

Classification details

North Central Gur (Mieke et al. 2012:726)

1. Oti-Volta (Buli-Konni, Atakora (OV East), OV West, Gurma, Yom-Nawdem)
2. Bwamu
3. Koromfe

South Central Gur

1. Gurunsi (with three sub-branches)
2. **Cerma-Cuuramma**
3. Lobiri-Jaane
4. Kaansa-Dogose
5. Khe-Dogosu
6. Baatɔnum

Possible Central Gur

1. Kulango
2. Senufo

Isolated: Cɛfɔ, Viemo, Samu group, Tusian

Uncertain: Miyɔbe

Word order

On the syntactic level, Cerma has a(n) **SVO** structure with a **head-initial** structure in nominal phrases:

fíé-bǐná-ndú ‘fresh leaf’ < *fíé-lú* ‘leaf’ + *-bǐna-* ‘humid’
 ná-mpílá-ŋó ‘shea butter’ < *ná-mmá* ‘oil’ + *-pílV-* ‘white’

and a **head-final** order in associative constructions and compounds:

dǐlò-ŋ-pórúó-ŋgú ‘rainbow’ < *dǐlò-ŋó* ‘God, rain’ + *pórúó-ŋgú* ‘sabre’
 híè-ŋ-váá-ŋó ‘jackal’ < *híè-ŋgú* ‘bush’ + *váá-ŋó* ‘dog’

Nouns

1. Structure of a nominal stem in citation form:

(Prefix) – Stem – (Extension) – Pre-final N – Suffix:

SG	jǐé-	ŋ	ó	PL	jǐé-	náá-	m	bá
	snake	prefinal	suffix		snake	Ext.:plural	prefinal	suffix

só-	l	lú
hone	prefinal	suffix
y		

máá-	fáá-	m	mâ	<	fá
prefi	work	prefinal	suffix		to work
x					

2. Types of tonal pattern

Type A (H-H): dú-ŋgú/dú-nní ‘house’

Type B (H)B-B): yû-ŋgù/yû-nnì ‘head’

Type C (B-H): tí.bì-ŋgú /tíbì-nní ‘tree’

3. Mapping of agreement (AGR) and nominal form classes (NF) (Mieke 2022)

	AGR		NF	Number
1 (1) ¹	u		-Ø, -V, -ùó, -yô	SG, TN ('irregular nouns')
			-ŋo	SG, TN
2 (2)	ba		-bää	PL ('irregular nouns')
			-mba	PL
3 (15)	ku	_____	-ŋgu	SG, TN
4 (10)	ni	_____	-(n)ni	PL, TN
5 (12)	ka	_____	-ŋga	SG
6 (22)	mu	_____	-(m)mu	PL, TN
7 (5)	di	_____	-(L)Le	SG
8 (6)	a	_____	-ŋa	PL, TN
9 (23)	ma	_____	-(m)ma	TN
10 (21)	du	_____	-(L)Lu	TN

Class numbering according to the Cerma Language Committee, in brackets the numbering of the Gur Working Group.

Remarks

- Agreement forms (AGR) can be predicted from nominal forms (NF) and vice versa.
- The homorganic pre-final *-N-* is a diagnostic flectional feature that distinguishes AGR from NF.
- There is no multiple affiliation of singulars to plurals or vice versa. Likewise, there is no pairing of an individual TN class with another class.
- There is no doubt that the 'deriflection' system of Cerma and Cuuramma has been restructured

in former times, cp. the Cuuramma system which shows the same basic structure, but the number of genders is reduced, and there are multiple mappings of singulars and plurals, and no clearly definable sub-gender of irregular nouns within gender 1/2):

Deriflection system of Cuuramma compared to Cerma (Mieke 2022)

The Cuuramma AGR markers are given in brackets:

Cuuramma			Cerma		
SG	TN	PL	SG	TN	PL
-w (wu)		-ba (ba)	-ŋo (-Ø, -V, -ùó, -yo)	_____	-mba (-bää)
-gu (gi)		-(n)ŋa (ŋa)	-ŋgu, -ŋga	_____	-(n)ni
-Ri (di)		-ga (ga)	-(L)Le	_____	-ŋa
	-Ri (di)			-(L)Lu	
	-(m)mą (ma)			-(m)mu -(m)ma	

¹ Class numbering according to the Gur Working Group, in brackets the numbering of the Cerma Language Committee

4. The four ‘state’ forms of nouns (depending on the morpho-syntactic context):

	Citation form	State of composition	State of association	State of absolute truncation
Woman (1/2)	cíè-ηò cáà-mbà	cá- cá-	cíèη- cáàη-	cíè ---
House (3/4)	dú-ηgú dú-nní	dú- ~ dú- dú- ~ dú-	dúN- dúN-	--- ---
‘tò’ (10)	júú-rú	jú-	júúr-	--

Citation form (= morpho-tonological realisation of a noun in object position before a pause), appearing:

- in (indef.) subject position,
- in first positions of associative constructions when the nouns belong to classes with suffixes which do not show the prefinal suffix on the surface,
- before cardinal numerals,
- before some pronouns (that I call ‘pronouns in the strict sense’),
- before the relative marker *màη*
- with the locative enclitics =*na* or =*η*
- with the pragmatic =*i* (definite or focus)

State of composition, appearing:

- with compound nouns
- with qualifiers

State of association, appearing

- in associative constructions (except the classes with suffixes which do not show the prefinal suffix on the surface)
- in nominal phrases before pronominal determiners and before the narrative pronoun
- before the conditional marker *da-*
- in compounds with the noun *-tieŋo* ‘possessor’

State of absolute truncation

In contrast to the state of composition, this state does not appear in nominal formations, but only as subject in a very special predication type. In addition, its use is restricted to singulars of animates. The verb in question follows with minimal basic marking: it occurs in citation form (neuter) or in perfective form, and with the (present/neuter) negative marker. The indefinite/generic marking of the noun in question is confirmed by the fact that the construction most often appears in proverbs, as well as in complement clauses.

Verbs

Cerma has two principal verbal stems: the short (basic) one that serves as citation form and from which the other, the long one, is derivable. The long form serves primarily as perfective stem. However, the perfective stem itself serves as derivational base of the imperative plural as well as of the ‘dependent-imperfective’ form which occurs rarely and only in a well-defined syntactic-pragmatic environment.

There are six verb classes (I-VI) with sub-classes (a)-(c) which are defined according to their behaviour in forming the perfective verbal stem. The following table shows the tonal patterns of the different formations, but with only one item for each class (except for class I):

Cl.	Basic	Perfective	Dependent-Imperfective	Imperative Plural	Verbal noun	Gloss
Ia	dá	dáá	dáǎŋ	dáàŋ	dâ-mmà	to see
Ib	wǎŋ	wááŋ	wáǎŋ	wáàŋ	wâ-mmà	to speak
IIb	běl	bí.láá	bí.làáŋ	bí.lààŋ	bél-má	to take
IIIa	túŷ	tú.yàá	tú.yàáŋ	tú.yààŋ	túŷ-má	to bear
IV	jí.nà	jíé.nà	jíè.náŋ	jíè.náŋ	jí.nà-mmá	to put
V	bǎ.llà	báá.là	báà.láŋ	báà.láŋ	bá.llá-mmá	to be lost
VI	ká.ráà.nú	ká.ráà.nú	ká.ràà.núŋ	ká.ràà.núŋ	ká.ràà.nù-mmá	to forget

There are six verb classes (I-VI) with sub-classes (a)-(c) which are defined according to their behaviour in forming the perfective verbal stem.

The structure of a mono-verbal predication:

Subje ct (+TOP) (+FOC)	(Aux.)	(Modal Preverbal)	(Deictic preverbal)	(coreferential pronoun)	Verb	(Object) (+DEF) (+FOC)	(Adverb)

There are two tense markers: *ká* (future) and *nàa* (past), which occupy the same slot as the three negative markers which are differentiated for future (*sié*), general (present) (*sa*) and past/perfect (*sáá*). The narrative tense is characterised by a special pronoun (cl.1 *wuɔ*, cl.2 *baa* etc). Apart from a handful of pre-verbal modality markers (which must be treated as a separate category), the ventive *ka* and the allative *ji* (both with their respective perfective morphemes) immediately precede either the basic or the perfective verb stem.

Underspecified nasals

1. Within the noun phrase

- As prefinal nasals in noun stems
- As connective in associative constructions
- As reduced variant of the locative enclitic =*na*

2. With verbal stems in final position as characteristic feature:

- Of the sub-classes (c) which occur in the verb classes I-III
- Of all loans (*fǎ̀à̀mũ̀ŋ* ‘to understand’ < Dyula *fàamu*; *zùéŋ* ‘to play’)
- Of the dependent imperfective stem
- Of the imperative plural
- As reduced variant of the derivative morpheme *-nu*

3. In certain syntactic positions

- As marker in subordinate clauses as enclitic
- As co-marker in subordinate clauses as enclitic

Cp. three different nasals (only) in Curramma (Suggest 2006 :88), classified as ‘particules’:

n liaison de deux noms: *mũ̀ɔ̀ri n-sú̀ɔ̀gu* ‘La maison du chef’

ñ- série verbale : *wù wúú́lá ñ-tǎ* ‘Il a fini de manger’

ń- conditionnel : *w ù ń-jo, mǎ̀ ji ta* ‘S’il vient, je vais partir’.