

# A LINGUIST'S FIELD NOTES

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## INTRODUCTION

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*Around the word «field» come to crystallise contrasting views, debates, sometimes unnecessary disputes about what should be a specific type of linguistics by its methodologies and its objectives. It appears, however, to be more legitimate to associate it with the manner of being a linguist when, at certain moments, the discovery of a language cannot be dissociated from the discovery of the space where this language is inscribed. The discovery then has to do with techniques, certainly, but also with landscapes, meetings, risks, and (why not?) with adventures, to the point where the linguist gets lost.*

*In 1990 Bernard Caron arrived, in the north of Nigeria on the trail of Zaar, a language that was numerically the most important of the group of Chadic languages about which precious little was known. He has written a story about this research which *Le Gré des Langues* published in 1995.*

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## AZARE, JUNE 1991

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The Range Rover gulps up the ribbon of asphalt that rolls out towards Maiduguri, straight out in front, as far as the eye can see. We have been driving since early morning when we set out from Kano. Scarcely a brief stop on the way to swallow, sitting on a mat, a bit of *tuwo* with a baobab sauce that has no taste but with enough pepper in it to quench our hunger. The landscape of peeled savannah, brownish at this time at the end of the dry season, is flat and monotonous, barely made more cheering by the few colonies of baobab trees.

It is three o'clock in the afternoon when we leave the main road and branch off towards Azare. The sky is covered, the wind is blowing from our right, at first in gusts, then more and more violently, driving bundles of spine branches across the road. In the ensuing oppressive semidarkness, the light of the setting sun turns sulphurous, unreal,

lighting up intensely trees, mud villages and men hurrying to take shelter from the tornado that makes *boubous* flap violently.

Now the rain is beating hard on the car. We find Azare almost deserted with only a few children hopping in the puddles formed by the hard driving rain. There's no-one to ask for direction. We go round and round under the heavy rain in this little town planted around a cross-roads right in the middle of the plain.

We end up in a small hotel, the Central Hotel, where I rent a tiny room : toilet, sagging bed, some arm-chairs, a little table, the whole thing sombre and not very clean. I take my rest there while waiting for the storm to stop. An hour later, the storm has ended. Drops of rain continue to fall on the town as a strong stench of humus rises from the ground. The earth sprouts again and holds its shoots towards a trembling light of the early morning sun. Here I am at last in Azare, in Bauchi State, to meet Emmanuel Ali, a Zaar speaker and an English teacher in a Teachers' Training College.

### **IN SEARCH OF EMMANUEL ALI**

A year earlier, I had been recruited to participate in a project to draw the map of the dialects of Hausa, a national language spoken over a wide area. The contacts I had made over the years with my Hausa colleagues whose collaboration was indispensable to me had made me doubt the feasibility of this study. Therefore, even before arriving in Nigeria, I started looking for another project as an alternative to the Hausa project, should it fail to take off. In fact, my Nigerian Hausaist colleagues, if they did not abandon the university for journalism, senior administrative posts or the bank, spent all their energy trying to survive from day to day in a continent that looks down on its intellectuals. What strength would they have for linguistics?

I had therefore sought the opinion of Chadicist colleagues working in Europe or the USA, asking them the question : On which Chadic language not yet described should one work as a matter of priority in Nigeria? Without exception, everyone pointed to Zaar, the language accounting for the greatest number of speakers among those that constitute the West-B-III sub-branch of Chadic languages. In fact, there was very little information about this group of languages, also called «Bauchi-South». This latter name arises from the name of the part of the state where these languages are spoken. I

therefore proposed a project to write a monograph on the Zaar language in order to fill this gap in our knowledge of this group of languages.

In November 1990, I took up an appointment at Ibadan, in the south of Nigeria. Ibadan is a big Yoruba town of more than 3 million inhabitants. The capital of Oyo State, it is mischievously described as the biggest native village in Africa. 850 km north of Ibadan, is Tafawa Balewa, a tiny town which is the administrative headquarters of the Zaar country, in the south of Bauchi State. Although now nearer Tafawa Balewa than when I was in Paris, the task before me was not any easier. I therefore set out on a hunt : I made people around me know that I wanted to meet Zaar speakers; I posted notices all over the university, where the quota system of admissions guaranteed that a certain number of students came from the North ; I distributed handbills in the army barracks, where the population mix gave me hope for the presence of Northerners. Yet, five months later, I still did not have a single response to my notices and messages, which apparently did not reach those for whom they were intended.

It was then that I took off for Frankfurt, in Germany, to attend a colloquium organized by Rudolf Leger and Dymitr Ibrizimov to assess ten years of research in various fields of study : geology, history, culture and the languages of the part of Nigeria around Lake Chad. This research was set up in Maiduguri under the directorship of Herrmann Jungraithmayr. The colloquium, a kind of high mass to which all the international Afroasiatic big-wigs were invited, was organized to pay homage to him.

## **BURE**

In the papers read at the colloquium, mention is made of a language, Bure, which Rudolf Leger discovered the previous year in the north of Bauchi State. Out of curiosity I go to see him and to question him. This language, more or less dead, is only spoken in the village of Bure. He explains to me how, accompanying a geographer colleague of his in search of the old course of the River Gongola, he saw this big village in the middle of the bush, after two hours of going along a track that is used only during the dry season. Posing the usual questions that research linguists ask, he discovers that only a few people in this village still speak a language whose very name is unknown to us.

He leaves his colleague to go on in the direction of the river, which is quite near. While waiting for his friend to pick him up on his return, he settles down with a speaker and takes advantage of the two hours he has before him to fill a questionnaire of linguistic enquiry. This questionnaire immediately confirms that he is dealing with a Chadic language most probably belonging to the West-B-II group.

Rudolf then tells me that he does not intend to carry the study further and that he will be glad to hand over these documents to me. Since my Hausa project is at a dead end, and I have not found a Zaar speaker, I begin to dream of following in Dumezil's footsteps, that is, to describe a language spoken by a single speaker...

When I tell Rudolf about my lack of success in finding Zaar speakers he says that in the bar of the guest-house at Daraza, where he had stopped briefly mid-way between Bauchi and Maiduguri, he had met a Zaar Speaker- one Emmanuel Ali. This being the only bar within a radius of a hundred kilometres where one could drink a cold beer, their common passion for this drink had made them meet. He describes Emmanuel as pleasant, open, very communicative, and highly motivated to work as an informant for European researchers. He gives me his address at Azare, at the extreme north of Bauchi State, where he teaches at a Teachers' Training College.

I return to Nigeria full of hope. At last I am going to be able to do research on Chadic linguistics. As soon as I arrive at Ibadan, I send an express letter to Emmanuel. I take some time to settle my pressing problems and, at the beginning of June, I take off for the North -- two days of driving -- expecting to either meet Emmanuel Ali or get to Bure, while hoping that I will be successful in achieving at least one of these goals.

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, I have time to learn about the socio-political situation of the Zaar language.

## **ZAAR**

*Zaar* means «a human being» in the language of the same name, and this is how they call themselves as an ethnic group, in contrast to their Hausa, Fulani, Angas, Jara and other neighbours. The name *Saya* was given to them by the Hausa. This name has pejorative connotations linked to the fact that the Zaar had long ago in the past been

reduced to slavery by the Hausa. The Zaar call their language *vik-Zaar*, literally «the mouth of men». Therefore, to the question «Who are you?», they will reply «Men», and to the question «What is your language?», they will reply «The language of men».

In the vast Moslem entity of Northern Nigeria, dominated politically and linguistically by the Hausa-Fulani, the Zaar constitute an ethnic group fiercely opposed to Islam. According to their oral tradition, the Zaar were driven away by the Kanuri from the banks of Lake Chad around the 16th century; they set out southwards in search of «the black rock», where, according to an oracle, they were to found their new nation. After trekking some 250 km, they stopped at the approaches to the Jos Plateau, in a crater surrounded by mountains of black stone, and founded Puji («The Black Rock» in Zaar). Puji was later renamed Tafawa Balewa by the Fulani. At the end of the 18th century, they fled from the jihad launched by Usman Dan Fodiyo and took refuge in the hills. To escape forced conversion to Islam and the slave expeditions of their Hausa-Fulani Moslem neighbours, they set up villages which they surrounded with stone fortifications. The peace secured by British colonization allowed them to come down from the mountains to the more fertile plain. About thirty years ago, they abandoned their original animist and clan cults for an evangelical form of Christianity (ECWA : Evangelical Church of West Africa, COCIN branch : Church of Christ in Nigeria).

Since the 1980s, with the economic problems of Nigeria, ethnic and religious tensions have developed in various parts of the country, particularly in the North. At Zaria, riots unleashed by the Moslem preacher Mai Tatsine were bloodily put down by the army. Figures quoted at the time indicated that there were several hundred thousand fatalities. In Kano and Kaduna, brief but violent clashes occurred sporadically and caused hundreds, perhaps thousands of deaths. In 1990, at Tafawa Balewa itself, a very violent conflict broke out which spread as far as Bauchi, the state capital. This violence was capped by the destruction by fire of the whole centre of Tafawa Balewa ; many villages were burnt to the ground, and hundreds of people were reported dead.

I knew, therefore, that I was in danger of encountering difficulties with the political police of the Federal Government (State Security), who could take me for a religious agitator, or a French spy. The Zaar themselves, on the defensive in relation to the Federal Government, with its considerable power, could suspect me of coming to

investigate the events of 1990 for the benefit of the police. Added to this was the fact that the Moslems of the North had developed anti-Western sentiments arising from the Gulf War. It must be remembered that the Hausa listeners of the BBC World Service had, by an overwhelming majority, voted Saddam Hussein Man of the Year 1990. I got myself ready, therefore, to make use of all the treasures of tact and diplomacy at my disposal.

### **EXPLORATION OF AZARE**

I leave *Central Hotel* to go to the Teachers' Training College in search of Emmanuel. The Teachers' Training College, a campus of the type one finds in the Anglo-Saxon world, is situated about three kilometres outside Azare. New buildings are hidden away within an immense compound that is half bush, half yam and millet farms cultivated by the teachers and the administrative personnel accommodated on the campus. The classes over, I am taken to Emmanuel's residence, the boys' quarters of a three-storey building in which the luckier teachers have their accommodation. Apparently, there is a serious accommodation crisis in Azare.

The door is padlocked from the outside; there is no one at home. I scribble a note, which I place on the padlock. I come back in the evening and find myself face to face with Emmanuel's neighbour, who tells me that he left that same day to see me at Ibadan. He is to arrive the following day. I am distraught just thinking about all these useless kilometres! And travelling is so expensive for Nigerians! Emmanuel's neighbour offers to introduce me to other Zaar speakers living in Azare, and I decide to go to the NITEL (Nigerian Telecommunications) office first thing the following day to try to phone Ibadan to leave instructions for Emmanuel to be received as a guest in my house and to return to Azare the following day.

*The following morning.* The NITEL office is a 5-minute walk from the hotel. A pleasant walk under the acacias of the town, which enables me to benefit from the cool air brought in by the storm of the previous evening. I learn from the telephone operator that there is no direct line between Azare and Ibadan and that he must phone the Bauchi exchange, which will call him back thereafter. The operator at the Bauchi exchange to whom he will indicate the Ibadan number I want to call, will dial this number and will

then connect the Azare operator if he gets it. I will then be called to lift the handset in a broken-down cabin situated at one corner of the room.

As is the custom in Nigeria, I prepare my mind to wait the whole morning, sitting on the sagging arm-chairs of the NITEL waiting-room, I plunge into Stendhal, which I had the foresight to bring along with me. I wait for scarcely five minutes and a miracle occurs: I am called and I hear the voice of my neighbour's wife at Ibadan. She promises to do whatever is necessary to receive Emmanuel.

### **THE RESEARCHER ON THE GRILL**

After that, I climb into the Range Rover and return to the Teachers' Training College to meet Emmanuel's neighbour. We climb two floors up the building and, as promised the day before, he takes me to Emmanuel's «brothers». I am welcomed by two people into the sitting-room of a rather large modern apartment. One of them is a soldier in uniform; the other is a woman, the «Madam» of the house. We wait for the Master of the house, who has gone out to bring his friends for support. I am offered a seat and a Fanta to drink. Half an hour later, I am surrounded by about ten people and the session begins. I recount my research projects on their language (phonology, grammar, lexicon, collection of texts); I tell them about Rudolf and about Emmanuel, whom everybody calls Ima. They know about Ima's trip to meet me at Ibadan and express their sadness at the unfortunate incident. I ask them if they want us to begin the research. They agree but soon become embarrassed and reticent.

I have since learnt that you don't say *no* in Africa. A *yes* does not commit you to anything and is often open to a wide interpretation. What is not started on the spot has very little chance of ever being accomplished. «Tomorrow» is, at best, more or less synonymous with «Yes, if I have time» and at worst, «Never».

My interlocutors want to know what my motives are ; what kind of work I want to do ; for whom ; who is going to read it ; what questions I am going to ask them. My University of Ibadan identity card reassures them only partially. The questions come thick and fast, some repeated several times. I have the impression that I am being cross-examined by a difficult jury. After more than an hour of questioning, they appear more or less convinced that I did not come to investigate the 1990 events at Tafawa Balewa,

that my sole interest is the study of their language, and they finally agree to answer my questions. I bring out my equipment and I begin my first research.

### FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE

I had brought my tape-recorder, a research manual in three volumes, an exercise-book, a pencil and an eraser. In this climate of suspicion, I dare not bring out the tape-recorder (a Walkman player-recorder with a good independent microphone). I limit myself to the book, the exercise-book and the pencil. Subsequently, for fear of making my interlocutors ill at ease, I will use the tape-recorder on very few occasions in this phase of the research. I regret it bitterly today, because, constantly, when I go over my field notes, I lack recordings against which to do the checking.

I had been advised to come to Nigeria with my own stationery (exercise-books, pens, pencils, erasers)... I will realise later that this very stationery brought from Europe established a barrier between me and my interlocutors. In fact, only the stationery produced locally is within the reach of the purchasing power of my Nigerian colleagues, and it is of a very bad quality. Biro-pens leak and flow onto the writing paper; the graphite of pencils is very hard, causing the writing to be pale and illegible; erasers are dry, and they scratch the paper without rubbing off the pencil markings; writing papers soak up ink and stick to pens and to the graphite of the pencils. Knowledge of all this enables me later on to give presents that are well appreciated.

The documents on Zaar that I had then at my disposal, though very limited, were not negligible. Shimizu's (1975) mimeographed field notes, deposited at the University of Kano, consist essentially of a list of basic vocabulary terms (about 200 words) collected for purposes of glottochronological comparison.<sup>1</sup> Schneeberg's 1971 and 1975 publications with a very theoretical phonological orientation based on a minimum of lexical and morphological data.<sup>2</sup>

I have observed important differences in analysis between the two authors (two tones + «downstep» for Shimizu ; three tones for Schneeberg). Even within the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Shimizu, K., *Boghom and Zaar: Vocabulary and Notes*. Kano, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Schneeberg, N., «Sayanci verb tonology». In P. Newman (ed.), *Special Chadic Issue*, 1971; (pp 87-100). Schneeberg, N., *Sayanci Phonology*, Ph.D., Indiana University, 1975.



Schneeberg (in particular in the tonal modulations), I have observed differences between one publication and another. If these documents gave me some idea of the nature of the problems to expect (problems that are in any case familiar to any linguist working on Chadic languages), I had to do the work all over again from scratch, because of their contradictions.

For my initial investigation, I had two questionnaires at my disposal. The first is the famous «Red Book» by LACITO.<sup>3</sup> This is a research manual whose aim is to guide the linguist step by step in his field work. It covers all the domains of linguistics such as those conceived by Haudricourt as being capable of accounting for the essential link between the language and the environment in which its speakers live. And so in three volumes topics such as the following are covered : phonology, lexicon, morphology, syntax, socio-linguistics, ethnology, oral literature. You will also find in it an extremely restrictive descriptive outline, where the discovery procedures take the place of the theory of language, and where the deep structure of language, and, in particular, all hierarchical representations of that structure in constituents are rejected. Having previously come across these problems at the initial stage, when I was engaged in the description of Ader Hausa (Niger Republic), I had quickly decided not to use this manual, except as a reminder in the area of cultural lexicon. It was therefore for that purpose that I brought it: to build up for myself a basic vocabulary that would enable me to tackle what I considered as my truly productive and intelligent research, work from the *corpus*. On the other hand, and this was purely psychological, it enabled me to give myself a countenance and to project before my interlocutors the image of a professional. In this way I hoped that I would be quickly taken seriously. The second questionnaire, elaborated in Frankfurt, was an investigation of the cultural lexicon of the Sahelo-Sudanese region a copy of which Rudolf Leger had given me. I wanted to test it against the basic questionnaire of LACITO, which compared to it is longer and more complex. When used, Leger's questionnaire turned out to be both more specific and more complete.

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3 Bouquiaux, L. & Thomas, Jacqueline M.C. (eds.), *Enquête et description des langues à tradition orale. I L'enquête de terrain et l'analyse grammaticale. II Approche linguistique (Questionnaires grammaticaux et phrases) III Approche thématique (Questionnaire technique et Guides thématiques)*. Paris, SELAF, 1976. LACITO (or Laboratory of Languages and Oral Tradition Civilisations), is a C.N.R.S. laboratory founded in the good old days of structuralism. In France, this manual was for a long time the reference book for field linguistics, especially in the African domain.

That day, following the principles of a good methodology, I begin with a short sociological questionnaire on the people present. In order not to make anyone uneasy, I do not write down their names but only their sex, age, place of birth, ethnic origin and the place of birth of their parents. They are all *Zaar*, married to *Zaar* women, descendants of *Zaar* parents originally born in one or the other of three neighbouring villages.

The research turned out to be very difficult, difficult because of me, since my ear was not trained for this language. I hear the sounds incorrectly, and I am not sure of the tonal heights. The choice was between recording the sounds, having them repeated *ad nauseam*, or making the speakers whistle the tonal heights. One of the techniques for making the melody of a phrase, a sentence or a word more perceptible is in fact to make the speaker whistle the tones. But, this is out of the question because the people before me are distracted, overwhelmed by their domestic preoccupations. They really want me to be patient and wait for the return of Ima, but the type of work I am asking them to do appears really ridiculous to them. In any case, they are too many for the work to be done efficiently.

After half an hour, I stop and ask who would be willing to come to the hotel the following day to work with me. I would need one or two people. Two men volunteer. I then explain to them that my hotel room is very small. They offer to help me find a room in another hotel where they know the manager very well. The two men climb into my car and we drive to *State Hotel*.

### **FROM CENTRAL HOTEL TO STATE HOTEL**

State Hotel is a hotel that belongs to the Bauchi State Government, which has established a similar hotel in each town of some importance. This is generally what happens in the North of Nigeria. At Azare, the *State Hotel* is two kilometres away from the centre of town, in the opposite direction to the Teachers' Training College. This not-very-active town is an administrative centre in which the buildings are widely scattered. The inhabitants cover long distances on foot, on motor-cycles or, when they are lucky, at the back of small taxi-motor-cycles driven by youngsters. Almost all the taxi-motor-cycles belong to a single owner.

Like the Teachers' Training College, the *State Hotel* is situated in a vast compound, which long ago must have been a park. Beautiful acacias can still be seen there, but every part of it that can be cultivated has been transformed into a farm by the manager. Following a narrow tarred road, which meanders between the bungalows, we go towards a one-storey central building housing the reception, the office of the manager, the bar, the restaurant and the kitchen. Each bungalow consists of two suites. Each suite has a sitting-room (with arm-chairs, sofa, low table, reading table, refrigerator and fan), a bed-room (with a huge bed which can take at least four people, an air-conditioner, cupboards), a bathroom and W-C. Everything must have been new twenty years ago, but was never maintained. The painted ceiling is ripped open, the wall-to-wall carpet comes off ungummed; so also does the tiling in the bathroom, where there is no running water and two buckets of water are placed as substitutes and a bowl for scooping water is a substitute for the shower. The air-conditioner makes more noise than it cools, and a fan is provided to support it. Fortunately, and contrary to what happens at Ibadan, electricity supply at Azare is relatively constant. The sitting-room attracts my attention; I think of transforming it into an office for the informants. The price of the suite is derisory. I am stunned by the absolute calm and the country-side scenery. A motorized vehicle passes on the distant road barely every half-hour. I will understand later that the clientele of the hotel is mostly made up of government functionaries sent on a mission by the Bauchi State Government, which, of course, never pays its bills. This explains the state of decrepitude of the suites. In addition to the fact that the hotel is quite a distance from the centre of town, this makes it unattractive to its potential clientele. The manager is happy when I arrive, because it gives him hope for immediate payment in cash. After emptying a whole can of insecticide in all the nooks and corners of the rooms, as well as on the mattresses (a painful experience of cohabitation with bedbugs has taught me to be prudent) and demanding that the suite be cleaned, I pay for some days in advance and I go back to pick up my baggage from *Central Hotel*.

### **TSOHONKURAH ESKI GUS**

In the morning of the following day, at about 9 o'clock, my two volunteers appear. We take our seats in the sitting-room, and we begin work. Very quickly, it becomes apparent that one of the two is clearly less motivated. At the end of this first session, he

tells me that he will not be able to come again, and I find myself with only one informant, who will later come constantly and punctually to appointments, sometimes accompanied by one curious person or another. That is the beginning of a collaboration with Eski which continues till today.

Eski is a remarkably patient man, who laughs heartily over nothing, with an infectious joy. He has a clear and beautifully resonant voice, and he whistles the tones with a power and a consistency, which are explained by his early childhood spent in the field guarding his father's goats. All this, in addition to his honesty, his serious-mindedness, his kindness, his tenderness, makes me believe that I will never have a better friend among the *Zaar*.

Eski is a colleague of Ima's at the Teachers' Training College and is also an English teacher. His name, Tsohonkurah, was given to him to pay homage to his grandmother, an apparently famous woman, and means «old hyena» (**s'ohon kura**) in Hausa. Although he is attached to it, it is probably a difficult name to bear. From it he took only the initials (S-K), which gave rise to «Eski».

Eski has some linguistic ideas and is really interested in my work. He tries to understand the procedure I want to adopt, how I transcribe what he says and, above all, he wants to know how an orthography can be devised quickly. A devout Christian, he regrets that the Bible has not yet been translated into his language, and he cannot stand the fact that the language of worship, in the church is Hausa, the language of people the *Zaar* consider their enemies. He has therefore conceived of a project to translate the Bible into *Zaar*.

Like the people I met on the first day, he is a member of an association for the promotion of *Zaar* history and culture. For the moment, their main activity consists in the publication of an annual calendar showing the photographs of members of the executive committee of the association, and the printing of posters in honour of their famous elders. These elders are heroes of the resistance against Hausa power, and Eski says, without blinking that they are between 120 and 145 years old.

Let me quickly, define my position vis-à-vis the religious and political goals of the association, even if it is at its embryonic stage. My objective is to write a monograph

on the *Zaar* language and to advance our knowledge of Chadic languages in general. As for the creation of an orthography for the publication of pedagogical, religious and other texts, that cannot come except from the *Zaar* themselves. My role could be that of a technical consultant, not that of an initiator or of a sponsor.

I had worked with Eski for two days and, one beautiful morning, Ima burst into our sitting-room now transformed into an office.

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## I BEGIN WORK AT LAST

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### A LINGUIST WHO NEEDS TO ATTUNE HIS EARS

State Hotel, Azare, 10 :00 a.m. I start work with Eski on «basic vocabulary» and conjugation paradigms. Progress is slow. My ear begins to get used to it; I hear tone contrasts better, but I don't have much confidence in myself. I ask Eski to repeat himself, to whistle and to whistle again. I go over again and again the previous day's work.

After reading Shimizu's and Schneeberg's articles<sup>4</sup> again, I take the decision to do the description all over again by myself.

Schneeberg's work is seen as a system of rules for generating *Zaar* phonological forms. It is a very complex system, and is strictly along the lines of *The Sound Pattern of English*. Moreover, Schneeberg's transcription of *Zaar* tones in the article is different from what she did in her thesis. Both pieces of work were published at about the same time and no mention was made of the difference in the two tone transcriptions. Furthermore, no explanation was given by the author. Moreover, many of the rules described by Schneeberg had a very restricted domain of application. Beginning with a few theoretical principles, the work then takes the form of a series of specific rules, which are intended to explain the numerous exceptions to these general principles. At the end of this description one has the definite feeling that *Zaar* grammar is no more than a collection of exceptions without coherence. Add to this the paucity of the corpus used in the description, and you will understand why I had grave misgivings about

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<sup>4</sup> *op. cit.*

relying on Schneeberg's work to begin the study of this language. Discouraged, I could not believe that a language could be so complicated. I tended therefore to have more confidence in Shimizu, who marked only two tones with *downstep* («faible tonale» in French) in his list of 200 words drawn from the basic vocabulary.

At the beginning of my work with Eski, I had come to the conclusion that the language operates a tonal system of two distinct tones. I soon discovered that the system was much more complex, and that it probably had three significant pitches (High, Mid and Low), with a possibility of a combination of two tones on a single syllable. Things were complicated because of vocalic length. Since length was significant, tonal modulation was theoretically possible over both short and long vowels.

Let V represent short vowels, VV long vowels and C consonants. The syllables that are theoretically possible are of the type CV and CVV (open syllables), CVC and CVVC (closed syllables). The tonal modulations are heard relatively easily over the long vowels, the closed syllables ending with a voiced consonant (only sonorous segments carry melody). But they are difficult to hear over syllables with a short vowel, whether they are open (CV) or closed with a voiceless consonant (CVC).

At this stage of the research work with Eski, I had not yet defined these problems. I was simply hearing the tonal changes, which I was just beginning to pick up. Over the long vowels, I was hearing and distinguishing contrasts between three significant levels and two modulations: one rising and one falling. I could not say whether it was a Low-High modulation, Mid-High or Low-Mid for the rising modulation, nor whether these three modulations were present and had meaning in the language. The same thing was applicable to the falling modulations, with the registers High-Low, High-Mid and Mid-Low. With regard to the difficult syllables (CV or CVC with a voiceless final consonant), I could not say whether I was dealing with a flat or a modulated tone.

Tonal contrasts are found to be very important in this language. The conjugation paradigms are an illustration of this. As in many Chadic languages, conjugation comes in the form of prefix morphemes attached to the verb, to mark aspect, tense, mood, number and person.

Some conjugation paradigms show contrast by their tone alone, with these tone differences being borne sometimes by the verbal prefix and sometimes by the verb itself. During the sessions with Eski, one point was particularly difficult to make out. This was the subjunctive. I had it repeated over and over again, whistled over and over again, and I heard no difference in the pronunciation, that is, until Eski drew my attention to the fact that the difference was marked only on the verb. I understood then that, for the subjunctive, the plural was marked by a floating low tone which appeared on the verb.

Let us take the verb *yel*, and the form of the first person *ma*. If one compares the narrative and the subjunctive, one can have the following meanings for the same segmental sequence, depending on their tonal patterns<sup>5</sup> :

<b>mə yél</b>	<i>I saw</i>	Narrative
<b>mó yêl</b>	<i>we saw</i>	Narrative
<b>mə̀ yél</b>	<i>that I might see</i>	Subjunctive
<b>mə̀ yèl</b>	<i>that we might see</i>	Subjunctive

I had not yet reached this point with Eski. Rather, he was answering my questions with his usual patience, while one of his «brothers» was flipping through the pages of a newspaper in a distracted manner. It was then that Ima arrived and I got acquainted with his dramatic talents.

### **IMA, AT LAST!**

Ima burst into the sitting-room of the bungalow now transformed into an office. He is a rounded-faced man of thirty-five years, with an advanced stage of baldness, and he has a jovial, care-free and pleasant personality. Work stops; I tell him how happy I am to see him at last, and apologise for the unnecessary journey he made. I express my hope that he was well received at my house in Ibadan. He had not stayed in my house, he says, but had preferred to take off immediately to Lagos where he had a cousin in the army he wanted to see. On his way back to Azare, at a point south of Kaduna, his taxi

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<sup>5</sup> I give here the definitive tone marks adopted much later in my work. On a vowel, the grave accent marks low tone, the acute accent high tone, the circumflex accent falling tone, the chevron a rising tone and the absence of an accent mid tone.

was attacked by highway robbers. We were all in a state of shock. It is at this point that he starts speaking in Zaar and goes into a long and lively discussion with Eski and their «brother». I switch on the tape-recorder which, for the first time, is put to work.

A translation of the conversation is done for me, and so I get to know the details of the story. Having left Lagos that day and reached southern Kaduna in the middle of the night, the taxi driver had felt exhausted and so left the highway to find a garage in a small village where he could park and sleep in the taxi, probably one of those durable 504 station-wagons, with three rows of seats, made in the Peugeot factory at Kaduna. At 5 o'clock in the morning a car arrives, parks near the taxi and three men emerge from it armed with revolvers and sticks. They order everybody out of the taxi and relieve them of their money, watches and jewellery. The driver, who had had the sense to throw away his car keys, gets a good beating. One of the robbers, angered by Emmanuel's empty wallet, hits him with it and throws it to the ground after removing his identity papers from it. Once the collection is over, the robbers take off into the darkness of the night undisturbed. After finding the car keys in the bush, the taxi driver takes off again and drops his passengers off at Bauchi. There, a bread-seller, a Yoruba woman that Ima knows, lends him taxi money for his trip back to Azare. The wallet incident and the generosity of the bread-seller are of particular interest to the listeners.

At Ibadan, six months later, curiosity pushed me to begin the transcription of my recordings with this tape : 45 minutes of spontaneous narrative interspersed with questions, queries for explanations, comments, *etc.*<sup>6</sup>. This particularly lively dialogue brought together three educated Zaar people, all of them English teachers in a Teachers' Training College. The result is a discussion that is typically mixed linguistically : the basic language structure is Zaar, whereas a large proportion of the vocabulary, as well as many long expressions, comes from Hausa or English. Apart from the initial surprise that the discussion was mixed linguistically, the result of my work was positive. The borrowings made it possible for me not to spend too much time on the vocabulary and to tackle the grammatical problems from the corpus directly. This is not always possible at the beginning of the study of a language.

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<sup>6</sup> This work of transcription, translation, linguistic analysis will be done with Sunday. See *infra*.



With the return of Ima, Eski was able to resume a more normal rhythm of life, he and Ima relieving each other at the hotel for a week. The following Saturday, Ima and Eski were invited to the marriage of one of their friends in the hills overlooking Dawaki, an Angas village 15 km south of their own village of origin, Tudun Wada, at the other end of Bauchi State, 250 km from Azare. They asked me to drive them there. I was delighted because that gave me the opportunity to visit the Zaar country and to see the places which for one good week, I had heard being spoken about. I took advantage of the trip to try to carry out some projects : one was about the Bure language, which I had not forgotten, and the other was the recruitment of a full-time informant to work in my house at Ibadan.

### **TAFAWA 'BALEWA**

Early on Saturday morning, we left Azare, facing directly south. There were six of us in the Range Rover, as Eski was travelling with a nephew living in with him and Ima was with his latest female conquest. In addition, Eski was bringing along a goat as a gift to his parents. It sat quietly in the boot of the car throughout the journey. After a stop over at Dass for a refreshing and stimulating *fura*, we arrived at Tafawa Balewa where Eski's parents live. I now came to a full realization of what had happened during «the riots of Bauchi» which had started at Tudun Wada. The centre of this very tiny village, which comes to life once a week on the market day, is completely devastated. All the houses are blown open, blackened by the fire. The incident happened the year before, and the physical marks had not yet been erased. There was silence in the car, and I refrained from asking questions.

### **TUDUN WADA**

After waiting a few minutes for Eski, we take off again for Tudun Wada, 10 km south of Tafawa Balewa. The road is new and is not at all busy. It was constructed in such a manner that it was raised over the surrounding terrain, running over a small plain embedded in the hills of dark volcanic stone. The asphalt goes on as far as the bridge which bestrides a dry river, the boundary between Bauchi and Plateau States. The whole of this plain, from Tafawa Balewa to the river, on the left as far as the hills and on the right going back up the hills, is Zaar country. Ima announces to me the names of the

villages on each side of the road. Each village is a very dispersed settlement where each compound is separated from its neighbours by at least a hundred metres. In each compound the huts are arranged in a circle and joined together by a wall. They open onto an interior courtyard which houses a grain-store, a kitchen and, in one corner, a bathroom. Entry into this courtyard is gained through the front hut. The huts are built with clay and are rectangular in the Hausa fashion. In the past, the huts were circular, as is still the custom in the south among the neighbouring Angas. In contrast to Moslem Hausa women in the cities who stay shut away from society, Zaar women are free and very energetic. They fetch water from wells, grind millet and beans, cook, do the washing and work on the farms. The men engage in farming; they hunt, build their houses and take responsibility for providing money to buy clothing and drugs and to educate the children.

We leave the tarred road to follow a very narrow track winding its way between the various fields of millet, hungry rice, beans and pepper. The dark-red colour of the variety of millet that is grown around the settlements catches my eye. After about one kilometre, we come to the compound belonging to Ima's father. He is sitting under a shade in front of the entrance-hut and conversing with a neighbour. He has the same round head and the same stocky build as his son. Ima tells me that he is eighty years old. I have difficulty believing this. It must be said that in Nigeria, one tells you without blinking that this and that old man is 115, 120 or 135 years old. Ima's elder brother, an ex-soldier with a big moustache, is introduced to me. Much slimmer than Ima, he has an intense gaze and looks as if he is gnawed inside by worries. We are quickly surrounded by a swarm of turbulent children wearing torn and dirty clothing. On another occasion, I will see the same children dressed in new and sparkling clothes for mass. A small boy begins to cry on seeing me and runs away to take refuge in the arms of his elder brother. As always, I cannot but suspect that I am looked upon as an ogre sent to threaten or punish him.

Two chairs of metal frame and woven plastic seats are brought out and set out in my honour. The greetings and conversation are in Hausa. A calabash of *kunu* is brought out. This is a sour, light and refreshing cereal-based drink. Ima explains in Zaar that I am looking for an informant who would come to live with me at Ibadan and be paid a

full-time salary (the equivalent of a minimum wage in Nigeria), including board and lodging; he sends for his cousin Sunday. Aged 25 years and with secondary school education, he lives in his father's compound with his two wives and four children. He cultivates his own farm and on market days he goes to the next village, 'Boi, where he repairs bicycles. He comes and sits facing me on the other chair, and we begin a conversation in English. I begin to ask him questions to give him an idea of the type of work he is going to do and to assess our level of communication. He is quick to understand but whistles much less efficiently than Eski because, intimidated, he has difficulty repressing his urge to laugh. One certainly has to be of a good disposition to be able to quickly take to performing this task before the whole neighbourhood and the children who are puffing and imitating him as he whistles. I very quickly conclude things there by saying that for me he will do fine. He himself accepts the job, while negotiating for additional conditions for his stay at Ibadan, namely, that I should pay for his driving lessons as well as the other costs for obtaining his licence. I accept these conditions happily, saying to myself that his stay with me will give him a chance to acquire an additional qualification. We agree to meet again in the month of September, when I will come to pick him up on my return from my vacation in France.

### **THE MARRIAGE AT DAWAKI**

Then we take off for the village in the hills overlooking Dawaki. We get back to the tarred road running south, in the direction of the bridge which we cross to enter a track that is full of bumps and stones. This is the beginning of Plateau State, and we branch off to the left to climb up the hills into Angas territory. The huts become round, the terrain abrupt and wooded, the roads narrow and difficult. At the end of the road, we come upon a plateau on which the village sits comfortably. We go straight to the church where we arrive just as the mass is ending and the married couple are coming outside.

The married couple are about thirty years old. The groom is wearing a tie and a dark suit, and the bride a long white dress and an enormous lace veil. The rice is scattered by handfuls. Village women, their waists decorated with leaves, carry palm branches, sing and dance in a circle around the traditional orchestra. This orchestra is composed of drummers and trumpeters, the trumpets being made from huge bull horns. Their ankles disappear in a bush of rusty iron rattles that resound when they strike the ground

rhythmically. Their costume is also traditional: a hair-do of cowries, a pair of shorts and tunic of skin and fur. The rest of the village dance around tightly together in another circle.

Everybody moves along singing and dancing in the direction of the school courtyard where arrangements have been made for the reception to take place after the church ceremony. A public address system connected to a generator, a platform with a microphone where the principal actor officiates : the Master of Ceremony, MC. On one side, for the special guests, a row of large upholstered armchairs that one is surprised to find outside in the open air, in the middle of such a big school courtyard. On the other side, a good many chairs for the remaining guests. In a corner the Treasurer installs himself at a table with his two assistants. The ceremony begins with a roll-call and introduction of the guests who come forward with their presents, most of them in the form of cash. The amount is announced on the microphone with the applause of the crowd. The whole ceremony is slow, formal and dismal for the couple, who have to try and keep a straight face. The married couple, scowling, bear everything with patience. After some dances, the cake and the warm soft drinks are given out to the guests, and the treasurer announces the total sum collected for the couple. After presenting our small contribution, we disappear without waiting till the end of the ceremony. We take to the road again in the direction of Bauchi.

### **UNGUWAR SAYAWA, BAUCHI**

At Bauchi, we pass the night with Eski's uncle, in the Zaar quarters known as Unguwar Sayawa in Hausa (the quarters of the Zaar). They insisted on preparing a small room for me alone where I sleep on a bed. At nightfall, we sit in the cemented courtyard. In the darkness, under the light of the stars, the night is refreshing. Eski asks his aunt to tell us a Zaar folktale so that I can record it. The exercise stops abruptly because, under the emotional stress, she loses her memory. All join in to try and reconstruct the story, which they do, not without difficulty, as we have to stop after ten minutes.

The following morning, Eski and Ima go in search of story-tellers so that I can do some recording. Eski goes to see the Elders whom he meets at mass. Ima, for his part,

drags me along to an enclosure where women brew and sell traditional beer. The enclosure is at the outskirts of the town, and is surrounded by yam farms. We find there five or six of Ima's friends, comfortably seated in the courtyard under a canopy of fruit-trees. These give a really cool shade from the sun at these early hours of a morning that is already warming up. I sit down on a clay bench with my back to the wall and get out my equipment as Ima explains who I am and what I do. I place an order for millet beer for everybody, and a young man, about 25 years old, begins to tell his story. I switch on the tape-recorder, look to see that everything is working properly and sip my millet beer slowly. It is both sweet and bitter at the same time: a beer that stands in the middle between our beer and cider. As soon as this first folktale is over, another one begins, and another one, all told without a break and without hesitation. After three hours, two tapes and three rounds of drink, we go back to the car, speaking in loud voices, more or less tipsy. A totally successful recording session, with which everybody expresses satisfaction. Some months later, during the transcription, I am able to attest that the technical quality is satisfactory and the content of the tapes very interesting.

We take off again for Azare after picking up Eski as he comes out from mass. He has not succeeded in persuading the Zaar-speaking Elders to help me.

## **BURE**

On the road to Azare, before Darazo, we branch off to the right in the direction of Bure. I do not want to forgo the chance to see what this village is like, a village where a few people still speak this mysterious language that R. Leger had spoken to me about in Frankfurt.

The beginning of the track is not easy to find. After twice taking off in the wrong direction, we finally make our way across the bush along a path that is scarcely marked out by tyre tracks. The terrain is flat, the vegetation sparse: there are some bushes with a few scattering trees. We meet some Fulani shepherds, young men with braided hair, wearing leather and copper jewellery, a pole on one shoulder, and impassively watching us pass by, a little bit of astonishment in their eyes.

We ask them for direction several times, worried that after an hour and a half of following the track, we were not already at our destination. At last, we see a big

village with a modern well and a medical dispensary. We inquire from a group of girls sitting and chatting by the road-side whether we are indeed in Bure. They say we are not, that Bure is further on. We are at Kubi. We inquire from them what language they speak: «Hausa», they answer. Do people speak or have people spoken another language in the village? No. These people are Hausa, and they have always been Hausa.

As a matter of fact, I will pass through this village again a year later, in the company of an old resident of Bure who will introduce me to a few people of his generation who, he knows, are in no way more Hausa than himself and speak a language that is different from his own, a language of which he understands only the greetings. I will carry out a short investigation of an hour and a half on Kubanchi, the Hausa name for the Kubi language. The only speakers that can be found are two old women and the Wakili of the village, a kind of spokesman of the Chief. The women have all but lost memory of their language, and the man has lost all his teeth, which was not helpful in identifying the consonants. From a linguist's point of view it is evident that this language, though close to Bure, is sufficiently divergent from it for one to conclude that it is another small Chadic language belonging to the same North-Bauchi group as Bure.

We get back on to the road and, after crossing the bed of a dried-up river, we arrive finally at Bure. This is a large village of more than 500 inhabitants of a compact community, with a market that is well-known among their neighbours. We leave the car behind, at a little square, and continue on foot to pay homage to the village Chief. We pass near a butcher's stall, located on the road-side in the open air under a tree, surrounded by the usual cloud of humming flies. Eski remains behind to negotiate to buy a goat head. This peaceful village, all slopy, with its tortuous alleys, its walls of dark brown featuring paintings of geometrical motifs, pale, originally white, is a charming place. A large part of this charm lies in the silence in which it bathes. The few cars that venture to find their entry into the access road must stop at the gates of the village; the streets are too narrow for them.

We come to the house of the Chief at the top of the village. We ask to see him. We are told that he has gone to pray at the mosque. We wait a little. When he returns, we introduce ourselves to him. He receives us under the canopy of a tree outside his house. We explain to him the object of our visit and tell him about Rudolf Leger. As a

matter of fact, he did leave a good memory of himself behind, thanks to the small gifts he gave out. Unfortunately, his informant is dead, and the Chief can't see who could replace him. I inform him of my intention to come back to the village for two weeks to carry out research on the language. He is not enthusiastic about the idea and he warns me of the risks of such a plan to my health.

We leave, a little discouraged by this rather cold reception. We find Eski who has bought his goat head at a record low price compared with the prices charged at Azare. He is in the middle of a crowd of people who are curious to know who we are. After some discussion, in Hausa most of the time, it turns out that none of the people present speaks the language, apart from greetings and a few basic words. One of them, a young man, happens to be a student of Eski's at Azare. He tells us about an old man who he thinks could be useful to us. He is a pastor of about 75 years, who lives at Misau, a small village 90 km south of Azare which we saw on our outward trip. He knows the language very well and would certainly be happy to answer our questions. Ima then says that he knows the pastor and that we could make a stop at Misau on our way back.

We make our way back to the major road, which takes us two more hours. As soon as we reach the tarred road, we turn to face northwards.

### **REVEREND ALLABURAH, MISAU**

We stopped at the hotel that had witnessed the meeting between Ima and Rudolf. Unfortunately, the town had been without electricity since the previous day, and the beer was not cool. It was towards evening that we arrived at Misau at the Pastor's house. His house was beside the church from which the sounds of hymns could be heard. Ima found him in the church. He came to join us by the car. A smiling old man, in a large bubu and a Hausa cap, he appeared strong and had an impressive personality. He was enthusiastic and agreed to work with me for two weeks when I came back to Misau. The State Hotel was a hundred metres from his house, which would allow me to make the same arrangement as at Azare.

That was what I was able to do the following year. I worked everyday, in the morning and in the afternoon, with the Reverend AllaBurah. He did not speak English. The language of research was therefore Hausa. I had sometimes to break the sessions

to allow him to have a nap on the chair in the sitting-room. But what a memory! What knowledge! After a little reflection this man, who has lived at Misau for the past 25 years, and had not therefore had any occasion to speak his language, recollected the technical and cultural vocabulary of that language. The flora, the fauna, everything was there. I asked him for the names of plants and animals I knew in Hausa. He could describe them to me: their colour, their habitat. He stated what the plants were used for, how to hunt animals. He himself had hunted them when he was young and was living at Bure. He remembered the hunt for the hippopotamus in the Gongola River. Of course, these animals have now disappeared. With the exception of the Yankari Game Reserve, all the woods of these regions of Northern Nigeria were rid of animals. (This is not far from the truth. In my two-year stay in Nigeria, I saw only one monkey near Tudun Wada. For «bush meat», Nigerians are reduced to hunting rodents).

Day in day out, I cross-checked the data but the memory of the old man was never found wanting. From time to time, as his memories came back to him, he himself was surprised at his knowledge, and a childish joy lit up his face. His eyes twinkled. He liked to walk about with me in the market, to introduce me to milk sellers and to ask them to prepare me the best *fura* with the purest milk. It was funny to see him, a pastor, being addressed as *Alhaji* by the sellers. (This Hausa word, which designates someone who has gone to Mecca on pilgrimage, has now become a term of respect for addressing an old man). He affectionately brushed aside the young beggars, telling them that they would do better to go to school than to loiter about in the streets. The children ran away crying and saying that it was the devil's school and that they preferred to go to a koranic school. I felt a strong sense of respect, and even affection, for him.

I found in him a feeling of deep sadness. If he had brought up many children, and if he was still bringing them up, he and his wife were without descendants. At the age of 35 years, he had been one of the first converts to Christianity in his village, but it is Islam that has won. All Bure is now Moslem. He told me that when he returns to the village to visit his family or to do some shopping, the children run away from this insane old man who insists on speaking to them in a language they don't understand.

We went together to Bure one market day so that he could buy beans. It was the middle of the rainy season, the harvest period for millet and beans. But the Pastor's



harvest was a disaster, and he wanted to buy some beans at Bure while prices there were still low. The market was not well supplied that day. There was no beans, and the only bag of rice was sold out as soon as it was put down on the ground. The Pastor had to go home empty-handed. I was intrigued by the sheer number of stands brimming over with beautiful rose fuchsia flowers with lily-shaped corollas everywhere. The reverend gentleman explained to me that they were tobacco flowers that were bought by Fulani shepherds. They dab their teeth with the pistil to paint them orange with the pollen.

He took me to the house of his brother, a good Moslem with two wives and five children. The reverend gentleman wanted me to tape a conversation of real-life Bure and not just of lists of words and made-up sentences. On arriving at his brother's we sat down and conversation started with greetings, but it very soon came to an abrupt end. His brother took off and left the two of us there. He no longer wanted to be associated with this language of the pagans. He was now a good Hausa-speaking Moslem. I saw how deeply the pastor had been hurt. It was then that I came to understand that he was no more than a figure on the sidelines that Bure village had rejected. He could only live at Misau, and it was there that he had taken refuge. He was still living there when I passed through again at the end of 1993.

This is how a language dies in Africa, within a period of two generations. In Northern Nigeria, conversion to Islam means the complete adoption of a whole mode of life: education, dress, daily activity given rhythm by prayers, Hausa language, confinement of girls and women, private law and business law. In a word, integration into a vast social community which exposes the villagers to the outside world while, at the same time, giving them a proper African identity: they become Hausa.

What happens to the language ultimately? Russell Schuh has published a short description of some of the Chadic languages of this area.<sup>7</sup> I have compared Bure with these languages, for example, Kirfi which is spoken in a village (Kirfi) that stands facing Bure on the other side of the Gongola River. The Bure language is indeed very close to it, and I am tempted to say that Bure and Kirfi are probably two variants (dialects?) of the same language.

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<sup>7</sup> Schuh, Russell G., *Bole-Tangale Languages of the Bauchi Area (Northern Nigeria)*. Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1978.

## YOHANA TONJ AND GUS

We arrived at Azare by nightfall. The next morning, I went back to my cruising rhythm, working in relays with Eski and Ima in the sitting-room of my bungalow at the State Hotel.

I soon learnt that the manager of the State Hotel, a friend of the Zaar, was in fact from a village, Sigidi, near Tudun Wada. Of course, in this village, the people speak yet another language which the Zaar call Sigidi. The inhabitants of this village call themselves Gus, which means «man» in their language. If one adopts in this case the same mode of naming as for Zaar, the correct name of this language or of this speech ought to be Gus. Shimizu mentioned the Sigidi language in his writings without saying anything more about it. This language is spoken in the hills to the west of Tudun Wada, within the borders of Plateau State, in an area barely accessible by modern means of transportation.

The manager, whose name is Yohana Tonj, agreed to give me a bit of his time to answer my questions. He stayed altogether one hour during which we were constantly interrupted by his employees. I was able to do no more than begin a lexical questionnaire with him in the presence of Eski and Ima. It was very instructive. They, who did not know this language and did not understand it, recognised the words as Yohana Tonj pronounced them. They saw them as deformed variants of their own language.

I put forward the hypothesis that Sigidi is probably a dialect of Zaar, with no less validity than the Zaar of Kal, a village situated between Tudun Wada and Sigidi. This dialect of Kal is described by Schneeberg as conservative compared with the one that she and I also describe. What is called Zaar seems to be a variant that developed in the Tafawa Balewa plain from a conglomerate of speech-forms, mid-way between language and dialect, but forming a single linguistic unit within the family. The Zaar on which our work is about to confer the status of «standard» is probably the result of the evolution of the language as it was spoken when the Zaar came down from their hills to cultivate the plain, and in the process of which they came into contact with and assimilated part of their neighbours : the Angas, the Jarawa, etc. There is room here for

systematic, extensive research to reconstitute the history of the languages of this region.

### **GOOD-BYE AZARE**

Soon came the time to take to the road again back to Ibadan. I bid good-bye to the Zaar community in the bar of the hotel. I paid Eski and Ima what I owed them for their work as informants. Everything went very well with Eski. He accepted what I offered to give him : the equivalent of his salary for two months for the two weeks he had worked half-time for me. It was more delicate with Ima. He demanded ten times more, supporting his case with the claim that that was what a friend of his was receiving for working for the German mission at Maiduguri. I later learnt from Rudolf Leger that this colleague of Ima was a student of geography, a map specialist who did surveys for the German archaeologists, and that the amount he had talked about represented what he had received for a collaboration of one year and for very specialized work requiring precise professional competence.

I told Ima that I was paying for my research from my own pocket and that I did not have access to that kind of money. If he insisted on his terms, I would have to end our collaboration. He persisted, and after giving him an amount equivalent to a quarter of what he was demanding, plus a little additional sum that he wanted on behalf of his friends who had welcomed me on my arrival, I swore never to work with him again. That is exactly what happened, and he went thereafter to offer his services to Maiduguri where Professor Jungrathmayr, who was in charge of the project, hired him to collect and transcribe recordings on oral tradition. Being more flexible than I in his dealings with people and money, this great Africanist knew how to make full use of Ima's capabilities.

For my last evening at Azare, I had accepted an invitation to eat the goat head brought in from Bure. This is a delicacy in the south of the country, prepared with a lot of pepper (also called *pepe soup*), which promotes the drinking of phenomenal quantities of beer. This generally takes place in a bar, a sort of inverted Norman hole, where the solid aids the digestion of the liquid. I nibbled an ear in a distracted manner, and in the company of Ima, his girl-friend and Eski, I ended the evening in one of the two bars of the town.

In a vast, dimly lit, courtyard dislocated chairs and metal tables were set out in groups here and there. A deafening sound system, saturated and distorted, rolled out cassettes of American music. One drank there very many bottles of Nigerian beer served ice-cold (The importation of beer, as well as the raw materials used for its production, is banned). One could order a *pepe soup* to go with the beer. Having already had ours, we contented ourselves with beer for Ima and myself, Eski and Ima's girlfriend opting for a non-alcoholic malt drink, which I had tasted during my first stay in Nigeria and which almost made me sick. I allowed the conversation to become languid, not having much to say to Ima. The music filled up the gaps in the conversation and I preoccupied myself with the activities of women entering and leaving through a door different from the one by which we had come in. It was explained to me later that there was a «hotel» nearby where these ladies lived and entertained their customers. This «hotel» depended on the bar. One could go in from the courtyard of the bar or directly from outside. I came to understand then why my driver had refused to join us and instead went to sit in a corner from where he had a good view of what was going on in the annex of the bar. He never lost time to find good addresses.

I still feel a soft spot for a song that caught my attention during this period and which I was impatient to hear played each time I went into that bar. I pricked up my ears to hear the voice of a white woman humming, over cool and haunting music, words speaking of a cafeteria, of rain and the bells of a cathedral. It was indeed unreal, way out of touch with the American production which normally played in Nigeria, way out of touch with the situation in which this music was broadcast. This song, *Tom's Diner*, like the other songs of Suzanne Vega, is now associated with the nostalgia I have for Azare, its shabby bar and my work with Eski on Zaar.

The next day I took to the road again for Ibadan, very much disturbed by the final episode with Ima. Everything taken together, the result of this trip was positive. For the following year I had hired an informant, Sunday, who was going to join me as soon as I came back from my holiday in France. I had promising recordings to feed my work with him. I had a very good contact in the person of Eski, who did not support Ima's attitude and who had great interest in our work. And I had another contact for Bure in the person of the Reverend Allaburah. I could look at the future with confidence and

hope in my second year in Nigeria to make up for the time I had lost during the first.

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## **GOOD AND BAD FORTUNE AT IBADAN**

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In September 1991, I return to Ibadan to begin my second and final year in Nigeria. I go up to Misau, in the North, to work for two weeks on Bure with the Reverend AllaBurah. On my way back I branch to pick up Sunday at Gyara in Bauchi State.

On arriving at Gyara, I am told that he left in the morning, as on all Tuesdays, for the market at 'Boi, where he does a second job as a bicycle repairer. And it is there that I find him, in the midst of dismantled motor-cycles and spare parts, grey with dust, his clothes stiff with dirt. In two hours he is back home, takes a shower and slips into clean clothes. He says good-bye to his family and jumps into the car, his face lit by a wide smile. He is happy to leave his village to discover the big cities in the south of the country.

### **CREDU**

The second year at Ibadan started on a rather promising note. I returned to the Centre for University Research and Documentation (CREDU), opened at the University of Ibadan the previous year by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CREDU had been sited by the French Embassy at the University of Ibadan in the Institute of African Studies. As Director, I had two hats: to formulate and administer research in the humanities and to conduct my own research in linguistics, for which I was given the job. It is on this basis that I divided my time between the administration of the Centre and my research on Chadic languages. Matters concerning my accommodation and the setting up of the Centre being more or less finalized, I picked up my cruising rhythm.

CREDU<sup>8</sup> was one of the French research institutes abroad funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, like those in Great Britain, Japan, South America, Syria, etc. They are sited in non-francophone countries to promote research in the humanities on the countries they cover. CREDU's headquarters was sited in Nairobi, where it covers East Africa. In 1985, the first branch office was opened at Harare in Zimbabwe. This branch

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<sup>8</sup> CREDU has since been renamed IFRA (French Institute for Research in Africa).

office constituted a forward observation post for South Africa before a research centre was officially sited there. In 1990, CREДУ's Director, who knew Nigeria very well, succeeded in persuading the Ministry and the Embassy in Lagos to open another branch office in Nigeria to integrate West Africa into a network that was beginning to form. Of course, the funding fell short of these ambitious plans, and they ended up with a slender budget and an elaborate administrative set-up. Fortunately, the support of the Cultural Counsellor, in the form of post-doctoral scholarships and budgetary extensions, made it possible to organize a colloquium, a collection of works and a newsletter, and to bring some Nigerian researchers into CREДУ's activities.

Many reasons combined to favour the choice of Ibadan as its foundation site. In Nairobi, CREДУ is sited in a building directly opposite the Embassy of France. The embassies had still not packed out of the former Nigerian capital, Lagos, a swarming, disorganized, stinking and dangerous city, full of traffic jams. Moreover, the sheer cost of a building in the embassy reservation area of Lagos made it impossible to site CREДУ in the same environment as in Nairobi.

Aside from these physical considerations, there were also diplomatic reasons: the conditions in favour of the siting of CREДУ in Nairobi made CREДУ look like an extension of the services of the Embassy, its scientific objectives not always being clearly distinguished from the needs of the Embassy for information, especially in the mind of the Ambassador himself, who sometimes tried to make CREДУ undertake research work needed to write his telegrams to *Quai d'Orsay*<sup>9</sup>. Paradoxically, therefore, geographical proximity was the cause of tensions between CREДУ and the Embassy.

In Nigeria, the federal structure of the state, the decentralization of cultural life, and the relative independence of research and universities with regard to central power, made it possible to avoid the problems and ambiguities of Nairobi by distancing CREДУ from the capital. At the same time, the non-existence of modern means of communication were (telephones and fax machines perpetually out of order) required that the centre be not sited too far away, so that administrative problems could be resolved quickly. Letters could be picked up at least once a week, from the Embassy :

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<sup>9</sup> *Quai d'Orsay* is the address in Paris of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Nigeria the diplomatic bag and the telex were the surest and fastest means of communication.

On the other hand, decentralization, which goes hand in hand with the federal structure of Nigeria, offered an additional flexibility. In fact, research is conducted at the level of each establishment: universities, research centres of the ministries, association of museums, foreign institutes. The existence of the oldest university at Ibadan, and of the Institute of African Studies within that university, provided the solution. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (I.I.T.A.) is also at Ibadan. A huge research establishment<sup>10</sup> sited in the north of the city in a gigantic American-style campus with impeccable lawns, a hotel, a restaurant, a swimming pool, a food shop, a satellite antenna for telephone and electronic correspondence, it is completely autonomous. Although completely cut off from the town, the institute, by recruiting Nigerians locally and fostering relations with local experts, maintains at Ibadan a certain intellectual activity. This explains why the brain drain is felt less at Ibadan (and Lagos) than elsewhere in the country.

The choice of Ibadan for CREДУ was, however, regarded by the University of Ife as a betrayal. The University of Ife is another important university in the south-west. It had maintained a close relationship with the University of Bordeaux and its Institute of Political Science for ten years.

### **THE LINGUIST BECOMES AN ADMINISTRATOR**

Without informants to work with at Ibadan during my first year, I had devoted my time to financial matters. Coming fresh from the University of Orleans where I had just been promoted from Assistant Lecturer in English to the position of a Lecturer, I had no administrative experience whatsoever, and at the beginning I was a little apprehensive about working in a country where I had not worked before. On my arrival, I expected to find the question of the integration of CREДУ into the University of Ibadan already settled in the form of a co-operation agreement between the Embassy, the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the University. In order to have a

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<sup>10</sup> I will meet its director at a dinner in a Lebanese businessman's house. This director, an American, as 90% of the researchers, will negligently reveal to me that he has a budget of six million dollars. The budget I had been given for CREДУ in Ibadan did not reach 25 thousand dollars.

co-operation agreement fully negotiated, a former French assistance personnel attached to the University of Ife had been given a six-month appointment to come and set up CREDU at Ibadan. This specialist in political science saw in his stay at Ibadan the opportunity to catch up with the time he had lost in writing his thesis. He arranged to rent an official bungalow that the Director of *Alliance Française* did not occupy and effected, on CREDU's budget, the only purchase of some property during his stay : a photocopier which he installed in his house. The negotiations he initiated for the co-operation agreement were not concluded and no agreement had been signed by the time I arrived at Ibadan.

In taking up my post, therefore, I discovered that the settling-in budget, which had been allocated to CREDU, had hardly been touched by the purchase of the photocopier and that I had only two weeks to spend the money or definitely lose this budgetary allocation.

In the office space that had been allocated to us, I found Wumi, a secretary that my predecessor had at least succeeded in recruiting, sitting at a small table behind an old typewriter in the middle of a room without any other furniture. This room was in fact one half of a former archaeology laboratory which had been partitioned into two. It was complete with draining boards and taps. The other half had been requisitioned by the Institute of African Studies during the vacation to accommodate a young researcher, a lone member of an Institute of Islamic Studies. Wumi had to suffer many times the proselytizing advances of this Yoruba Moslem who was seeking to convince her that it was indecent to expose her arms and hair to the lust of every Tom, Dick and Harry.

I succeeded in arranging for a meeting with the lady Director of the Institute of African Studies, not without some difficulty since my predecessor had not left a very positive image of CREDU behind. I negotiated the return of the other half of the room, the transfer of Islamic Studies to another part of the building, and the release of an adjacent second large room to CREDU on the condition that it got it ready for its own use. This meant that I had to arrange to remove the draining boards in the laboratory, clean out and repaint everything. I put in a library/reading room, which I equipped with furniture. The half recovered from Islamic Studies served as a reception *cum* archival



room for the adjacent secretariat. My office was set up in a small, self-contained room.

I recruited a second secretary, Elizabeth, a francophone Togolese, a smiling, placid matron full of goodwill but whose commercial zeal I had to check before she turned her office into an *adire*<sup>11</sup> shop. Wumi was able to leave the secretariat to Elizabeth and to devote herself completely to the library. Following the initiative of the CRELU in Nairobi, she went through the major articles of the Nigerian press (magazines and many dailies). She cut and classified, by theme, articles dealing with current affairs in Nigeria (political, cultural, social events, etc.). A part-time position was created for a student to assist in the classification and shelving of the press files.

Wumi manifested exceptional qualities in her position as a librarian. She had spent two years in Paris where she had completed her schooling when her mother was working there at UNESCO. A writer, T.V. producer, and researcher at the University of Ibadan, this lady was among the first set of people to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree in Nigeria. She was now in retirement. After studying French and documentation, Wumi had taken up her first job at I.I.T.A. She had very quickly decided to leave that segregationist universe and come to work in a francophone environment which was more familiar to her. This was in spite of a considerable loss in salary, my predecessor having been particularly hard in his negotiations with her. Apart from her work as a librarian, Wumi was a member of Amnesty International and she was a writer. A few months after my arrival, her first novel which was still in manuscript form, obtained the Nigerian equivalent of the French Goncourt. This was a phenomenon without precedent. It quickly found a publisher.

Wumi and her mother Mabel were soon among the closest friends I had in Nigeria. Their assistance was particularly invaluable to me when it became necessary to re-negotiate the status of CRELU, my predecessor having neglected to sign an agreement precisely defining the conditions of our association with the Institute.

## LIFE AT IBADAN

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<sup>11</sup> *Adire* is the name of traditional Yoruba cloth.

Finding lodgings was also difficult. I had about one month to furnish a place where I could receive my family for Christmas. The recession, which was biting the city of Ibadan hard, brought matters to a point where the rented property market was practically non-existent for lack of demand : rents were so low that the landlords could no longer maintain their property properly. The empty houses, abandoned over a long period of time, were in a lamentable state and would have needed major repairs. I ended up renting a villa in a luxury residence, the property of a group of insurance companies. There, too, the maintenance had been minimal, but the quality of the construction had made it possible for the buildings to hold out better. It was a debauchery of concrete in Hollywood dimensions, situated in one of those quarters at the outskirts of the town known as *Government Reservation Areas* which are found in all the big Nigerian cities. These are urban housing zones, residential quarters where the state government constructs houses for its senior functionaries. These quarters attract rich Nigerians, and so one finds there beautiful colonial style villas built in large parks and, since the civil war, reclaimed camps where modern constructions hide themselves from public view behind high walls guarded by armed security men.

It was in one of these residences that I finally ended up, at the other end of Ibadan. Everyday I spent close to an hour in the car to get to the university, and another hour to get back home. One shared the road with crowds of pedestrians walking briskly by, hawkers and beggars walking alongside markets, heaps of refuse threatening to tip over onto the pavement; herds of cattle arriving from the north of the country, dilapidated taxis moving in a lopsided manner and trailed by stinking plumes of smoke, and Mercedes Benz cars, the owners, propped up at the backs of their air-conditioned balloons, casting a contemptuous glance at the swarms of life around them.

Seen from the top of one of the hills that make up the city, Ibadan offers an unending spectacle of a dark-brown sea of rusty iron roofs punctuated by islands of greenery which still appear here and there. One wonders how so many people can live together, with so little provision of infrastructures. The infrastructures that existed before have ceased to function because of lack of maintenance. In the two years I lived in my beautiful luxury residence, I never saw a drop of water coming out of the taps. This did not stop the state water board from charging their water rate. I arranged to have

a tanker of water delivered every two weeks so that I could enjoy the comfort of my house. With much vigilance and frequent personal contacts, one could manage to keep a telephone line working. Electricity supply was often cut off because the most deprived Nigerians were sometimes reduced to stealing the bolts of the electric pylons and the cables and transformers. These were resold as raw materials. The outages caused by such thefts sometimes lasted up to two weeks. All my neighbours had their own electric generators. Consequently, when there was an outage, not only was I in darkness and a victim of the heat of the tropical night, in addition I benefitted from the concert of the diesel engines which surrounded me.

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN**

The University of Ibadan is sited on an open-plane campus with extensive lawns, brightly coloured trees, locust-bean trees, palm trees and gigantic bougainvillea. The English who had planned this campus had done it according to their taste and their deservedly world-famous sense of landscapes. There is an immense library that is freely accessible and centrally air-conditioned; there is a conference centre, a hotel, churches, a mosque, a theatre and a bookshop, in addition to all the usual university buildings. But all this is no more than the testimony of a past splendour. The federal government stopped funding the university system in 1984. Starting from that date all acquisitions for libraries, as well as subscriptions to scientific journals, stopped. The reduction of subventions to a minimum for recurrent expenditure could no longer maintain such expensive services. The air-conditioners in the library are out of order; the windows are open; the books are now covered with dust, and humidity takes its toll on collections that any French university library would be proud to possess.

Lack of water in the university residences has given birth to a business for water carriers. Reservoirs built on the ground floor of residences are filled by water tankers. The richest students have recourse to children who carry up buckets of water into their rooms on the higher floors. For the less fortunate ones to have a shower or to do their washing, they are obliged to queue up beside the reservoirs on the arrival of a water tanker, generally early in the morning or late in the evening. The basic food is prepared and served by private businesses in the university restaurants and is scarcely edible. The

same single meal is on offer everyday. The hostels have two, three or four students per room and it is difficult to study in such crowded rooms or to have any privacy.

If the university system in Nigeria is lucky to have remarkable teachers and researchers, thanks to efforts made before, the future is hardly encouraging. The badly paid teachers run away from public service or multiply their private activities to make money on the side. When the government does not close down the universities for fear of student demonstrations, the strikes are endemic. The teachers do not have access to the tools for acquiring knowledge, and the students even less : no books or journals in the libraries and no money to buy them themselves. The price of a scholarly work represents half the salary of a lecturer! It is a whole system which is crumbling, and the last generation of great Nigerian intellectuals is today 40-50 years old. Those to take over from them are nowhere to be found.

### **THE HAZARDS OF A LINGUIST**

It is therefore in the second year that my research with Sunday could really begin. The Nigerian office hours (7.30h –15.30h) allowed me to divide my day's work into two parts : the morning was spent at the university; the afternoon and the evening were spent at home on the Zaar language. The whole routine was only interrupted by trips to Lagos.

After returning to the exploration of the basic vocabulary, I went on to the transcription of the recordings. I started with that of the story of the attack on Emmanuel by highway robbers, then I went on to the tales recorded in the millet beer parlour in Bauchi State.

We installed ourselves, Sunday and I, on a large table in the sitting-room. So I was able to comfortably spread around me cards and exercise-books on which I noted ongoing work, pieces of paper on which I scribbled hypotheses, references and intuitions of the moment.

To put in place a reliable system of transcription for my use, I classified the vocabulary elucidated, verbs on one side, nouns on the other. I put the nouns in lists according to their tonal pattern to facilitate the subsequent confirmation of the

correctness of their classification. I made Sunday repeat them. The melody of the words regrouped in this way made a sort of refrain. The one whose tonal pattern I had wrongly noted broke the monotony and so made itself noticed: it was then taken out of the list of words bound together by a similar tonal pattern.

One day, a mere week after the arrival of Sunday in Ibadan, work was proceeding apace when we were interrupted by the front door bell. It was during the afternoon break and only Sunday and I were in the empty house. I went down to open the door. Fred, a friend, wanted to spend some time with me. As we were considering the possibility of meeting later, we heard some noise of broken glass upstairs. I said to myself that a nail must have given way and a frame fallen to the floor. I therefore calmly went upstairs to see how to fix it back. Arriving upstairs, I found Sunday standing beside the working table, his thigh with a deep gash, an ever widening pool of blood at his feet.

The table was on the high plane of the living room, which opened through a bay window onto a lawn, the lower part opening through a balcony onto a small valley covered with bamboo and palm-trees which palm-wine tappers regularly climbed.

Sunday had seen something move on the lawn and had thought that it was a monitor lizard, a delicacy highly appreciated by the Zaar. He therefore jumped up with precipitation to pursue it, forgetting the bay window, which was closed to keep in the cool air from the air-conditioner. He just simply went through it. I suspect that it is his shoulder that broke the window and that a very thick fragment of the glass had gashed his thigh. He had then entered the room, completely taken aback by what had happened to him.

Overcoming my panic, I stretched him out on the floor, telling him to press very hard on his leg. I ran to fetch compresses and sticking plaster in my bathroom and came back to bandage the wound as tightly as I could to stop the bleeding. What should I do now? Ask for assistance. I had a telephone line which worked fairly well. I telephoned Wumi. No question of taking Sunday to the hospital. Wumi, who had friends in medical circles, absolutely forbade it. She knew a surgeon in a private clinic. Fred and I put Sunday in the car and I drove straight to Wumi's house. She took us to the clinic very

near her place. There was no-one there. A secretary asked us to wait. All the medical personnel had gone out. We waited half an hour for them to return; then we gave up. Fred then recommended a doctor whose clinic was opposite his shop. The doctor studied in Germany and had many white patients. We set off for the doctor's clinic. Since distances are long in Ibadan and the roads are sometimes crowded by incomprehensible traffic jams, it was fortunate that the clinic was not far away.

On our arrival at the clinic, we met a secretary who asked us to wait while she went to call the doctor. The young doctor calmly examined the wound and prescribed antibiotics to prevent an infection, of the 15cm wound after stitching it. He took Sunday into a room, closed the door, stitched up the deep wound and gave Sunday a penicillin injection. The whole procedure lasted more than an hour. Sunday did not say a word during the whole episode. He came out of the room looking very pale and sweating profusely, having probably suffered quite a lot without flinching. He told us later that because the operation took a long time, the initial anaesthesia lost its efficacy bit by bit. He returned to the clinic regularly for the next two weeks to take his penicillin injections and to have the bandage changed. His wound healed very well, and the whole incident is now no more than an unpleasant memory of his first few weeks at Ibadan.

Our work continued until Christmas. I went back to Paris, Sunday to Gyara, each of us to see his family. On my return, I waited for Sunday in vain. After some days I received a letter in which he informed me that he had broken his collarbone while driving a motorbike in the narrow roads of the hills in his village. He had gone to the next village, to a bone-setter who took care of fractures. The sick go to stay with him in his residence until their limbs have returned to their normal form. He practised a treatment consisting of vigorous and repeated manipulations aimed at reducing the fractures in the first instance. This was then followed by massages with chicken grease and tight bandages. The chickens that produced the grease were bought by the patient and, once the grease was extracted, the rest of the chicken was eaten by the family of the bone-setter and by the patient.

Sunday came back at the end of two months, his arm held in place by a sling made of bands of cloth of uncertain colour, impregnated with stale grease, and from which

he absolutely did not want to be separated. I ended up persuading him to believe that his bones had fused back and that he could remove the bands and take a bath. This he did, and he discovered that he had recovered the complete use of his arm.

During Sunday's absence, Eski, who had heard of the accident, took advantage of a two-week holiday to come from Azare to work with me. I therefore benefited from his knowledge of English grammar to clarify the meanings of certain conjugation paradigms, something that took a lot of time with Sunday.

### THE ZAAR CONJUGATION SYSTEM

Zaar has a well developed system of conjugation. Assisted by Schneeberg's article, I was able to begin my investigation of it at Azare with Eski.

According to Schneeberg, besides an imperative and a Subjunctive, the language possesses five tenses (a Narrative, three Pasts and Future) and four aspects (Continuative, Perfective, Habitual and Punctilliar). The Narrative functions in fact as an Aorist, and the Habitual as a general Imperfective. The three Pasts are the Immediate Past (what took place the same day), the Remote Past (what took place two days or more ago), and the Recent Past which occupies the intermediary position. To indicate that a certain event took place yesterday, it is not necessary to use an adverb : the Recent Past suffices to situate it in chronological time.

Tense and aspect can combine relatively freely, and Schneeberg brings out combinations of one tense with as many as two aspects : Remote Past + Perfective + Punctilliar ; Immediate Past + Habitual + Punctilliar.

Schneeberg's description turned out to be correct in terms of notations and distributional analyses. It was observed, however, from the study of the recorded texts that her work must have been done from questionnaires, because other conjugation paradigms eluded her : a conjugation was set aside for hypothetical systems (unfulfilled condition) ; finally, in the tales, there occurs an invariable form which replaces the conjugation form and the person marker in concord with the subject -- in the following examples, instead of **ka** (you + Future), **mya** (I + Conditional), **ma** (I + Future) :

(1) **ka**                    **ɣí**                    **yáà?**  
 thou + Future    leave                    question  
*Are you going to leave?*

(2) **myáá**                **súú,**                **ma**                **ɣí**  
 I + Unf. Con.    want                    I + Fut.    leave  
**myáá**                **súú**                **hɲ,**                **ma**                **ɣɲ.**  
 I + Unf. Con.    want                    Neg.            I + Fut    leave + Neg.  
*If I want, I'll leave ; if I don't want, I won't leave.*

One can find the morpheme **ʃèè** invariable whatever may be the tense, aspect or mood, or the person and number of the subject :

(3) **á**                    **wú**                **tu**                **kyààn**                **ʃèè**                **fim**                **zàmba**  
 he + Narrative    say                    that    you                    SHE    do + me                trick  
*He said, it is you who have deceived me.*

where **ʃèè** replaces **kə**, that is to say <you + Narrative> ;

(4) **ʃèè**                **yelí**                    **ɲáá?**  
 SHE    see + Perfect                Question  
*You have understood, haven't you?*

where **ʃèè** replaces **káá**, that is to say <you + Perfect> ;

(5) **ʃèè**                **lóór**                **volaŋ**                **dí,**  
 SHE    carry                    groundnuts    here  
**ʃèè**                **ndəər**                **dən**                **wò**                **kón**  
 SHE    shell                    house    your                only  
*If I bring you groundnuts, you will have to shell them at your house.*

where the first **ʃèè** replaces **myáá**, that is to say <I + Conditional>, and the second replaces **ka**, that is <thou + Future>.

The absence of grammatical gender, added to this obliteration of aspect and tense markers, gives these Zaar tales and fables a very special tonality.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> What I assumed to be a new tense used in tales appeared, on closer look, to be the imitation of a speech impediment characterizing the hyena, and is not to be found anywhere else in the corpus. [note added in 2002]



## THE EVENTS OF APRIL '91

For me work was making good progress. As for Sunday, he was philosophically enduring the monotony of life at Ibadan. Certainly, he was enjoying such comfort as few Nigerians knew. The work that I required of him was, if repetitive, at least not physically demanding. But I was not working full-time on the language, and the few assignments that I could ask him to do alone were very limited. He remained idle for many hours, away from his friends in the village, alone in the big empty house. He had brought along with him from the north some cassettes recorded by Zaar singers. These singers, whose singing was accompanied by a little guitar with metal strings, spoke about their daily lives in the village, their marriage and money problems. But above all, Sunday continually listened to the song on the events that occurred in April 1991 at Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi State. This flare-up of violence, which was very localized and did not last up to one week, is a very sensitive subject in the region and the fire is still smouldering today.<sup>13</sup> The spark that lit the powder was an incident that should have been harmless.

In Northern Nigeria, the sellers of roast beef who sit along the streets kill their animals by themselves. This is generally the work of the Moslem Hausa. At Tafawa Balewa, a few Zaar also engage in this trade. A Fulani (therefore a Moslem) had come to buy some skewers from a Zaar. After he had finished eating his beef, the Hausa sellers near the Zaar made fun of the Fulani, telling him that he had just finished eating a dead cow since that beef had not been killed by a Moslem. The Fulani accused the Zaar of cheating, but paid anyway before going away. The Zaar began to attack the Hausa, asking them why they were trying to destroy their trade. The quarrel degenerated into a brawl. Zaar schoolboys who were just then coming out of school joined in. One person was knocked down. The brawlers brought out their knives. The schoolboys knocked down the stalls and set fire to the shops and houses of Hausa

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<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of July 1995, more riots took place at Tafawa Balewa and its environs. The federal government succeeded in suppressing the incident until the publication of an article in *Tell*, an opposition newsmagazine, on 8 January 1996. According to this article, which quoted figures that were certainly exaggerated, there were 146 deaths among the Zaar ; 30 Zaar villages, 8 Jara and Hausa-Fulani villages, and 77 churches were destroyed. Only about 15 men from the Zaar community were arrested and thrown into detention in Bauchi. I found Tafawa Balewa, at the time of the 1995 end-of-year festivities, patrolled by military police, and vehicles entering or leaving the region were stopped and searched at two checkpoints. I must add that I saw no burnt-down village or church and that no-one talked to me about such a massacre. On the other hand, I was told about arrests in connection with the incidents of 1991.

people in the area. Following this, the traditional and government authorities tried to calm down the situation. The mobile police patrolled the town day and night. The Igbo traders, an ethnic group from the south-east of the country and normally the first victims of this type of riots, fled from the town. At the instigation of the authorities their shops, with their stocks of beer, were pillaged and their goods distributed to the Zaar. This kept them busy and put them out of action for a day or two.

That was all as far as Tafawa Balewa was concerned; but the confrontations moved to Bauchi, the state capital, and into the neighbouring villages. The reprisals of the Hausa were horrific : destruction of Christians' houses; killing of the occupants. Eminent members of the Christian community were specially targeted : doctors, army officers, engineers. Following the killing of a senior army officer, the regiment that he commanded decided to avenge his death and organized the eradication of several Moslem villages. Headless bodies were piled up on trucks and displayed in the streets of Bauchi. A crowd of Moslems therefore went in a procession to the palace of the Emir of Bauchi to ask him to launch a jihad against all the Christians in the state, something he apparently agreed to do. The governor of the state, assisted by the army, just managed to stop the massacre from getting out of hand.

Between the villages, Moslem Fulani shepherds lived in camps which tended to become perennial : the structures were no longer of straw but of clay. Fulani villages were beginning to form around these camps. Sunday told me how the Zaar had driven off these Fulani and had forced them to vacate the region. Those who were slow in moving were massacred. In 1992 I saw the ruins of these houses. Now all the villages in the area where Sunday lives (the southern part of Tafawa Balewa division) are inhabited by Christians only.

In the press, in the rest of Nigeria, it was talk only of religious conflicts. The political and economic dimensions linked to population pressure were hidden. In the rural areas, it is a question of control of the land; in the cities, it is a matter of control of trade. And so, at Tafawa Balewa the local authority banned the slaughtering of cattle outside the places officially designated for the purpose, for reasons of hygiene. The Moslems took advantage of this ban to monopolize the new abattoirs constructed by the local government. The administration of these slaughter-houses, like all

administrations in the North, are in the hands of Moslems. The Christian butchers had taken possession of a cemented place which they had transformed into a parallel abattoir. The reaction of the Hausa at the beginning of the conflict can be explained by their anger to see their control of the meat market frustrated.

In the songs, the theme of war for the land is a recurrent one. The departure of the Fulani, looked at from the outside, is catastrophic for the farmers. The traditional osmosis is broken : during the dry season, once the harvests were over the shepherds penned in the herds in the fields and these herds ate the millet stalks and then fertilised the fields with their dung. When the rainy season came, they migrated to the pasture lands of the North, which usually disappeared during the dry season. Moreover, certain zones were transformed into irrigated lands, which make the cultivation of dry-season crops (onions, tomatoes, vegetables) possible. These zones also were considered as lands from which the herds of the nomadic shepherds were barred.

These shepherds have therefore a tendency to settle down in the south, where they come into competition with the traditional farmers. This increases the population pressure which is already very intense in Nigeria and has led to the abandonment of the fallow land system. The abandonment of this system and the lack of natural fertiliser means exhaustion of soils and lower returns. Since chemical fertilisers are too expensive for the Nigerian farmers, their harvests are just enough to feed their families during the year and quite inadequate to cover financial expenses.

The manner in which the Fulani were driven away has brought about another catastrophe for the Zaar. Traditionally, the savings of settled populations are invested in livestock entrusted to Fulani shepherds who keep for themselves a part of the cattle in compensation for their work. Obviously, the Fulani who fled the area went away with the livestock which had been entrusted to them. The owners have never recovered them, and have therefore seen, in some cases, the fruit of years of savings disappear.

The village of Gyara, where I stayed several times, and Sunday himself suffered at second hand as a result of this civil war. One of the children of the village had gone to study agronomy in Bulgaria and had come back to work in rural planning in Bauchi. His qualifications and influence put him in a position of advantage and also made it possible

for his village to benefit. The village therefore had a very deep well, with a modern pump installed, which ensured that the village had pure water all the year round. He had built a cement house in the village, which, except for the church, was the only one that had corrugated iron roofing. He had promised to make Sunday the driver of the pick-up van he planned to buy in order to engage in the transportation of goods. He had a tractor and was cultivating a huge expanse of land in the European way. This man, whom everybody called «Engineer», was among the prominent people assassinated. His memory has been perpetuated in the cassettes of the singers.

In the song that Sunday was listening to, a chorus was repeated again and again : «We will defend our land, we will kill them, we will bleed them like cattle.» Personally, I was horrified by the intensity of the hatred and the calls to murder in which Sunday bathed the whole day. But, after all, is this so different from the line «May impure blood wash our furrows», which is in the French national anthem?

### **THE END OF THE STAY**

At the end of the 1992 academic year, in order to make the research centre a little better known, I decided to organize an international colloquium on political science, the proceedings of which I edited with two Nigerian specialists. The novelty of this work was a distraction for me for some time; but it made me abandon my research on Zaar, and the time for my final departure to France came quite quickly.

At the end of the few months of work with Sunday, I had more or less established the basic vocabulary and the stability of my transcription system. The transcriptions of the recorded tapes had helped me to ascertain the conjugation paradigms and to describe more clearly the system of verbal classes. The nominal system remained confusing.

I was thereafter able to exploit these first pieces of work for a paper on the verbal classes of Zaar at a Congress of NACAL. I presented another one on nominal and verbal plurals at a meeting of the Group of Chadic Studies.

But these studies made me quickly take note of some fuzzy areas in my work. I had settled on a notation which represented a first intuitive phonological analysis, but I was still not sure of the transcription of modulated tones on short vowels in an open syllable.

I had realised their importance while studying the conjugation of about ten very common monosyllabic verbs. In addition, the Zaar speakers with whom I had worked all came from the same area and spoke the same dialect, the most modern form of Zaar and the most unstable. This meant that some of the information on possible earlier forms of the language (both from the morphological and phonological points of view) certainly escaped me. I did not have the means to evaluate the dialectical variations within the whole of Zaar. This would have given my work a little diachronic perspective and would have enabled me to collect maximum information for my colleagues who are comparative specialists. This information is indeed essential for the reconstruction of the history of the family of Chadic languages, on the one hand, and of that of the migrations of populations in the north of Nigeria on the other. I was therefore determined to go back to work with Sunday and Eski to clear up, one way or the other, the mystery surrounding the modulations on short vowels in open syllables and to carry out research in the different villages of the Zaar nation, in order to identify the dialectical variations that there may be in Zaar. This is what I was able to do during two research trips in 1993 and 1995.

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## REVISITS

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Full of energy and enthusiasm on my return from Africa, I did not take long to yield to invitations here and there, and I accepted too many administrative duties. Unfortunately, goodwill alone was not enough. In Nigeria, the distance between Ibadan and my direct hierarchical superiors in Nairobi and Paris made me more or less the sole decision-maker and executor of whatever concerned the life of the research centre. I was very disconcerted by the tardiness and cumbersomeness of the processes of decision-making and execution in the university environment in which I was now going to work. I learnt from bitter experience the importance of habits acquired within work groups in operation for several decades, and about the force of emotional solidarity, which carries decisions. All these, in addition to the preparation of my courses, left me with little time for Zaar. I was, however, able to arrive at some results in phonology (on the tonal system) and in morphology (on the verbal classes).

## ZAAR TONES

An initial phonological analysis of my corpus enabled me to take a decision leading to the simplification of the notation of the tones.

In her works Schneeberg noted that, in a modulated tone, every non-High tone is realised as Mid. Therefore, of the six theoretically possible combinations obtained by combining the three Zaar tones on a single syllable (LH, LM, MH and HL, HM, ML<sup>14</sup>), only two combinations are possible : MH and HM. This was confirmed in the lexicon where no contrast is found to occur involving the other combinations. This would therefore enable us to reduce the notation of the modulated tones to a simple contrast between a Falling Tone, which could be symbolized by a circumflex (â) and a Rising Tone symbolized by a chevron (ǎ)<sup>15</sup>.

However, in the conjugation, there is a problem that appears to complicate the picture. In the Imperfective, the number contrast is marked in the conjugation pronoun by the Mid tone in the singular which contrasts with a Low tone in the plural :

3s.	ʧiʔá máŋgónì	<i>he arrives</i>
3p.	ʧiʔá máŋgónì	<i>they arrive</i>

Some speakers contract this conjugation form into a single syllable and mark the conjugation contrast on the syllable. This results in a modulation, showing a contrast between two Rising tones : a Mid-High and a Low-High tone :

3s.	ʧáá máŋgónì	<i>he arrives</i>
3p.	ʧàá máŋgónì	<i>they arrive</i>

In the whole of the Zaar language, it is the only context, in which there is a contrast between two Rising tones. Furthermore, up till now I have not been able to find more than one Falling tone. I therefore took the decision to maintain the contrast only for this

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<sup>14</sup> The tonal patterns (TP) are symbolised by the following letters : H (High), M (Mid), L (Low), F (Falling), R (Rising).

<sup>15</sup> This problem of tone markings goes beyond the simple question of orthography. In fact, the orthography will probably not mark all the tonal contrasts but, from the point of view of economy, only certain crucial contrasts. This concerns a classic phonological problem which touches on the tonal system of the language. The simplification which I was seeking to achieve by applying Occam's principle aims at taking into account the economy of the language itself.

conjugation set /aá/ vs /àá/ and to use /âá/ (on long vowels) or /ǎ/ (on short vowels) to mark the rising tone elsewhere else.

From the point of view of the tonal system of the language, we are probably looking at the transition from a system with two modulated tones towards a system with three modulated tones, through the phonologization of the consequences of a morphological phenomenon. This evolution will be definitively integrated into the language when it spreads into other parts of the grammar.<sup>16</sup>

### ZAAR VERBAL CLASSES

I was also able to prepare a paper on the verbal classes in Zaar for a congress of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics. This work on verbal classes saw the light of day through a comical turn of events that is worth recounting.

Among the Chadic languages there are verbal classes whose working system, to state it simply, looks familiar to someone who is acquainted with the «groups» of French conjugation. Let us remember that in Zaar the conjugation prefixed to the verb is marked by a person morpheme combined with aspectual, temporal and modal markers. I call «conjugation sequences» the paradigms of these markers, numbering several tens of them. Following the conjugation sequences to which it belongs, a given verb will have a tonal pattern (TP) which will vary according to two criteria. First, it will vary contextually according to the conjugation sequence ; second, it will vary lexically. This lexical variation, which is not predictable from the morphology or the phonology of the verb, is characteristic of Chadic languages and had made linguists group together in classes the verbs behaving in the same manner morphonologically in terms of conjugation. In the case of Zaar, it is only the tonal pattern of the verb that varies.

Schneeberg (1971) had identified three of these classes. The first consists of polysyllabic verbs (essentially two-syllable verbs), monosyllabic verbs dividing themselves between the other two. To clearly show the form of these different

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<sup>16</sup> I thank my Director and colleague of LLACAN, Mme France Cloarec-Heiss for her contribution towards this reflection. [However, another solution seems to emerge among the younger Zaar generations : the MH modulation is reduced to M, thus keeping the original contrast as an opposition between M and R, maintaining a simpler version of the tone system. Added 2002]

morphonological classes (having no semantic content), we will use here the third person singular of the Perfective.

- **Polysyllabic verbs** (TP Mid-High) : **ndará**, *to be good, beautiful* ; **jisónj**, *to know* ; **rətsə**, *to decorate*.
- **High-tone monosyllabic verbs** : **súú**, *to like, to want* ; **ɔ́ǎá**, *to pull* ; **lǎ́r**, *to open* ; **ɔ́ǎ́r**, *to stay put*.
- **Mid-tone monosyllabic verbs** : **baɬ**, *to break* ; **ɬim**, *to call* ; **lək**, *to cut off* ; **mbii**, *to take*.

But while transcribing a text with Sunday, my main informant, I stumbled on the verb «*to rest*» which, in the Narrative, had the TP Falling-Mid : **ndáàlaa**. This made me to revise the systematic study I had done of all the verbs in my lexicon and of their forms according to their conjugation sequences. The tonal patterns obtained in the Narrative led me to come to the following conclusions.

The verbs of a High-tone syllable remain unchanged compared to the forms highlighted by Schneeberg<sup>17</sup> :

syllables	Perfective	TP	Narrative	TP	meaning
1	<b>ɔ́ǎá</b>	H	<b>ɔ́ǎá</b>	H	<i>to pull</i>

This class of verbs with the TP H constitutes a totally separate class, which is not large. The phenomena of variation are found in the other verbs, mono- and disyllabic together, which may therefore be designated as -H.

- **One-syllable verbs** : The class with Mid tone in the Perfective appears either with a Falling (**ɬǎà**, *to put* ; **ɓòk** , *to peel*) or a Low TP : **dùùm**, *to ruminate* ; **vàà**, *to be hot* ; **ɔ́òp**, *to stab* ; **bwàà**, *to choose*.
- **Two-syllable verbs**, which have the TP Mid-High in the Perfective fall into two classes in the Narrative : (i) the class with the TP Low-High : **ɔ̀lár**, *to halt* ; **ɔ̀iyét**, *to shake* ; **ɔ̀rndé**, *to snore* ; **v̀ertá**, *to fear* ; (ii) the

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<sup>17</sup> The forms of the Perfective and the Narrative are given here to highlight the differences between the forms cited by Schneeberg and those cited by me.



class with the TP Falling-High : **ǒúm̄tsó**, *to equalize* ; **ndwáàtsó**, *to grow old* ; **máàra**, *to slap* ; **túùrà**, *to push*.

So, in the Narrative we have five different tonal classes : three classes of verbs with two syllables and two classes of verbs with one syllable.

A quick survey of the classes thus constituted led me to conclude that all verbs with an initial low tone began with a voiced consonant. I put this against a remark by Schneeberg with regard to verbal nouns, concerning the phenomenon of the conditioning environment of the low tone by «*non-implosive voiced obstruants*» (from now on +V), and of the high tone by the other segments (-V) (Schneeberg 1974 : 139)<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, the two new classes were phonological variants of the two classes with the TP -H (that is to say Mid and Mid-High) discovered by Schneeberg. In the following table, the five tonal patterns of the Narrative will be compared with those of the Perfective, for which only three tonal patterns are found to exist.

syllables	characteristics	Perfective	TP	Narrative	TP	meaning
1	unchanged	<b>ǒ́áá</b>	H	<b>ǒ́áá</b>	H	<i>to pull</i>
1	+V	<b>bwaa</b>	M	<b>bwàà</b>	L	<i>to choose</i>
1	-V	<b>ʔ́aa</b>	M	<b>ʔ́àà</b>	F	<i>to put</i>
2	+V	<b>zìyót</b>	H	<b>zìyót</b>	LH	<i>to shake</i>
2	-V	<b>ǒúm̄tsó</b>	MH	<b>ǒúm̄tsó</b>	FH	<i>to equalize</i>

- But what about the verb **ngáàlāa**, *to rest*, which had put a bug in my ear and whose tonal pattern was always so unique? Another fact set it aside from the rest of the words in the language : its final vowel was abnormally long for a word of two syllables. Only some badly digested loan-words e.g. **àmmáá**, *but*, borrowed from Hausa) had this type of final

<sup>18</sup> In the text originally published in French, I went further into my analysis :

« The polysyllabic verbs with the TP Low-High all begin with a +V consonant. But for the other verbs, a possible conditioning is yet to be found to account for the distribution of the TP between Mid-High and Falling-High. The criterion is given by the weight of the first syllable. The verbs with the TP Falling-High all have a heavy first syllable (CVC : **ǰ́ngás**, *to refuse* ; **ǒúm̄tsó**, *to equalize* ; or CVV : **túùrà**, *to push*), whereas the verbs with the TP Mid-High have a light first syllable (CV : **rotsó**, *to decorate* ; **tuná**, *to recall* ; **sulár**, *to return* (tr.) ; **mbòtsó**, *to put out*). »

This was a mistake due to the fact that I didn't hear properly Falling tones on CV syllables (cf. *infra*, the passage on acoustic phonetics), and heard Mid tones instead. This led me to inventing an ad-hoc rule to account for a non-existent Mid-High verb class in the Narrative. Instead, all initial syllables in these disyllabic verbs, both heavy and light, take a Falling tone. [note added in 2002]

vowel. But this had nothing to do with borrowing. For a long time the mystery was total until the evidence flashed before my eyes : I had to deal not with one word but two : **ngaa**, *to take*, and **laa**, *work*. «*to rest*» is therefore expressed in Zaar as «*to take work*»<sup>19</sup>. Once again, the structure of the working language (in this case English, French, and even Hausa) had prevented me from seeing the uniqueness of the described language. But the irony of the situation is that this persistent error had led me to be more accurate in my description of the verbal classes.

- Pushed by the logic of the phonology of the verbal classes, I ended up going over again the work I had done on eight verbs I had isolated for posing problems of interpretation of their tonal forms. It had to do with verbs beginning with a consonant -V, and ending with a short vowel (**ɗu**, *to beat* ; **nda**, *to enter* ; **fu**, *to say* ; **la**, *to leave* ; **ɗja**, *to drink* ; **su**, *to return* ; **ta**, *to climb* ; **tu**, *to meet, to find*). In the Perfective, I heard a mid tone for all the verbs. It had nothing therefore to do with verbs with a lexical high tone. Consequently they all belonged to the lexical and morphonological class -H, -V. What form do they take in the third person singular and plural of the Narrative? The shortness of the vowel made the perception of the tone dicey, even after making my informants to whistle as slowly as possible. Most of the time, however, I heard not a mid tone but a high, sometimes with a rippling that I was tempted to interpret as a falling tone. So, high or falling tone? This was a pertinent question because it was possible that the falling modulation on a light syllable is systematically realized as high, in which case certain high tones could, in different contexts, be hidden falling tones.
- Could I find assistance from parallels in other parts of the language? No noun in Zaar has this syllabic structure. The only grammatical morpheme bearing the same uncertainty as to whether it is a high tone or a falling

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<sup>19</sup> This etymology was not volunteered by my informants, and it remains unexplained.

tone was the Remote Past morpheme (**ta**). Its tonal behaviour is identical with that of the Recent Past (**naa**), which in certain contexts takes the form **naà**, with a clearly perceptible falling tone because it is carried by a long vowel. The parallel between the two past tense morphemes strongly suggests the existence of such a falling tone over the Remote Past of **ta**, that is, over a monosyllable ending in a short vowel. Is this tone «simplified» under the form of a high tone or did it keep its form, which meant that I could not hear it clearly? I could not resolve this problem.

Returning to Paris, I appealed to the kindness and expertise of Annie Rialland of the Laboratory of Acoustic Phonetics of Paris III. But the complexity of the methods suggested to me, apart from the poor technical quality of the recordings I had at my disposal, made me to suspend finding a solution to this problem, until I discovered the tool for acoustic analysis of the SIL<sup>20</sup>, called CECIL. This tool consists of a blue box which can be linked to a portable computer, and which digitalizes the recordings in combination with an analysis of the sound signal, producing a representation of the intensity as well as of the frequency of the sounds, broken down into formats and melodic curbs. Thanks to a cheap equipment that is not too difficult to carry, I saw here the possibility, of returning to the field with a portable laboratory of acoustic phonetics. This is what the URA 1024, to which I now belonged, enabled me to do in November 1993.

### **THE NOVEMBER 1993 RESEARCH PROJECT**

This research project was to cover three facets of my work : (1) the phonological investigation, which I carried out at Azare with Eski and Sunday while staying at the State Hotel, to which I had now become accustomed ; (2) the co-ordination of the compilation of the French-Hausa dictionary which I had launched before my departure from Nigeria ; (3) a video coverage of the harvest festival in Sunday's village.

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<sup>20</sup> The SIL, or *Summer Institute of Linguistics*, also known under the name of *International Society of Linguistics*, is an association of evangelists whose aim is to translate the bible into all the languages of the world. In order to do this, they have produced special computer devices for describing and publishing non-European languages, which they distribute to all interested linguists at prices defying all competition.

I devoted about ten days to each of these projects. I started with Hausa, at Zaria, in a hotel where CRELU, renamed IFRA (French Institute for Research in Africa), had brought together four contributors and two editors, Ahmed Amfani and myself, in a kind of conclave to work continuously on the compilation of the dictionary. Ahmed Amfani, who came up with this idea, saw this as the only way to drag his lecturer-colleagues away from their daily concerns and to allow them to devote themselves at last to this dictionary. The idea was good : they did in ten days what they had not succeeded in doing in a year.

- The last time I was at Sunday's home, in the village of Tudun Wada, I had been told of the harvest festival (**Ləpm Zaar**, literally *the Zaar moon*), which was held every year in November. I therefore came armed with a tape-recorder and a video camera to record this cultural event. Without taking an explicitly ethnographic view, I wanted to collect as much information as possible about the Zaar cultural situation, which might one day turn out to be useful, if not to me, at least to colleagues who might be interested in such documentation. On arriving at Tudun Wada, I was told that the festival had ended two weeks earlier. Seeing my disappointment, Sunday proposed to me to arrange for an orchestra to come and perform to give me at least an idea of what the festival was like. I accepted the proposal.

### **THE TUDUN WADA FESTIVAL**

As the preparations were being made, I came to the realization that to arrange for an orchestra to perform was not an easy matter. It meant that a meal and millet beer had to be served to about ten people. I therefore had to buy the food items and the ingredients for the preparation of the beer, and I also had to find the people to cook the food and brew the beer. If to arrange for an orchestra entailed so much work, why not invite several at the same time?

So, little by little, a real festival was organized. Nine different groups came to perform, one after the other, from 2 o'clock until the sun went down around 6:30p.m. Two villages came together to dance and sing in the presence of the King of Tudun

Wada, who wore a white lace turban and sat on an arm-chair under a tree.<sup>21</sup> The singing, dancing and pouring of libations went on almost everywhere in the village until very late into the night, as each orchestra continued to play in its own corner once the recording had been done. As for me, at about 7 o'clock, after eating a little rice and roast chicken, I slumped on my bed, exhausted after being on my feet all afternoon in the heat of the sun, holding a camera in my hands and trying very hard to film in the chaos. The requirements for the production of a good video recording are hardly compatible with the tradition of dancers who normally dance clustering together in a circle around the orchestra and raising clouds of dust in the process. Three masquerades covered from head to toe with hemp fibres danced and entertained the crowd with their antics.<sup>22</sup> From time to time, the king stood up and, brandishing a leafy branch, tried to push the crowd back in order to make space for me.

In the end, I had a video tape of three hours. Given my lack of experience, it was of an acceptable quality. It showed all kinds of orchestras : the horn-orchestra of the king of the neighbouring village ; an orchestra of women dancing and singing to the sound of a tambourine while shaking some sort of maracas ; an orchestra of tambourine and flutes. I particularly liked one group: Two singers performed accompanied by extraordinary instruments. One singer, wearing an incredible *chapka* made from artificial fur, was playing a guitar made of wood and metal recycled from tin cans ; and the other, with a guitar of reeds in each hand, hop-danced, at the same time singing at the top of his voice with a nasal twang. The singer with the *chapka* was a giant of a man, enveloped in a large black coat, his cheeks inflated and covered with a long beard. The other singer, the musicians and the dancers wore bottle-green uniforms, their waists tied with a white band, and on their feet were moulded plastic sandals that one finds in all the local small markets. Two dancers, a father and his ten-year-old son, hopped about wildly in a frenzied tap-dance, each of their ankles heavy with a bundle of metal

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<sup>21</sup> You should know that the Zaar, in contrast to the Hausa, do not wear the turban. This turban, or chieftaincy, is conferred on the villagers of the region by the Emir of Bauchi, a Hausa. In a period of violent revolt against the Hausas, to see a Zaar chief turbaned in this way is rather paradoxical.

<sup>22</sup> The masquerades which have lost all relevance in the wake of the disappearance of their traditional practices came out only to add a folkloric colour to the event. Women were allowed to joke with them, whereas, in the past, no woman or uninitiated child could confront them except under pain of receiving an immediate violent punishment. As soon as they heard the noise of a masquerade cry, they were to rush and hide right inside the houses.

bells. They dared the notables of the village to encourage them by pasting naira bills on the face of the young boy.

Later, on a tape-recorder, I recorded some songs which women used to sing in the past while they were milling grain on millstones with their hands. These songs are no longer known except by a handful of old women, the din of the diesel engine used by mills having replaced the polyphony of feminine voices. Moreover, the festival, the dances and the masquerades no longer exist today except in the form of folklore, severed as they are from the cultural and religious meanings they used to have. In about thirty years, the Christian religion has stripped from their memory anything that in any way reminds them of the pagan past of the Zaar people.

Sunday, who was the organizer of the festival, saw his social status move up by a peg. As for me, I had created for myself a reputation as a patron which, if it enabled me to occupy a place in the village, engendered expectations which were bound to lead to disappointment. The village people now saw in me someone who was definitely interested in raising the status of their language as well as of their culture. So much so that I had afterwards to state clearly that I was not going to come every year to organise the same festival. It was, unfortunately, what the king expected from me. Two years later, a young lady, seeing me shopping in Tafawa Balewa market, exclaimed : the European has come back; we are going to dance!

People in the village were nonetheless beginning to show signs of impatience at not seeing concrete results from my work. My informants had to provide answers to questions that were becoming more and more pressing : How far had that work gone, that work which was so serious, so important, and which lasted so many years? When would they be able to read in their language? My problem was to make them understand that the practical fallouts from my work, if there were going to be any, did not depend on me directly. The description which I was doing was no more than the first step towards the elaboration at a later date of an alphabet that would enable the language to be written in a simple and economical way. I had proposed to several educated Zaar men to work with me to produce an orthography. I had put them in touch with the Bible Translation Bureau at Jos so that they could work towards the production of a Bible in Zaar, a project that was so dear to their heart. But this implied devoting fifteen years

of their life to work that was not remunerated, or something just as demanding, and they all said they couldn't do it.

### **A LITTLE ACOUSTIC PHONETICS**

Far away from Tudun Wada, at Azare, I tied myself down to phonetics works. Thanks to CECIL, the first stage was to associate the vowels and the sonorant consonants of the utterance with the melodic curve. To the unvoiced consonants correspond an interruption of the curve produced by CECIL. Only a voice associated with a cyclic sonorant sound makes the software to calculate a frequency measured in hertz, which, in relation to time, represents the melodic curve of the utterance.

I was quickly able to lay out the levels of the three tones in Zaar : at the beginning of the utterance, H = 120 Hz ; M = 110 Hz ; L = 95 Hz. These levels are relative, as a result of the downdrift phenomenon which lowers the general level of tones from the beginning to the end of the utterance, so that an H tone at the end of the utterance may be realised lower than an L tone at the beginning of the utterance.

The falling tone (F) is marked by a significant lowering of about 30 to 35 Hz, beginning at a level higher than an H tone, that is, for an F tone at the beginning of the utterance, an attack starting at about 135 Hz.

The rising tone (R), which is also clearly perceptible to the ear, particularly when it is whistled, is indicated on the graphs by a relatively small deviation in the form of a rise not exceeding 15 Hz. Sometimes, it shows only by a simple blockage of the downdrift movement, in the form of the maintenance of the register.

Let us recall the problems I was trying to resolve : (1) to work on the perceptions of my ear, and to verify my transcriptions ; (2) to identify the tones realised on final short vowels (H or F?). The results were partially disappointing.

I had first to eliminate certain reading errors caused by the context. The end of the utterance is marked by a sudden fall of half a tone, and every M tone is realised there as L. It was therefore necessary to find a non-final context.

Schneeberg had proposed to present all the verbs conjugated in the negative form by

having them followed by the negative morpheme, which she wrote as hɲ with a Mid-High rising tone. First, this negative morpheme was systematically whistled H by my informants, without any modulation. On the other hand, it changed all H tones into F tone, something that I became aware of only very late.

I therefore started looking for another context, which might enable me to perceive clearly what precedes it. I found it in the form of the direct object personal pronoun (M tone<sup>23</sup>), followed itself by the negative form to avoid its being lowered at the end of an utterance. Once the context had been found, the melodic curve corresponding to the short vowels turned out to be of little significance. On most of the recordings, because of the shortness, this curve came down to a slight descent of about 5 to 10 Hz maximum, which could as well be attributed to the environment of the plosive consonants. The only common characteristic between the «classic» F tone and this realisation was the very high starting point (135 to 130 Hz). Therefore, the only acoustic argument in favour of the interpretation as an F tone rather than as an H tone was linked not to the variation of the height, but to the height from which it fell. This, added to the morphological argument already mentioned (that is, the parallel between the two Past morphemes *naa* and *ta*) made me to tend towards the marking of an F tone in the context. Moreover, I eventually succeeded in getting some «good» recordings, which provided confirmation of my conclusion. Thus, in the following recordings, where the monosyllabic verb *ta* (*to climb*) appears, the contrast is clear between the high tone of *ta* (a Past marker) in the first recording (cf. Fig. 1) :

**mə tá ʃôŋŋ gwààs** : *I climbed up the tree*

and the falling tone in the second (cf. Fig 2) :

**á tá ʃôŋŋ gwààs** : *he climbed up the tree*

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- <sup>23</sup> I discovered also later that the Mid tone is realised Lo after a verb ending in a Lo tone. This was masked by the small difference separating the Mid from the Lo tone and by the downdrift phenomenon. But this lowering had nothing to do with the problem in hand.



FIGURE 1

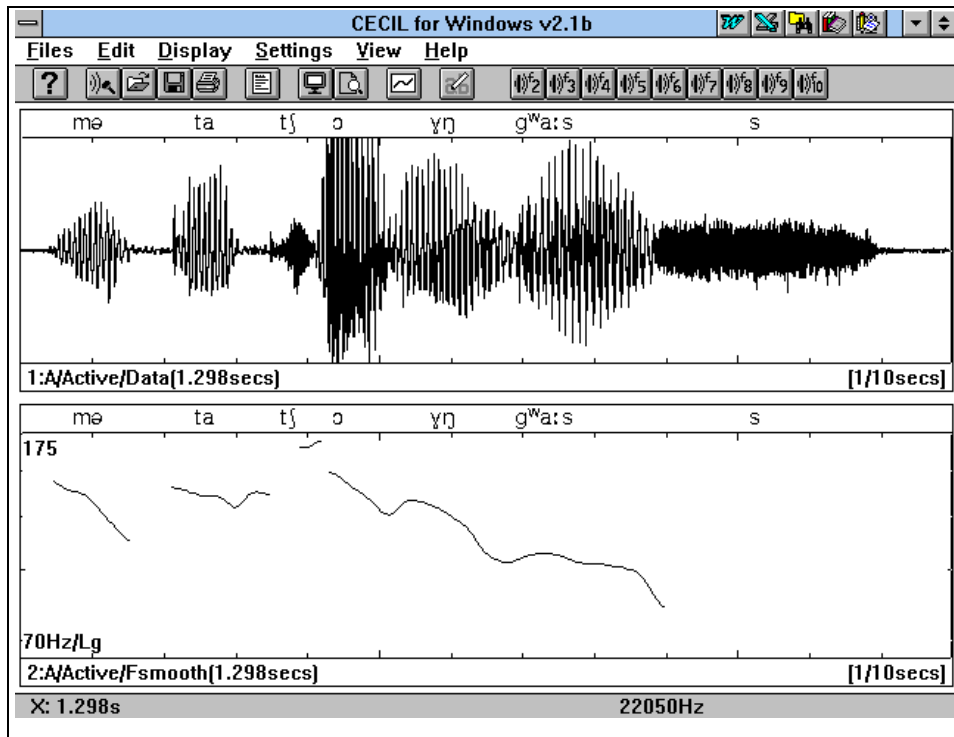
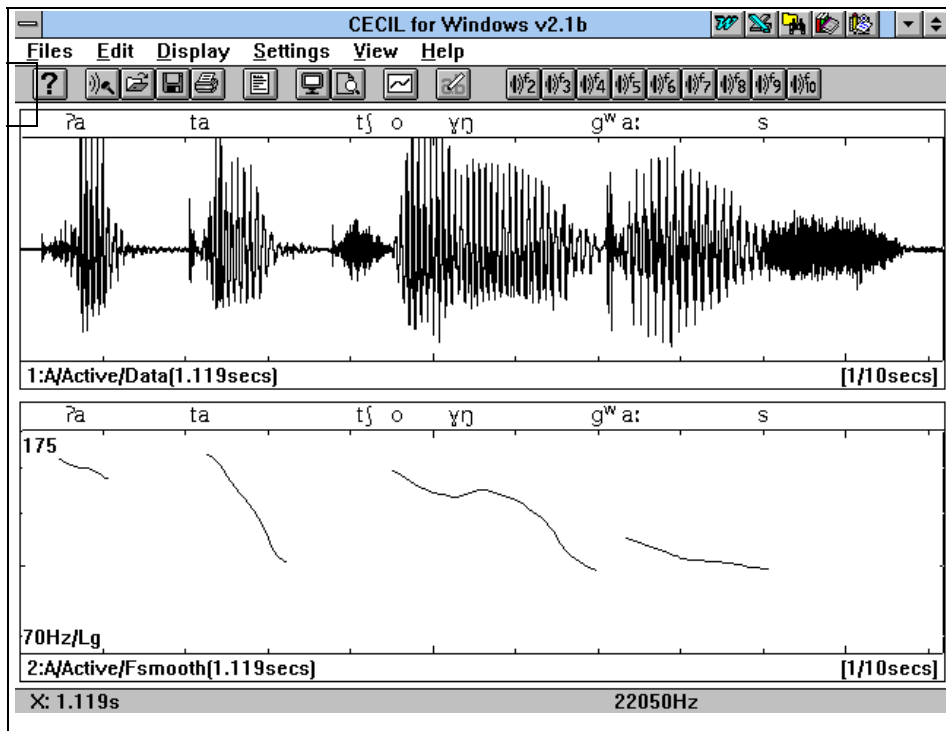


FIGURE 2



## THE RESEARCH PROJECT OF CHRISTMAS 1995

In December, 1995, the URA of INALCO (National Institute for Languages and Cultures Overseas), which had become UMR by merging with a part of LACITO, provided me with the funding for a second research trip to Tafawa Balewa to investigate this time the dialectical differences within the Zaar-speaking area. I spent the whole period of the research trip in Tudun Wada, Sunday's village, during the dry season. Sunday put me up in the two completed rooms in the new house, which he was building. I enjoyed the profound tranquillity of this stay, surrounded by the affectionate and teasing gentleness of Sunday's family. I felt perfectly at ease, relaxed, living in rhythm with the rising and setting of the sun. I spent Christmas in the village. A goat and a few dogs were killed to make ordinary life better. This gave occasion to excessive eating of roast meat and drinking of millet beer.

During the day, I walked the roads across the hills to fill my questionnaires in the surrounding villages. We set out on two motor-cycles, with me sitting behind Sunday, the second motor-cycle driven by Michael, the mechanic accredited by Sunday and Ali their own friend. This luxury was not a waste because each motor-cycle developed a fault at least three times a day, and Michael, with an ingenuity that is common in Africa, repaired the machines immediately using spare parts which he had brought along for the trip.

The people in the first village we visited were very suspicious indeed. It took us more than an hour to reassure the king and to convince him that our research had nothing to do with taxes or the secret police. Moreover, the on-going judicial investigations into the 1991 riots justified the people's suspicion. The reputation enjoyed by Sunday's father, the first (but now retired) motor-cycle repairer in the region, served us as a rite of passage, and we succeeded in persuading the people to answer our questions. Better still, once our working session had ended, they suggested that they announce our impending visit to the next village. Indeed, the next day on arriving at the second village we found the council of elders already assembled. They were waiting for us, having chosen one among them to answer our questions. That is how the research was conducted from one day to another in the six villages we went to. Frequently, the working session ended with a cup of *kunu* (a drink made from millet

flour), sometimes with a meal, which gave us the energy to take off again and face the roads leading back to Tudun Wada.

Among the villages visited I included Jigi where the Gus language is spoken. This language had excited my interest during my first visit to Azare. Research on the languages of the region (Shimizu, 1975) mention three dialects as far as Zaar is concerned, each one named after the largest village where it is spoken : Lusa, Lere and Kal. Sunday and the inhabitants of Tudun Wada and the region extending as far as Tafawa Balewa speak the Lusa variety, by far the most widely spoken. Gus (called Sigidi, from the name of the main village where it is spoken) is mentioned as a neighbouring language different from Zaar. But Sunday does not understand the Zaar spoken in Kal, a village that is nearer to Jigi than to Tudun Wada. He needed an interpreter to be able to communicate with the inhabitants of Kal, whereas there is mutual intelligibility between the Zaar of Kal and the Gus of Jigi. An inhabitant of Jigi even told me that in the past the inhabitants of Kal called themselves Gus, and that it was only recently that they were integrated with the Zaar, as they were attracted by their greater numbers and their economic success. The big towns on which the Gus depend for their economic activities are Gindiri (a village dominated by the Piem ethnic group), and, beyond that, Jos, the capital of Plateau State. Those on which the Zaar depend are Tafawa Balewa and, beyond that, Bauchi, the capital of the state of the same name. Their history is also slightly different. If they all regard themselves as coming originally from Bornu and from the banks of Lake Chad, the Gus had their ties in the west through Zaria before settling down definitively in the north-east corner of Plateau State. It is therefore obvious that ethnic and linguistic identity is a very complex matter, which has to take several factors into consideration.

Linguistically, the situation is quite interesting. At first sight the basic lexical corpus is common between Gus and Zaar. As far as the grammatical structure is concerned, they are also obviously related : the same organisation of the aspecto-modal system, the same syntactic structure, the same system of nominal classification (with nevertheless more developed plurals at Jigi), and the same system of verbal derivation. But there is an important difference : the morphological support of these systems is radically different. For example, if the conjugation system is the same (the same tense, aspectual

and modal system, expressing the same semantic distinctions between three different pasts, etc.), the morphemes which signal these distinctions are different and do not seem to be etymologically related. This explains the lack of mutual intelligibility between Zaar and Gus. The tonal system of Gus seems to be simpler than that of Zaar, with fewer modulated tones and an absence of tonal verbal classes.

And so we are once again, and in a pointed manner, faced with the problem of the genetic classification and of the identity of the languages and dialects of this region of Africa, at the cross-roads of social factors (political, economic), historical as well as linguistic. The idea of a linguistic family reconstructed according to the genealogical tree model seems to be more and more difficult to apply here.

### **THE JULY 1996 RESEARCH PROJECT**

It was the third (and probably last) research trip of two months in summer of 1996 that enabled me to formulate the ideas on the relationship between Zaar and Gus, ideas which the simple vocabulary questionnaires completed during my first research trip in December 1995 did not lead to.

I was again able to contact Ibrahim Jigi, a Gus whom I met in the village of Jigi in December 1995 and who had given me his address then. We worked together for about a week. This may appear to be a short period, but thanks to my knowledge of Zaar and the many traits it shares with Gus, I was able to figure out without too much difficulty the skeleton of the latter language.

With regard to Zaar, I had settled the main contentious issues relating to its morphology and phonology. This long trip, made possible by the hospitality of the Martinis who welcomed my informants and myself into their large house at Jos, was devoted to the revision of the texts which I had put together at Ibadan, and to the transcription of newly recorded texts. It was a comfortable well organized trip, the informants came one after the other to work in my study. Efficient work, carried out exactly according to schedule; but how boring! Locked up in the study, with no other landscape but the showers of water of the seasonal rains which were beating down on

Jos without ceasing, I missed the sun and the big spaces of the Tudun Wada savannah; I missed Azare; I missed the visits to the breweries of millet beer at □bi; but above all I missed the warmth and affection of Sunday's family.

At the end of the trip, I now have in written form the six songs of Musa Zamba which I had collected during my visit to Azare; I have five Zaar tales recorded at Bauchi while we sat around calabashes of millet beer; I also have two extracts of conversations that went on by fits and starts and which were recorded at Tudun Wada in December 1995.

### AND NOW ?

Here I am at the door-step of a new stage in my work. After the field research, the perpetual and sudden going back and forth between the recording of the data and the intuition of their structural pattern, here now comes the time for the slow work of analysis as I sit alone in front of a piece of paper, before the computer screen, or confronting a circle of colleagues whom I still have to convince about the value of my discoveries.

I know that the task of elaborating and writing up, the time-consuming, sometimes tedious, but necessary task, is rendered even more difficult by being done far away from all that sustained me during my research trips : the kindness of Sunday and his family, but also the landscapes of the African savannah. I have left a part of myself at Tudun Wada, and time scarcely passes without my recalling its vegetation. Rarely have I felt the serenity which comes upon me, sitting on a tree trunk, as the dusk falls on the tall trees of this region.

The locust tree is reassuring as it punctuates the landscape of the Zaar plain with its imposing majesty. It extends afar its protective and gentle shade, which shades off the sun just sufficiently to cool down its ferocity without keeping out its gleam. It inspires the same feeling of abundance, of continuity of life as the luxuriant oak trees which are found in the English countryside.

The baobab is unsettling, almost frightening. It is bloated, twisted, possessed. One cannot say what torment, what suffering is responsible for inflicting on its arms these

incredible, grotesque postures. It just about achieves recognition as a plant. The old baobab trees, their grey bark suffused with rose, balance between the mineral and the animal. It is certain that the ghosts of the bush have chosen to remain there. If not, how does one explain their strangeness?

Imagine a country spared of written symbols. When one is coming from the cities, writing is slyly propagated along the routes to our countryside : bill-boards, signposts, road signs. Our eyes are constantly directed, our attention captured, our mind solicited by these pointless signals. Oh for the purity of a countryside where the human presence is confounded with natural harmony : the ochre horizontality of the earth, the yellow colour of the straw. The locust trees underline these vast expanses with their widely extended dark-green leaves. Above them, in the distance, the dark-blue mountains undulate. Here and there, the vertical leap of a kapok tree. Scarcely visible under the locust trees, are the brownish spots of small houses covered with thatch. And suddenly, piercing through the red sky, comes the white flight of a troop of egrets settling down for the night on a giant kapok tree.

Little by little the sun goes down, the last glimmers of the setting sun go off, and with the morning star, the moon takes possession of the countryside. The glow is discrete, so much so that it is no longer seen in our cities where the night gleams with so many electric lights. There in the countryside, people are surprised to see their shadows cast by the moon on the ground, the white sand on the roads marked out clearly in the night, the silhouettes of the trees showing off their majesty even more than during the day when the sun crushes them under its implacable white light. In the night, the sounds seem amplified; the limited view is relayed by the ear. One hears from afar the rumbling of a diesel engine, a spirited conversation, a drum beating. Cheered up from drinking their traditional beer, neighbours intone a few songs. There is calm and tranquillity, a feeling of the infinite under the silence of the stars.

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## POSTFACE (JULY 2002)

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*I have been fortunate to have the opportunity of going back regularly to Tudun Wada, at least once every two years. I have devoted most of my time to exploring the different dialects of Zaar and the relationship of Zaar to the other South Bauchi Chadic languages. I have gathered material on **Sigidi (Guus)**, **Dott (Zodî)**, **Langas (Nyamzax)**, **Zaranda**, **Luri**, etc. I have published one article on **Guus** and am preparing some on **Zodî** and **Nyamzax**.*

*Last summer, more religious trouble took place in Tafawa Balewa, unnoticed by the rest of Nigeria. The tension was still palpable when I was there in January this year.*

*I have gathered a good quantity of texts in Zaar, thanks to the help of Gaba Sama'ila, son to the Sarki of Tudun Wada. He has become a master in writing his language (including tones) and has helped me transcribe interviews, dialogues and songs. His very consistent marking of tone has confirmed my hypotheses concerning the existence of a falling modulation on open syllables with short vowels. This has led me to revise some of the analyses I gave in the original text. The mistakes I identified have been corrected in this translation.*