

## Book Review

**Cécile, Lux.** 2013. *Le tetserret, langue berbère du Niger. Description phonétique, phonologique et morphologique, dans une perspective comparative.* Berber Studies 38. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. 560 pp., Hardcover ISBN 978-3-89645-938-1

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*Le tetserret, langue berbère du Niger* is an important addition to the literature on Berber languages. This description of aspects of the grammar of the southern Berber language Tetserret also sets a modern standard for descriptive phonetics and phonology of Berber languages.

Tetserret is both the newest Berber language to be identified (in Attayoub 2001) and one of the most endangered. Tetserret is spoken only by two speech communities in Niger, totaling fewer than 2,000 speakers, and all Tetserret speakers are also fluent in the Berber language Tamacheq (Touareg), which has dominated the region for considerable time. Yet, as Lux shows, Tetserret differs significantly from Tamacheq in phonology and morphology.

The book has two foci: detailed description of Tetserret phonetics, phonology, and morphology is accompanied by comparison of Tetserret with other Berber languages, especially Tamacheq, Zenaga (Mauritania) and Tachelhit (Morocco). Lux effectively establishes three points: that Tetserret belongs to the Berber language family, that it differs significantly from surrounding Tamacheq, and that it resembles the geographically-distant Zenaga in certain idiosyncracies, likely pointing to a heretofore unknown shared history.

An introduction gives an overview of the Berber language family and introduces the social setting in which Tetserret is spoken. A group called the Ayytawari Seslem, historically a religious tribe, speak Tetserret proper; a closely-related variety called **taməsəghlalt** is spoken by the Kel Eghlal n Enniger, who also live among speakers of Tamacheq. Although the two varieties are close enough to be considered the same language, Lux notes that oral histories give diverging origins for the Ayytawari Seslem and Kel Eghlal n Enniger, with no explanations for their linguistic convergence (45, n 41). Lux attributes Tetserret's centuries-long survival under the dominance of Tamacheq to the prestige it is said to enjoy within its community. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the generation of young parents have only passive Tetserret comprehension, while teens and children can neither understand nor speak the

language. Since the situation of Tamacheq dominance would seem to be a constant, one broader question concerns the apparent wholesale shift to Tamacheq in the 1980s or 1990s: what changed in the sociolinguistic milieu? The introduction ends with frank, detailed explication of Lux's fieldwork on Tetserret; she lists both strong and weak points. Among the weak points are the facts that fieldwork was conducted through a French-Tamacheq interpreter, and that her consultants were all male (65–66).

Two chapters on phonology are devoted to establishing the Tetserret phonological consonant and vowel inventories. Both chapters begin with overviews of pan-Berber systems, proceed to give phonetic inventories for Tetserret, and then work through arguments for phonemic status of speech sounds. The chapters' conclusions compare the Tetserret inventories with the earlier pan-Berber descriptions. The Tetserret consonant phoneme inventory is typically Berber, with a range of pharyngeal consonant phonemes. Tetserret consonant phonemes diverge from the majority of Berber languages in several ways. Some postulated proto-Berber sounds that have remained as phonemes in most modern languages are different in Tetserret: *\*ɣ* has largely either disappeared (though often leaving an impact on vowel or other consonant quality) or developed into /ʕ/; *\*s* has become /ʃ/, *\*z* has become /ʒ/, and *\*ʒ* has become /ʒ/. All of these developments are shared by Zenaga but not by other Berber languages, except that in Zenaga *\*ʒ* has become /θ/.

All Berber languages show morphophonological correspondences in paradigms between singleton and geminate consonants. For some consonants, these are idiosyncratic; most Berber languages show a regular paradigmatic correspondence between /y/ and /qq/, /d/ and /tt/, and /w/ and /gg<sup>w</sup>/. Typically, the singleton members of these pairs do not occur as geminates, nor do the geminate members occur as singletons, except in loans. In Tetserret, the usual Berber paradigmatic correspondence between /d/ and /tt/ is regularized, with singleton /d/ corresponding to geminate /dd/. The Tetserret geminate corresponding to /w/ is /bb/. Again, both of these developments are shared with Zenaga but not, for instance, with Tamacheq.

While the northern Berber languages are known for having simple vowel inventories of just three vowel phonemes, another group of Berber languages is described as having relatively 'rich' vowel inventories. Tamacheq, Zenaga, and Tetserret are among these. Unlike Tamacheq, which has three front vowels, two mid-central vowels, and two back vowels, Lux analyzes Tetserret as having a symmetrical phonemic vowel inventory, with three height contrasts for front and back vowels, plus a mid-central schwa. In the environment of pharyngeal or uvular consonants, vowels are realized as lower. In this chapter, Lux draws on formant measurements to pick apart similar vowels. Her transparent

methodology here is greatly welcome, and really should be the norm for descriptive language studies.

Lux works classically from the phonetic vowel inventory to the phonemic inventory, checking for complementary distributions in pharyngealized and non-pharyngealized environments. Since it is phonetic [æ] in Tetserrret that corresponds to /a/ in other Berber languages, Lux chooses to transcribe this as [a]; the actual phonetic [a] is then transcribed as [ɑ]. (This is not consistent throughout the chapter, however, with [æ] often discussed in opposition to [ɑ], as on pages 200–205.) The two low vowels are almost in complementary distribution, with [ɑ] occurring mostly in pharyngeal or uvular contexts and [a] elsewhere. Indeed, some instances of [ɑ] that lack synchronic pharyngeal or uvular consonants can be shown to have historically contained a uvular. But a few other instances of [ɑ] are unpredictable based on environment, so Lux keeps both /a/ and /ɑ/ as phonemes. Lux allows for phonetic epenthesis of the schwa between consonants, but uses examples where verbs in perfective forms begin with schwa paradigmatically to argue for its phonemic status (232). (One might still suggest that these forms actually begin with glottal stops, with the schwa separating the glottal stop from the following consonant.)

A chapter on prosody follows. The first part of the chapter examines the role of the accent in Tetserrret and Tamacheq. Lux shows that accent placement in these languages with a long history of contact has not converged. Tetserrret accent is placed differently on masculine (antepenult) and feminine (penult) nouns, while Tamacheq nouns of both genders have default accent placement on the antepenult. In verbs, Tetserrret accent occurs on the first syllable in the aorist, the last syllable in the perfective, and the first syllable of the verb root in the imperfective. This last is similar in Tamacheq, but otherwise Tamacheq verbs, including those in the perfective, are generally accented on the antepenult ('resultative' forms excepted). The second part of this chapter is a brief exposition of Tetserrret intonation. This section lacks the comparative angle that accompanies every other section of the book, and does not show anything out of the ordinary cross-linguistically.

The final substantive chapter, on Tetserrret morphology, allows the author's familiarity with Berberist literature to truly shine through. While pan-Berber comparison played a secondary role in the phonology and prosody chapters, here the comparative angle sets the agenda; the morphology chapter is a collection of comparative studies rather than a full description of Tetserrret morphology. These studies show that several Tetserrret morphological features not only differ from Tamacheq but are unique among Berber languages, while still clearly Berber. For instance, the Tetserrret 'participle' form is unique in four respects, with an additional two unusual features shared with Zenaga in one

instance and Zenaga, Tamacheq, and Ghadamsi in the other. Tetserret distinguishes the classic Berber three verbal aspects, perfective, imperfective, and aorist. But under negation, Tetserret verbs lack the usual Berber special form for the negative perfective, and have instead a special form for the negative imperfective. Several shared peculiarities of Tetserret and Zenaga morphology, compounded with the aforementioned consonant phoneme similarities, lead Lux to posit a close genetic relationship. This is despite the geographic distance between modern speakers of the two.

The comparative focus here may frustrate those hoping for an overview of Tetserret morphology in its own right. For instance, only verb classes corresponding to the Tamacheq Group I (Prasse 1972–73) are discussed in the morphology chapter. One remains curious about Tetserret verbs that do not correspond to the Tamacheq Group I sub-classes; these are not described, nor do the tables in the Appendices show them.

After a brief conclusion, the book includes six appendices: a map; lists of verbs according to sub-class of the equivalent of Tamacheq Group I; lists of abbreviations and grammatical morphemes; a lexicon; a selection of interlinearized elicited sentences; two interlinearized narrative texts. The sampling of elicited sentences is especially welcome, as such appendices are rare with language descriptions.

Some parts of the book read amateurishly for want of references to general literature. On language endangerment and maintenance in general, Lux cites Thomason (2001); on mechanisms of historical linguistics, Dixon (1998). For prosody, quotes are from Fox (2000); the Jun (2005) volume on intonation is mis-cited in the References, with the editor's first name misspelled and mistaken for her last name in both citations. Also in the prosody chapter, the author cites Chaker (2009: 69) as asserting that languages whose speakers lack a literary tradition tend to have less-developed morphological or syntactic marking of syntactic relations, relying instead on prosody to indicate these (265). This misinformed claim may be an unfortunate indication of the way specialists in particular language families can be blinded to broader typological realities.

The book is largely free of typos, though not completely. In addition to the mis-cited Jun volume, there is a wrong cross-reference on page 303, n 225.

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