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A grammar of Tagdal: a Northern Songhay language

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Summary

A Grammar of Tagdal, a Northern Songhay language of Niger provides a synchronic description of the Tagdal language as it is spoken by the Igdaalen of the Republic of Niger. These people are usually counted as Tuaregs by the larger population of Niger and are spread among semi-nomadic encampments from as far south as near the southern border with Nigeria, to the northern city of Agadez, and areas in between.

Northern Songhay is considered a branch of the larger Songhay language family. However, it also shares many features of Berber languages, especially of Tuareg. Features of Tuareg can be found throughout the language, side-by-side with Songhay features. Both Tuareg and Songhay features are easily recognisable as coming from either source language. At first look, the syntax seems to be primarily Songhay in origin. However, this is something which warrants more study.

Chapter one provides information concerning the people, the sociolinguistic situation, and some discussion about the classification of Songhay, and Northern Songhay languages in particular. Some discussion of the methodology in this book, as well as a brief text are also included.

Chapter two is a description of some of the most common phonological processes in Tagdal. It is shown that both closed and open syllables are possible, as well as syllables that begin with vowels. Next, an inventory of the consonants in the language is provided, including of the three most common Tagdal varieties, that of the Abargan and Kəl Illokod, which most resemble Tadaksahak; followed by that of the Kəl Amdid and Tarbun; then of Tabarog. The section on vowels demonstrates that, at least at first glance, all of the vowels except for schwa have long and short variants. Nevertheless, in light of the findings in the third chapter, this might need to be revisited. It is demonstrated that the surface realisation of vowels is context-dependent, with vowels in unstressed syllables being uttered in a more central position. It is also demonstrated that the central vowel ə will change its position and height, even its roundedness, depending on context. In the section about sound rules, the assimilation of /n/ is discussed. It is also demonstrated that /n/ is realised as a nasalisation on the preceding vowel when it is followed by /f, s, z, ʃ, ʎ, or ʒ/. In words that end in a vowel, the final vowel is elided when the following word begins with a consonant. In addition, /ay/ with a short vowel is realised as [ej] and /ow/ with a short vowel is realised as [ɔw]. The final section shows the various stress patterns possible in Tagdal.

The third chapter presents the morphology of Tagdal, along with some of the main prosodic features of the language, which accompany the morphology. It is demonstrated that Tagdal has, in fact, two prosodic sub-systems, one for vocabulary of Tuareg origin and one for vocabulary of Songhay origin. The chapter begins with a description of the pronominal sub-system. It then continues with a description of the noun of Songhay etymology. It is demonstrated that the vowel in the CVC syllable of

Songhay origin elongates to CVVCV when another vowel is added. By contrast, nouns of Tuareg origin function by a completely different set of rules. The main consideration with nouns of Tuareg etymology is whether, after all the prefixes and suffixes are added, stress falls on the penultimate or on the antepenultimate syllable. If stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable, this affects vowel and consonant length throughout the word. The section ends with a description of how masculine and feminine nouns function with respect to Tuareg vocabulary. The chapter then moves on to how Tuareg roots are nominalised, versus how Songhay roots are nominalised, along with a brief discussion of when to use Songhay versus when to use Tuareg vocabulary. This is followed by a discussion of adjectives in Tagdal, beginning with how Songhay roots are adjectivised and ending with how adjectives are formed from Tuareg roots. Most adjectives derived from Tuareg roots involve the presence of the Subject Relative marker *a-*. A discussion of adverbs and adpositions, which are fairly closed sets in Tagdal, follows. The next section of chapter three describes the verb. Once again, the language treats verb roots of Songhay origin differently from those of Tuareg origin. This is especially important because primary stress in the verb normally occurs somewhere on the root. The following section discusses three derivational affixes which attach onto verb roots of Tuareg origin: the Passive the Reciprocal and the Causative. Since the question in Tuareg roots is whether stress falls on the penultimate or antepenultimate syllable once all prefixes and suffixes are accounted for, affixation is an important consideration for all Tuareg verbs. The section on the three prefixes in question ends with a discussion of suppletion, where Songhay roots are supplanted by those of Tuareg origin whenever one of the three derivational prefixes comes into question. Chapter three continues with a discussion of the morphology of the verb. This includes the bound morphemes that precede the verb root – the proclitic, the Tense-Aspect-Mood prefix and negation prefixes. The chapter ends with a discussion of what follows the verb root. This includes the Venitive and Allative suffixes and the Direct Object clitic. Then the Indirect Object is discussed, along with the Dative marker *sa*.

Chapter four begins with a description of the Noun Phrase, starting with a discussion of determiners. Tagdal has a number of determiners, each of which matches the Noun Phrase in number, either singular or plural. The determiners then function to indicate whether the Noun Phrase is definite or indefinite. The next section discusses Noun Phrase coordination. Normally each coordinated Noun Phrase is followed by one of several conjunctions. The next section describes the Adpositional Phrase. Tagdal mostly has postpositions, though one preposition, *nda*, also functions as a coordinator. Next, default SVO word order is discussed in normal clauses containing a verb, followed by a brief discussion of non-verbal clauses. The next section describes clause coordination, both with and without a connector.

The sections which follow discuss syntax, especially in complex sentences – defined here as sentences containing more than one clause. First, a description of subordinate clauses is provided. In general, these can be broken down into various types of adverbial clauses, various types of complement clauses and relative clauses. Relative clauses can be either Subject, Object or adpositional relatives. The subject relative clause is distinguishable by the presence of the Subject Relative marker *a-* where the

proclitic would normally go in the verb. The object relative clause is one where the Object is the relativised position and the demonstrative or determiner follows the head noun, followed by the verb. Instead of the Subject Relative *ə-*, the verb has a normal proclitic. There is also an adpositional relative clause, where the Adpositional Phrase is relativised. The following section describes how commands and requests are made in Tagdal, followed by a section describing how questions are formed, either yes/no, tag or various kinds of content questions.

Finally, the book ends with a very brief description of how Tagdal handles elements above the sentence, such as paragraphs or an entire discourse. The section begins with a discussion of cohesion between sentences, between paragraphs and within a discourse. This is followed by a brief description of how the language uses word order, the presence (or lack of) pronouns and connectors to either increase or decrease the prominence of various elements in the larger discourse.