

A Historical Phonology of Central Chadic

Of all of the African language families, the Chadic languages belonging to the Afroasiatic macro-family are highly internally diverse due to a long history and various scenarios of language contact. This pioneering study explores the development of the sound systems of the ‘Central Chadic’ languages, a major branch of the Chadic family. Drawing on and comparing field data from about 60 different Central Chadic languages, H. Ekkehard Wolff unpacks the specific phonological principles that underpin the Chadic languages’ diverse phonological evolution, arguing that their diversity results to no little extent from historical processes of ‘prosodification’ of reconstructable segments of the proto-language. The book offers meticulous historical analyses of some 60 words from Proto-Central Chadic, in up to 60 individual modern languages, including both consonants and vowels. Particular emphasis is on tracing the deep-rooted origin and impact of palatalisation and labialisation prosodies within a phonological system that, on its deepest level, recognises only one vowel phoneme */a/.

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A Historical Phonology of Central Chadic

Prosodies and Lexical Reconstruction

H. Ekkehard Wolff



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Dedicated to the memory of three excellent fellow Chadicists,
who contributed insights to the study of prosodies in
Chadic languages

Carl F. Hoffmann (1925–2007)

Daniel Barreteau (1950–2007)

Russell G. Schuh (1941–2016)

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Preface

Historical-comparative linguistic research in the Afroasiatic language phylum suffers from deficits regarding robust comparative studies in the branches and sub-branches of its African member families, which constitute the vast majority of its currently known 382 member languages. One of the most under-researched language families within Afroasiatic is Chadic, whose almost 200 named languages constitute the largest language family within the phylum. Among the Chadic languages, the Central Chadic (aka ‘Biu-Mandara’) branch with its about 80 languages again constitutes the majority. Central Chadic languages are notorious for their internal diversification not least due to an assumed immense time-depth, which eminent experts like the late Russell G. Schuh have occasionally compared to Indo-European rather than to any of the latter’s constitutive families, like Germanic, Romance etc.

The current volume provides an in-depth study of the historical phonology of Central Chadic, unravelling the structural principles and diachronic developments that link the highly diverse phonetic surface representations in modern Central Chadic languages, as they are spoken in North-Eastern Nigeria, Northern Cameroon and Western Chad, i.e. roughly along the southern shorelines of the former Mega-Chad Lake, to Proto-Central Chadic (PCC) lexical reconstructions. The study rests on an online database (Gravina 2014b) comprising published and unpublished data on 250 lexical items from 60 (plus 6 language varieties) of the then known 78 named languages of this branch (Lewis 2009). The book offers meticulous historical analyses of some 60 selected lexical items, which could be considered controversial in terms of both synchronically underlying and historically reconstructed phonological units that make up the vocalic domain. It covers diachronic processes starting from an archaic *root-and-pattern* structure in PCC to the modern Central Chadic languages, and it distinguishes strictly between the regimes of *phonological* (‘lexical’) and *morphological* (‘grammatical’) *prosodies*, which extensively influence the surface forms of lexical items in the present-day languages. Particular emphasis is placed on tracing the deep-rooted origin and impact of *palatalisation* and *labialisation prosodies* within a phonological

system that, on its deepest level of analysis, recognises only one vowel phoneme */a/.

The study refines the classic *comparative method* and *internal reconstruction* approaches to cope with the needs of Central Chadic language typology, and it does so in combination with a bottom-up *dialectological* perspective. It remains informed by received typological wisdom from Afroasiatic linguistics regarding root-and-pattern and *weak radical* structures, applying it to a branch of Chadic that had long been considered innovative rather than archaic, because of the almost complete loss of a few diagnostic typological features of the common proto-language (like grammatical gender, broken plurals, etc.), yet ignoring aspects of phonology and morphophonology (like root-and-pattern and weak radicals) that reflect early or even pre-Chadic retentions rather than branch-internal innovations. The book provides new insights into historical (Central) Chadic phonology, in particular with regard to constitutive phonological units in the vocalic domain and their diachronic evolution. By identifying the ultimate segmental sources of palatalisation and labialisation prosodies, it unearths their deep-seated historical origins and describes their continuing effects on synchronic representations that tend to veil etymological relationships between lexical items in modern Central Chadic languages far beyond recognisability.

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Glossonyms Used for Central Chadic Languages and Language Variants

GROUP	language
BATA	Bachama Bata Gude Jimi Sharwa Tsuwan
DABA	Buwal Mbudum Gavar Mazagway Hidi Daba
MAFA	Mafa Cuvok Mefele
TERA	Tera Nyimatli Ga'anda Hwana
SUKUR	Sukur
HURZA	Mbuko Vame Ndreme
MARGI	Bura Margi Margi-South Kilba
MANDARA	Matal Podoko Mandara Malgwa Glavda Dghwede Guduf Gwara

Glossonyms for Languages and Language Variants

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MOFU	Ouldeme
	Muyang
	Mada
	Moloko
	Zulgo
	Gemzek
	Merey
	Dugwor
	Mofu North
	Mofu-Gudur
MAROUA	Giziga
	Giziga-Muturwa
	Giziga-Marva
	Mbazla
LAMANG	Lamang
	Hdi
	Mabas
HIGI	Kamwe-Nkafa
	Kamwe-Futu
	Kirya
	Psikye
	Bana
KOTOKO-ISLAND	Buduma
KOTOKO-NORTH	Afade
	Mpade
	Malgbe
	Maltam
KOTOKO-CENTRAL	Lagwan
	Mser
KOTOKO-SOUTH	Zina
	Mazera
MUSGUM	Vulum
	Mulwi
	Mbara
	Muskum
GIDAR	Gidar

Abbreviations and Symbols

∅	deletion of diachronic or synchronically underlying segment; non-representation of category
* <u> </u>	reconstructed/hypothetical root or segment
^x <u> </u>	invalid reconstruction
/.../	phonemic representation
[...]	phonetic representation; distinctive feature
[±syll]	ambivalent/underspecified for feature ‘syllabic’
>	input to output; change to
<	output from input; derived/stemming from
/_#	in (word-) final position
+	juncture between REDuplicated units; re-segmentalisation/phoneme split, e.g. /C ^w / > /C+w/
√	root shape incl. vocalisation slots (blanks, or filled by /a/)
√... (C)a	final lexical root vowel */a/
√...C(a)C...	optional medial slot for */a/
ə	epenthetic vowel schwa
+W	labialisation prosody (operating on the particular lexical item)
+Y	palatalisation prosody (operating on the particular lexical item)
<u> </u> ^y , <u> </u> ^w	indication of prosody (source/affected domain to the left)
aka	also known as
a ^y	/a/ affected by Y-prosody: usually yielding [e]
a ^w	/a/ affected by W-prosody: usually yielding [o]
ə ^y	epenthetic vowel affected by Y-prosody: usually yielding [i̠] or [i]
ə ^w	epenthetic vowel affected by W-prosody: usually yielding [ɯ] or [u]
C ^y	palatalised consonant (by origin, or as affected by Y-prosody)
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Abbreviations and Symbols

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C ^w	labialised consonant (by origin, or as affected by W-prosody)
^m b, ⁿ d, ^ŋ g, ...	prenasalised obstruents
C	consonant (slot)
CV.CV.CV.	syllable structure
CC	Central Chadic
fn.	footnote
FV	final vowel */a/ (optional, following suffixal root-augmental element)
incl.	including
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
PC	Proto-Chadic
PCC	Proto-Central Chadic
PLH	Proto-Lamang-Hdi
RED	reduplicative root augment
SIL	SIL International (formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics)
V	vowel (slot)
vs.	versus, as opposed to