Herrmann Jungraithmayr & Carsten Peust (en collaboration avec Michèle Laplace), *La langue kwang et ses dialectes (République du Tchad) : Précis de grammaire-textes-lexique*

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This monograph provides a grammar sketch of Kwang (ISO 639-3: kvi; glottocode: kwan1285) together with texts and vocabulary. Kwang is an under-described and under-documented East Chadic language spoken by 16 to 18,000 people that have settled mostly in an area between the Logone and the Chari rivers in Chad. The Kwang-speaking area is bordered by the Massa people in the West,¹ the Ndam in the East, the Bagirmi (whose Nilo-Saharan language is the source of many borrowings in Kwang and other Chadic languages) in the North, and the Gabiri (Tobanga) and Somray in the South. Herrmann Jungraithmayr & Carsten Peust distinguish two main dialectal continua of the Kwang language, namely the south-east continuum and the north-west continuum (pp. 20-21). The research reported in La langue Kwang et ses dialectes (République du Tchad) includes varieties of these continua. Most data come from the Mobu variety (south-east continuum), but there are also data from Ngam (north-west continuum), Cagin (south-east continuum) and some lexical data from Alwa (north-west continuum). A noteworthy feature that distinguishes the dialect continua is tone scheme inversion (“flip-flop”), e.g. LH > HM bádi (Mobu) > bádi (Ngam) ‘father’ (p. 21). Dialectal tonal differences occur in different domains of the Kwang language, and Jungraithmayr & Peust meticulously illustrate this throughout the monograph. Other differences, e.g. vowel changes, intervocalic consonant voicing/devoicing, the realisation of prenasalised plosives, impede intelligibility between speakers of the different dialects (see p. 21).

The monograph under review includes five unnumbered main parts. The first part, Introduction (pp. 19-25), briefly explains the research context, and describes the Kwang people and their language, including a few sociolinguistic and historical notes, and previous literature. In this introduction, Kwang’s relationship to Chadic and Afroasiatic as well as to Kera, the only other language in the Kera group of the A sub-branch of East Chadic (see Newman 2013), is briefly discussed. Kwang and Kera are not mutually intelligible, and, as Jungraithmayr & Peust report (p. 25), Ebert (1987) counts only 37 shared roots out of 100 lexical items of the Swadesh-100 word list. It is to be noted that comparison with Kera appears only minimally in this monograph. As the authors point out, a more systematic comparison of Kera and Kwang, including their non-lexical data, would be desirable.

The second part, Précis de grammaire (pp. 27-97), presents a grammatical sketch of Kwang in three chapters. The first chapter focuses on phonology. Kwang’s consonant inventory resembles that of many other Chadic languages. A remarkable feature, however, from the perspective of someone as interested in the Masa languages as the author of this review, is the absence of the fricatives /f/, /v/, and /z/; only /s/ and /h/ are attested. In contrast, /f/, /v/, and /z/ are phonemes in Kera, the closest sister language within East Chadic (see, e.g., Pearce 2013). In general, it is common for East Chadic languages to have a low fricative count. Barayin (East Chadic B), for example, only has one fricative: /s/ (see Lovestrand 2012). As for the vowels, Kwang has a 7-vowel system. While consonants tend to be more stable, vowels, for their part, are affected by many different phonological processes including vowel mutation (apophony), and harmony. The stability of consonants underscores their centrality in the formation of lexical roots and is reminiscent of the root and pattern organisation as found in Semitic. Kwang has parsing morphology: in sentence-final position, a final vowel is changed to schwa or deleted.² Parsing morphology is also attested across Chadic (see, e.g., Frajzyngier 2016; Shay 2020).

¹ In this review, “Massa” refers to a group of people who speak “Masana”. “Masa” refers to a branch within Chadic.
² “Parsing morphology” refers to alternation between phrase/sentence internal and final forms (see Shay 2020).
The second chapter (Morphologie) of part two contains most of the descriptive data. It describes the morphosyntax, including details of the pronoun system and the morphology of nouns and verbs. Kwang has a typical Chadic pronoun system with a gender distinction in the singular (second and third persons) and a distinction between inclusive and exclusive in the first person plural. Kwang also distinguishes between subject and object pronouns. Subject pronouns are prefixal, while the object pronouns are described as suffixes – even though these pronouns seem to lack a key feature of affixes, i.e. word class selectivity (see, e.g., Haspelmath 2023). I would rather analyse the Kwang object pronouns as (en)clitics, given that they can attach to verbs, nouns, and prepositions, i.e. they are not class-selective. Jungraithmayr & Peust also present a set of so-called “absolute pronouns” (p. 38), which, as far as I understand, are used in identificational non-verbal clauses or related operator-bound focus constructions, e.g. ‘(it’s) you’, ‘it’s only you’, ‘you too’. It is not clear why the authors do not parse these pronouns into subject pronouns and a copula, especially as the non-subject material (n)dë repeats in all the “absolute pronoun” forms (p. 38). Other pronominal forms, kànày (m), này (f) and kànày (pl), are used as demonstratives and relative pronouns (p. 40). While the diachronic details are unknown at this stage, the use of kànày (m), này (f) and kànày (pl) both as demonstratives and relative pronouns instantiates a known development path from demonstrative to relative marker (see, e.g., Frajzyngier 1987). Kwang has another demonstrative, inà/in, which has the demonstrative base n found in the Masa languages of Chadic.4 A similar form, ina, is found in quotative function in Peve (Masa, see Shay 2020). The form ina can also be related to the quotative element ana found in Musey (Masa, see Shryock 2010). This similarity is further evidence for the link between demonstratives and quotative elements shown in the Masa languages (see, e.g., Guitang 2024).

Nouns are involved in many different morphological constructions, which is unusual from a Chadic perspective. For example, Kwang uses a series of prefixal markers ba- (m), ma- (f), and ka-(pl) to form agent nouns (e.g. ëga ‘weaving’ > bà-ëga ‘male weaver’, kà-ëga ‘female weaver’), denomyns from toponyms (e.g. mòòbù ‘Mobu (land)’ > kà-mòòbù ‘Mobu (people)’), or nouns of opposite gender (e.g. sèmgì ‘lion’ > mà-sèmgì ‘lionsess’). The markers ba- (m), ma- (f), and ka- (pl) are highly reminiscent of the agentive marker *mV attested across Afroasiatic, including Chadic (Meyer & Wolff 2019). The originality in Kwang is that these markers reflect gender (m, f) and number while this has been neutralized in other languages where mostly only *mV is attested.5

Generally, the gender-number assignment systems of Kwang are quite elaborate, which is surprising given the trend away from morphological marking observed in many other Chadic languages (see, e.g., Baldi & Leger 2011; Newman 2006; Blench 2021, inter alia). The data presented by the authors (pp. 44-48) are rich and puzzling at the same time. Take, for example, plural marking. It is shown to be marked by a variety of means including (i) suffixation of -ay,6 (ii) vowel mutation (apophony), e.g. gisìgi ‘bone’ – kàsìgi ‘bones’, (iii) suffixation + vowel mutation, e.g. tìyè ‘pestle’ – kày-yì ‘pestles’, and (iv) -(V)n suffixation (+ vowel mutation), e.g. kìbì-ìdë ‘buffalo’ (-dë marks the singulative) – kìbìn-in ‘buffalos’. In addition, there are other isolated cases that seem particularly hard to analyse synchronically. My impression is that the number system of Kwang (and the morphology of this language in general) shows different strata of morphological change, some of which must be contact-induced. A unified account of plural marking alone might require the integration of concepts like prosodies (Roberts 1994; 2001; 2007; Wolff 2022) and root-and-patterns (see, e.g., the analysis of plurals in Mubi (East Chadic B) in Souag 2021).

Finally, Kwang verbs also host many means to mark pluractionality or different values in the domain of tense-aspect-modality (TAM). The description of the morphosyntax of TAM is thorough but the semantic content of the forms discussed is, for the most part, either unknown or only vaguely captured. The section on TAM also shows some idiosyncratic use of terminology. A clear example is the parfait (perfect) category. The authors have identified four different strands of the parfait. The

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3. The authors claim nonverbal clauses lack a copula (p. 39).
4. Masa is one of the four branches of Chadic, which also includes the West, East, and Biu-Mandara branches.
5. Note that in the Masa languages, one reflex of *mV is a prefixal CV reduplicant without gender distinction (see Guitang 2024).
6. Suffixation can be paired with the plural prefix ka-.
parfait 1 is said to express narrative past or an accomplished (achevé) state in the present, while the parfait 3, derived from the parfait 1, is said to be used only as a “narrative tense” (a case of idiosyncratic terminology). The meanings expressed by the parfait 2 (derived from the parfait 1) and the parfait 4 (derived from the parfait 3) are not known to the authors. A central property of the perfect is that it describes a temporal relation in which the eventuality/situation time precedes the reference/topic time (see, e.g., Klein 1994). However, this property does not appear clearly in the illustrative data for the Kwang parfaits.

The last chapter of part two (Notes de syntaxe, pp. 95-97) includes very brief remarks on sentence structure, including simple sentences (verbal and non-verbal) and complex sentences (relative and adverbial clauses).

The remaining parts of the monograph under review are composed of a) a collection of glossed texts (Textes, pp. 99-132), including 12 explanatory or narrative texts from the Mobu dialect and 1 from Cagin, and 16 proverbs from Mobu and 3 from Cagin; b) a bilingual French-Kwang lexicon (pp. 133-180) with more than 1000 entries, including data from the Mobu, Ngam, and Cagin dialects, as well as illustrative pictures; and c) a Mobu-French lexical index with 828 Mobu entries (pp. 182-191).

Newman (2022)’s comprehensive Chadic bibliography speaks eloquently of Herrmann Jungraithmayr’s contribution to scholarship on the Chadic languages (there are more than 10 pages with entries having him as the sole author or in collaboration). For the monograph reviewed here, Jungraithmayr has collaborated with Carsten Peust, who has so far written several contributions on Chadic languages, mostly from the East and West branches. This monograph is a welcome and meaningful contribution to scholarship on the under-studied East Chadic languages. The descriptive data provided by the authors are fascinatingly detailed and puzzling. The included textual and lexical data constitute invaluable material for researchers with an interest in the comparative study of Chadic and Afroasiatic. I would like to commend the authors for writing this monograph entirely in French (this commendatory remark also extends to the French proofreader, Michèle Laplace), which means French-speaking linguists in Chad and Cameroon will have easier access to its content than to comparable works written in English or, in some cases, in German. While this monograph is one good way to make Herrmann Jungraithmayr’s data available to a large audience, including Chadian linguists, its price, 48 euros, is a major impediment. Open access to the audio recordings would be highly appreciated. 7

References


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7. Some audio recordings have been archived with the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna: https://catalog.phonogrammarchiv.at/. I have not been able to access the recordings.


