

Comparison of renderings of the Sukur language

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The wordlists

The following wordlists were recorded by

1) the linguist E. Wolff in February-March 1974 in the plains of Mildo (miḷu). His informant was Dīwá Búgá, 18 years old. The collection was made in one sitting without any opportunity for rechecking. Wolff notes that the language -- **gèmə sákun** -- is spoken in the settlements of:

sák^wún, máḷḷəŋ, ndálłmí, táwłá, dzóyàl, tóyòm, màtàkà, dàmài and bàbà (Sukur, Mildung or Meldeng, Ndalmi, Tawla, Dzuyel, Teghem, Mataka, Damay, and Baba)

2) the anthropologist C.K. Meek (1931:317-20) in 1927 or 1928 from the chief Nzaani of Sukur and two of his sons with whom he had a “short conversation” in Madagali. Meek does not specifically name the language.

3) the linguist Paul Newman on 31 December 1973 who refers to the language as **saakən**. He informs us (Email of 040203) that his ‘list was collected in one sitting, was never rechecked, and thus the reader should not assume that it is reliable in detail.’

4) N. David and J. Sterner in 1992-96 who refer to the language as **sakun**, and

5) K. Sntenchuk and R. South, students of linguistics at the University of Calgary, in 1995 from tapes made in 1992-93 by N. David.

I am grateful to Ekkehard Wolff and Paul Newman for making their lists available to me. and for their suggestions regarding transcription.

Transcriptions

All but David and Sterner use the International Phonetic Alphabet. On the advice of Newman and Wolff I have replaced – as is standard practice and convention among Africanists/Chadicists – the palatal semi-vowel (approximant) represented by ‘j’ in the IPA character set with ‘y.’

David and Sterner’s decision not to use IPA characters was intentional as they wish to render **sakun** in a way that makes it possible for Sukur to write their own language using a typewriter. It would however be necessary to substitute, as is common practice in Nigeria, a barred i (ī) for the schwa that they render as ẽ.

They attempted to maintain the equivalences between the International Phonetic Alphabet and their transcription indicated in the table below.

Comparison of the various transcriptions indicates that the David-Sterner renderings are recognizably similar to those of the linguists although they are unable consistently to distinguish certain unfamiliar sounds, and in particular:

- ɣ and ɣ̣ and perhaps ɟ, which they render somewhat erratically as gh, ghr, x and h,
- ʒ and dʒ which they generally render as zh and j;
- they are erratic in their recognition of glottal stops, sometimes represented as an initial w,
- and they overuse the, admittedly common, schwa (ə).

Notes:

1. IPA characters were produced as indicated in the section 'Keyboard layout ...' following the table.
2. Comments in parentheses (), for example as to the meanings of words, are by ND. Square brackets [] enclose the transcriptions of South and Sratenchuk.

IPA character or sequence	ND and JS transcription	Sound represented	Examples/Notes
ɣ	gh	voiced velar fricative	similar to German 'machen'
ɣ	ghr	harsher voiced velar fricative	as above but as if followed by a short guttural r
x	x	voiceless velar fricative	as in German Ich
ʒ	zh	voiced postalveolar fricative	as in 'measure'
dʒ	j	voiced palato-alveolar affricate	as in 'judge'
ʃ	sh	voiceless postalveolar fricative	as in 'shame'
tʃ	c	voiceless palato-alveolar affricate	as in 'church'
ɬ	dl	voiced lateral fricative	
ɮ	tl	voiceless lateral fricative	
ʔ	ʻ	glottal stop (except before b and d)	
ɖ	ʻd	voiced implosive d	
ɓ	ʻb	voiced implosive b	
ŋ	ng	velar nasal	as in English 'sing'
ə	ē	schwa, a central vowel	
y	y	palatal semivowel	as in English 'yet'
au	-aw	terminal sequence	as in English 'allow'
ai	-ay	terminal sequence	as in English 'die'
i:	-iy	terminal sequence	as in English tea
	w	inserted to separate syllables	e.g., Ruwa not Rua
	()	a very short or optional vowel	e.g., <i>k(ē)ra</i> (dog) noted on the root only
	a grave accent	represents a low tone	rarely indicated
	an acute accent	represents a high tone	rarely indicated

The Wordlists

	English	sákuń of E. Wolff 1974	sukur of C.K. Meek (1931:317-20)	saakon of P. Newman 1973 and in [...] of K . Snatenchuk & R. South 1995	sakun of N. David and J. Sterner 1992-96
1	one	kəlí	kɪli	kərí	kili, zung, toy
2	two	bák	bak	bák	bak
3	three	máken	makɪn	máakón	maakēn
4	four	fwáf	fwɔt	fwafu	fwa'd
5	five	ǰám	ɬam	ǰám	dlam
6	six	mókwa	mukwa	míkwà	mukwa
7	seven	máďáf	madaf	máďáf	ma'daf
8	eight	tək̀əz	tɪkɪz	tók̀əs	ték̀ez
9	nine	míçí, míńí	mɪxi	móńí	mitli
10	ten	ʔwàn	wɔŋ	úwàŋ	wang
11	eleven	ʔwàn tǎn kómbù	wɔŋ ɬam kɪmbə		wang tang kēmbē
12	twelve	ʔwàn bək̀ kómbù	wɔŋ bə kɪmbə		wang duk kumbē
13	thirteen	ʔwàn mákèn kómbù	wɔŋ makɪn kɪmbə		wang maakēn kēmbē
20	twenty	sàràsók	sara sək		sarasək
21	twenty-one	sàràsók tǎn kómbu			sarasək tan kumbē
22	thirty	màk̀əbsók			maakēn pēsək

23	forty	fwábsók			
24	fifty	ḡəbsók			
25	sixty	múkwbabsók			
26	seventy	máďábsók			
27	eighty	tókóbásók			
28	ninety	mĩfibsók			
29	one hundred	wasók	wə sək		wasək
	two hundred		du wə sək		
	four hundred		fwət wə sək		
	many		kɪŋ		king
	all		papa	pat	pat
30	father	dàdá	faŋa (father + my)		da
31	mother	màmá	maŋa (mother + my)		ma, mama
36	brother	náfə-ŋá		[naf]	naf
37	sister	ḡánəŋá			dlán
38	son	ruwó màḡà			ruwi madlax
39	daughter	dèm			dèm
48	face	kómá			kəma
51	head	kó	kə	kó	kə
52	hair of head	ḡimbúd	ḡimbut	ḡumbút	shumbut
53	nose	ḡin	ḡin	ḡin	shin

54	ear	ḥəmàì	lɪmai	ḥəmàì	dlēm̄ay
55	eye	ʼis	is	ís	is
56	cheek	γùlòm			ghulum
57	beard	γəmáì			ghēm̄ay
58	chin	tʃákám			cakam
60	mouth	ɲù		w̄u	ngwu
61	lip	túbùɲù			tu'bungu
62	tongue	γànàì	γanai	γànàì [γenay]	ghanay
63	tooth	íḥíɲ	lim	ḥín	dlyin
64	neck	wàì		wáì	'òy
66	throat	ɲgùlùm			nggulum
67	chest	xàdó			ghadē
68	breast (fem.)	ʔǔwà	waʔ	[ʔwa]	'wa
69	hand/arm	(r) ɾì	xut ri/iri	rí	ri
70	finger nail	pòlāk	pɪlak		pēlak
72	elbow	fólógum			fēlēgum
73	shoulder	tápàt		[takaʔ] ?a typo k for p?	tapatl
74	armpit	ʔófɔ́ɲá		[ʔuf]	tlēf
75	finger	kwátó ɔ̀rì	ruri (sing), riri (pl), virʃin ri (children arm/hand)	[k ^w ateri]	kwátári
76	back	dʒáx	wɔʔi and dʒax		jax

77	heart	mándəv	mɪndɪv	[munduf]	mëndəv
78	belly	xùd	xut	xút	ghu'd
79	liver	móná		[mna]	m(ë)na
80	kidney	γúləʃíʃí			ghuləshishi
81	guts	xáléd			hali'd (intestine)
82	leg	nás	nas	nás [nas]	nas
83	heel	vúnàs			vu nas
84	knee	kóróm	kırım	kóróm	kërum
85	toes	dʒáxnàsʃ (= upper part [back] of foot)			ruwi nas
86	(belly [sole] of) foot	xúdnàs	dʒax na:ʃ (= upper part [back] of foot)		ghu'd nas
96	navel			(m) bus	mbus
97	body	və			və'd
98	skin	túkəvə			tu'b
100	blood	mómbùs	mumbus		mumbuss
101	bladder	mís			dlya mis
102	gall	írək			iruk (gall bladder)
103	bone	táɫ		[taɫ]	tatl
104	vein	bólódʒí			bəliji
105	urine	mís			mis
106	faeces	vú			vu

107	sweat (also very hot weather)	vùs			vus
108	saliva	nyáx			nzuga
109	voice	ḡàmà			(dlama = happy)
110	name	ḡà		ḡá	'bà
112	person	ndù	mdu		nda, ndu
113	man, men	ndùmàḡà màçlòxó	malax moidzixə		madlax, matlyihë
114	woman	zèr zírí	zir ziri		zër, zhiri
115	boy, boys	ruwí vóřĩŋ	ru dzuu (child small)		ruwi, vërishin (child, children; boy specified as ruwi madlax)
116	girl, girls	dèm dógwám			dëm, dugwam (daughter)
120	old man	màḡám xàré			madlax mu harrën (man in age, i.e, elder)
121	old woman	zírízàk			zërajik
122	king (chief)	çídi	ḡidi	xyədi	xidi
123	slave	vái	vəi		vay
124	God	zīgílá	dzigilla		Zhigila
126	medicine	yínwún			nyiwun
	doctor		bilaga		tu nyiwun
127	guest	mátèbé			mutëboey
128	friend	myáŋá (+ my)	meeŋa (+ my)	[myaŋa] (+ my)	miya

129	hunter	ndái 'yèx			nday iygh
	smith		dəi		'day
132	thief	mókár			mëkër
133	water	yâm	yiam sətə	[iyam]	iyam
134	river	ɣàn	llan		dlàn
135	rain	yàm ʒigílá	yiam		iyam
136	cloud	bà			bà
137	smoke	'yín			in
138	dew	mínúk			minyukw
139	fog	gùsə			kusë (harmattan haze)
140	thunder	mbórám			mbërëm
141	lightning	wódfiyám			mbërëm më wu'd (dubious)
142	sky	ʒigíla			zhigila (also means God)
143	wind	míʔ			mí'd
144	sun	pís	pis	pís [piθ or bis]	pis
145	moon	tyá	tea	kórà (surely an error)	t(i)ya
	full moon		axi mə hyen		
	new moon		andas tea		
146	star (and planet)	gúmɣà		[gumðla]	gumdla
	earth		xat		ha'd

148	night	və̀d	vət	vət	və'd, vay (the latter in sense of night's sleep?)
	day (afternoon)		kavək		vak
	morning (early around sunrise)		maʃin		mashin
157	year	vàʔ			và
158	rainy season	vǐ			vi
159	dry season	ɣrán		[ɔran]	ghëran
160	fire	kú		ku	ku
161	(char)coal	ʃún (charcoal powder)			vin
162	ashes	sǔá			swá
163	tree, trees	fwóy	ʃiku ʃuku	fwái	fwoy
164	leaf	vò	ɗui		vwax
165	root	yím (probable error = stone)		[tʰi]	tli
166	branch	rí fwóy			
168	seed	sóʔ			sə'd
172	thorn	dʒík			jik
173	grass (a stiff kind used for brooms)	sóbək		dʒu (w) i (thatching grass?)	sə'bək
174	mountain	ŋwà	ŋwa hill	[ŋ ^v a]	ngwa
177	ground	xàd			gha'd

178	sand	lígídík			shawshawa ligëduk
179	mud (clay, daub)	bùł			bëtl
180	dust	rígídák r extremely trilled		[ligidik]	ligëduk
181	forest	gàmba (uncultivated 'bush')		[gudluv]	gudlëv gamba ('bush')
183	house	ȳí		ȳi	ghríy
184	room	ʔír	ir house	yír	ir
	roof		džík (basketry roof frame)		kë ir (jik = frame)
185	wall (of stone)	dǒgǐ		[dugi]	deggoey
186	door	ɲwù ʔír (doorway)	mu ir		da dlya ir
189	road (& way, path)	dǒví	tʃíve		civi
190	well (traditional well & spring)	mbǒzír		[mbuzir]	mbëzhir
192	farm	ȳór			ghër
193	hoe	ɲgúdíum			ngu'dum
195	stone	yím bótài (stone+pebble)	iyim	yíim	yim
	iron		tʃukuri		cukuri
201	animal	'yùk (goat?)			
202	hyena	dǒgùvù		dǒgǒfu	duguvu
204	scorpion	mbárdài			mbërday

206	chameleon	màxələ́látáŋgàw			mahēlatanggaw
207	termite (white ant)	ḅót' [ḅɪt]			'bet' (ant)
210	lion	kírkindzín (a perhaps mythical dangerous animal)		lovar	revarri
211	leopard	dógwàvə	dugavak		dēgwavak
212	elephant	zúwán	rɪvɛrɪ (error – see lion)	dzuwan	juwan
213	bush cow = buffalo	mài	gammak (error – see sheep)		may (? a kind of antelope)
214	baboon	bólám		bólám [blam]	b(ə)lam
215	monkey	ʃwí	billam (error – see baboon)	mətʃəfa	shwi
216	crocodile	xóm	kɪlɪm		kēlum
219	snake	ʃíʃí	sisi		shishi
221	tortoise	kólpo			kil(ə)pu
	frog		gumbak (= toad)		vwanja (gwombak = toad)
222	spider	zámbá			zamba (? = spiderweb)
223	louse	dʒəŋgár		[dʒaŋgar]	janngar
224	flea	mápiʃápíʃá			mapishapisha
225	mosquito	víndzón			vindzəng
226	fly	dʒwí	dʒui		juwi
	bee		dʒu mam (= fly		

			honey		
231	cow	ḥə	ḥə	ḥə	dlē
232	bull	dʒərḥəŋ			jir dlē
233	goat	dyúk	yuk		iyuk
235	sheep (ewe)	gámàk	gammak		gamak
237	horse	dòk	du		duk
239	donkey	zúŋgwà			zungwa
	pig		vəgis		vəguz
256	dog		kírra	kəra	k(ə)ra
	mouse			kúm (given as rat)	kum
	chicken		takur		takur
258	bird		yak	yák	yak
	feather		ʃimbut yak		
	egg(s)		daŋgal lai		ndangadlay
265	horn	twóm			tom
266	tail	túr			tur
268	meat	íhywí	lwi	ɣ ^w i [ḥwi]	tluwiy
269	fish	kíríf		kíríf	kirif
270	soup (or sauce)	úwí			uwiy
	beer			pàḥə [mpazɛ]	m(ə)padlē
271	milk	ʔwá			'wà
272	salt	nyárgə	nyerga		nyerga

276	guinea corn (sorghum)	xéy	xui		ghëy (low tone)
277	millet (pearl)	rúwàf		[riwɛ]	riwa'd
	maize		xlabír		tlyabër
279	okra	ɲgàʒàwái			ngadla'oy
280	beans (cowpea)	ɣàxón		[əxun]	ghën
287	oil	mýír	mir		miir
289	fat	ɲgólái	məzámə hyen		mbëza mëtlyan (meat fat [white])
290	groundnuts	índánɲ	kolakotʃi	[ndaɲ]	indang (kulukwaci)
297	mat (sleeping)	kóri	pətta		kəri
	basket		mɪgɪssa		megissa
298	bow	rài	rai		ray
299	arrow	và	va		và
	gun		bandɪɲ		
301	knife	kóɓ	kəp		kə'b
	spear		mbayaz		mbëghaz
305	calabash	tàpóy			tappi
306	pot	dòw	du		dow, duw
	drum		daɲ		dang
309	work	ʒón		ʒən	dlën
310	war (& fight)	vùr	xɪp		vur
311	sleep	vày			iviy, evey

313	death	ɲùs			ngus
314	corpse	ndà mútsùn			nda mutsun
315	life	sàf			saf
316	sickness	ɣwà			vě'dkě
318	fever	páłkó			idan
320	hole	ùvùď			vu'd, vwu'd
323	place (a flat place or field)	ndòv			děv
425	eat	ďúm			'dumě
426	drink	sún (? I drink)			sě
428	urinate	tárá mís			ta mis
429	defecate	tàgòrà vù			těkě vu
430	do	ḃónómá ɣón (do work)			'bēn
431	go	dzúwá			dza-, ra- (with various suffixes)
	go!			kúďi	kudi
432	come	yòw (come!)			ya- (with various suffixes)
	come!			yô	yaw
433	return	yòw as come		[mbəvʌ]	baavě
434	enter	ɣràɣó			ghraghě
435	go out	yávà			ra-va

437	go up	rámá ŋwà (+ mountain)			ra-ma
438	go down	yáxà			ra-ha
439	run	xwí			huwi
441	see	ǵyírá			kēē
442	hear	ɬyám			tlyam
446	hit	dzədzə (kill or beat)			‘dar
448	kill (or beat)	dzə		[zizu or dzi]	dzē, dzēdzē
450	pull	dɔ̀dámá			dě'dama
452	carry	ɬámá			tla-ma or tla-va
455	put down	fə			'bēgē (or fē ?)
461	open	yámà		[yama] (close!)	dlyama (close!)
462	closed	gúnà			guna (open!)
463	bury	rəm			rum (and ghrē ?)
468	burn	gyém			dim
469	roast	pónám			pēna
481	cut	ɬə			dlē
483	build	bámá			ba
489	steal	kərəm			kēr
491	fall	dʒixá			jiha
493	know	àsón (= I know)			sē
506	give	mátʃà			má

509	sell	póràm			përa
510	buy	ḩəmárá			dlëmá(-ra)
511	call	bàtʃà		[βaβa]	'ba'ba
512	sit	ñzá			nza
513	give birth	ĩhá			yii-ha
515	throw	dòdàmá			dluw-ma
517	die	ɲùs			ngus
525	stand	ndàs			ndas
528	finish	ákóǎ			kě'd
529	begin	ɣànè má		[ahanma]	ghan(ë)ma
530	fill	nèxè má			nëghma
531	marry (take & carry, pick up, catch)	łámá zër (+ wife)			tla (zër)
532	show	gànè và		[gændava]	ganë-va
538	pour	bógóɣàmbèg		[bəgura] (pour out)	bëgë-ha (pour into)
546	divide	tógà và			tëka(-va)
547	break	pólá và			pëtla
	tall		zəbır		zëbur
	large		di		ndey = big
	small		dzuhoi		jëwu, ju, juwi, jëhwoy
	Northerner		uvwa = “Beriberi”		vuwa

	Hausa		hausa		hausa
	Pabir		babir		
	Ful (Fulani)		pɪlasar		p(ë)lasar
	Margi		buxɪɗɪm		bëbëghëdum

Keyboard layout using the the SIL Doulos IPA font

Characters in red are actually used

Unshifted

q w e r t y u i o p [] \
 a s d f g h j k l ; ' \
 z x c v b n m , . ?

Shift

x / - \ ~ ^ v o u ~ ..
 +
 æ w ε r θ Y U I Ø Θ R ʃ ʔ
 α ∫ ð γ G^{h j} H ʒ^l ɿ
 ʒ χ ç υ β η ηⁿ · ʔ

Alt

` [˘ ʌ i θ ʎ (on second line)
 Y (on third line)
 ʎ (on bottom line)

Control

(on top line)

Other signs produced as follows:

Using macros: ə by ctrl e

ɔ by ctrl shift o

d̥ by ctrl shift d

ʙ by ctrl shift b

ʈ by ctrl shift t

Rarer signs were produced by inserting symbols directly, e.g., ʎ, ɿ œ ç _ as in ruwí

Lastly, the following represent my substitutions for symbols not in the font

č (c shift asterisk) substitutes for the voiced palatal plosive that the IPA represents as an upside down f

ǰ represents a velar implosive (I'm not sure that this is the correct sign)

u represents an omega used on one occasion by Snatenchuk and South (a back vowel)