# Gender in Vere and Atlantika Vere (Draft)

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0. Introduction

Vere (aka Verre[1]), a name said to derive from *vére, pl. vére-ì* 'friend', refers linguistically in the narrow sense to a cluster of closely related lects spoken in and around the Vere Hills, south of the Upper Benue, NE Nigeria. Each of the lect bears its own name referring to the speech form of a particular local group; e.g. Batim (Batəm), the lect of the Bati, Markəm, the lect of the Marki, Gwerim, the lect of the Gweri. The latter was chosen as the 'Standard' for the *Verre Language Project*.

In its wider sense 'Vere' ('Verre') is used as an ethnonym embracing several ethnic groups as well as their languages. Meek (1931: 414) reports under "Verre" ten distinct groups of which at least three, the Zango (or Jango)[2], the Wom (aka Pɛrɛba), and the Vomni, apparently speak separate languages. Lode 1992 seems to subsume under "Vere Kari" languages and people of several small groups (Kobo, Kari, Eilu, Nissu, Wowi) in the northern part of the Alantika Mountains. Their languages (Kobom, Karim, Eilim, Nissim, Wommu)[3] form a language cluster of their own which I propose to name Alantika Vere.

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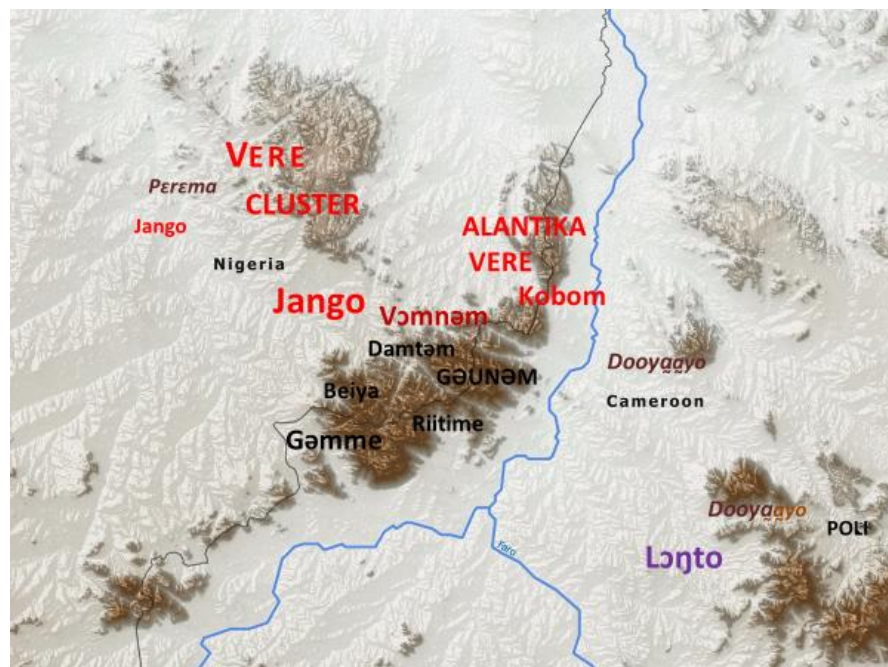
[1] Cf. Verre Language Project. 2008. Reading and writing Verre.

[2] The 'Were' presented in Strümpell 1910 is most probably a Jango variety.

[3] Language names often bear the characteristic suffix -m or -mV commonly found in Benue-Volta languages groups.

The best documented variety of the main Vere cluster around the Vere Hills appears to be up-to-date the one spoken around Yadim. A dictionary of the Vere of that area was made available (multi-copied) by Blench & Edwards in 1988 with the title: *A dictionary of the Momi Language*.[4] The name 'Momi' they propose to refer to language and people derives, as I was told at Yadim, from *Mɔɔmi'* meaning 'small boy' in the language of their playmates, the Samba Daka.[5]

The second cluster commonly subsumed ethnically and linguistically under a cover term of 'Vere' is situated in the northern part of the Alantika Mountains.[6] Apart from the Kobo which are mentioned by Blench & Edwards (1988) and in the Ethnologue most of the peoples and their languages are not mentioned elsewhere in the literature. The available data shows that we may differentiate the following lects (in brackets the appellation of the local group): Kobom (Kobo), Nissim (Nissu), Eilim (Eilu, Ogolo), Wommu (Wowi), Sagdəm (Sagdi), Samləm (Samlo). Much more information is needed to understand the interrelation of the various lects, whether they are all intercomprehensible, which ones are mere local variants of a single language, and how they as a whole or individually differ from Vomni, and the Gəunəm and Damtəm varieties to the south. The lects presented here Nissim and Eilim which are merely variants of a single language, but clearly distinct from Kobom and Wommu, all of them are spoken in Cameroon. Information on Sagdəm and Samləm, the two lects in the Nigerian part of the Northern Alantika Mountains, is still very fragmentary.

Both clusters are part of the Vere subgroup of the Gəmme-Vere Branch of Samba-Duru, one of the subgroups of the Benue-Volta (or Adamawa-Gur) languages (Kleinewillinghöfer 2019). Common to class languages of Vere-Gimmə is that they predominantly mark class membership on nouns by characteristic suffixes; concord morphemes, class markers that map agreement on dependent constituents appear to be mainly suffixed but may also be prefixed.

1. Genders, AGR, and NF classes in Vere (Markəm and Batim)

The 'Momi Dictionary' complemented by own field notes from the same variety,[7] form the data-base of this presentation. Additional information comes from another variety, namely Batim, the lect of the Bati. The lexical differences between the two varieties appear to be slight and not crucial for the scope of this study.

In Vere, as well as in other class languages of the Vere - Gimme branch, we note a considerable disparity of the quantity and form of the AGR classes and the quantity and form of the characteristic noun suffixes (NF) using the various AGR patterns. Singular / plural oppositions based on the noun suffixes (table 2) show a much larger complexity. This discrepancy becomes evident when comparing table 1 and table 2, and it is illustrated in extent by the entries of the comparative wordlist in the Appendix. The few examples in (1) already demonstrate some of the discrepancies. In (1) the demonstrative pronouns 'this (here)' and 'these (here)' follows the nouns. The pronominal stem *a-* bears the respective agreement or concord suffix.

(1)   <u>AGR</u>   NF

AGR	NF		
S / I	-s / -i	nɔɔ-s **as** / nɔɔ-i **ai**	'this bird / these birds'
S / I	-z / -ri	zii-z **as** / zi-ri **ai**	'this person / these people'
S / I	-z / -ŋbi	guu-z **as** / gu-ŋbi **ai**	sauce; soup; stew (Batim: gùs / guŋbe)
L / I	-t / -i	bìn-t **al** / bìn-i **ai**	'this stone / these stones' (Batim: bil / billɛ)
L / I	-l / -r	guu-l **al** / guu-r **ai**	'this horn / these horns'
L / I	-r / -ti	zuu-r **al** / zuʔu-tì **ai**	'this head / these heads'
K / M	-k / -m	mùù-k **ak** / mùù-m **am**	'this face / these faces'
K / I	-kp / -u	kpɔ́-kp **ak** / kpá-ù **ai**	bark (of tree)
K / T	-r / -t	kè-r **ak** / kè-t **at**	'this calabash / theses calabashes'
U / T	-p / -r	kum-p **au** / kum-r **at**	'this silk cotton tree / these … '

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[4] The lexicon is posted on the web: http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/AU/Momi%20dictionary.pdf
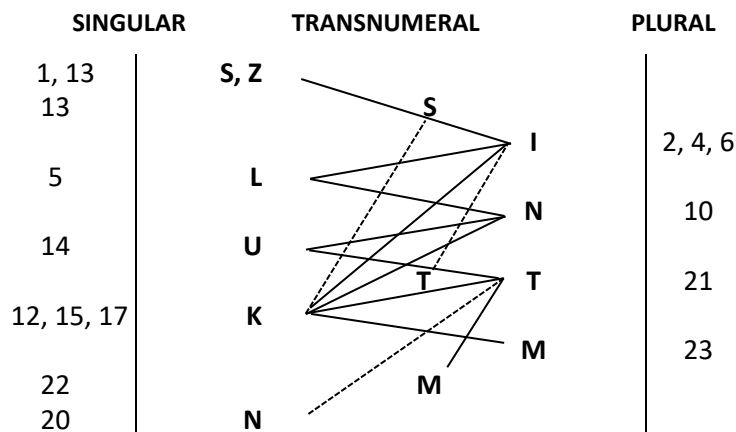
[5] The Ethnologue lumps under 'Mom Jango' the lects of the main Vere cluster with the Jango language, as well as Kobom, and probably also other lects of the linguistically distinct Alantika Vere cluster.

[6] https://www.blogs.uni-mainz.de/fb07-adamawa/files/2015/06/Vere-group-100-.pdf

[7] I worked at Yadim in 1995 with one of the consultants to the Momi Dictionary.

Table 1: Vere noun class system based on the AGR classes and genders

SINGULAR	TRANSNUMERAL	PLURAL
1, 13	S, Z	
13	S	
	I	2, 4, 6
5	L	
	N	10
14	U	
	T T	21
12, 15, 17	K	
	M	23
22	M	
20	N	

The lines in the tables illustrate which classes form number oppositions (singular/plural pairings); dotted lines indicate that not many examples exist for a particular opposition. The numbers in the two outer columns in table 1 are part of a comparative analysis. They link the various classes to their probable cognates in class systems across Benue-Volta (Adamawa-Gur). The numbering system follows Miehe et al. (2012: 5-7) and was designed as a reference system for comparative studies of noun class systems across Volta-Congo. It corresponds to a large extent to the class numbers known from Bantu. The deviations are class 23 [*ma] which corresponds to Bantu 6a [*ma], class 22 [*mu], which corresponds to Williamson's class 6B (1989: 38), as well as class 13 [*sι] which Williamson equated with Bantu class 13 [*ti]. No correspondences to Bantu classes were so far presumed for class 21 [*tυ], and what I propose to call 'thing-class' class 20 [*da] in Gur (Miehe et al. 2012) and [*ne] in Samba-Duru (Kleinewillinghöfer 2018).[8]

In table 2 the outer columns show the AGR (or concord classes), and the inner columns the respective noun forms found with singular, plural and trans-numeral nouns that require the same AGR pattern to map agreement on dependent constituents.

Table 2: Vere noun suffixes (NF) and their gender pairings

S	-z, -s	-ri, -ni, -ki	I
	-ø	-ŋgbi	
		-i, (-ø)	
L	-ø, -l	-r	
	-ø, -r	-ʔ, -ø	
		-ti	
U	-p, -b, -u		
		-n	N
K	-k, -kp		
	-ø, -ʔ, -a	-t, -ət	T
	-ka, -kpa	-r, -ø	
	-ra, -r		
		-m, -rem	M
		-m	
N	-n		
	-ni		
		-t	T
		-s	S

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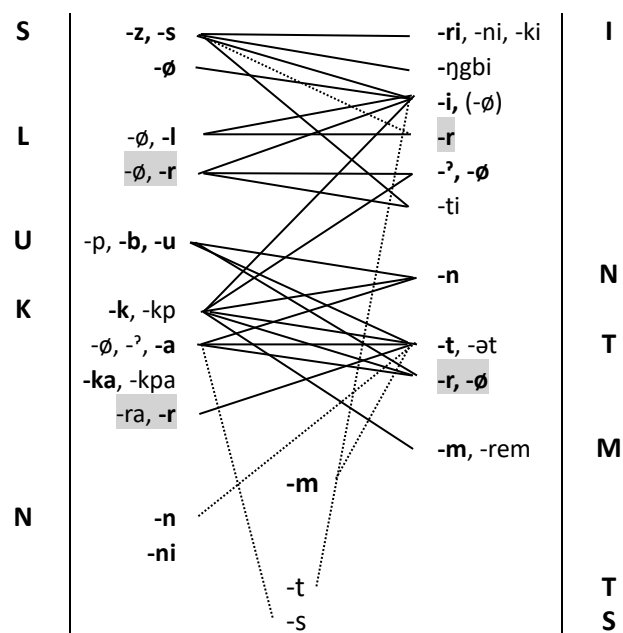
2. Genders, AGR, and NF classes in Eilim – Nissim (Atlantika Vere)

In all the varieties of the Alantika Vere cluster, we note a similar disparity of the quantity and form of the AGR classes and the quantity and form of the characteristic noun suffixes (NF) using the various AGR patterns as in Vere. Singular / plural oppositions based on characteristic noun suffixes (table 4) show a much larger complexity than the genders differentiated by distinct AGR as in table 3. This becomes evident when comparing the tables 3 and 4. The examples in (2) illustrate some of the discrepancies.
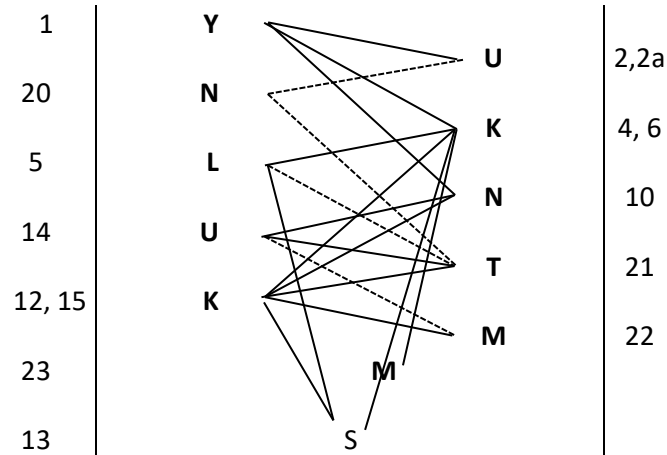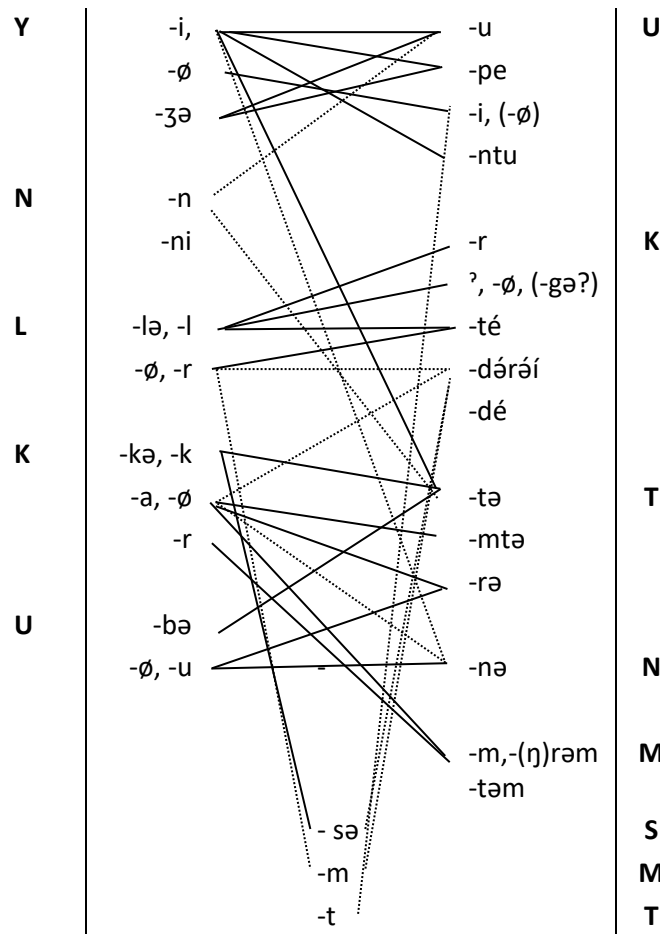
Table 3: AGR in Eilim - Nissim

Table 4: Eilim-Nissim noun suffixes (NF) and their gender pairings

(2)   <u>AGR</u>   <u>NF</u>

I / U	-i / -pə	ma-i **àyà** / má-pə **àwà**	'this person / these people'
I / U	-i / -u	nɔ́-í **àyà** / nɔ́-ú **àwà**	'this bird / these birds'
L / K	-lə / -gə	bíl-lə **àlà** / bi-gə **àkɜ̀**	'this stone / these stones'
L / K	-r / -te	baa-r **àlà** / baa-te **àkɜ̀**	'this belly / these bellies'
L / K	-lə / -r	gúl-lə **àlà** / gú-r **àkè**	'this horn / these horns'
U / T	-bə / -tə	kúm-bə **àwà** / kúm-tə **àtə̀**	'this silk cotton tree / these … '
K / M	-kp / -əm	tí-kp **àkà** / tíg-ə́m **àmà**	'this forge / these forges'
S / K	-sə /-dərei	mɔ́-sə **àsɜ̀** / mu-dəréí **àkɜ̀**	'this face / these faces'
S / K	-sə / -de	gu-sə **àsɜ̀** / gu-de **àkɜ̀**	'this meat stew / … ' ['viande préparé]

Of interest for the evolution respectively erosion of gender systems in the Alantika Vere group are the nouns in (3) which differ between the two close lects of Nissim and Eilim.

(3)

S / I	wáá **àyà** / yérú **àwà**	'this child / these children' (Eilim)	
N / I	mán wá **àn** / yérú **àu**	'this child / these children'	(Nissim)
K / T	míí àkɜ̀ / míí-mtɜ̀ **àtə̀**	'this nose / these ..'	(Eilim)
K / N	míí **àkɜ̀** / míí-nə **ànà**		(Nissim)
U / M	rəu **àwà** / rəm-m **àmà**	'this nose / these ..'	(Eilim)
U / N	rəu **àwà** / rəm-nɜ̀ **ànà**		(Nissim)
K / K	dam **àkɜ̀** / dam-dərei **àkɜ̀**	'this nose / these ..'	(Eilim)
I / K	dóbzə **àyà** / dób-pe **àkɜ̀**?		(Nissim)
K / K	tɛ́m **àkɜ̀** / tɛ́m-dɜ́rɜ́í **àkɜ̀**	'this heart / these ..'	(Eilim)
L / K	tɛ́m-lə **àlà** / tɛ́m-dɜ́rɜ́í **akə**		(Nissim)

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