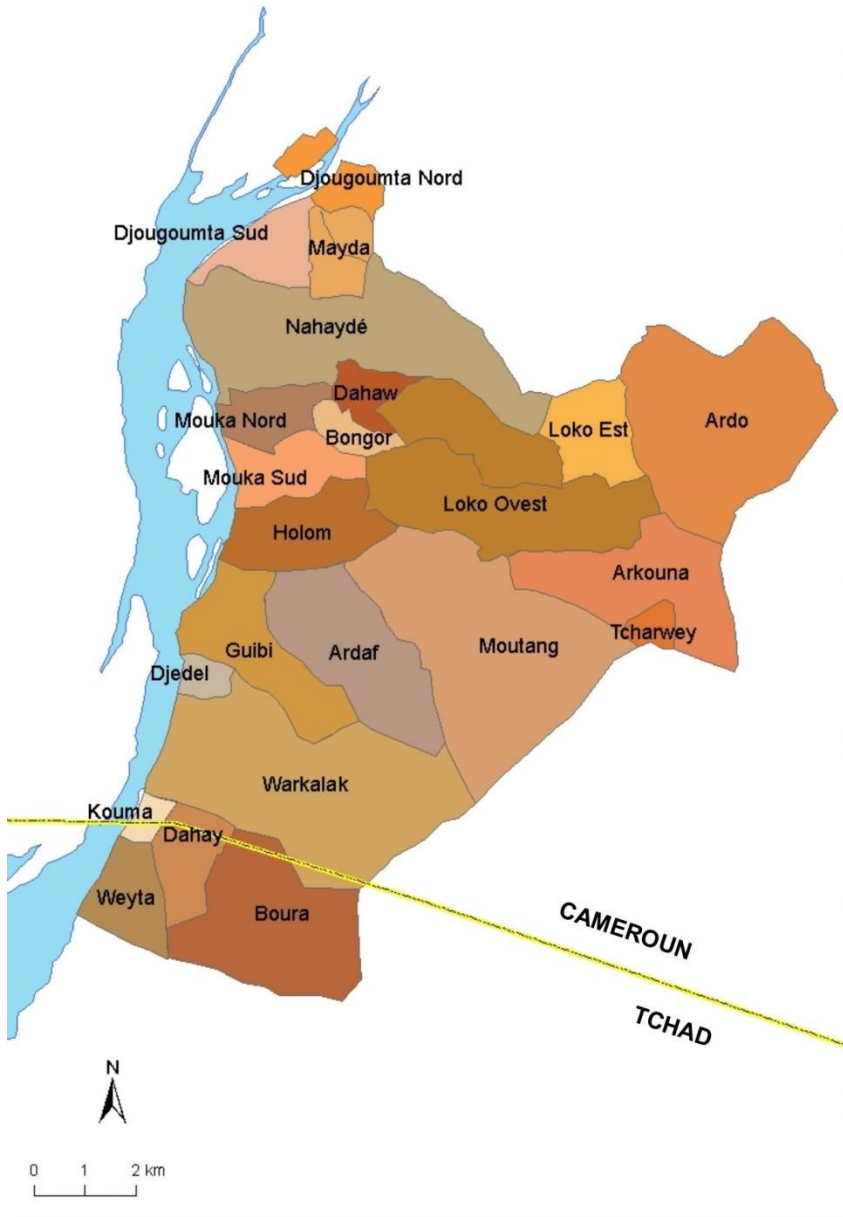*Figure 1: Geographical location of Gizey (D'Ascenzo 2019a)*

Figure 2: Gizey villages in Cameroon and Chad (D'Ascenzo 2019b)

While the Gizey are clearly conscious of the cultural and linguistic traits which distinguish them from the neighbouring Walya, they generally do not build a differentiative narrative (Gaffuri 2019). For example, as Gaffuri, Melis & Petrarca (2014: 517) point out, 'the Gizey language is generally not perceived as different from those of the neighbouring Masa groups' [my translation]. The feeling of belonging to a separate Gizey entity usually manifests itself around the *Nulda* (New-Year feast celebrated in February) and peaks during its celebration. As Petrarca (2019: 106) puts it: 'the *Nulda* distinguishes the Gizey and the Gizey distinguish themselves thanks to the *Nulda*' [my translation]. Thus, outside of the *Nulda*, the Gizey identify with the Masana language and their *hùn gìzéynà* 'mouth (language) of the Gizey' is described as a variety of Masana (Petrarca 2019). The Masa, for their part, refer to the Gizey as 'Wina', a term they apply also to the Wina themselves (Ousmanou 2007).

Gizey is not an endangered tongue; it is still actively used in daily interactions and transmitted to younger generations. It is also not very much affected by contact languages like Fulfulde, French, Tupuri, or Musey (Ajello 2006). However, as Ajello (2006) points out, subtle cultural changes imputable to modernity seem to provide a basis for shift or attrition. De Dominicis (2006) has also described the tonal system of Gizey as being endangered; but it is not clear whether this relates to contact or deeper diachronic change.

2. The status of Gizey within Masa

The classification of Chadic languages in Newman (2013) places Gizey under the Masa branch; earlier research by Melis (1999, 2002, & 2006), Ajello (2006 & 2007), and Ajello & Melis (2008) has repeatedly advocated for this categorisation. Other sources describe Gizey as a dialect of Masana; e.g. Barreteau & Dieu (2005) consider it to be a Western dialect, while Simons, Fennig & Eberhard (2019) list it as a dialect of Masana with a claimed mutual intelligibility of 80% between Gizey and Walya. In contrast, Ajello (2007: 1) indicates 'there is no linguistic inter-comprehension between the Massa and the Gizey ethnic groups, although their languages undoubtedly share some common features'. Our research shows there is some degree of mutual intelligibility, though it is not very high and not symmetrical. Thus, mutual intelligibility testing with speakers of Gizey (20) and Masana (13) using the recorded text testing method (Casad 1974; Yoder 2017) for narration and conversation shows that the Gizey sample understood Masana texts better than the Masa did for Gizey.

3. Linguistic analyses

Descriptive work on Gizey has yielded an inventory of segmental and prosodic units (De Dominicis 2006, 2008, 2009). Ajello & Melis (2008) have compiled a Gizey-French bilingual dictionary. There are also sketches of other aspects of Gizey in Ajello (2007, 2011). Ajello (2006) summarises the sociolinguistic situation of Gizey crisply and cogently. Melis (2019) has argued that Masana and Gizey are synchronically different languages based on differences in: (a) consonant distributions; (b) vowel inventory; (c) vowel harmony type; (d) morpho-phonological processes in Gizey not attested in Masana; (e) implementation of consonant-tone interaction; (f) lexicon; and (g) sporadic sound changes observed on cognate forms. Comparative research has not been extended to other relevant areas such as morphology, syntax, and information structure, amongst others.

My description aims at a comprehensive sketch of grammatical structural units, and the way these encode morpho-syntactic and information categories. I have collected oral data from Gizey native speakers, including tales (with videos), songs, and riddles. I have also collected some data with the Questionnaire on Information Structure (Skopeteas et al. 2006). Antonino Melis has also shared some of the data his team collected in the early 2000s with me.[2] The analysis of these data has identified an antilogophoric pronominal system which appears to be a typological rarity. Antilogophoricity refers to the use of special markers (e.g., pronouns) to refer to participants other than the reported speaker in a reported speech event. I also recently described analogy as a source of total reduplication in Gizey (Guitang 2021).

Links

1. Centre culturel et musée de la Vallée du Logone (CCMVL): maintained by Antonino Melis, drives research on the languages of the lower Logone basin and documents the languages and cultures of the area. http://www.valleedulogone.com/ accessed 2021-10-28

2. Open Science Framework (OSF) project page: https://osf.io/gq3wp/?view_only=0e98f1cfd35e47b6b4896fb152ec18f2 accessed 2021-10-28

3. Recorded text testing scores: . https://osf.io/r8skn/?view_only=05fec74445164333b04aefe719c0c231 accessed 2021-10-28

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[2] None of these data have as yet been made available, although there are plans to do so at some point in the future.

Acknowledgements

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