

## Book reviews

*Blench, Roger & Stuart McGill (eds.). 2012. Advances in minority languages research in Nigeria. (African languages monographs 5). Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.*

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This is an impressive volume of some 370 pages, containing twelve articles of different lengths, devoted to very different aspects of the languages of the Nigerian Middle Belt. Most articles go back to presentations given at a monthly meeting of the Jos Linguistics Circle. Information on all the articles can be found in the preface (by McGill and Blench, pp. xv–xxii) and in an appendix “Abstracts” (pp. 367–372). The main body of the book is in four parts: Part I – Introduction; Part II – General Issues; Part III – Morphosyntax in the Nigerian Middle Belt; Part IV - Topics in Kainji Linguistics. The articles in Part II cover widely diverging topics, such as the relation of Nigerian prehistory to linguistic geography, some unusual sounds in Nigerian languages, the linguistic evaluation of oral traditions, and the use of Arabic script in modern Nigeria.

The preface gives detailed abstracts of all the articles in the volume; strangely, however, the page-numbers deviate from those given in the table of contents. The Introduction (Chapter 1) outlines the sociolinguistic factors that threaten the future development, if not the very existence, of the minority languages of the Nigerian Middle Belt. National and international linguistic academia have largely ignored the minority languages, while grassroots movements, based in several individual communities, have taken the development of their languages into their own hands – with or without official support.

Part II (General Issues) contains four articles covering a wide spectrum of topics. Using linguistic data, Roger Blench (Chapter 2) gives insights into the prehistory of the Nigerian Middle Belt. Unfortunately, archaeology receives even less attention than linguistics in Nigeria, so that a comparison between results provided by both disciplines is hardly possible. The most wide-reaching hypothesis put forward in the paper is connected to a nearly extinct language: Jalaa. Blench argues that this language is the last remnant of a formerly widely-spread family of languages spoken by hunter-gatherers and which has been superseded by invaders from the North-West (Proto-

Songhay) and North-East (Proto-Saharan). In the text there is some confusion in the numbering and labelling of maps: map 4 appears both on p. 28 and p. 31 with the heading “Expansion of Chadic and Volta-Niger”, map 5 on p. 33 is identical with map 4 – however with a different heading (“Ijoid and surrounding languages”); map 7, mentioned on p. 34 in the text, is missing.

The next paper in Part II (Chapter 3) by Matthew Harley demonstrates the richness of phonetic phenomena in the languages of central Nigeria and beyond. The sounds in question are a) labio-coronals in Eastern Chadic (Bura-Higi). In Bura-Higi an amazing number of labio-coronals can be found whose apparent historical source is a reduction of CVC-sequences where, after loss of the vowel, labio-coronal clusters may result; b) interdental approximants of the Bauchi cluster of Kainji. Gerhardt (1983: 86) notes that these sounds are also found in the Hyamic subgroup of Central Plateau where they are the product of the palatalization of labials.

Of a more exotic nature is Harley’s description of the “explosive bilabial nasal” of Ningkyoob; this is articulated with “the lips [...] open [and] with an audible pop”, i.e. a click-like sound. Gerhardt’s data on Ningkyoob – collected in 1969 under the heteronym Kaningkom – (published 1983: 131f.) correspond exactly to the phonemic transcription of the items presented by Harley (p. 60), although the phonetic realisation is different:

Gloss	Harley	Gerhardt
‘ground’	/mwi/	[mwi]
‘swallow’	/mwe/	[myir] /mwir/
‘inside’	/mwiŋ/	[myiŋ] /mwiŋ/
‘children’	/mweŋ/	[mbyiŋ]
‘dew’	/mweŋ/	[myeŋ] /mweŋ/

Instead of the click-like sound, I noted a velarized variety of the sound in question. Given the relatively high age of my data and the fact that this pronunciation is found in only a limited number of Ningkyoob speakers it seems reasonable to assume that the development of this click-like sound is a recent phenomenon.

Selbut Longtau’s paper on oral traditions of migratory history (Chapter 4) highlights the contradictions in the various traditions concerning the possible north-eastern origin of the languages and peoples of the region under discussion. Often, the theoretical origins are prominent empires or even areas outside Africa in the Near East.

However, the evidence gained from linguistic research can, in many cases, be used to deconstruct the myths of north-eastern or extra-African origin.

Andy Warren-Rothlin (Chapter 5) gives an overview of the use of the Arabic script in modern Nigeria outlining the difficulties associated with using different script-types and different orthographies to write languages other than Arabic. The chapter contains tables for the transcription of Hausa and Fulfulde sounds into Arabic script, and adds useful comments on the historical spread and present use of the Arabic script. Most of the examples are taken from Hausa.

Part III treats problems of morphosyntax in individual languages: Chapter 6 “Focus in Rigwe syntax” by Daniel Gya; Chapter 7 “Tense, aspect and manner encoding in Ikaan” (Sophie Salfner) and finally Chapter 8 “Jukun verbal nouns” (Anne Storch). In Rigwe, various types of focus constructions have to be differentiated: pronoun focus, noun focus, verb focus and adjective focus. In each of these settings different devices are used to mark what is relatively the most salient information.

The most important section in Salfner’s article treats a category of adverb-like elements which show specific phonological, morphological and syntactic features. They are described individually in terms of their semantic properties and the contexts in which they occur. Even if these elements are somewhat outside the semantics of TAM, they are, nevertheless, integrated into the verb and occur between the verb prefix and the verb root. To make things even more complicated almost all of these morphemes present their own tonal specifications.

Anne Storch’s paper explores the typology and grammar of verbal nouns in Jukun. Although most of the Central-Jukunoid languages have lost nearly all of their nominal class exponents, verbal nouns continue to be marked. The derivative character of verbal nouns is indicated by different morphological means in individual languages, e.g. reduplication of, and tonal changes in, the verb stem. Moreover, in some languages different markers are used for transitive and intransitive nouns.

Part IV treats topics in Kainji linguistics. Chapter 9 by Stephen E. Dettweiler shows that long consonants in C’Lela should be represented in the orthography. Due to an incorrect analysis of the sound system, the orthography has failed to mark the vowel-length contrast.

Dettweiler points to the need for careful phonological analysis as necessary basis for orthographic decisions and suggests a consistent marking of vowel length in the language despite the fact that, in some environments, this contrast is neutralized.

Rebecca Smith Paterson (Chapter 10) maintains that in ut-Ma'in the attribution of nouns to individual noun-classes is regulated by semantic features. Here, she engages in a discussion that has left its traces in the literature on nominal class-systems for decades. Readers that belong to the adherents of the position that noun-classes are simply morphological categories void of any inherent meaning will certainly not subscribe to Paterson's ideas. The arguments she adduces in favour of the semantic motivation for class assignment are a) derivational evidence and b) the assignment of loanwords to particular classes. As fascinating as the idea of semantic determination of noun-classes may be, the examples given show that the semantic range of the single classes/class pairs is too wide to allow the term 'semantic motivation' to be used as a label. One of Paterson's examples is the class pair 5/6 "round shape – pairing" (containing nouns such as "basket", "well (water)" or "crowd/swarm"); the degree of semantic range here is quite substantial and surely requires more evidence. The same can be said of the class pair which is described as containing nouns from the semantic field "life cycle"; the members of this class range from animals to human beings, body parts, cereals and natural phenomena (class pairs 7u/2 and 7Ø/2). Semantic similarity can certainly be found in some noun-classes, however, it seems that this is not a promising approach to the analysis of the whole ut-Ma'in noun class system.

Stuart McGill (Chapter 11) gives an overview of the development of long consonants in Cicipu. After a detailed description of the function of long consonants in the grammatical system of the language, he devotes a section to the historical development of long consonants, especially in nouns. Some noun-classes show geminate consonants while in other classes they are never observed. McGill postulates that long consonants have their origin in noun class prefixes; he supports this hypothesis with data from other Eastern Kainji languages such as Kambari. As long ago as 1974 Gerhardt (1974: 574–582) suggested that the long consonants of Western Kainji language Dakarkari go back to a nominal class prefix *bu-* that has been assimilated to the stem-initial consonant.

The last chapter (David Crozier: “From verb morphology to discourse: a study of Central Kambari”) gives a detailed overview of verbal morphology and an introduction to information structure including different ways of focus marking. It ends with an annotated text that exemplifies the many topics discussed in the paper. The conclusion maintains that further study of verbal extensions could be interesting for reconstructing the proto-forms of Benue- and even Niger-Congo.

The twelve papers of this volume – each in its own field – present a remarkable and welcome contribution to our knowledge of this severely neglected area. A lot of language data is provided to exemplify the statements of the papers. However, a final proofreading could have emended quite a number of misprints and editorial flaws.

### References

- Gerhardt, Ludwig. 1974. Pi-, hi-, fi- und bu- in den Plateausprachen Nordnigerias Klasse neun/zehn oder Klasse 19? *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*. Supplement II, 18. Deutscher Orientalistentag. 574–582.
- Gerhardt, Ludwig. 1983. *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Sprachen des nigerianischen Plateaus*. Glückstadt: Verlag Augustin.