A Collection of Dinka Songs

Bert Remijsen, Angela Impey, Elizabeth Achol Ajuet Deng, Simon Yak Deng Yak, Peter Malek Ayuel Ring, John Penn de Ngong, Tatiana Reid, D. Robert Ladd, M. Meyerhoff (eds.)

About this document

This document provides information to make this resource – A Collection of Dinka Songs – accessible to those interested to use it. Section 1 presents a brief introduction. Section 2 explains the fields in the index file, a spreadsheet document that provides details on a song-by-song basis. Section 3 surveys the file types that are used.

1. Introducing the collection

All kinds of topics and events are put to song in Dinka culture, and most people have their own songs. Good singers command respect, as do composers, who are paid to eloquently express the events that the commissioning owner of a song wants to sing about. Very often, the topic matter is very personal. As Francis Mading Deng has noted, songs constitute a mode of communication that allow a singer to express sentiments that cannot be uttered in speech, such as complaint or reproach.

The songs in this collection were recorded and annotated as part of the project 'Metre and Melody in Dinka Speech and Song', a project carried out by researchers from the University of Edinburgh and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of their 'Beyond Text' programme. The project aimed to understand the interplay between traditional Dinka musical forms and the Dinka language (which distinguishes words not just by different consonants and vowels but also by means of rhythm, pitch and voice quality), and to learn more about the way the song tradition responded to the disruptions of the long Sudanese civil war.

In this context, we aimed to record a large collection of Dinka songs for preservation in a long-term sound archive. This collection is the result of that effort. It presents song material from 36 Dinka singers and groups of singers.

2. Explanations to the information in the index

The first six fields in the index (Name, Sex, Age, Dialect, Background, Time away) relate to singer(s). Then follows the filename of the song. After the filename follows information that is specific to the song, and also details on permissions.

Name – The singer's name is stated in the first field of the index, and it is also part of all of the file names relating to a particular singer.

Dinka people do not have a fixed family name. Instead, the first name of an individual is followed by the first names of his or her father, grandfather, and sometimes also of the great-

grandfather. Moreover, an individual often has both a Christian name and a Dinka name, and there may also be a nickname. For example, the names by which the Dinka leader John Garang is known includes his Christian name and his Dinka name. That is, Garang is not to be interpreted as a family name. He may have a nickname, but it is not commonly used. In the song collection, on the of the singers has the name 'Peter Bol Deng Arok', both 'Peter' and 'Bol' are his Christian and Dinka first names, respectively. 'Deng' and 'Arok' refer to his father and grandfather, respectively. In the case of 'Akoy Tiemraan Mayom Deng Chol', the sequence includes first name, nickname, father's name, grandfather's name, and great-grandfather's name. This person may or may not have a Christian name; in any case, he does not use it. In Dinka, the nickname can often unambiguously identified by the fact that it follows the name directly, without a prepositional marker /ę́/ 'of'. This preposition is often found between names that are part of a lineage sequence, e.g. between first name and father's name.

The most complete record of a singer's name is reflected in the Name field of the index. This is based on the questionnaire and/or permissions documents. In addition, the singer's name also makes up the first element of all the file names relating to a particular singer. This name element is composed of two names, which tend to be whichever names the singer goes by. This may be Christian first name + Dinka first name, as in MarcoPiol; or it may be a Dinka first name followed by a father's name, as in NyanateerMading and MaturPanyon. It can also be a first name followed by a nickname, as in AkoyTiemraan and DengFanan.

In the case of group songs, both the Name field of the index and the first element of the file names refer to the specific dialect, the dialect cluster this specific dialect belongs in. These notions will be explained in detail below, in the section Dialect.

Sex – The sex of the singer is stated in the 2nd field of the index. This information is drawn from the questionnaire.

Age – The age of the singer is stated in the 3rd field of the index. This information is drawn from the questionnaire. This is often an approximation, as the dates of births are not always recorded.

Dinka dialect – Information about the singer's dialect is stated in the 4th field of the index. This information is drawn from the questionnaire. Following the dialect survey in Roettger & Roettger (1989), two levels are distinguished here. The Dinka dialects are divided into four clusters: Padang (North), Rek (Southwest), Agar (South), Bor (Southeast). Each of these consists of at least four particular dialects. In the index, we state first the name of the specific dialect, followed by the cluster this dialect belongs to – e.g. Hol (Bor cluster). Note that Rek, Bor and Agar are both the names of specific dialects, but also the names of overarching clusters.

Background – The 5th field in the index provides information on the village where the singer has grown up, and the place where his/her parents are from. This information is drawn from the questionnaire.

Time away – Many Dinka people have been displaced by the war, between the early 80s and the conclusion of the comprehensive peace agreement between Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army in 2005. This is the case in particular in the Bor region (Southeast). The 6th field in the index states the number of years a singer has spent outside the Dinka-speaking territory. This is also based on the questionnaire.

Filename – The filename is structured so as to provide a unique and consistent identification of the song material in the collection. A filename has minimally the following structure: [TwoNames_DateOfRecording_PartNumber], as in BolDeng_25JAN10_part1

The parts are numbered within each recording session, identified by the date. This notion of a 'part' is a sound recording. With some singers, only one sound file was recorded, so that there only is part1. With others, two or more recordings were made part2, part3, etc. If a singer was recorded on several dates, there may be more than one part1 files for that singer with 'part1'. Here the date, in the second element of the filename, is crucial to uniquely identify each recording, e.g. BolDeng_18JAN10_part1 and BolDeng_25JAN10_part1.

When annotating recordings, it was often decided to divide a recording into chunks. This is particularly useful when a singer has sung several different songs within the same recording. When this happens, the singer often calls out the name of his favorite bull, to mark the end of one song and the beginning of the next one. Many recordings (parts) have been divided in this way, into song-sized chunks. Importantly, the original recording (part) is always retained. Alongside it, there are smaller sound files, each consisting of a particular chunk. As seen from the following example, the chunks are identified by number, and each chunks is followed by the precise time interval in the relevant part file (in this case BolDeng_14JAN10_part2)

BolDeng_14JAN10_part2_chunk1_0to95
BolDeng_14JAN10_part2_chunk2_95to206
BolDeng_14JAN10_part2_chunk3_206to295

When a sound file has been chunked, the index contains one entry for each chunk, and there is no record for the part file as a whole.

If there is a prose introduction at the beginning of a recording, this is sometimes – but not always – separated as a chunk.

We should caution that the practice of chunking has not been applied consistently. Annotators were free to divide parts into chunks or not. Simon Yak consistently chunked multi-song recordings, and in some cases repetitions of a song also appear as different chunks. Achol Ajuet and Peter Malek typically did not, preferring to treat any recording as a whole. A good example of the latter approach is the KodokChan_24AUG09_part1_chunk2_38to6010. This recording is about one hour and 40 minutes long, and the singer covers a range of related topics. While the prose introduction

has been separate as a chunk (chunk1), the remainder of the song has been treated as one unit (chunk2).

Date of recording – The date of the recording appears in the 8th field of the filename, in the format year.month.day. The same information is also included in the filename, as the second element.

Place of recording – The place of the recording appears in the 8th field. It is based on the metadata file of the song, and/or on the permissions document. Recordings with singers of various areas were made in the compound of SIL Sudan in Juba. Many other songs were recorded during data collection trips, to various areas in the Dinka speaking territory. The table below summarises the most important data collection trips. On the first trip, Peter Malek Ayuel Ring also collected children songs. Elizabeth Achol Ajuet Deng also recorded two Malual Dinka singers in Khartoum.

Time	Recordist	Location (by dialect zone)
March 2010	Elizabeth Achol Ajuet Deng	Maluth town; Mabek cattlecamp (both in Ageer dialect region within Padang)
April 2010	Simon Yak Deng Yak	Various locations in the Nyarweng, Twic East and Hol dialect zones, all within Bor
August-December 2012	Elizabeth Achol Ajuet Deng	Wau and Kuajok towns (recording singers from several dialects within Rek)

Type of Song – The type of song information was entered in the metadata file. We did not start out with an a priori classification of Dinka songs into types. Instead, the Dinka team members were free to provide a general characterization of the song. This information was copied into the index file without any further editing. Some labels refer to the form; others are more descriptive of the contents. Several of the labels can also be found in Deng (1973). Finally, it may well be that some discrepancies merely represent synonyms, whereby one term is prevalent in one area, and another elsewhere. In this context, it is worthwhile to note that Simon Yak Deng Yak hails from Twic East (Bor cluster), whereas Achol Ajuet Deng and Peter Malek Ayuel Ring both come from the Twic region (Rek cluster).

Accompaniment – Most songs do not involve any accompaniment. Others have rhythmic beating with a stick and/or ululation. This information is based on the metadata file and/or the song itself.

Composer – Many Dinka people compose their own songs; other pay specialist composer to set the content they want to sing about to songlines. We have tried to record the identity of the composer. In some cases, a song is widely known in a particular community, and the composer is not known. This information is drawn from the metadata file.

Owner – We have avoided recording songs when the singer is owned by somebody other than singer. When we figured this out after the recording, the song in question was not

included in the collection. This avoidance does not apply to songs that owned by a particular group (e.g. a clan or an age set), as long as the singer is a member of that group. This information is drawn from the metadata file.

Microphone **–** The microphone is most often a Shure SM10A headset-mounted close-talking directional microphone. In some cases, we have used the internal microphone of the ZOOM H4N. The most common motivation for doing so was in the case of group songs, in order to capture the various voices.

Recorder **–** The recorder is almost always a ZOOM H4N solid-state recorder. In a few cases, it is a Marantz PMD 660. In both cases, we have recorded at 48kHz.

Recording quality and comments **–** This field typically covers the signal-to-noise level of the recording and the extent of clipping/oversampling. It also is often stated if a song recording sets in too late (when a singer has already started), or ends too early (before the end of the song). If the song in question is a chunk, taken from a larger recording (part), then it is possible to address this by going to the relevant part file.

Annotations **–** This relates to the level of annotation in the TextGrid file. Our most common level of annotation involves tiers showing the Dinka orthography, the English translation, and a tier for comments. For a handful of songs, we have also included phonological transcriptions and morpheme glosses.

Annotator **–** This field is only filled out if TextGrid annotations are available.

Forms **–** This field specifies which forms are available for a song. Ideally, there is a speaker-specific questionnaire, a speaker-specific permissions file, and song-specific a metadata. These forms are all available for most songs. When this is not the case, it is almost always the metadata file which is missing. Gaps in the index – typically marked by underscores – reflect missing information in these three forms, or the fact that one or more of them are missing altogether.

Permissions **–** This information is drawn from the permissions form. We distinguished between the permission to archive, and the permission to disseminate on a not-for-profit basis. These notions were explained to the singers by means of examples.

Summary **–** A brief summary of the contents the song, drawn from the metadata file.

3. File types

.wav – The songs themselves are invariably in the wav format. In one instance (KodokChan), the permissions were also recorded (in wav format).

.TextGrid – The annotations were originally created in the Praat-specific TextGrid format. In some cases, there is a second TextGrid file, preceded by 'unicode' in the final field of the filename. For example, there is KodokChan_24AUG09_part2.TextGrid, but also KodokChan_24AUG09_part2_unicode.TextGrid. The latter file has been derived from the former after running the 'convert to unicode' command in Praat. This commands turns the Praat-internal backslash trigraph convention (e.g. \ep for ɛ) into the Unicode standard.

.eaf, *.pfsx* – These two files are derived from the .TextGrid files, in the context of their conversion to ELAN.

.doc, *.docx* – These formats were used for the questionnaires. In addition, the graphic file resulting from scanning a permissions document is often embedded in this format, rather than written to a pdf.

.pdf – This format was used for the permissions file.

References

Deng, Francis Mading (1973). The Dinka and Their Songs. Oxford University Press.

Roettger, Larry & Roettger, Lisa (1989). A Dinka Dialect Study. *Occasional papers in the study of Sudanese languages* 6, 1-64.