

Book Review

Maarten Mous. 2016. *Alagwa-a South Cushitic language of Tanzania: Grammar, Texts and Lexicon.* (Cushitic and Omotic Studies, 7). Köln: Rüdiger Köppe. XVIII + 354 pp., 79.80 EUR. ISBN 978-3-89645-492-8

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This work features a grammar (234 pages), sample texts (21 pages), and lexicon (57 pages.), and at once represents the authoritative text on the Alagwa language as well as a major descriptive contribution to Southern Cushitic. Spoken in the Kolo District of Dodoma Region, Tanzania, Alagwa (ISO 639–3: wbj) is one of a very small number of Cushitic languages spoken in this country, where the majority of languages are Bantu. In the *Ethnologue* (Simons and Fennig 2017) Alagwa is given an Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) level 6b, meaning that intergenerational transmission is weakening, and the language is losing both speakers and domains of use (Lewis and Simons 2010: 116), in this context, presumably to Swahili and Rangi. As such, this work captures a language whose patterns are rather rare in the Tanzanian context, and the description of which may, in coming generations, be harder and harder to accomplish. What follows is not an exhaustive treatment of what may be found in this book, but will focus on phenomena of particular interest to linguists familiar with Cushitic, but perhaps not Alagwa.

The Introduction provides important context for the rest of the work: Alagwa is spoken by approximately 10,000 people living in a series of villages between the Kondoa-Babati road and the Bubu river. Most communities are mixed with speakers of Rangi, and most Alagwa people practice Islam. Mention is also given to when, where, and with whom the data was collected and checked, as well as the contact language (Swahili). A paragraph is given to discussing all major previous works which mention Alagwa in any meaningful way. The chapter concludes with a short story in Alagwa, followed by several paragraphs of line-by-line commentary. Designed not so much to provide detailed analysis, this commentary highlights the salient

grammatical patterns present in the language, providing cross-references to where one may learn about them more fully. This ‘teaser’ is an unusual, but very creative, way to give the reader a feel for the language before continuing into the rest of book.

On the whole, more detail here would be appreciated, especially on the language context. Specifically, information on language use, language attitudes would be welcome, especially given the endangerment status of the language. More detail on methods and methodology would also help better contextualize the work. Further information about participants in the study (including at least year of birth, gender, and other languages spoken), would be very valuable indeed. A note on the different genres collected and used, as well as how they differed in style and content, would also be useful.

The Introduction is followed by a chapter on Phonology, with discussion given to consonant and vowel phonemes, tone and intonation, syllables, positional and sequential restrictions, reduplication, and processes involving vowels. As a note on orthography, the revision of the characters [◌] and [◌] (featured in Mous’ 1993 grammar of Iraqw), representing [ʁ] and [ʔ] respectively, to / and ‘ makes for much easier reading, and is a very welcome change indeed. In addition to its ‘full vowels’, Alagwa has three whispered vowels: ⁱ, ^u, and ^a, which provides evidence for a three-way length distinction in the vowel system: short, long, and whispered (19). It is unclear, however, if the descriptor *whispered* therefore is referring to vowel-length or, as it is more commonly used (e.g. Laver 1994), to phonation type, or to both. Argumentation for the inclusion of the diphthongs **ay** and **aw** to the vowel inventory (30–32) is novel and convincing. The phenomenon described on pages 41–42 probably ought to be called vowel *deletion*, rather than vowel *coalescence*.

The following six chapters—Nominal modifiers and pronouns; Number formation and nominal derivation; Verbal derivation; Verbal inflection; Selectors; and Adjectives, Adverbs and other word classes—are devoted, more or less, to the morphology of the word classes of the language.

Alagwa is typical within Southern Cushitic in many regards. Nouns may be one of three genders (44), but may change gender if changed for number, due to a rich series of number suffixes which each have a stable association with gender (73). Number values are either singular or plural (70), with number agreement visible only on the adjective (193). Nominal morphology is suffixal (43). Verbs may be divided into four conjugational classes, determined largely by phonological shape (153). There is a series of verbal derivational suffixes

associated largely with argument structure (**-is**, **-it**, reduplication) and aspect (**-im**, reduplication) (113). There is also a rich series of imperative forms (169). Most clauses feature an inflectional complex called the selector, separate from the verb, but responsible for expressing information including core arguments, TAM, and focus (174).

Major differences between Alagwa and other Southern Cushitic languages (such as Iraqw) are also described. A nominal suffix exists specifically for deriving names of languages (101–102). Associative or genitive constructions must employ the anaphoric pronoun (66). The selector is not mandatory in every clause (173), and also features a marker for beneficiary object (176–177). Adjectives do not agree with their heads in gender (p. 193). Very often, where a feature in Alagwa differs significantly from an analogous feature in the closely-related Iraqw and/or Burunge, the author points this out—a practice which proves particularly useful for readers familiar with other languages of the group and interested in comparison.

Throughout these primarily morphological chapters, the author has reconciled many seemingly Cushitic-specific phenomena with more familiar cross-linguistic concepts. A comparison of analogous phenomena in the Iraqw Grammar (Mous 1993), produced from his doctoral dissertation, and the current work is ample proof of this ongoing project to render ‘exotic’ constructions as extensions of widely-discussed and better-understood ones. Two good examples of this are the new analysis of the Predicative Suffix (62), which had in the earlier Iraqw grammar been called the ‘Background Case’ suffix (Mous 1993: 107), and the Anaphoric Pronouns (66) which had previously been analyzed as ‘Independent Construct Case Pronouns’ (Mous 1993: 116). This kind of approach makes a language like Alagwa more accessible to a non-Cushiticist audience.

Seemingly more recalcitrant, however, is the concept of ‘selector’ which, in one form or another, is a major characteristic of many Cushitic languages. The definition here “an inflectional complex that [...] constitutes the left boundary of the verbal complex” is not very satisfying, especially given that it is never made clear what, exactly, is inflecting. An alternate analysis would be to assume that the selector is a null auxiliary \emptyset , to which core arguments are obligatorily expressed. In the case of the non-consecutive basic selectors, the analysis would envision the forms as follows:¹

1 Where: S = Subject; O = Object; and P = Speech Act Participant (1st or 2nd person).

(1) The non-consecutive basic selectors (adapted from Table 7.1, Mous 2016: 174)

Subject			Object		
			F	M	Pl
1/2	a	1	i		kunu
	a-∅		a-i-∅		S.P.O.PL
	S.P-Aux		S.P-O.1-Aux		
		2	i	oo	kunu
			a-i-∅	a-oo-∅	S.P.O.PL
			S.P- O.2F-Aux	S.P-O.2M-Aux	
3	i	3	a	oo	i
	i-∅		i-a-∅	i-oo-∅	i-oo-∅
	S.3-Aux		S.3-O.F-Aux	S.3- O.M- Aux	S.3- O.Pl- Aux
		REC			kunu
					REC

In this analysis, Alagwa obligatorily marks all core arguments (in the spirit of Svolacchia and Puglielli 1999). Because of Alagwa's system of vowel deletion (explained in this work on pages 41–42), series of vowels are simplified to one surface vowel. Extending the polysynthetic tendency further, and assuming that when the object is expressed inside of the verbal complex it is some kind of incorporation (not the kind discussed in Kooij and Mous 2006, but à la Barrie and Mathieu 2016) and therefore not marked on the selector. The form **kunu** for 1st or 2nd person agent and plural patient seems to have been generalized from the reciprocal.

The final chapter, Basic sentence structure, is dedicated to the syntax and pragmatics of the language, and features discussions of nominal sentences; basic verbal clauses; the subject; the object; beneficiary objects; locative complements; infinitival complements; prepositional phrases and coordination; questions; and relative clauses. Following 29 pages of phonology, and 168 pages of morphology, 17 pages to cover sentence structure may seem rather spare. However, Alagwa is a morphologically rich language, accomplishing much of what would be accomplished at sentence-level in another language with morphology (e.g. 'passivization' pages 182–183). Also, other material which might be considered sentential and was treated previously (such as much of the discussion of prepositions on pages 211–217) is not repeated here. Details given in this chapter on information structure are tantalizing, and serve as a good primer for the texts which follow.

The following chapter is a detailed treatment of three Alagwa texts, transcribed, broken into constituent morphemes, and provided with a gloss. Helpfully, a detailed description is provided before every text, giving information on place and date of recording, as well as context such as the relation of the story to Alagwa culture and religion, as well as how the material was transcribed and translated.

The final chapter is a Lexicon: Alagwa words and their English definitions, followed by an English-Alagwa index. This is truly a fantastic resource, with many definitions followed by short example phrases (and English translations), as well as ethnographic information including local uses of plants. Crucially, each form of the noun is given, along with its gender and (if known) its number.

Regarding presentation and production, most of the text is clear and easy to read. Some issues do, however, exist. The Map of the Alagwa Area on page xvii lists several of the major Alagwa communities, but could have benefited from some further thought on design (see Gawne & Ring 2016: 197–200): zoom level seems too small, colours and resolution make reproduction nearly impossible, and even the most major roads are difficult to pick out. Perhaps more seriously is the arrangement of the Alagwa Texts (237–265). First, morphemes and their glosses are not vertically aligned, making it difficult to associate any given morpheme with its appropriate gloss. Second, while the morphemes and their glosses are presented together, the translation is presented *separately* at the end of each text. In order to read the texts, one must leaf back and forth, guessing at which sentence corresponds to which line in the transcription and gloss. One wonders why the author did not simply employ the three-line format morphemes-gloss-translation instead.

When taken as a whole, perhaps the greatest weakness of this work is that the examples used throughout are not given identifiers with which they can be resolved back to the recordings or notes of the author. (Kießling 2007) established that, in Alagwa, “the major syntactic devices [...] are determined to a large extent by purely pragmatic factors” (135). Resultantly, the ability to see the examples used within their larger context is arguably critical to a proper understanding of the phenomena being exemplified. The texts provided would have remedied this somewhat, but, for reasons described above, using them is not easy.

With this said, this work-product of several cycles of data collection and years of detailed analysis—represents the very latest in the scholarship of Southern Cushitic, and now makes Alagwa one of the most thoroughly described languages of Tanzania. This book will well serve any Cushiticist looking for reliable and well-researched data on Southern Cushitic, as well as any typologist seeking accessible information with lucid explanation. Because of its attention

to ethnographic details, the anthropologist will also find this an important resource on a people underrepresented in Western academic literature.

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