

Koromfe

John R. Rennison

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Strong linguistic and ecological pressures are gradually pushing Koromfe, a local language spoken in the north of Burkina Faso, West Africa, towards extinction. Spoken by, at the most, 10,000 people, Koromfe has defied political and cultural domination by other local languages.

Few other researchers have studied Koromfe in such depth and this is the first detailed linguistic analysis of its kind, consequently providing data which sheds light on many previously unanswered questions concerning both Koromfe and genetic and general linguistic issues. The information which constitutes this Descriptive Grammar is based on field work conducted by the author. As a Gur or Voltaic language, the author shows how Koromfe shares many phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic affinities with other such languages.

John R. Rennison is currently Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Vienna. He has worked extensively on the theory of phonology and morphology, and has worked on Koromfe for sixteen years.

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Editorial statement

Until quite recently, work on theoretical linguistics and work on language description proceeded almost entirely in isolation from one another. Work on theoretical linguistics, especially in syntax, concentrated primarily on English, and its results were felt to be inapplicable to those interested in describing other languages. Work on describing individual languages was almost deliberately isolationist, with the development of a different framework and terminology for each language or language group, and no feeding of the achievements of language description into linguistic theory. Within the last few years, however, a major rapprochement has taken place between theoretical and descriptive linguistics. In particular, the rise of language typology and the study of language universals have produced a large number of theoreticians who require accurate, well-formulated descriptive data from a wide range of languages, and have shown descriptive linguists that they can both derive benefit from and contribute to the development of linguistic theory. Even within generative syntax, long the bastion of linguistic anglo-centrism, there is an increased interest in the relation between syntactic theory and a wide range of language types.

For a really fruitful interaction between theoretical and descriptive linguistics, it is essential that descriptions of different languages should be comparable. The *Questionnaire* of the present series (originally published as *Lingua*, vol. 42 (1977), no. 1) provides a framework for the description of a language that is (a) sufficiently comprehensive to cover the major structures of any language that are likely to be of theoretical interest; (b) sufficiently explicit to make cross-language comparisons a feasible undertaking (in particular, through the detailed numbering key); and (c) sufficiently flexible to encompass the range of variety that is found in human language. The volumes that were published in the predecessor to the present series, the *Lingua Descriptive Studies* (now available from Routledge), succeeded in bridging the gap between theory and description: authors include both theoreticians who are also interested in description and field workers with an interest in theory.

Editorial statement

The aim of the Descriptive Grammars is thus to provide descriptions of a wide range of languages according to the format set out in the *Questionnaire*. Each language will be covered in a single volume. The first priority of the series is grammars of languages for which detailed descriptions are not at present available. However, the series will also encompass descriptions of better-known languages with the series framework providing more detailed descriptions of such languages than are currently available (as with the monographs on West Greenlandic and Kannada).

Bernard Comrie

Koromfe

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Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality
of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the
original may be apparent

For Gerlinde, Barbara, Jennifer, Christina and Julia
because I love them

and for the Koromba
with deep respect.

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Preface

This book is the result of 16 years of work on Koromfe, alongside other linguistic interests. It would not have been possible without the active and passive support of several people. I would especially like to thank my family, who increased during those years from 2 to 5 (other) members, for their active interest in the early stages and for their patience during the final stages.

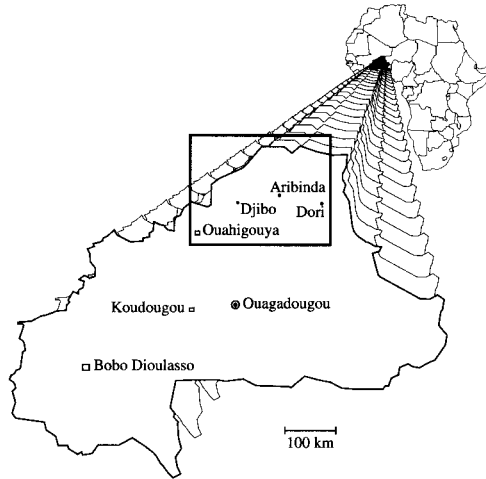
Annemarie Schweeger-Hefel (†) put her house in Tulfes, Tyrol at my disposal for my first informant sessions and provided me with background information on the culture of the Koromba without which I would have been lost.

A grammar of this kind is never ‘finished’, especially for a perfectionist like myself, and writing it has raised many further questions which I wish I had the time and resources to try to answer. I thank my informants for their help and Bernard Comrie, the series editor, for his extremely attentive inspection of the manuscript and suggestions for revisions, which were always to the point and well-received. Special thanks go to Oskar Pfeiffer for his diligent proofreading of the manuscript. Of course, the entire responsibility for what is written here is my own, and I absolve all others from any part of the blame for the faults that may remain.

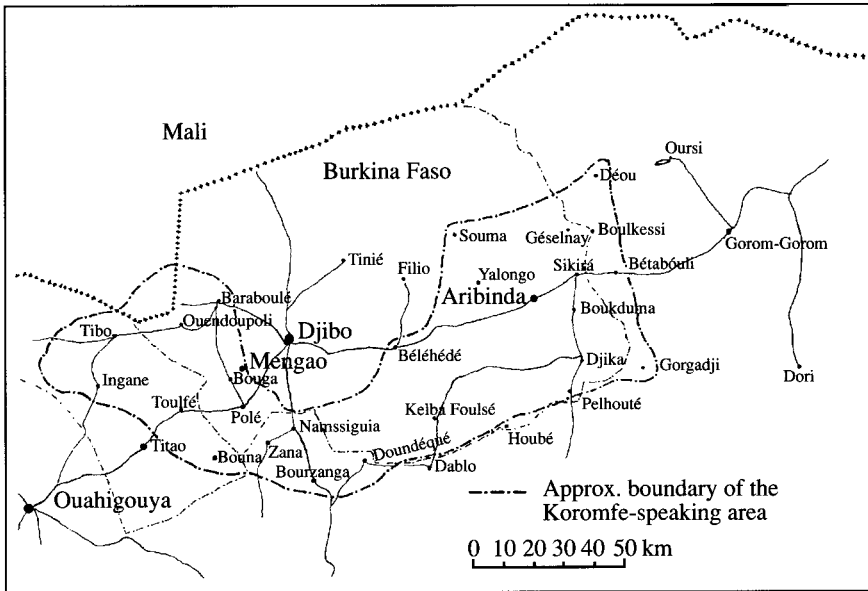
I would welcome feedback from anyone working on related languages (e-mail: *john@ling.univie.ac.at*).

Vienna, October 1996

- (2) *Maps of the Koromfe-speaking area, based on Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972) and Prost (1980).*
 a) *Africa and Burkina Faso (capital Ouagadougou), with a box indicating the location of map b).*



- b) *The area where Koromfe is spoken (alongside other indigenous languages). The dots for Mengao and Aribinda are enlarged for better visibility, and therefore do not correspond to their actual size.)*



Introduction

The language

The name of the language described here is pronounced [koromfe] by its speakers. Since the vowels [u,ɔ,o] are distinctive, the printed names ‘Kurumfe’, ‘Kurumfé’ etc. which have been used in the past are inaccurate: I have therefore taken the liberty of replacing the printed name of the language with the more accurate form ‘Koromfe’. The same phonetic inaccuracy applies to the printed name of the speakers, who call themselves [koromdo] (SG.) / [korombɔ] (PL.). I use the printed forms ‘Koromdo’ and ‘Koromba’ respectively. The regional variety described here is spoken in the village of Mengao.

Speakers and genetic affiliation

Koromfe is a small, local language spoken in the north of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) in a U-shaped area which surrounds the town of Djibo to the west, south and east (see the maps in (1)). Other local languages are also spoken in this area, especially Mòoré (a Gur language), Fulfulde (Fula-Wolof) and Songhai (Nilo-Saharan). This is a part of the Sahel that is rapidly declining in population because of the rapid and unavoidable encroachment of the Sahara. In the area around the village of Mengao there are very few trees left, and it is only a matter of time until these, too, disappear forever. No newly planted tree can grow roots long enough to reach water before drying up; artificially watered trees rarely survive. This monograph is therefore a documentation of a language that is dying — not only from linguistic pressure (see below) but from ecological pressure. The Koromba who take the road south are unlikely to preserve their language for much longer than the present generation; and in Burkina Faso, one generation is about half as long as in Western Europe.

The area immediately surrounding Mengao is known as [lorom] (printed name ‘Lurum’), and is documented ethnologically in Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972). The religious affiliation of the Koromba is given in the SIL Ethnologue database, based on Grimes (1992), as 70% traditional religion, 26% Muslim and 4% Christian. My informants think that

the percentage of Muslims is increasing and of adherents to the ‘traditional religion’ decreasing.

Koromfe is a Gur or Voltaic language, and, contrary to the judgement of Prost (1980) and the ethno-historical claims of Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972), it has clear phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic affinities with the other Gur languages of that area — for example with Mòoré, which is the most widely-spoken Gur language (with several million speakers), and which enjoys high prestige among Koromfe speakers, most of whom also actively speak Mòoré. Manessy (1978) considered Koromfe to be an independent branch of Central Gur. The SIL Ethnologue database gives the exhaustive genetic affiliation: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Gur, Central, Northern, Koromfe, and claims that there are some 100,000 Koromfe speakers. My own estimate, and that of Prost (1980) is far lower — at the most 10,000, though possibly as few as 2,000. Whatever the number, it is rapidly declining, and may reach zero within not much more than my lifetime.

The noun class system of Koromfe shows a striking resemblance to that of the Bantu languages, but uses suffixes instead of prefixes. I think that this resemblance is more than accidental.¹

Prost (1980) says that there are very few Mòoré words in Koromfe. In my own experience this is untrue, both for obvious loans (see below on suffix vowels) and for cognates such as *kōbre* ‘bone’ (directly from Mòoré) vs. *kobre* (Koromfe). The position of Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972) is that Koromfe is gradually being ‘corrupted’ by Mòoré infiltration. For them, Koromfe was the ‘original’ language of the area now inhabited by the Koromba, and they therefore never seriously entertained the idea that Mòoré and Koromfe are descended from a common ancestor. One problem for all three researchers was the identification of the inflectional suffixes, particularly the nasalized noun class suffixes, like the [Vŋ] variant of the *-gV* suffix (where V is a harmonized vowel). This superficial phonetic difference blurs the great morphological similarity between the inflections of Koromfe and those of Mòoré and other Gur languages.

Previous research

Few other researchers have worked on Koromfe, and only one of them (Hans Mukarovsky, Professor of African Studies at the University of Vienna) was primarily a linguist.

Schweeger-Hefel & Mukarovsky (1961) is a first tentative analysis of the phonology and morphology of the language. Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972) is an ethnological study which includes a vocabulary (without details of the system of transcription used) but no other linguistically relevant information. Prost (1980) is a grammatical sketch of the language, including a few translated texts. It is difficult to use because the transcription is unreliable. None of these researchers discovered (or was prepared to accept) the great variety of phonetic vowels that exist. Nevertheless, both Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972) and Prost (1980) are interpretable to a large extent, and contribute to the general picture of the language.

My own research directly relating to Koromfe has been published in the form of a Koromfe-French dictionary (Rennison, 1986a) and a collection of texts translated into French (Rennison, 1986b). The inflectional categories in the verbs have been revised in the present monograph due to later research on tense and aspect, and a few minor phonetic details in the dictionary are not quite accurate.² Koromfe has also been the object of some of my more theoretical linguistic (particularly phonological) research; the relevant articles are given in the bibliography.

One point on which all researchers agree is that Koromfe has no tones, even though by rights it should have. This point is brought home by the anecdote about a whistling bird (A. Schweeger-Hefel, p.c.) who, the informant said, whistled a sentence in Mòoré. When asked what the bird was whistling in Koromfe, he replied: ‘Nothing.’

Field work

The field work which I carried out as the basis for this grammar began in 1980, when I spent 2 months ‘interned’ with Ousséini Badini in Tulfes (Tyrol, Austria), in the house of Annemarie Schweeger-Hefel, intending to collect, edit and publish the notes of the late Wilhelm Staude (whom I never met), and to transcribe and translate some of his recordings, archived by the Phonogrammarchiv (Sound Archives) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The former undertaking proved to be impossible because Staude’s transcriptions were not sufficiently accurate. Instead, we translated the texts published as Rennison (1986b), then started a new dictionary from scratch, though based on the cultural terms collected by Staude,

and on Schweeger-Hefel & Staude (1972). This was the basis for Rennison (1986b).

Then, in the early 1980's, Annemarie Schweeger-Hefel discovered a Koromfe speaker in Vienna (an unimaginable piece of luck) — Kemde Abdoul Malick, who came to weekly informant sessions at my home over several years, and helped me finish the dictionary and texts, and provided the first information specifically elicited for the present grammar.

In February 1985 I made my (so far) only trip to Africa, namely to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, where I worked intensively for four weeks with Souleymane Sawadogo, who provided the rest of the information for this grammar, together with Ousséini and Kemde, who were also there for occasional consultation. I should perhaps mention that travelling to Mengao, the village whose variety of Koromfe is described here, is not easy, and my debt to those who did so to make the recordings which I used is high.

This grammar is therefore based on field work with three speakers only, and was never carried out in the village of Mengao. However, the tape recordings made there by Wilhelm Staude and Annemarie Schweeger-Hefel were also used and interpreted (with the help of my three informants), so that the number of speakers encompassed by my research is somewhat larger. Nevertheless, I admit that a study of this kind is less than complete without data on actual communication, especially of a day-to-day nature; this is particularly noticeable when it comes to ideophones and interjections in §4 below.

'Dialects'

The degree of divergence between the regional variants of Koromfe seems to be very small, and I therefore have no doubt that the language data which I collected is as homogeneous as linguistic data of this kind can be. Obviously, variations due to casualness and speech tempo are immanent in all language systems, and are also found in Koromfe. On the other hand, the kind of sociolinguistic variation corresponding to 'register' or 'dialect vs. standard language' in European languages is entirely missing in my corpus (barring polite plurals and lexical choice) — probably due to the field-work setting. A comparative word list, recorded by Wilhelm Staude, of Koromfe spoken in Mengao (in the west of the Koromfe-speaking area) with Aribinda (in the extreme north-east of the area) shows no significant

differences beyond a few different choices of lexical items by the Aribinda informant (mostly words which also exist in Mengao). The ‘dialectological’ data of Prost (1980: 107–110) shows the same pattern: no linguistically significant dialectal variation.³

Informants

Precise data on my informants was not always available: none of them knew their precise date of birth.

Ousséini Badini was born and raised in Mengao, where he received primary school education. His parents, grandparents and all known ancestors came from Mengao. At the age of about 20 he went to Ouagadougou, where he works for the state-owned cotton monopoly. He was about 25 years old in 1980, when I worked with him.

Kemde Abdoul Malick was also born and raised in Mengao, where he received primary school education. His mother is a Koromba, with all known ancestors from Mengao, but his father is a Mossi with relatives in Ouagadougou. This enabled Kemde to receive further professional training in Vienna during the period when I worked with him. His age in 1982 was about 25 years. Kemde was also able to provide some invaluable data on Mòoré, since it was the language of his father. After returning to Burkina Faso in 1984 Kemde taught at the Austrian school in Ouagadougou.

Souleymane Sawadogo was born and raised in Donombéné, a smaller village north of Mengao. He received primary school education in Mengao and later trained as a primary school teacher (though I do not know where). He taught at the primary school in Mengao up to our informant sessions in 1985, when he was on leave in Ouagadougou for a few months. He later returned to Mengao. In 1985 he was about 25 years old (i.e. the youngest of my informants, by a few years).

All three informants spoke excellent French, though of course lexically and idiomatically West African French. Kemde also spoke very good German. As a slight token of their competence in French: All three used front rounded vowels in the right places, which is by no means usual in Burkina Faso. They were all three very quick to learn the linguistic categories that I was interested in, and developed an interest in the ongoing linguistic description, so that they were often able to volunteer relevant examples, counterexamples, irregularities etc. which I might otherwise not

have discovered. I thank them sincerely for their help in producing this grammar of their language. The faults that remain can only be my own.

Presentation of the data

Transcription

Koromfe has no written form, standardized or otherwise. The transcription used here (apart from §3, where everything is phonetically transcribed) is my own, and is phonetically/phonemically oriented. There is therefore no capitalization or punctuation in the examples given here apart from horizontal dashes to indicate a pause.

The only deviations from IPA transcription are given in the following list (and cf. §3.1.1–2):

- *g* is used for all realizations of /g/, including the automatic allophone [ɣ]; for /d/ on the other hand, the allophones [d] and [r] are distinguished.
- The automatic nasal allophones of *h* and *w* ([h̃] and [w̃] respectively) are never marked; the nasal allophone of *j* is transcribed *j̃* because these are the spurious ‘palatal nasal stops’ noted by other researchers.
- The vowel schwa ([ə]) occurs variably according to tempo and casualness, and is transcribed here as it occurred in the original utterance.
- Vowels given in parentheses are realized phonetically as schwa or zero; the form in parentheses would be audible in a phrase-final or pre-pausal realization of the word.
- Syllabic nasals are not specially marked because a) they can automatically be identified by the context in which they occur (post-pausally before a consonant), and b) they are non-syllabic in medial positions.
- The 2nd person singular clitic pronoun is transcribed only *m*, *n* or *ŋ*, and not in the full spectrum of its other automatic variants.

Choice of examples

The example words, phrases and sentences given in this grammar were chosen according to the scale of preference given here (which I consider to reflect the naturalness of the language samples):

1. texts recorded by Wilhelm Staude (as interpreted by my informants);
2. data elicited by myself from my informants;
3. other sources (always explicitly mentioned).

I have tried to use as much material of the first type as possible, because I am convinced that it is the least influenced by linguistic methodology. This means that sometimes the presentation has rough edges or incomplete paradigms.

Interlinear glosses and abbreviations

The interlinear word-for-word glosses give (one of) the relevant meaning(s) of the word in normal type (if there is one) and grammatical information in SMALL CAPITALS. The use of a plus sign, as in '+ SG.' means that the morpheme SG. is replaceable by some other morpheme, whereas the use of parentheses, as in '(SG.)' means that the word is used in the category SG., but does not necessarily have any other inflectional forms. Other information is given in parentheses, e.g. (=RECIPROCAL) means 'is used as a reciprocal'. Such information which is not lexical or morphological in lowercase italics, e.g. (*proper name*), (*elided*), and should be self-explanatory. The glosses of UNMARKED form of verbs have no special abbreviation (since no morpheme is added to the bare verb stem) but just the lexical gloss, e.g. *be* 'come' means 'the UNMARKED form of "come"'. All other verb forms are specifically mentioned in the glosses, e.g. *benε* 'come + PAST'.

The abbreviations used in the interlinear glosses are given in (2) below. Note that a missing bottom line of a table means that it is continued on the next page, and a table with no number or caption is a continuation of the table on the previous page.

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(2) Abbreviations used in the interlinear glosses, diagrams and tables

<i>abbr.</i>	<i>meaning</i>	<i>abbr.</i>	<i>meaning</i>
?	uncertain	N	noun
??	unknown	NEG.	negative
1PL.	1st person plural	NOM.	nominal
1SG.	1st person singular	NON-HUM.	non-human
2PL.	2nd person plural	NON-SPEC.	non-specific
2SG.	2nd person singular	NP	noun phrase
3PL.	3rd person plural	OBJ.	object
3SG.	3rd person singular	PARTIC.	participial (adjective)
ADJ.	adjective	PL.	plural
ADV.	adverb	POSS.	possessive
ART.	article	POSTCLIT.	postclitic
AUX.	auxiliary	POSTNOM.	postnominal
CL.	class suffix	POSTPOS.	postposition
COLL.	collective	PP	pre-/postpositional phrase
CONJ.	conjunction	PREP.	preposition
DESCR.	descriptive (adjective)	PROG.	progressive aspect
DEMONST.	demonstrative	PRON.	pronoun
DET.	determiner	QU.	question word
DIMIN.	diminutive	QUANT.	quantifier
DISJ.	disjunctive (free word form)	QUEST.	question particle
DUR.	durative aspect	REL.	relative (pronoun or particle)
EMPH.	emphatic particle	SENT.	sentential
EXCL.	exclamation	SINGULAT.	singulative
FUT.	Future auxiliary use	SG.	singular
HUM.	Human	TRANS.	transitive
IDEOPH.	ideophone	UNM.	unmarked verb form
INDECL.	indeclinable	V	vowel whose quality is determined by vowel harmony
INTERROG.	interrogative	v	verb
INTRANS.	intransitive	VP	verb phrase

Notes to the Introduction

- ¹ Half in fun, I reconstruct the word Bantu itself (*ba-ntu* ‘people’) as being the Koromfe word *dɔɔ-ba* ‘peasants’. All Koromba are peasants. The stem *dɔ(ɔ)* probably historically meant ‘being’ in Koromfe, and can be found in *dɔɔ*, PL. *dɔɔfi* ‘animal’ and in *dɔfre*, PL. *dɔfia* ‘god’. The *ba* plural morpheme of the human noun class is identical in Bantu languages and Koromfe.
- ² For example, I did not distinguish ‘epenthetic’ from lexical final vowels, and had some other full vowels for what I now know are schwas.
- ³ In this context I must add that I have worked extensively on dialectal variation in (one variety of Austrian) German, cf. Rennison (1981), and had hoped to find something similar in Koromfe — but did not. Some differences in the numerals described by Prost (1980) are discussed in §2.1.6 below.

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1 Syntax

1.1 General questions

1.1.1 Sentence-types

1.1.1.1 Direct and indirect speech

Speech that is quoted, whether directly or indirectly, is usually introduced with the conjunction *ke*, which corresponds roughly to English *that* (and also *because*). Rarely, both direct and indirect quoted speech can be found without an introductory *ke*. It seems that the omission of *ke* is facilitated by a) change of the narrator's current rôle (e.g. to an animal's voice in a fable), b) change of the pace of narration ('excitement'), and c) the presence of another *ke* within the quoted speech itself. Examples are given in (3)–(4). Note that underlining is used here in word-for-word glosses to mark both directly and indirectly quoted speech.

- (3) kɔ a jemdi bole ke hāi
then ART. hippopotamus + SG. say + PAST that (CONJ.) EXCL.
ase la da ŋkɔ neŋ n sib jereŋa
what (QU.) EMPH. win DISJ. PRON. 2SG. thus PRON. 2SG. die here
n josə neŋ
PRON. 2SG rot thus
'Then Hippo said "Hey! What's happened to you to make you die here and rot like that?"'

- (4) kɔ (a)¹ jemdi mɔ̄ bole dɔ̄
then ART. (*elided*) hippopotamus + SG. also say + PAST PRON. 3SG. HUM.
zakə mɔ̄ ke mə bɛ la mə bi
cheat also that (CONJ.) PRON. 1SG. come with (CONJ.) PRON. 1SG. child
ja dɔ̄ ja verə selle dɔ̄ pa
EMPH. PRON. 3SG. HUM. go raise outdoors PRON. 3SG. HUM. give.
'Then Hippo also said: "He cheated me too, telling me to bring my child, and saying that he would raise him outdoors (=on land), (and) he would give (him back to me)."'

In sentence (3) the conjunction *ke* is used immediately before an exclamation which is a part of the directly quoted speech; in (4), on the other hand, there is no *ke* even though the immediately following sentence is a part of Hippo's speech (being directly quoted by the narrator). The *ke* of

- (7) n zommaa a mūī
 PRON. 2SG. want + PROG. ART. rice
 ‘You want some rice.’
- (8) də bellaa sã
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. come + PROG. tomorrow
 ‘He will come tomorrow.’
- (9) a boro hoŋ pa də kēš a
 ART. man + SG. DET. HUM. SG. give PRON. 3SG. HUM. woman + SG. ART.
 fāī
 porridge
 ‘The man gave/gives the porridge to his wife.’
- (10) a kēš hoŋ dogom a nɛmmō koŋ
 ART. woman + SG. DET. HUM. SG. cut ART. meat DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 la a gabrɛ
 with ART. knife + SG.
 ‘The woman cuts the meat with the knife.’

In sentences (11)–(16) the question particle *bi* is shown as containing a short vowel, although the vowel is usually lengthened phonetically — often to a quite considerable extent. However, I consider this lengthening to be a prosodic manifestation (or at least accompaniment) of question intonation; lengthening does not always take place, and is never distinctive.

- (11) a veŋa koŋ nēnaa bi
 ART. rain DET. NON-HUM. SG. defecate + PROG. QUEST.
 ‘Is it raining?’
- (12) a vaga koŋ be bi
 ART. dog + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. come QUEST.
 ‘Has the dog come (back)?’
- (13) n zommaa a mūī bi
 PRON. 2SG. want + PROG. ART. rice QUEST.
 ‘Do you want some rice?’

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- (14) də bəllaa sã bɪ
PRON. 3SG. HUM. come + PROG. tomorrow QUEST.
‘Will he come tomorrow?’
- (15) a bɔrɔ hoŋ pa də kɛ̃ʃ a
ART. man + SG. DET. HUM. SG. give PRON. 3SG. HUM. woman + SG. ART.
fãɪ bɪ
porridge QUEST.
‘Did the man give the porridge to his wife?’
- (16) a kɛ̃ʃ hoŋ dogom a nɛmmɔ̃ koŋ
ART. woman + SG. DET. HUM. SG. cut ART. meat DET. NON-HUM. SG.
la a gabrɛ bɪ
with ART. knife + SG. QUEST.
‘Did the woman cut the meat with the knife?’

1.1.1.2.1.2 Leading

1.1.1.2.1.2.1 Expecting the answer yes

The yes-no questions suggesting a positive response are formed syntactically in an identical way to the neutral yes-no questions (i.e. positive declarative sentence plus sentence-final question particle), but use different question particles. There are two particles, *kai* and *dɔ* which are used in this type of yes-no question. Both particles are also words in their own right: *kai* is a comparative particle meaning ‘rather’ or ‘more (than)’, and *dɔ* is the negative copula or emphatic particle (corresponding to the positive particle *la*). The examples given in (17)–(22) correspond to those in the (positive) declarative sentences (5)–(10) and the neutral questions (11)–(16). Note that the position of the question particle (always sentence-final) is the same in all types of yes-no questions. Here, only examples with *kai* have been given; the examples with *dɔ* are identical when the question particle is switched.

- (17) a veŋa koŋ nɛ̃naa kai
ART. rain DET. NON-HUM. SG. defecate + PROG. QUEST.
‘It’s raining, isn’t it?’

- (18) a vaḡa koŋ be kai
 ART. dog + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. come QUEST.
 ‘The dog has come (back), hasn’t it?’
- (19) n zommaa a mūī kai
 PRON. 2SG. want + PROG. ART. rice QUEST.
 ‘You want some rice, don’t you?’
- (20) də bellaa sā kai
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. come + PROG. tomorrow QUEST.
 ‘He will come tomorrow, won’t he?’
- (21) a boro hoŋ pa də kēš a
 ART. man + SG. DET. HUM. SG. give PRON. 3SG. HUM. woman + SG. ART.
 fāī kai
 porridge QUEST.
 ‘The man gave the porridge to his wife, didn’t he?’
- (22) a kēš hoŋ dogom a nēmṁṁ koŋ
 ART. woman + SG. DET. HUM. SG. cut ART. meat DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 la a gabre kai
 with ART. knife + SG. QUEST.
 ‘The woman cut the meat with the knife, didn’t she?’

1.1.1.2.1.2.2 Expecting the answer no

Yes-no questions which expect the answer no have the structure of a negative declarative sentence, plus a sentence-final question particle. The question particles, *kai* and *də*, are identical with those of the corresponding yes-no questions that expect the answer yes. Since the correspondence is so regular, only a single example is given here, in (23).

- (23) a veŋa koŋ ba nēna kai
 ART. rain DET. NON-HUM. SG. NEG. defecate + PROG. QUEST.
 ‘It isn’t raining, is it?’

1.1.1.2.1.3 Alternative

The only alternative yes-no questions that exist in Koromfe involve repetition of the finite verb with a negative pronominal subject (and optionally some pronominal objects). There exists no corresponding structure with a

negated main verb and non-negated repeated verb. Examples are given in (24)–(29).

- (24) a veŋa koŋ nēnaa bɪ
 ART. rain + SG. DET. SG. NON-HUM. defecate + PROG. QUEST.
 gaa nēna
 NEG. PRON. 3SG. NON-HUM. defecate + PROG.
 ‘Is it raining or not?’
- (25) a vaŋa koŋ bɛ bɪ
 ART. dog + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. come QUEST.
 gaa bene
 NEG. PRON. 3SG. NON-HUM. come + PAST
 ‘Has the dog come (back) or not?’
- (26) n zommaa a mūi bɪ m ba boŋ
 PRON. 2SG. want + PROG. ART. rice QUEST. PRON. 2SG. NEG. like
 ‘Do you want some rice or not?’
- (27) də bellaa sā bɪ
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. come + PROG. tomorrow QUEST.
 daa bella
 NEG. PRON. 3SG. NON-HUM. come + PROG.
 ‘Will he come tomorrow or not?’
- (28) a bɔrɔ hoŋ pa də kēŋ a
 ART. man + SG. DET. HUM. SG. give PRON. 3SG. HUM. woman + SG. ART.
 fāi bɪ daa pane dɪ
 porridge QUEST. NEG. PRON. 3SG. HUM. give + PAST PRON. 3SG. HUM.
 ‘Did the man give the porridge to his wife or not?’
- (29) a kēŋ hoŋ dogom a nēm̄m̄ŋ koŋ
 ART. woman + SG. DET. HUM. SG. cut ART. meat DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 la a gabɾɛ bɪ daa dogome
 with ART. knife + SG. QUEST. NEG. PRON. 3SG. NON-HUM. cut + PAST
 ‘Did the woman cut the meat with the knife or not?’

In these alternative yes-no questions, the question particle *bɪ* is always on a high pitch. (NB: Unlike other Gur languages, Koromfe has no tones.) Also, there is a slight pause, or pause effect, after *bɪ*. Note the variations (all optional) in the tense of the repeated verb and even in the choice of

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(31) alama pa (a) vaga koŋ a
 who (QU. PL.) give ART. (*elided*) dog + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. ART.
 mūī
 rice
 ‘Who (pl.) gave the dog rice?’

(32) ase na zōmmō
 what (QU.) PRON. 2PL. want + DUR.
 ‘What do you (pl.) want?’

(33) ase a kēō hoŋ paŋe a vaga
 what (QU.) ART. woman + SG. DET. HUM. SG. give + PAST ART. dog + SG.
 koŋ
 DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘What did the woman give to the dog?’

(34) ala də paŋe a fāī koŋ
 who (SG.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. give + PAST ART. porridge DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Who did she give the porridge to?’

Examples (35)–(38) show the questioning of an adverbial (here: time, manner, place and cause respectively).

(35) sefu də na a manē
 when (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. see ART. money (COLL./ PL.)
 hēŋ
 DET. NON-HUM. PL.
 ‘When did he find the money?’

(36) nāŋkāā də leb a dāŋ koŋ
 how (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. build ART. house + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘How did he build the house?’

(37) nde də na mē sundu
 where (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. see PRON. 1SG. horse + SG.
 koŋ
 DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Where did he see my horse?’

Syntax

- (40) a. də bə ke də pə a
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. say that (CONJ.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. give ART.
 gabrɛ kɔŋ əla
 knife + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. who (QU.)
 ‘Who did he say he gave the knife to?’
- b. də bə ke əla la də
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. say that (CONJ.) who (QU.) EMPH. PRON. 3SG. HUM.
 pə a gabrɛ kɔŋ
 give ART. knife + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Who did he say he gave the knife to?’
- c. əla la də bə ke
 who (SG., QU.) EMPH. PRON. 3SG. HUM. say that (CONJ.)
 də pə a gabrɛ kɔŋ
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. give ART. knife + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Who did he say he gave the knife to?’
- (41) a. də hamandaa ke də nə
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. think + DUR. that (CONJ.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. see
 mə sundu kɔŋ nde
 PRON. 1SG. horse + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG. where (QU.)
 ‘Where does he think he saw my horse?’
- b. də hamandaa ke nde
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. think + PROG. that (CONJ.) where (QU.)
 də nə mə sundu kɔŋ
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. see PRON. 1SG. horse + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Where does he think he saw my horse?’
- c. nde də hamand(i) ke də
 where (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. think + DUR. that (CONJ.) PRON. 3SG. HUM.
 nə mə sundu kɔŋ
 see PRON. 1SG. horse + SG. DET. NON-HUM. SG.
 ‘Where does he think he saw my horse?’

- (42) a. də bo ke də na a
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. say that (CONJ.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. see ART.
 mane hēŋ sefu
 money (COLL./ PL.) DET. NON-HUM. SG. when (QU.)
 ‘When did he say that he saw the money?’ (*Reading*: ‘When did he see it?’
but not: ‘When did he say it?’)
- b. də bo ke sefu də na
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. say that (CONJ.) when (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. see
 a mane
 ART. money (COLL./ PL.)
 ‘When did he say that he saw the money?’ (*Reading*: ‘When did he see it?’
but not: ‘When did he say it?’)
- c. sefu də bole ke də
 when (QU.) PRON. 3SG. HUM. say + PAST that (CONJ.) PRON. 3SG. HUM.
 na a mane
 see ART. money (COLL./ PL.)
 ‘When did he say that he saw the money?’ (*Reading*: ‘When did he say it?’
but not: ‘When did he see it?’)

The questioning of the first (i.e. embedded) NP of a compound (NP+N) NP in example (43) requires a pronoun in the subordinate clause position when the *wh*-word is matrix-sentence-initial (in (43b)), but not when it remains *in situ* within the subordinate clause (in (43a)). For clarity, the full structure of (43a) is given in (44). In (43b) it is the encircled NP of (44) which is moved to matrix-clause-initial position and replaced with the pronoun *gυ*; the emphatic particle *la* is omitted to preserve the reading of the sentence (although it would still be structurally permissible, but would be taken to modify *lebam* in the changed structure).

- (43) a. də bole ke ase lebam
 PRON. 3SG. HUM. say + PAST that (CONJ.) what (QU.) build + GERUND
 la kāŋa
 EMPH. be hard
 ‘What did he say is difficult to build?’ (*Wh-word in situ.*)

- (45) a. mə sa kɔ̃m bɛnɛ lɛ ɔ
 PRON. 1SG. father when (CONJ.) come + PAST thus PRON. 1PL.
 kure (a) dɪɔ
 begin + PAST ART. (*elided*) eating
 ‘When my father arrived⁵ we started eating.’
- b. ɔ kure (a) dɪɔ mə sa
 PRON. 1PL. begin + PAST ART. (*elided*) eating PRON. 1SG. father
 kɔ̃m bɛnɛ lɛ
 when (CONJ.) come + PAST thus
 ‘When my father arrived we started eating.’
- c. ala kɔ̃m bɛnɛ na kure
 who (QU.) when (CONJ.) come + PAST PRON. 2PL. begin + PAST
 (a) dɪɔ
 ART. (*elided*) eating
 ‘When who arrived did you (pl.) start eating?’ (=‘After whose arrival did you start to eat?’)

Non-finite clauses and nominalized clauses (beyond ‘NP+GERUND / ACTION NOUN’ constructions exemplified in (43)) do not exist and therefore have no elements that can be questioned. In NP+GERUND constructions, as with all compound NPs, and irrespective of whether the gerund / action noun can be considered the rendition of a full clause, only the NP which precedes the gerund or action noun can be questioned, and this NP is always the direct object of the verb, as exemplified in (43) above. When the action noun has taken on a more concrete nominal (i.e. non-actional) meaning, it can be combined with an actor noun in a genitival construction such as *a dɔfre pãũ* ‘a gift from God’ or *dombɔ pãũ* ‘(their) gifts to/for one another’. But in these phrases, if a verbal interpretation is forced, then the first NP must be interpreted as the direct object (giving some very strange readings!).

1.1.1.2.2.1.3 Constituents of noun phrases

The selective interrogative adjective ‘which’ in Koromfe always follows the noun which it qualifies, as do all other (nominal) adjectives. Example (46) shows the construction in a direct object NP, and (47) in an indirect object NP.