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A grammar of Tadaksahak a northern Songhay language of Mali
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11. Summary

A Grammar of Tadaksahak, a Northern Songhay Language of Mali provides a description of the Tadaksahak language as it is spoken by the Idaksahak, who number about 30,000 in the most eastern part of Mali, around the administrative town of Menaka.

Northern Songhay is a branch of the Songhay language family that shows many features also found in unrelated Berber languages, such as Tamasheq. Traits of Tamasheq are found throughout the grammar starting with sounds, syllable structures, word formation and particularly in verb derivation. In many other aspects, Tadaksahak is clearly like most Songhay languages.

Chapter one provides information about the location of the people, details about the classification of the language, earlier studies done by other authors, some dialectal variations and some social and historical particularities of the community.

In chapter two the phonology is presented. It is shown that closed syllables are common, as well as syllables with an initial vowel and a closing consonant. Also open syllables are found. Striking are the pharyngeal consonantal phonemes as well as the whole series of pharyngealized alveolars. Basically any consonant is attested in syllable-final position and therefore consonant clusters with different consonants are common. The section on vowels presents evidence

for length contrast for five basic vowels. Only schwa occurs exclusively in a short variant. It is shown that the realization of the vowels is context dependent. In unstressed syllables they tend to be uttered in a more central position. In the section about sound rules, phenomena like assimilation of /n/, sibilant harmony, vowel contractions and cases of resyllabification are presented. The last section shows the different stress patterns for words.

The third chapter presents the morphology of the language. Several aspects of verb morphology and nominalization strategies look like straight out of a Berber grammar. It is shown that verbal derivation is traceable to Tamasheq for causative, reciprocal and middle as well as passive (which is distinctively marked). In addition, any verb root that is of Songhay origin is supplanted when derived and a semantic equivalent of Tamasheq origin takes its place. Another non-Songhay feature concerns inflection where the subject pronoun cliticizes to the verb and is always present even when there is a lexical subject.

Noun morphology is described in the second part of this chapter. It is shown that the basic structure of nouns is of two kinds, one with a number prefix, the other without. Even though some nouns are marked for gender, there is no grammatical gender agreement.

Plurals are formed with various strategies, like adding a plural suffix, or a plural prefix, or a combination thereof as well as a plural prefix in combination with alternating plural vowel patterns within the noun.

Nouns with a number prefix are mostly traceable to Tamasheq as far as they are not loans from Arabic. For nominalization it is also the origin of the term that decides which strategy is used. In addition to this, actor and instrument nominalization follow the Berber pattern, prefixing the respective morphemes. While compounding is a very productive feature in Songhay languages, it is not in Tadakshak. The pronouns are presented, as well as the postpositions and the few prepositions. A larger section is dedicated to the description of the way adjectives are formed from verbal roots. Again, there is a Songhay and a Tamasheq strategy of doing it, depending on the origin of the root. However, it is shown that the Tamasheq suffix is gaining acceptance also for Songhay roots. The chapter is closed with a presentation of the numerals.

Chapter four presents the syntax of the language. First noun phrases (NP) are covered. As many as five different demonstratives can follow a noun while one precedes it. An additional determiner can be found in any noun phrase with a different function from that of the demonstratives; numerals in NPs behave differently depending on their value, the different paradigms are presented as well as the NP syntax with other quantifying modifiers and adjectives.

The following section presents uses of the mood-aspect-negation (MAN) morphemes which are mutually exclusive, somewhat different from other Songhay languages where a negation morpheme can be

combined with a modal morpheme. Imperatives distinguish singular from plural addressees and an imperative particle marks all negative imperatives.

The next longer section shows the basic argument structure.

Tadaksahak is an SVO language, which exhibits quite a number of labile verbs used in both intransitive and transitive constructions.

Verbal noun complements are very common while there is also a class of verbs that takes two unmarked nominal complements. A subsection presents different types of clausal complements, the most widely used being one with a complementizer particle. A short section presents copular clauses together with existential, locational and possessive predications.

A larger section describes the two different strategies for relative clauses (RC). There is the restrictive RC with the head followed by the modifying clause without a resumptive pronoun for any grammatical function. A noun can be extracted from a postpositional phrase. The non-restrictive RC is formed with a *sa* linker after the modified noun phrase. *sa* is followed by a complete clause.

Possessor relativization is only possible with *sa*.

In the next section the different syntactic structures for topicalization and focalization in a simple clause are shown. Then interrogative morphemes and structures are presented as well as a number of other particles that function at clause level.

The last section deals with complex sentences such as clausal

coordination, purpose and causal clauses, conditionals and temporal subordination.

The appendixes give two texts with glosses, lists of verbs of Songhay origin with their causative and/or passive forms, an English – Tadaksahak wordlist and a wordlist containing Songhay cognates.