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Grammaire cuvok: langue tchadique centrale du Cameroun

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Cover Page



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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

This dissertation is the first large-scale study of Cuvok, a Central Chadic language from Cameroon. The book is divided into 14 chapters.

Chapter 1 is a general introduction. It deals with general information about the language and its speakers. Here we find a presentation of the geographical, historical and economic background of Tchouvok. With regard to the language, this chapter discusses its classification, previous research, sociolinguistic context, and its importance in communication in the Tchouvok village. Our research has shown that Cuvok is still used in many domains, but it is increasingly in competition with French and Fulfulde because of their growing role in the public sphere. A major literacy effort is taking place through courses encouraged by NGOs as well as through multilingual education offered by the government. The literature review revealed that Cuvok was still a language that needed a lot of study to achieve successful standardization. Regarding previous research, the availability of sociolinguistic research is noted in addition to some preliminary work done in the early 2000s by the author in his MA and DEA studies. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the methodology of data collection and the conventions used to present the findings.

The emphasis of chapter 2 is ethnolinguistic, in particular a discussion of the role of the blacksmith. The blacksmith is a key figure in society due to his dual role in his intervention in the so-called visible or physical world and in the magico-spiritual world. This chapter also discusses how the role of the blacksmith in society is undergoing great changes and is falling prey to new ideas and behaviors. The blacksmith is presented as one who possesses powers to master the invisible and spiritual realms.

Chapter 3 deals with the consonant inventory. The phonology of Cuvok is characterized by a wide range of consonants, and it retains some of the characteristic consonants of Central Chadic languages, such as the two lateral fricatives and the two implosives.

In chapter 4, prosody and tone are the focus. A description of the vowel system is provided, with a distinction between two phonemic vowels that only contrast in their final position of the word. A palatalization prosody, which emanates from a final front vowel, allows for the definition of harmonic domains within nominal and verbal categories. The so-called laminal consonants undergo palatalization while the labialized velar consonants and labials tend to round adjacent vowels. Following the discussion of prosody, the two basic tones: low tone and the high tone are introduced. The low tone is the standard tone of the verbal root, while the tone in nominal roots is not predictable. A number of morpho-phonological rules are also presented.

Chapter 5 is the beginning of the section devoted to morphology. In this chapter nouns are shown to have a fairly simple plural formation using /háý/. Kinship terms have irregularities in their plural form. We analyze [má-] as a nominalizer that allows the conversion of other word classes such as numerals and verbs into nouns. In this chapter, we also discuss constructions involving body parts. No distinction is made in Cuvok between masculine and feminine at the level of grammatical gender.

Post-nominal elements are covered in Chapter 6. These are primarily expressions of possession, plurality, numerals, determiners, topic marker, deictics and adjectives. In addition to some adjectives denoting size, value, age, and colors, a large class of ideophonic words function as adjectives in nominal word groups. The relativization of the subject and direct and indirect objects is also discussed in this chapter. Topicalization also occupies a prominent place through the examination of topicalizable functions. The topicalization of the relative clause is considered a case of bisectional construction that allows the topicalization of the verbal predicate.

Chapter 7 concerns questions in Cuvok. The analysis shows that there are three types of interrogative sentences. The first includes closed, or polar, questions that require clear "yes" or "no" answers. Secondly, open, or content-based, questions are those which the speaker can answer with constituents. Both polar and content questions are formed with a question word or particle at the end of the sentence. The third type of interrogative, however, relies only in intonation. The third type of interrogative relies on intonation to solicit information and is mainly used for rhetorical questions. Questions and negations are modalities that always come at the end of the sentence.

The study of prepositions and their use are covered in chapter 8. Prepositions are classified in several ways. We first group them into prepositions that a) fall within the harmonic domain of the noun and those that b) fall outside this domain, and thus do not undergo harmonization with the last vowel of the noun. Another division is into simple prepositions and complex prepositions. The simple prepositions express association, comitativity, spatial location and result. All complex prepositions express location and can be subdivided into four groups: 1) those formed from two simple prepositions, 2) morphologized complex prepositions, combinations of two prepositions that function as a single preposition, which is evidenced by the palatal harmony between the two, 3) those obtained by combining a simple preposition with a term for a body part, and 4) those that are the combination of a simple preposition with a spatial location noun. The way the Tchouvok perceive the world is shown by the study of prepositions, markers of temporal, and spatial localization. The expression of the four cardinal directions by prepositions shows that the Tchouvok have a fixed orientation regardless of their location.

Chapter 9 discusses the verb root. In Cuvok, the verb root is very simple and always has a low tone. The different patterns identified include monoconsonantal and

polyconsonantal roots. These are classified into simple and complex roots. Simple roots have a simple consonant structure or a /CVC/ and /CCVC/ structure. Complex roots are divided into reduplications and long roots with an /r/ consonant. This chapter also discusses pluractionality, which manifests itself in the use of suppletive forms to express an action with a plural object.

The verbal complex is dealt with in chapter 10. The verbal complex includes the set of preverbal elements, the verbal root, and postverbal elements. This complex forms a harmonic domain in which the final vowel imposes its palatal prosodic property. The preverbal elements are those of tense and mode. Personal pronouns are also elements placed before the radical. The postverbal elements are the direct and indirect object markers as well as the inclusive and derivational suffixes. Among the derivational suffixes, there are directional suffixes, namely, the centripetal, marked by [-ék] ~ [-ák], and the centrifugal, expressed by [-ád] ~ [-éd]. Other suffixes include the medial voice [-átá], the causative [-dá], the partitive [-fá], the telic [-àbá], and the detransitive [-áj] ~ [-éj]. The forms and semantics of verbal suffixes are particularly complex with the precise meaning often unclear. [-àbá], for example, has a broad semantics of orienting the action of the verb toward a single and clear goal. The detransitive [-áj] ~ [-éj] is sometimes used to reduce valency of the verb, and other times it indicates that the direct object is absent from the sentence. In the latter case, the unexpressed element remains implicitly shared by the speaker and the addressee. This chapter also analyzes the [-á] 3SG.OD suffix under its different characteristics: [-á] is the allomorph of 3SG.OD [-jà] when constructed with the causative [-dá], and [-á] is 3SG.OD when the lexical object precedes the causative [-dá].

In Chapter 11, the discussion turns to the verb-noun collocation. This is a lexical construction that consists of combining a verb with a certain type of noun, called the intrinsic object of a verb. The entity thus obtained forms a semantically inseparable set. Although nouns from other lexical fields also occur in this type of combination, the lexical field of the human body is most commonly used in the formation of intrinsic objects in this type of composition. These collocations are usually idiomatic and it is difficult to say whether the verbal or the nominal part underlies the meaning of the whole. At the semantic level, verb-noun collocations can express reciprocity of actions, reflexivity, and joint actions.

Chapter 12 provides a brief overview of some syntactic aspects of the language. This chapter allows us to note that Cuvok is a language with SVO structure when regarding the word order in a simple sentence. Nonverbal sentences are examined through the expression of existential being and the copula. Negative modality is also discussed through its construction with verbal tenses, with the imperative, in interrogative sentences, and in non-verbal clauses. A few other constructions, such as prohibition

with /tá/, the progressive, and the narrative construction of the conjugated verb with its root are also considered.

The final two chapters contain appendices. In Chapter 13, a lexical list Cuvok-French and French-Cuvok words are transcribed phonetically. Chapter 14 presents three interlinearized sample texts which were recorded and transcribed.