

REVIEWS

Charles H. Kraft, *Chadic Wordlists*. 3 vols. (Marburger Studien zur Afrika- und Asienkunde, Serie A: Afrika, 23-25.) Vol. 1 ("Plateau-Sahel"), 261 pp.; Vol. 2 ("Biu-Mandara"), 196 pp.; Vol. 3 ("Biu-Mandara" et al.), 251 pp. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1981, DM 28/vol.

Reviewed by Paul Newman

This three volume work contains sixty-six word lists for some sixty Nigerian and neighboring Cameroonian languages. (The number of languages and number of lists do not match exactly because of duplications and dialect variants.) Sixty-two of the lists are from Chadic languages, representing three of the four major branches of the family (Newman 1977). Buried away in Vol. 3 of this work are also lists from four non-Chadic languages. These are Jaku and Bankala (Jarawan Bantu languages), Jari (probably the same as Izarek, an Eastern Plateau Benue-Congo language), and Yingilum (a presumably Adamawa-Eastern language spoken in Cameroon).

Most of the lists were collected in Nigeria in 1966-1967 (!). Only half of the lists were elicited by Kraft himself. Twenty-one were collected by Stephen Lucas, then a young man without linguistic training (but fluent in Hausa), four by Leon Jacobson, then a linguistics graduate student, four (contributed later) by Rodney Venberg, a missionary said to have had linguistic training, and three by other persons.

For each list the same 434 words were collected. These were transcribed directly from native speakers in the field and also recorded on tape. The tapes have not been published or deposited in an archive; but, according to Kraft (personal communication), they are available for use. Each list is preceded by a brief phonological sketch, mostly done by then graduate students at UCLA without knowledge of or experience with Chadic languages. A few lengthier sketches are provided by Kraft himself and by Russell G. Schuh.

Nowadays when it is so rare for linguists to publish basic field materials (especially word lists), one has to be grateful to Kraft for making available the large amount of material that he collected and compiled. However, one's appreciation in this case is unavoidably tempered by the disappointing standard of the work. Admittedly there are a lot of words, but the work as whole is sorely deficient in terms of reliability, scope, and analysis and presentation.

Reliability: In a work that contains some 28,000 entries, one of course expects and accepts a certain number of errors on individual words. The failings that I am alluding to are of a more general nature. Let me give just a few examples.

(a) For most of the lists, tone marking is totally unreliable. It would have been better to have omitted tone altogether (which is done in some cases) than to give the false impression that the tone marks are representing actually occurring tones. The arbitrariness of the tone marking is shown clearly by the practice of marking two tones only even in the case of languages that actually have three tones.

(b) Whereas distinctive vowel length is not only common but extremely important in Chadic (especially West Chadic), this is almost never noted in the word lists nor mentioned in the phonological sketches.

(c) It has long been known (cf. Greenberg 1958) that Ankwe (= Goemai) has a full contrast between voiceless and ejective obstruents, e.g. /p/ vs. /p' /, /s/ vs. /s' /, etc. The contrast is crucial to a correct representation of Ankwe and extremely important for historical reconstruction. The existence of the ejectives is totally overlooked in the Ankwe list, thereby rendering it essentially useless. So much for naive empiricism!

Scope. Although it might be considered unfair to criticize a scholar for what he did not do (as opposed to what he did poorly), it is worth touching on the matter as a reminder to other scholars. In my opinion, there are two general areas where omissions and incompleteness detract seriously from the value of the work.

(a) For the 400+ items on the list, normally only a single word is provided without any indication of nominal or verbal inflection. In the case of nouns, plurals are not given (even though these are exceedingly complex and interesting in Chadic) nor is gender indicated. (Would a Bantuist collect singular nouns only, in some cases even leaving off the noun class prefixes?) Similarly for verbs only one form is given, without any indication of related conjugational stems that might be used in the perfective or imperfective or subjunctive.

(b) A work which purports to provide basic raw data and nothing more could be expected to identify the languages included in some minimally adequate way. In fact almost nothing is provided. For example, for Pidlimdi (Vol. 2, p. 1) we are told only the name of the language, the name of the speaker, and the speaker's home town (a village that I have not been able to find on a map). The reader is not told where the language is spoken (off the Biu plateau to the southwest) nor that it is mutually intelligible with Tera (a better known, better described language). The only information about classification given for any of the languages is a referential number in the table of contents (not repeated on the page where the

language is introduced) which refers to a generally inaccessible, preliminary classification done by Hoffmann (1971).

The excessive unreliability of the lists and the shallowness of scope of the work point to a major error that dates back to the field work stage of the project. Kraft tried to do too much. Word lists of thirty languages collected carefully and analyzed properly would have provided much more valuable information than the word lists actually presented, of double that number of languages.

Analysis and Presentation. Here I shall comment on three matters that add to the difficulty in using what should be a straightforward source of primary data.

(a) Whereas in many languages it is easy to get a simple citation form for nouns suitable for a word list, it is often tough to decide what form to use for verbs. But whatever form one chooses, this has to be made clear to the reader. Kraft states in his exceedingly brief introduction that the items were elicited as indicated on the Hausa elicitation list. This is fine; but I wonder whether it is really reasonable to expect all users of the work to know Hausa and thus to understand that the Bole entry 381. *sulwo'i*, for example, does not mean 'build', as on the English list, but rather 'he built it'; or that 403. *gwaju badi* does not mean 'buy', but rather 'he bought a knife'. Besides, it is not true that the verbs in all the lists conform to the Hausa 'he Xed' model. For example, the Kanakuru (Dera) words 341. *tano* and 342. *dono* do not mean 'he went' and 'he came', but rather 'I went'/'I came', where the suffix *-no* is a first person recapitulating pronoun ("ICP" to Chadicists). Moreover, in other cases the verbs listed look to be stems abstracted from phrases or imperatives or verbal nouns. The problem is that you need to know the language in order to make sense of the verbs in the list, and if you knew the language that well you probably wouldn't need Kraft's list!

(b) On the whole the transcription system is easily interpretable, but even here there are problems of inconsistency and lack of explicitness. For example, following the general practice of Hausaists, low tone is marked (`) while high tone is left unmarked, but this is not spelled out. Failure to standardize is particularly rampant in the case of the lateral fricatives: the voiceless "hlateral" (IPA ɬ) is variously transcribed as *ɬ*, *θ*, *tl*, and *hl*, while the voiced counterpart (IPA ɮ) shows up as *ð*, *ɖ*, and *dl*.

(c) For each language the words are listed in numerical order where the numbers refer to the English and Hausa keys. The ordering is semantic within word classes, e.g. numerals, then nouns (grouped into parts of the body, animals, etc.), then verbs. Since Kraft does not provide an alphabetical index, the user must make up his own. More troublesome is the fact that the keys to the entries are only found at the beginning of Vol. 1.

Thus if that volume has been borrowed or is missing, the other two are totally useless. A separate key insert for each volume would have made more sense than binding the keys in a specific volume.

The publication of this work some fifteen years after the materials were collected and some ten years after they were first supposed to appear raises a general question of importance to all linguists. What is one supposed to do with basic field materials? Everyone pays lip service to the idea that basic materials are vital to progress in linguistics (whether historical, typological, or theoretical), yet no one wants to publish them. There is an even more perplexing question: what is one supposed to do with original materials on an undescribed language when one knows oneself that they are full of gaps and descriptively unreliable?

Personally I think that Kraft did the right thing in struggling against a myriad of obstacles in order to get these word lists published. Other scholars must be forewarned to use the materials with great care and discretion, but at least they are now publicly available rather than fading away in a dusty desk drawer.

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Rainer Vossen and Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, eds., *Nilotic Studies: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Languages and History of the Nilotic Peoples, Cologne, January 4-6, 1982*. 2 Parts. (Kölner Beiträge zur Afrikanistik. 10/1, 10/2.) Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983. 603 pp. maps, figures. DM 85.

Reviewed by Patrick R. Bennett

Volumes of conference proceedings are often uneven, unless they carefully select only a small proportion of the papers presented. This two-volume collection is a pleasant exception to the rule. Though the subject-matter is as wide-ranging as the backgrounds of the participants, the