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The phonology of Proto-Central Chadic : the reconstruction of the phonology and lexicon of Proto-Central Chadic, and the linguistic history of the Central Chadic languages

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English Summary

The goal of this study is to reconstruct the phonology of Proto-Central Chadic. Central Chadic is a language group spread across Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria and is a primary branch of the Chadic language family within the Afroasiatic phylum of languages. It is characterised by a high degree of phonological diversity, much higher than within the other branches of Chadic. Previous reconstructions of Chadic or its branches have focussed on the consonantal system. Here we will also tackle what may loosely be called the vowel system. The result is a reconstruction of the sound system of Proto-Central Chadic (though not including tone or stress), and of the daughter languages of Proto-Central Chadic, the ancestors of the present day groups of Central Chadic languages. The study includes a detailed sub-classification of the Central Chadic languages, and the reconstruction of more than two hundred lexical items.

In general, the Central Chadic languages are described as possessing very few underlying vowels, typically two, but in some cases just one (Barreteau 1988; Bow 1999). However the number of surface vowels is often considerably higher. There are two principal causes for this. Firstly, labialized and palatalized consonants play an important role in modifying the underlying vowels. Secondly, word-level vowel-harmony can cause the fronting or back-rounding of vowels throughout a word.

In the languages where vowel harmony is present, it is analysed as being caused by a phonemic entity known in Chadic linguistics simply as a 'prosody'. In this study we will show that there are languages where the palatalization of consonants is also due to the presence of a prosody.

From this basis we will categorise the Central Chadic languages typologically as following one of four phonological systems. The first is the Vowel Prosody system, where the predominant feature is the presence of vowel harmony. The second is the Consonant Prosody system, where the languages possess large sets of palatalized and labialized consonants. The third system is the Mixed Prosody system, where features of both Vowel Prosody and Consonant Prosody are present, and the fourth system is the Kotoko system, where there are no active prosodies.

In the Central Chadic languages, as well as in the history of Central Chadic languages, there is a strong interplay between the vocalic, consonantal and prosodic systems. Before any comparative analysis can be done, it is essential that the roles of these three components are understood in the individual languages.

Our task, then, is not only to reconstruct the underlying vowels and consonants of Proto-Central Chadic, but also to reconstruct the history of labialized and palatalized consonants, along with the palatalization and labialization prosodies.

There are several important results that come out of the study. The first is the reconstruction of a palatalization prosody for Proto-Central Chadic that has reflexes that cause front vowel harmony in Vowel Prosody languages and palatalize consonants in Consonant Prosody languages.

The second is to show that back-rounding vowel harmony and the labialization of labial consonants are not due to the existence of a Proto-Central Chadic labialization prosody, but are of comparatively recent origin, and are the result of processes that have affected labialized velars.

A third result is the reconstruction of three underlying vowel phonemes for Proto-Central Chadic. This system was largely preserved in the Consonant Prosody Languages, but was reduced to a two vowel system in the Vowel Prosody languages.

The book is in three sections. Section I, covering the first four chapters, gives the background for the rest of the study. Chapter 1 sets out the goals of the study, and describes the methodology used. It also presents the geographical and cultural location of the Central Chadic peoples, and gives an overview of the sources used to provide data for the study. Chapter 2 looks at the genetic and areal affiliations of the Central Chadic languages, summarising the previous research on the classification of the languages, and describing the main areas of language contact and contact-induced change. In chapter 3 we present the genetic classification used in the study, giving evidence from regular sound changes. We also describe several interesting and unusual phonological processes that are found within the history of Central Chadic, such as compensatory reduplication and compensatory prefixation. Chapter 4 is a

review of the literature on Central Chadic phonology, highlighting the key issues.

Section II, comprising chapters 5 to 9, presents a typology of the phonological systems that are present within Central Chadic, and describes the key phonological features of most of the individual languages and also the group proto-languages. Chapter 5 covers the Vowel Prosody languages, which are characterized by systems of vowel harmony, and chapter 6 describes the Consonant Prosody languages, which are characterized by complex systems of consonant palatalization and labialization. In chapter 7 we look at the Mixed Prosody languages, where elements of the Vowel Prosody and Consonant Prosody systems have combined, and chapter 8 describes the Kotoko languages, where neither the Vowel Prosody nor the Consonant Prosody systems are present. Chapter 9 is a summary of the phonological features of the languages and their immediate ancestor languages.

In section III – chapters 10 to 13 – we turn our attention to the reconstruction of the phonological system of Proto-Central Chadic. Chapter 10 gives a reconstruction of the consonantal system, chapter 11 looks at the labialization and palatalization prosodies, and chapter 12 reconstructs the vowel system. In chapter 13 there is a summary of the Proto-Central Chadic phonological system, and a possible scenario for the history of the Central Chadic peoples, covering people movements, linguistic developments and language contact.

Full data for the reconstructions used in the analysis is available online, and can be found at <http://centralchadic.webonary.org/>. There is also a summary of the Proto-Central Chadic lexicon, along with key isoglosses and loanwords, at <http://protocentralchadic.webonary.org/>.