

Reviews

Alessandro Suzzi Valli, *Maaka Oral Tradition and Proverbs*, „Studi Africanistici”, Serie ciado-sudanese 5, Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli „L’Orientale”, Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo, 2014, 229 pp. + 5 folios of selected charts, maps and images

This publication contains a piece of Maaka oral tradition with text translation into English, grammatical analysis, comments and glossary. Maaka (known also as Maha) is the name of a small ethnic group, according to R. Leger („Foreword” p. 7) comprising roughly four thousand people. They live in the south-western corner of the Yobe State in Northern Nigeria, in the vast and flat savannah zone, and - apart from a small number of hamlets - inhabit two main towns: Bara and Gulani. Known as skilled farmers, they are encircled by several major ethnic groups of Northern Nigeria: Kanuri, Bura-Pabir, Tera, Bole and Kupto.

Maaka’s tongue is an endangered language „which counts approximately 3000 speakers”! (A.S. Valli p. 13). It belongs to the Bole-Tangale group of the West-Chadic branch of the Afroasiatic family. Now nearly all Maaka speak Hausa, the vehicle of the Islam in this area. Suzzi’s book is therefore an invaluable source material for the preservation of the Maaka language and their traditional culture. Until the beginning of author’s activities not much was known about the people. The situation has changed in recent times thanks to his extensive field research among the Maaka in years 2010-2013. During several visits to Bara he had a chance to collect a large number of materials, especially based on oral tradition.

This publication on Maaka oral tradition has been possible due to support of the Ministero dell’Università e della Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica, and thanks to a collaboration with the University of Cologne. It is Rudolf Leger who included the author into the project on Maaka, financed by the German Research Council. There is not

much known on the ways of the data records except for the statement that they „have been based on multi-media techniques, part of which will be also available shortly via veb” (p. 9). The author also discloses that a full Maaka-English-Hausa dictionary with the reverse index is being prepared in collaboration with German linguists.

Out of the huge Maaka corpus, the author selected stories about migration and the relation of the Maaka to their neighbours, and has chosen some proverbs and riddles. The present text - as well as several others yet to be published - stems from the material recorded under the auspices of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and now deposited in Institut für Afrikanistik in Frankfurt under the care of Prof. H. Jungraithmayr. The typing, transcription and translation have been realised during a field research in 2012 by the author of the book, supported by Jibril Jatau Bara and Musa Ali Baba.

In „History of Bara” the pages on the left side (folios verso) contain the original Maaka text, including phonological and grammatical analysis with all morphological traits. The lines below the text comprise the literal translation accompanied by the morpho-syntactic indicators. On the front page (folio recto), the text is then reproduced alone, below followed by a free English translation.

Few pages of this volume are devoted to those Maaka proverbs which are frequently used by common people. They have been taken from a collection of proverbs and riddles gathered by H. Jungraithmayr and Jibril Jatau Bara (1998), and revised by A.S. Valli, Jibril Jatau Bara and Musa A. Baba (2012). The entries contain the original Maaka proverbs, literal translations, free translations, Hausa equivalents (if any), and one or two explanations.

The book is provided with hand-drawn beautiful pictures of the essential episodes of the story (by Massimiliano Sommella and Riccardo Rosati), a selection of which can be admired in the appendix. That is only a pity that in this very valuable and well structured book many misprints escaped the attention of the proof-reader. It applies to the free English translations of the text on pages recto.

Stanisław Piłaszewicz

Gian Claudio Batic, *A Grammatical Sketch of Bure – a Chadic Language of Nigeria*, Chadic Linguistics /Linguistique Tchadique /Tschadistik (ed. by Dymitr Ibriszimow, Henry Tourneux, H. Ekkehard Wolff), vol. 9, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Köln 2014, 178 pp.

The descriptions of endangered or little-known languages contribute to our knowledge about the varieties of language structures, but are also important as support to the attempts for language revitalization. The work done so far in the area of African studies is relatively significant in number but still insufficient with respect to the two above aspects.

The work under review presents a description of Bure (also known as Bubure or Bubbure), a Chadic language from northern Nigeria, used by a very low number of speakers in an ethnic population consisting of about 500 people. This is the first comprehensive approach to the structure of the Bure language which refers to material collected by earlier researchers (Rudolf Leger, Bernard Caron and Andrew Haruna), but is mainly based on the Author's field research undertaken during four trips in 2011 and 2012.

The book was published in a series of Chadic Linguistics as its 9th volume. Being a description of one Chadic language, it makes a breach in the sequence of publications dedicated to topics in Chadic linguistics which have a wider perspective. With the title stating that it is a grammatical sketch of Bure, it significantly differs from the descriptions of other Chadic languages done so far and from the linguistic descriptions of any other language in general. It combines the presentation of linguistic data with other factors that are relevant for the documentation of endangered languages by referring to the social, historical, religious and political context in which the language functions. The typological features of the Bure language are presented in the introductory chapter. The linguistic profile which is deeply embedded in current developments on Chadic covers lexical comparison and reconstruction. The position of Bure among Bole-Tangale languages is illustrated by ten lexical items from Bure and their equivalents in Kirfi, Galambu, Gera, and Bole. Their proto-Chadic roots are also indicated, according to the reconstruction by Jun-

graitmayr and Ibrizimow (1994). The Author's contribution to the knowledge of Chadic refers mainly to the description of Bure language structure in which already known but also some rare or unusual features have been manifested. As for criteria for fieldwork descriptions, the community's attitude is indicated as essential for collecting the data and their interpretation.

This is primarily a linguistic description but it also includes non-linguistic methodologies in the presentation of the collected material. The first chapter is devoted to sociolinguistic aspects that provide eleven disciplinary perspectives of the view on the Bure (*Bùbbùrè*) linguistic community (demography, geography, economics, sociology, linguistics, psychology, history, politics-law-government, education, religion, and media), according to the Sociology-of-Language framework proposed by John Edwards (remark: the book reference is correctly listed at the end as *Minority Languages and Group Identity*, 2010, but it is erroneously introduced on p. 23 as Edwards 2011). This approach also includes three basic categories (speaker, language and setting) that are relevant for the description. Adopting the criteria of language endangerment (following the model developed by the UNESCO expert group in 2003), the Author classifies the language as moribund, but at the same time he states that the language is critically endangered. The table on the multilingual situation in the Bure area in which Hausa and Fulfulde are the dominant languages completes the characteristics of the Bure language that justify the content of the book and how it was presented.

As far as the linguistic description is concerned, it is divided into five chapters which gradually deal with the phonology, nominal morphology, pronominal system, TAM system, and syntax. The Bure language has never been standardized; therefore, the Author adopts orthographic rules for the purpose of the description which are based on the Latin script and follow conventional rules of its application to African languages, including *b*, *d* for implosives and *mb*, *nd*, *nj*, *ng* for prenasal(ized) consonants. The correspondence with Hausa rules of orthographic encoding is observable in ignoring the glottal stop /ʔ/ in the word-initial position, but indicating it with ['] in other positions in the word, as well as in the lack of an orthographic distinction

between the tap [ɾ] and the trill [r]. However, four nasal consonants identified as phonemes are orthographically distinguished; therefore, we have the velar *ŋ* and palatal *ny* (to indicate /ɲ/), along with *m* and *n*. Long vowels are marked by double vowel letters, while both high and low tones have their diacritics placed above the vowel.

In the inventory of phonemes, some features characteristic of other Chadic languages are manifested, such as the implosives *b* and *d* (but not ejective *k*), palatalized (but not labialized) velar consonants, allophonic variants of the phoneme /p/, whereas a rich set of prenasalized consonants can be rather attributed to the features common to non-Chadic languages, similarly the lack of /z/ in the phonological inventory.

The analysis of vowel length and tonal pitch were made with computer-aided support (using the PRAAT program for sound analysis). The detailed presentation of the phoneme distribution makes the description of the Bure language quite exhaustive at the phonological level. Some very interesting linguistic material is placed under the section “The rhyme”, illustrating the intended use of the language’s sound properties. However, some inconsistencies in the description can be pointed out. The consonantal inventory consisting of 28 phonemes has the item *mb* listed in two different places. Since the phoneme *nk* mentioned elsewhere is lacking in the table, one may expect a typographical error which affects this consonant and its proper placement in the table. Moreover, the column headed as labio-velar imposes a misleading interpretation of its content. It includes the approximant *w* and the two consonants *kw* and *gw*, which in Chadic descriptive tradition are rather interpreted as labialized velar consonants. The latter one is not listed under the onsets admitted in Bure, whereas the word *gwómà* ‘antelope’ seems to confirm it.

The presentation of the structure is based on the most distinctive patterns in the area of morphology and syntax. Nominal morphology is illustrated by noun plurals, associative constructions and adjective-like structures. Separate chapters are devoted to the pronominal system and the TAM system. Typological properties of Chadic can be recognized in some structural patterns, but less common features are also manifested. Quite significant in this respect is a category of gen-

der which follows the Chadic characteristics (i.e. a distinction present only in the singular), but the rules of its assignment might be different. Gender distinction is productive in pronouns (in the second and third person of the singular), in demonstratives, in relative markers, but not in copulas. In verbal morphology, some features are interesting for their relevance for comparative works, e.g. the perfect marker *-kò* which is suffixed to the verbal stem is important for historical investigations focusing on the development of TAM systems in Chadic. Also the markers which function as verbal extensions are open for further interpretations in comparative analyses of other Chadic and non-Chadic languages.

The chapter on syntax covers different types of clauses (verbless, complement, relative, and interrogative clauses), but also includes patterns referring to semantic relations within the clausal frame. Providing examples from Bure, the chapter shows how semantic types of arguments (giving, affecting, speaking, thinking, and liking) differentiate language structure properties. This section is not supported by theoretic interpretations, but it provides source material for such studies from a more general linguistic perspective.

The final chapter consists of two texts provided with word-by-word morphological coding and interlinear English translation with the Hausa version at the end. The recorded speech in Bure is a piece of unique linguistic material which provides a source for further linguistic investigation and comparative analysis. A list of references complements the descriptive parts of the publication.

An important part of the book comes in the form of the appendices. The first appendix presents a set of colored pictures that create a photographic portrait of the Bure and present their traditional way of life. The second appendix consists of Bure-English-Hausa vocabulary, along with two glossaries – English-Bure and Hausa-Bure. Using the three languages for lexicographic purposes is a strategy motivated by the sociolinguistic situation in the area. Special attention to lexicographic entries related to local flora is devoted by providing illustrations to the listed terms. With this material, the names of plants that have been the subject of studies on Hausa language data

for decades (Blench 2003) have now received a new comparative perspective.

The whole book is supplemented by maps, tables and figures that make the presentation more compact but at the same time clear and easy to follow.

A Grammatical Sketch of Bure is a significant contribution to the description of Chadic languages from both the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects. It brings new insights to the current investigation on Bole-Tangale languages and West Chadic from a broader perspective. First of all, the description of Bure provides new data for areal studies. Bure has many features of a contact language that are relevant for studies on the stages of language development and language reconstruction. As for other aspects, this approach to the presentation of language is connected with the specific function of linguistic descriptions of endangered languages which tend to the use of the knowledge of languages for social good. This work is an attempt at language revitalization and provides support for initiatives which aim to protect small cultures living in contact with dominant cultures.

Nina Pawlak

Marjolijn Aalders Groot, *Verbal Art of the Fon (Benin)*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2013, 252 pp.; *Vodun Stories of the Fon (Benin)*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2014, 725 pp.

This book is a result of about two and a half years of the Author's stay in Benin. She came to this country in February 1975 and started to learn Fongbe in the summer of that year, which enabled her to commence a thorough research on the indigenous verbal art. The main objectives of the research was getting understanding of the techniques and skills of the performers of the Fon literary genre known as *hwénúxó*. Between April and June 1976 she recorded on audiocassettes the performances of 37 texts in Fongbe, and during her stay in Benin she completed the transcription and a first translation into French. In the years following the fieldwork, the Author checked the transcription and the French translation of the stories. However, she had to work for a living, which forced her to store the

tapes and the manuscripts in a metal case. So only in 2004 she restarted her work and digitized the analogue recordings.

The corpus of 37 texts of Fongbe verbal art was collected in three rural areas: Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. The size of the corpus is about 57.000 words and it comprises 12.000 utterances. As far as the performers are concerned, six women told twenty stories, seven men told fifteen stories, and a young boy and girl each told a story. All of them were keen on improvisation in story-telling.

Before embarking upon the structuring of the discourse in *hwénixó* Marjolijn Grool described the cultural and religious background of the stories. The essential part of the book is composed of five parts (20 chapters). The first part provides information on story-telling session, its background and recording. Its first chapter gives an overview of a number of publications referring to the former Kingdom of Dahomey, those dealing with Fongbe grammar and Fon verbal art. Chapter 2 describes the project of the recording of the corpus in the rural areas, whereas chapter 3 presents the event of the performance as well as some aspects of the performance. Of special interest is the discussion on the principle of duality in the royal administration of the Dahomey kingdom. One can also notice a severe critique of the M. and F. Herskovits' works which „have many lapses” (p. 26).

The second part deals with elements, topics and genre of the collected corpus. Its chapter 7 discusses characteristics of the *hwénixó* stories. All of them are set in the surroundings that are familiar to the performers and the audience. They have three main topics: power, conflict and taboos. The stories end with the loss of power by the culprit, who is sent into exile or into death. The Authoress noticed twenty three songs inserted in 19 stories of the corpus and she divided it into two major sub-genres: the dramatic *hwénixó* being a narrative about the fate of human life, and the comic *yéxó* – a narrative that tells trickster stories.

The third part contains an analysis of the structuring of the discourse. It describes the pauses by which the performers segment the narrative discourse into utterances and silence. Extensive pauses serve to highlight rhetorical phenomena. The peak of the story is

followed by a long pause. Chapter 10 emphasises the multifunctional use of the definite marker *ô* which marks the transition to a new paragraph in the story or indicates the central participant in the story.

The fourth part constitutes a survey of the stylistic devices that the performers use in the narrative. They are grammatical choices and the use of the emotionally marked words. The stylistic devices of the songs are also discussed: code switching, alliteration, assonance, contractions and elisions, use of loan-words.

The fifth part contains an analysis of the creative process by which the performer tells the story. It is observed that the practice of putting identical features and elements in different stories occurs far beyond the Fon area in Benin. The West African corpora show that the performers insert analogous elements in similar stories, but also in different ones. It becomes evident that in West African storytelling there is no ideal version of a story: there is no ideal story-line, but rather improvised versions.

The book is provided with an impressive list of references and three appendixes: I: The performers and the performances, II. The day to thresh the millet (Story from Abomey 4), and III. Graphical representation Abomey 4.

Vodun stories of the Fon are edited in the Fongbe version with an English translation. The edition is preceded by an extensive introduction which is partially re-edition of the former book. It has been enriched by remarks about the transcription and the translation, but impoverished by structuring the discourse, style in Fongbe verbal art, and performance, framework and story board. The stories have been arranged in three groups according to the place of their origin: The Ayou Stories (8 pieces); The Abomey-Calavi Stories (19 pieces) and The Abomey Stories (10 pieces). Technically, the Fongbe texts are placed on the folios verso, and the English translation on the opposite recto page. This makes it easy to compare both versions of the stories. Such an arrangement seems to be the reason for which the explanations in foot notes seem to be rather scarce and makes the reader to look for information in the descriptive part of both books.

Summing up, it is pertinent to say that both publications, so long awaited, deserve the attention of all those who are interested in the verbal art. Not only in Benin and Africa, but all over the world.

Stanisław Pilażewicz

Assibi Amidu, *Objects and Complements in Kiswahili Clauses - A Study of their Mechanisms and Patterns*. Köln, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2013, 677 pp.

The book was published as part of series *Grammatical Analyses of African Languages* edited by Wilhelm J.G. Möhlig and Bernd Heine. The Author, renowned for his long interest in Swahili morphology and syntax, once again as expected, raises a point of adequacy of traditional grammatical descriptions to Swahili and Bantu languages in general. The book further advances our knowledge on the subject of transitivity in Swahili, that has been thoroughly discussed in the author's book published already in 2001. This time it centres on the nature of objects and/or complements in Swahili predication-sentences or clauses.

This sizeable book is composed of nine chapters divided further into sections, followed by a bibliography and an index. It comprises Author's thoughts and insights on the interpretations of Swahili language structures as presented in various grammars and dictionaries ever published, and their adequacy for modern linguistic analysis within the framework of empirical grammar.

The first chapter on „transitivity, cognateness and introductory notes“ discusses the nature of transitivity and presents different views adopted in language descriptions. The author challenges the Hopper and Thompson continuum hypothesis and refers to his earlier findings of dual transitivity of predicate verbs in Swahili. His research reveals that verbs cannot be classified as having either transitive or intransitive character, as the same verb may generate both transitive and intransitive patterns. In other words, this bitransitivity means that predicate verbs may project both transitive and intransitive syntax in discourse. He also challenges traditional descriptions of Swahili grammar and points out the unfortunate character of the translational approach that results in inadequate descriptions of the

language. To support the thesis he gives examples of the status of locative nouns in Swahili or the so called 'phrasal verbs' and their treatment in various grammars. The author clearly states that he attempts to present a study on Swahili syntax that is far from adopting descriptions tailored for Indo-European languages.

Chapter two discusses the nature of syntactic constituents in predication sentences or clauses. The author presents six principles of grammar and predication sentence syntax that constitute the framework for proper interpretation of syntactic relations. These are transitivity system, complement system, relativity system, subordinate-main clause dependency, statistically central versus peripheral prototypes, and transitivity function of predicates and their predication sentences. Then the discussion turns towards difficulties in the description of the object or complement in Swahili. The neglect of extended predicates in clause structure analysis and its relevance for the understanding of Swahili syntactic categories is emphasized. The Author focuses his criticism on Ashton's grammar of Swahili published in the 1940's which provides interpretations not suitable anymore for modern description of the language.

In the next chapter – „transitives described as intransitives“ – some more inadequacies of Swahili descriptions are highlighted. The discussion focuses on object NPs that are usually presented as adjuncts or nominal constructions in traditional grammars, already mentioned in the previous chapter. In this attitude, an object is understood simply as a complement of a predicate, and this interpretation is clearly justified in the discussion. The chapter is divided into sections that gradually deal with subordinate versus main clause relationships linked by relativization, idiomatic verbal phrases or phrasal verbs or V + NP complexes, and objecthood from a historic and synchronic perspectives.

Chapter four looks at subject and object transpositions in predication sentences. The author's viewpoint contradicts the application of English topic subject hypothesis to Bantu languages. The notion of symmetric and asymmetric transposition is introduced. The subject and object transposition and the status of AGENT in passive and

reflexive syntax and in active non-reflexive syntax are dealt with in separate sections.

Chapter five is devoted to the verb *-enda* 'go'. It analyzes various constructions that confirm the transitive uses of this predicate verb, thus proving its bitransitivity, and focuses on contexts of specialization that it enters into and how it stimulates new, particularly idiomatic meanings.

Chapter six deals with constructions known as the syntax of passivization. It quotes different views on active versus passive syntax and the role of objects. Once again discussion reveals that a typical English approach is not suitable to Swahili, and it challenges again the adjunct hypothesis and phrasal verb analysis often attributed to some verb-NP complexes. It is presented how the object relativization test allows to set apart objects from complements. Once again evidence is provided that the NP undergoing object relativization must be an object.

The following chapter, seven, proposes a new approach to passivization theory based on the weaknessness of the theories of passivization and objecthood presented in the previous chapter. Then, in chapter eight, the discussion turns towards the idea of adverbial complements or complement adverbials of predicate verbs and the question whether they exist in Swahili. Again the problem of the translation equivalent approach is raised and its influence on the identification of various subjects and complements as adverbial subjects or adverbial complements. The claim is based on the notion of the noun class system on which Bantu languages operate. Because of it, the complements of predicates are regarded as nominal items since adverbial elements, that lie outside the noun class system, cannot generate agreement concords. The last chapter explores further the function of nominal-predicate phrases and prepositional phrases as subject and object.

In conclusion the book is a main of knowledge on Swahili morphology and syntax. It provides a lot of information that lie beyond the core scope of the book. It gives a solid basis and firm explanations to understanding peculiarities of Swahili grammar. The Author takes the language structure as a starting point for his analysis, and

rejects the use of translational approach that, in his view is totally inadequate in the descriptions of Bantu languages. Throughout the book, the Author provides evidence for how the analysis based on the English translation turns out false and misleading. Furthermore, the Author shows how acknowledgement of variation and diversity without overlooking uniformity in different languages may contribute to writing better universal grammars. Undoubtedly, the book challenges the traditional descriptions of Swahili grammar and should be of interest not only to linguists but lexicographers, language teachers and students as well.

Beata Wójtowicz