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Le grammaire du noon

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Summary

Noon is an Atlantic (Saafi) language spoken in Thiès area by approximately 32,000 speakers (Ethnologue 2007). The population has decreased considerably (Wane 2008) since the language is no longer transmitted to younger generation. The name is used by the speakers in reference to both their ethnic group and their language.

This thesis provides a description of cangin-noon, one of the dialects of noon, which focussed on several aspects of the language: the grammar, cultural events, narratives and riddles. The analysis is based on the collected data that are part of the thesis. The data comprises of various types of communicative events recorded in audio and video formats supplemented with data from elicitations. A large number of the data (15 hours) were transcribed and translated into English and/or French and is currently being archived in an electronic format available for future studies at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS, University of London. This aim was motivated by some urgency because the language, the culture and the tradition are disappearing.

The thesis is divided into 8 main parts including the language and its speakers, nominals and noun phrase, verbal morphology, ideophones, interjections and linguistic routines, basic syntax and divination.

Chapter 1 introduces the language and its speakers, presents the fieldwork and data collection and outlines the methodology adopted throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 gives information on the segmental phonology and the phonological processes of noon. The most phonological features are the consonant distributions, the vowel harmony based on ATR feature and the consonant and vowel length. I also discuss some phonological processes including vowel and syllable deletion. I present a critical overview of stress and tone including previous discussions on this subject (see Lopus-Sylla 2010 et Soukka 2000).

Chapter 3 deals with the nominal morphology. I discuss the root, the compound nouns, the reduplication, which is the process of copying all of a root and the derivational suffixes of the nouns.

Chapter 4 consists of critical overview of nominal classification. Little study has been done on the noun class system (see Lopus-Sylla 2010 and Soukka 2000). However, there are some irregularities and discrepancies with regard to the number and the delimitation of the noun class markers. I further investigate the nominal classification that consists of two agreement systems for nouns: one for modifiers that are attached to the noun and one for modifiers that are separate. The first agreement system is a typical Niger-Congo noun class system: an overt gender

system with partial semantic motivation and singular/plural class pairings. The second system, for agreement further away from the head noun, has an additional agreement singular/plural class pair for human nouns.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on pronouns. Pronouns exhibit \pm human distinctions. The subject pronouns are free pronouns that appear in isolation in the subject position. The first personal pronoun plural has inclusive versus exclusive distinctions. The object pronouns show \pm human distinctions : the +human object pronouns are bound pronouns suffixed to the verb and the –human object pronouns are free pronouns that show agreement with the noun they refer. Some interrogative pronouns exhibit \pm human distinctions ; others show agreement with the noun they refer.

Chapter 7 deals with two types of possessive constructions : possessive construction with juxtaposition and possessive construction overtly marked by a genitive modifier. There are two types of genitive modifiers *Cëŋ* and *Cuu*, they can be used as possessive pronominal clitics. The genitive modifier *Cëŋ* is attached to a head noun and the genitive modifier *Cuu* is separate to the head noun. The latter shows a distinction in the diminutive and human features.

Chapter 8 presents prepositions and prepositional phrases. The prepositions *në* ‘and, with’ and *ngë* ‘in, to, on’ are quite used in noon because of their several functions. They can form prepositional phrases when followed by temporal and/or locative nouns.

Chapters 9 and 10 consist of an overview of verbal morphology : derivational suffixes, conjugational affixes, auxiliaries and particles. I present previous studies on the derivational suffixes and I discuss in details their forms and functions. There are an important number of derivational suffixes. Verbs can be modified by one or more derivational suffixes ; I discuss their order and propose some combinations. The conjugational system is predominantly aspectual. Tense and aspect markers are presented and discussed.

Chapter 11 is concerned with ideophones, interjections and linguistic routines. I first discuss the phonological and morphological structures of ideophones. Ideophones comprise of one or two syllables with long vowels : CVVC or CVVCVVC. They can be marked by the repetition of all or part of the root to express intensity. Ideophones play an important syntactic role ; they may function as adverbs following specific verbs or as predicates. Second, I present interjections classifying them into three functions : expressive interjection, phatic interjections and conative interjections (Ameka 1992). Third, I discuss some linguistic routines in greetings, leave-taking, folktales and riddles.

Chapter 12 presents a brief discussion of simple and complex clauses. There are two types of simple clauses: verbless and verbal clauses. The verbless clauses comprise of equative construction, existential construction, presentative construction and locative construction. I describe the basic structure for verbal clauses and discuss the types of complex clauses.

Chapter 13 deals with divination from a multi-modal and linguistic perspective. I first present the various divination systems in Senegal and focus on noon divination's methods. There are three types of divination seances in noon: (1) therapeutic divination consists of using curative plants to treat disease; (2) private divination is performed to diagnose problems of individual; (3) public divination takes place in the bush but nowadays it is often performed in a field of the village. The diviners considered as 'elites' take part in the séance. The public divination is performed prior to some events (naming ceremony, marriage, death, etc.). The aim is to protect the community against harming forces. I try to investigate the divinatory techniques of noon. There are four geomantic 'houses' in which geomantic figures can be set up in even or odd numbers. The even figures are called witnesses and the odd figures are a reproduction of houses 2 and 4; the third and the fifth in the odd figures represent the judge, called *koh* by noon diviners. In noon divination, the geomantic figures can be sum up into three with regard to their symbolic characteristics and functions :

The geomantic figure 1 represents the place where diviners make the request. It symbolizes the witness ; it shows diviners what they are looking for. This figure is characterized by instability, i.e., everything that is placed in this figure is exposed to tribulations. The geomantic figure 2 is the place where findings are shown. It is also the arena where diviners combat evil spirits. It is stable and mobile because it is influence by its environment. For instance, the geomantic figure delivers a message that may not be effective only having protected it against other maleficent forces that prevent its realization. The geomantic figure 3 represents *koh* 'god'; it is stable and invariant. It is the judge. It confirms a message delivered by a geomantic figure and pronounces the sentence.

