

#07

décembre 2021



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Linguistique
et Langues
Africaines



- _ Floating tone noun class prefixes in Mada (Nigeria)
- _ Le nom du souverain dans les parlers « kotoko » du Cameroun
- _ Comptes rendus / Book reviews



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Comptes rendus de lecture

Book reviews

Erin SHAY, in collab. with Lazare WAMBADANG, *A grammar of Pévé (Grammars and Sketches of the World's Languages. Africa 9)*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, xv + 368 p.

By Joseph Lovstrand
SOAS University of London

A grammar of Pévé is Shay's third major descriptive work on Chadic languages following a dissertation on East Dangla (Shay 1999) and a collaborative work on Hdi grammar (Frajzyngier 2002), and preceding a fourth grammar due for publication this year (Shay 2021). It is another valuable contribution to the description of Chadic languages, an African language family which remains relatively under-documented.

The book has a flat structure; the main body consist of 21 chapters ranging in length from 4 to 28 pages. Chapter 1 gives a brief sociolinguistic background, including an important distinction between Pévé and Lamé/Zimé/Vùn Dzèpàò (Sachnine 1982). Sachnine's work is misclassified in OLAC and Glottolog as a grammar of Pévé, when Vùn Dzèpàò is actually a dialect of the related Herdé [hed] language (Shryock 1997: 33). Chapter 2 provides a sketch of the phonemic segments of the language with a few remarks on tone and other aspects of the phonology. The remainder of the book describes the morphosyntax, starting with a description of (phrase) final vowels under the heading "parsing morphology" in Chapter 3. The initial description of verbs in Chapter 4 points out that they are mostly monosyllabic, have no inflectional morphology and very limited derivational morphology. This chapter introduces the only grammatical use of tone (a high tone marking perfective aspect), description of a number of verb-noun compounds, and examples of a few verbs which have distinct (irregular) singular and plural forms, despite their being no inflectional form of verbal plurality. More aspects of verbal morphosyntax are described in various other chapters.

Chapter 5 introduces nouns, which are also primarily monosyllabic. Nouns do not inflect for number (although some irregular singular-plural forms exist), but the grammatical number of a referent can be expressed through verbal plurality, adjectives or demonstratives. Most modifiers are post-nominal, and generally, no more than one post-nominal modifier appears in a noun phrase. A small set of prenominal modifiers can express grammatical gender, relative age and size. Interestingly, the feminine gender marker with non-animate nouns has an augmentative (rather than diminutive) function. This chapter also discusses possession, numerals, nominal conjunction (associative preposition), personal names, and a num-

ber of polymorphemic referential phrases referred to as compounds. The final section describes agentive nominalization of verbs using a set of three prefixes inflected for gender and number.

Chapter 6 describes the distributions of subjects, direct objects and indirect objects, as well their respective pronominal representations. Subjects occur before the verb, and have two pronominal paradigms – one for indicative, and one for subjunctive. Direct objects and indirect objects share pronominal forms which also come in two paradigms – one for subjunctive and perfective (SBJV-PFV), and one used elsewhere. Word order is generally SVO, but non-SBJV-PFV direct object pronouns precede the verb (SOV). Indirect objects can be marked by several different means, one of which is an adposition which is prepositional in SBJV-PFV clauses (1), and postpositional elsewhere (2). In a non-SBJV-PFV clause, an indirect object pronoun can occur before the verb with no adposition, in the same manner as a direct object pronoun.

- (1) mum né zyè ne nà-n-a
 3SG.M give.PFV peanuts ADP 1SG.OBJ-FV¹
 ‘He gave me peanuts.’ (p. 120)

- (2) mum wá ne hu dǎw mbà ne
 3SG.M IPFV give goat one 1PL.OBJ ADP
 ‘He is giving us a goat.’ (p. 122)

Chapter 7 covers argument structure, valency alternations and reflexive/reciprocal constructions. Chapter 8 describes tense and aspect markers (future, perfective, imperfective, progressive) which precede the verb, except for the perfective which is expressed by a high tone on the verb. Uses of an unmarked verb form are also discussed. Chapter 9 is on grammatical mood. Subjunctive/imperative mood is primarily expressed through portmanteau subject pronouns. A number of clause-final particles can be used to nuance meaning, particularly in the subjunctive mood, or to express epistemic modality. Chapter 10, on “locative predications”, lists examples of verbs that take a locative argument, and describes directional and prior motion serial verb constructions. Chapter 11 describes a copular verb optionally used in equational, attributive and possession (“to have”) constructions which otherwise simply have a nominal, adjectival or prepositional predicate, respectively. An identificational construction also has a nominal predicate (no copula) followed by a clause-final marker *na* (labelled “impersonal pronoun” but which has other functions elsewhere).

1. FV: (phrase-)final vowel.

Chapter 12, on the “system of reference”, covers the use of adnominal demonstratives, locative demonstratives, manner demonstratives, and pronouns in discourse, as well as the use of nouns meaning ‘man’, ‘woman’ and ‘people’ as indefinite pronouns. Chapter 13 introduces a clause-final interrogative marker that occurs in both polar questions and content questions (with the question word appearing *in situ*). The next three chapters are short sketches (4-6 pages) on negation (clause-final with an optional preverbal marker), information structure and sentential conjunction. Relative clauses are described in Chapter 17 as following the head noun, beginning with a relative marker and ending with an optional demonstrative (as is typical in Chadic languages). An additional proximal demonstrative can optionally appear functioning as a relative pronoun in a position immediately following the relative marker. Chapter 18 shows that conditional clauses are marked by a form identical to the verb ‘to say’, as in (3).

- (3) hɔŋ là? gí kwáti ndó? si nambá dè ti
 2SG.F say/COND make food finish ASSERT 1PL FUT eat
 ‘If you have finished cooking, we will eat.’ (p. 259)

Chapter 19 is a detailed look at sentential and verbal noun complements, as well as auxiliation, with special attention to different patterns of marking same-subject versus different-subject complements. Chapter 20 is a brief sketch of comparative constructions, and Chapter 21 describes adjuncts, including adverbs and adverbial prepositional phrases. The end material includes a 22nd chapter with two interlinearized texts, two appendices compiling tables and listing common function words, and a lexicon of 600 entries.

Like many reference grammars, this book is primarily focused on morphosyntactic structures, with some relevant discussion of semantics and pragmatics, and a minimal phonological analysis. In fact, some basic aspects of the phonological analysis are left undone. This is explicitly stated in regards to the analysis of tone (p. 53), but also shows up in an ambivalence about the phonemic status of schwa, and a pair of labialized fricatives that are presented as phonemes (p. 34) but omitted from the phoneme tables (p. 30-31). The phoneme table also has another minor error – showing /f/ and /v/ twice each.

As is also fairly common (but not best practice), only a portion of the primary data the linguist worked with has been made available. The corpus of naturalistic data used for the analysis consists of an unspecified number of texts “related” (oral or written?) by Pévé speaker Lazare Wambadang, and an unspecified number of recorded conversations between Wambadang

and others (p. 126). Wambadang, who is described as an author (p. 50) but credited as a collaborator, is also the only person mentioned in regards to elicitation (presumably done in Maroua). There is no way to know to what degree (if any) this essentially idiolectal approach has influenced the analysis. A more holistic, community-oriented approach in line with documentary linguistics would have been ideal (e.g. Himmelmann 2006), however, given the recent socio-political context in northern Cameroon and its border areas, it is understandable that such a project might not have been feasible, and might not be for the foreseeable future.

In reference to work on other Chadic languages, Shay primarily cites the work of a long-time colleague, Zygmunt Frajzyngier, omitting reference to several dissertations and grammars published on Chadic languages in recent years. Interaction with general typological literature is also relatively limited. One effect of this selectivity is the appearance of somewhat idiosyncratic terminology in several places (although the context normally allows an informed linguist to understand what is being discussed). A potentially more confusing terminological issue is that the meanings of “imperfective” and “progressive” have been swapped in comparison with standard typological works.

The presentation of the data and analysis in each chapter is consistent, systematic and easy for the reader to follow. The glosses are less consistent, occasionally requiring some analytical work for a careful reader to dissect. Every grammar sketch leaves some loose threads, and this one is no exception. One intriguing area for future research is further analysis of “compounds”. This would require more data on forms that appear ambivalent between a nominal or verbal role in the syntax. The given analysis is that being followed by an object pronominal isomorphic with a possessive pronoun is indicative of a noun (p. 70-71), however this runs into an inconsistency when other forms are treated as verbs despite being followed by a different object pronominal which also happens to be isomorphic with a possessive pronoun (p. 123). Another topic that could benefit from further analysis is the so-called “impersonal pronoun” *na* (p. 195). Its distribution suggests it might be re-analyzed as an additional function of the demonstrative (“deducible reference marker”) *də* in its final-vowel form (p. 243, ex. 6; p. 315, ex. 75).

While Chadicists and Africanists might always wish for more, there is already much to appreciate about the breadth of coverage and attention to detail in this grammar. The insights offered into Pévè morphology and syntax are valuable for cross-linguistic research, including the curious case of an adposition which can either precede or follow its object. The use of the verb ‘to say’ in conditionals also seems like a rare feature for a Chadic

language. These intriguing details, set to a background of systematic analysis of a wide range of topics, make this a book that linguists are fortunate to have access to (not *open* access, but at least available electronically through subscription).

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