John Vanderelst, *A Grammar of Dagik*. Köln, Rüdiger Köppe, 2016, 263 p.

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Dagik is a Kordofanian language of the Talodi Group spoken in the Nuba Mountains (Sudan) in a handful of villages lying south of the Kadugli-Talodi road. The language has previously been known in the literature under the ethnonym "Masakin Gusar, including Masakin Buram and Dagig" (Stevenson 1956-57: §71). Since Masakin has pejorative connotations, meaning 'poor' in Arabic, speakers prefer the name Nuba Dagik, probably from Sudanese Arabic *dagiig* 'small'. Dagik speakers also refer to themselves as the people of Duwa or Ruwa [ɾʊa] 'homeland' (p. 3).

John Vanderelst's *Grammar of Dagik* is the published version of his PhD thesis, supervised by Prof. G. J. Dimmendaal and defended at Cologne University in 2015. It was the first published grammar of any Talodi language until the appearance of Heleen Smits' more detailed *Grammar of Lumun* in 2017. Vanderelst conducted most of his fieldwork with displaced Nuba Dagik in Omdurman, but managed to briefly visit the Dagik homeland in 2011. Methodologically, he situates himself in the descriptive framework called Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 2010). The book is organized as follows: chapter 1: Introduction, chapter 2 to 7: Morphology and phrase-level syntax, chapter 8: Clause structure. Three appendices present spelling conventions, a text (51 lines with interlinear glosses and a free translation), and a Dagik–English wordlist (884 items). The preliminaries and back matter include a section on conventions and abbreviations and bibliographical references.

The phonology chapter deals with vowels, consonants, syllable structure and tone. There are twelve vowels that can be arranged in two symmetric sets, which the author considers to reflect ±ATR.

(1) Dagik vowels

+ATR	i	[e]	[ạ]	[ɘ]	[o]	u
–ATR	ɪ	ɛ	a	ə	ɔ	ʊ

The vowels here represented by symbols between brackets occur only as the result of vowel harmony but not, for example, as the only vowel(s) within a word, which leaves eight vowel phonemes. The vowels within a root and associated affixes belong to the same harmony set; the situation is more complex when clitics and compounds are considered. Schwa is the only vowel that cannot occur word-finally

The consonant inventory consists of obstruents, nasals, the trill *r*, the flap *ɾ*, and the approximants *l*, *y* and *w*. The voiceless/voiced opposition

and the plosive/fricative opposition are only marginally exploited, which is a feature commonly found in Kordofanian (and other Nuba Mountain) languages. Another areal feature, the use of five places of articulation for obstruents, has been lost in Dagik, which shifted palatal *c to *s* and *ɲ to *n̪*. (The shift from a palatal to a non-adjacent dental nasal shows that the most salient feature of these two nasals is not their place of articulation but the extended contact between tongue and the hard palate.) This leaves four phonemic obstruents:

(2) Dagik obstruents

	/p/	/ð/	/t/	/k/
initial	p (~ β)	ð (~ t̪)	t	k (~ ɣ)
intervocalic	β	ð	ɾ	ɣ
after nasal	b	d̪	d	g
geminated	p:	t̪:	t:	k:
final	(in loans)	–	–	əkˀ (~ əŋˀ)

The only consonant that regularly appears word-finally is *k* ~ *ŋ* (p. 24f.), occurring always in the sequence *əkˀ* – in free variation with *əŋˀ* – in words of more than one syllable. In connected speech, the sequence is always deleted. In isolation, word-final *əkˀ* ~ *əŋˀ* is optionally deleted after *r*, e.g., *ŋɛrəkˀ* ~ *ŋɛrkˀ* ~ *ŋɛr* 'water'.

Consonant gemination is perceived more clearly by their voiceless plosive articulation of obstruents than by actual lengthening. Other arguments for consonant gemination can be detected in morphological processes such as the formation of pluractionals as well as in the equilibrium between automatic vowel lengthening in CV:CV as opposed to automatic nasal lengthening in CVN:V words.

Tone receives just a sketchy documentation and analysis (p. 35f.). The author shows that tone must be lexically contrastive with nouns (p. 41f.) and adjectives (p. 143f.), though not with verbs where tones depend on inflectional categories (p. 85-87). Tone is left unmarked and only incidentally referred to in rest of the book.

The central chapters of the book present nouns and their modifiers (Ch. 3), verb morphology (Ch. 4), adjectives (Ch. 5), free and bound pronouns (Ch. 6), and ways in which spatial and temporal meanings are expressed (Ch. 7). Like other Kordofanian languages, Dagik has a fully functioning noun class system as known from Bantu and other Niger-Congo languages. Nominal prefixes are in most cases single consonants and noun class agreement markers are alliterative; agreement is marked on nominal modifiers (demonstratives, possessives, associative constructions, the lower numerals 'one', 'two' and 'three', adjectives, relative clauses) as well as on predicates (verbs, copulas, adjectives). Kinship terms (except 'father' and 'mother') form their plurals not by prefix

alternation but by adding a (phrase-?) final clitic *=ɛ*. The agreement markers for personal pronouns and kinship terms are *p-* in the singular and *ð-* in the plural (though alliterative agreement sometimes prevails). In the singular, this corresponds to the pair of classes containing the word *pʊr* / *ʊr* 'woman / women, human being/s' as well as many other nouns referring to people, but the plural agreement marker *ð-* is a bit of a mystery since the paired plural class of this "human gender" has the glide *j-* as its agreement marker. The noun class prefix *ð-* occurs as the singular of a gender containing, amongst other items, long things, e.g. *ðʊləŋɛ / rʊləŋɛ* 'tongue/s', *ðɔr / rɔr* 'rope/s', *ðʊga / rʊga* 'root/s, vein/s'; some single-class nouns with *ð-* as prefix and agreement marker are *ði* 'fire', *ðɔri* 'strength' and *ðuɻu* 'a kind of grass'. There appears to be no particular link with human plurality.

Dagik has an interesting system of numerals (p. 78f.). Numbers 'one', 'two' and 'three' are adjectives and agree in class with the modified noun, 'four' is invariable. 'Five' is a shortened form of the phrase 'one-arm', 'ten' and 'fifteen' are shortened from 'all-arms' and 'all-arms-and-one'. Intermediate values are expressed by adding 'and-one', 'and-two', 'and-three', 'and-four'. 'Twenty' is shortened from 'whole body', 'forty' from 'bodies of two persons', and so on to 'two hundred' which is 'bodies of ten persons'. So, how much is this:

(3) A Dagik number puzzle

wasa	*wasa*	*wɔr*	*jɛɻa*
bodies	bodies	of.persons	two

I would have guessed eight hundred (20 x 20 x 2), rather than four hundred (as on p. 79)! One can easily understand why in daily practice higher numbers are increasingly being replaced by Arabic.

Chapter 4 deals with verbal derivation and inflection. In its easiest form, a verb stem consists of a root, possibly one or more extensions, and a final vowel. Extensions are causative, benefactive, locative, associative (reciprocal), middle voice, inchoative-stative, iterative and pluractional. (Pluractional verbs are also derived by stem-initial partial reduplication.) For example:

(4) Dagik verb extensions

causative	*rəg-ɪ* 'feed'	< *rəg-ɔ* 'eat'	(p. 89)
benefactive	*tɔr-ɪn-ɔ*	< *tɔr-a* 'cut (grass)'	(p. 93)
locative	*rəg-ɔ-ʈːɛ*	< *rəg-ɔ* 'eat'	(p. 96)
reciprocal	*ðiŋ-ər-a*	< *ðiŋ-o* 'push'	(p. 98)
middle voice	*t-ɛ-kːɔ*	< *t-ɛ* 'cook'	(p. 100)
inch.-stative	*səŋ-a* 'lie down'	< *səŋ-ɪ* 'lay down'	(p. 104)
iterative	*pɛl-ɛ*	< *pəl-ɔ* 'run'	(p. 104)
pluractional	*ulːəʈːo*	< *ulːo* 'descend'	(p. 130)

The morphophonological details can become quite complex, and I often found the explanations difficult to follow. What exactly are the three "states" of the verb (p. 120-122), and how best to interpret the distinction between "final vowels" and "FV", which is somehow important for defining the inflectional classes (p. 88f.)?

The array of inflectional categories appears to be manageable. One-word verb forms are the imperative and the perfective; the imperfective uses the (agreeing) copula *-a*, to which is added the clitic locative marker *ti*/*tɪ* to form the progressive and the cliticizable word *anda* 'afterwards' to form the "prospective" (future).

(5) Dagik inflectional categories of the verb

imperative	*rəg-ɪ* / *rəg-ʊ* 'Eat!' (SG/PL)	(p. 109f.)
perfective	*aŋɪ b-ɔ-rəg-ɔ* 'I ate.'	(p. 115)
imperfective	*aŋɪ b-a rəg-ɔ ŋərsɔ* 'I eat in the morning.'	(p. 116)
progressive	*aŋɪ b-a=ɾɪ rəg-ɔ* 'I am eating.'	(p. 117)
prospective	*aŋɪ b-a=nda rəg-ɔ* 'I will eat.'	(p. 118)

In these examples, the prefix *b-* marks agreement with the "human" class, which in the perfective is followed by the "predicative marker" *-ɔ*. The nominal or pronominal subject "normally" precedes the verbal complex, a nominal object would follow it. Of course, this is not the full story, which only unfolds slowly as one reads on, especially through the chapters dealing with pronouns and clause structure.

Pronouns are presented as occurring in six sets, P1 through P6. Each set consists of eight forms, exemplified here by set P1 representing the independent pronouns (p. 153):

(6) Dagik independent personal pronouns:

1SG	*aŋɪ* 'I'	1PL	*aŋɔnɪ* 'I and others'
2SG	*aŋa* 'you'	2PL	*aŋɔnɔ* 'you and others'
3SG	*aŋɔ* 's/he'	3PL	*aŋɛ* 's/he and others'
12SG	*aŋɔɾɪ* 'I and you'	12PL	*aŋɛnɔ* 'I and you and others'

While the labels "singular" and "plural" may not be fully appropriate for personal pronouns, avoiding the categories "dual" and "inclusive / exclusive" seems an elegant analysis to me since it captures the essential two-times-four symmetry of the system. Throughout the book (unless I have missed something) third person independent pronouns always refer to humans, though the statement that they can refer "anaphorically, i.e. to an entity previously mentioned" (p. 153) suggests no such restriction. In a previous article on Dagik personal pronouns, the author said about the third person pronoun that it "is restricted in its range to the pronominalization of animates (or maybe humans)" (Vanderelst 2013: 161).

Independent or free personal pronouns (P1) occur in preverbal position where they represent "the subject in independent declarative clauses without constituent focus" (p. 153). The other sets represent bound pronouns. Sets P2 and P3 attach to verbs, the remaining sets occur after the locative markers *ti*/*tɪ* and *nɔ* (P4, p. 166f.), as possessives after CL-*ɔ*- (the pronominal equivalent of the so-called associative construction; P5, p. 167), and after *na*- 'and' (P6, p. 167f.).

The verbal complex has separate slots for bound pronouns and class markers. Moreover, fillers of these slots are not restricted in their reference to just one syntactic argument (subject, object). Dagik shares this striking feature with other core-Kordofanian languages (term introduced by Vanderelst 2013: 159, referring to TALODI and HEIBAN), which distinguishes these languages from, *inter alia*, canonical (descriptions of) Bantu languages (s. also Schadeberg & Kossmann 2010).

Class markers (concords) occur only at the beginning of the verbal complex, see *b*- in (5) above; bound pronouns occur as verb suffixes. Concords refer to the preverbal noun or free pronoun, and this anaphoric (or backwards) reference defines the preverbal argument as syntactic subject in Vanderelst's analysis. Post-verbal bound pronouns can refer to the object but also to the "demoted subject". In more conventional relational grammar, when the argument of a predicate is changed, it is demoted or promoted to a different status, the ranking being S > DO > IO > chômeur. For Vanderelst, a demoted subject is still a kind of subject, and hence a clause can have a subject or a demoted subject or both – or even no subject at all. Only preverbal subjects – be they nouns or independent pronouns – have a concord preceding the verbal complex; a nominal object follows the verbal complex (7a: *kːəbi*). Pronominal objects referring to humans (and sometimes also to animals) are suffixed to the verb (7b: *-a*); there is no pronominal reference referring to inanimate objects. The same postverbal slot also hosts demoted subjects, which are said to occur in sentences with verbal focus (8a: with clause-final question marker *=âː*), preverbal focus (8b), and passives (8c).

(7) Nominal and pronominal objects

(a) *kːʊraðɪ b-ɔ-rəgɔ kːəbi* 'Kudadhi ate meat.' (p. 91)

(b) *aŋɪ b-ɔ-rəgɔr-a* 'I ate you.' (p. 163)

(8) Demoted pronominal subjects:

(a) *rəgɔr-a=âː* 'Did you eat?' (p. 155)

(b) *mara lɛtar-a* 'How did you scratch?' (p. 204)

(c) *ŋabɛ ŋ-ɔ-rəgɔ-ŋɛ* 'The fish was eaten by them.' (p. 205)

Even in the presence of a demoted nominal subject, there is obligatory doubling through a pronominal verbal suffix, as shown here by a content question (9a) and by a so-called passive (9b). This seems to be true for the perfective aspect only, not for the imperfective (10a) or the progressive aspect (10b), where the verbal complex includes a copula; cf. (5) above.

(9) Demoted nominal and pronominal subjects:

(a) *maɾa rəgɔ-ŋɔ k:ʊɾaðɪ ŋabɛ* 'How did K. eat the fish?' (p. 205)

(b) *k:ʊɾaðɪ b-ɔ-bəɽɪ-ŋɔ paṭ:ɪ* 'K. was hit by the man.' (p. 204)

(10) Demoted nominal subjects without doubling:

(a) *k:ʊɾaðɪ b-a gak:i kəra* 'K. is scratched by Kakï.' (p. 204)

(b) *k:ʊɾaðɪ b-a gak:i ɾɪ-kəra* 'K. is being scratched by Kakï.' (p. 205)

A curious by-product of Vanderelst's definition of "subject" is that it leads to analysing sentences such as (11a) as having no subject at all since the preverbal argument "which elephant" does not agree with the immediately following verb.

(11) Sentence without subject?

(a) *maðɔ miga asɔ* 'Which$_2$ elephant$_1$ came$_3$?' (p. 218)

(b) *seɽu siga səgɻ:a* 'Which$_2$ lion$_1$ did you see$_3$?' (p. 219)

Vanderelst posits "a distinction between the subject position, which agrees with the verbal complex, and the preverbal focus position, which does not" (p. 218). An alternative view would be that only topics agree, and that the passive construction is characterized by its information structure, i.e. promotion of patient to topic and demotion of agent to non-topic, rather than by its syntactic structure, i.e. syntactic promotion of patient to S and syntactic demotion of agent (see Van der Wal 2015, especially p. 94). This is in line with the observation that agreement in Dagik is strictly left-to-right, never cataphoric, or referring ahead to a later expression. The alternative view would give the sentence in (11a) a subject – albeit a focussed one. It would also resolve the uneasy ambiguity of the sentence in (9a) which Vanderelst is obliged to translate as "'How did Kudadhi eat the fish?' (lit. 'How was eaten by Kudadhi the fish?')", an ambiguity which presumably also applies to (11b): 'Which lion was seen by you?'. It would also account for the rather peculiar circumstance that the passive construction is only available for sentences with an expressed agent, which also has to be animate since no bound pronouns exist for other entities.

At first it seems that *A grammar of Dagik* is not difficult to read, but once you try to dig deeper, you realize how complex many issues are. Each subject is dealt with on just a few pages, not enough to answer all questions that come up. Looking at other recent studies of Kordofanian,

notably on Lumun (TALODI; Smits 2017) but also on Moro (HEIBAN, e.g. Rose 2013), the lack of tonal data and analysis makes one suspect that many details of morphology and syntax remain undetected. *A grammar of Dagik* may have shortcomings in coverage and in analysis, but that is what one may expect from a pioneering work by a young scholar presenting an uncharted language from a very poorly known language group.

For some scholars, Kordofanian languages derive their interest primarily from their isolated position: they are the only real exclave of an otherwise contiguous large language family, i.e. Niger-Congo, and even within the assumed NC family tree they occupy a rather isolated position (or positions, see Dimmendaal 2014). *A grammar of Dagik* again shows that the study of any of these language substantially adds to our knowledge and understanding of African languages and of human language.

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