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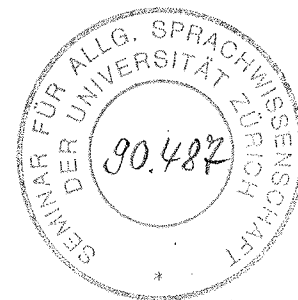


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Topics in
Nilo-Saharan Linguistics

Edited by
M. Lionel Bender



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PREFACE

The parallels between Linguistics and Mathematics are many and strong. I recall years ago hearing one of my Professors say something like "the business of Mathematics is proving theorems", i.e. making visible those hidden relationships in the data which are inevitably implied by their axiomatic and definitional bases. I suppose one could also say that the business of Linguistics is arriving at a theory of Language, i.e. making visible the hidden structure which is implicit in the Platonic formal system which underlies human languages.

But there is a difference: in Mathematics, the inspiration may originally have come from trying to model the physical world, but one can dispense with this and simply play with abstract systems invented at will so long as they do not violate metatheoretical constraints such as consistency (there are severe problems here--recall Gödel's Theorem--but this is not the issue at hand). In Linguistics, we need the Linguistic data on all known natural human languages (present and past) in order to abstract the underlying system, or alternatively, if we know how to do it, we might arrive at the system from any one language, e.g. one's own, a la Chomsky! But we do not know how to do it--at least not yet.

All this leads to a justification for yet another volume of descriptive and comparative studies. These days it seems easier to get into print studies on this or that aspect of syntax or phonology from this or that theoretical point of view than to get out a collection such as this one. The foregoing should not be interpreted to mean that I am opposed to theoretical work: in fact, as I stated, it is the real business of Linguistics. But so much theoretical work is doomed to be ephemeral. Even the most important works of a few years ago by the greatest theoreticians are now often seen as quaint if not downright deadends. The secondary job of language description has its virtues too, one of which is providing essential input to the more exalted theoretical scholarship.

The collection at hand can be considered as a sequel to the volume (*Nilo-Saharan Language Studies*) I edited in the Michigan State African Studies Center series (1983). It includes papers on a number of much-neglected languages of Africa. The authors range from some of our best-known African linguists to some well-prepared amateurs (relatively speaking) who are in the forefront of bringing some of these obscure languages to our attention.

I would like to express my appreciation to these contributors, who showed the usual patience and cooperation during the too-long process of bringing this book to fruition. I also thank my co-editor, Franz Rottland, for his involving me in this series and for his many contributions to this volume. The office of Research Development at Southern Illinois University provided a small grant which allowed me to hire a typist/word processor who prepared most of Chapters 1-8 and 18. This was Gayle Jany, who was a pleasure to work with and who learned quickly how to handle a very difficult set of typescripts. The authors of Chapters 9 and 10 (Vossen, Heine, and

MABA VERB-INITIAL CONSONANT

PM	v(v/f)	z(z/s)			
PF	β(f/w)	z(s/y)			
PM	f(w/l/φ)	s(y/φ)			
PF	φ(b/f)	s(s/s)			
PM	w(w/l/φ)	l(l)	r(r)	y(y/φ)	
PF	w(w/w)	l(l/l)	ɿ(l/ll)		
PM	m(m)	n(n/φ)	ŋ(n)	ɲ(ɲ)	ɳ(ɳ)
PF	m(m/m)	n(n/n)		ɲ(n/ɲ)	ɳ(ɳ/ɳ)

Compare this with the Modern Maba and Fur inventories arrived at on strictly synchronic grounds:

Maba						Fur				
p	t	t		k	ʔ	p	t		k	
mb	nd	nd	nj	ŋg		b	d	j	g	
f	s						s			
							z			
m	n		ɲ	ɳ		m	n	ɲ	ɳ	
	l						l			
	r						r			
w			y			w		y		
/p/ > f, b						/p/ > f				

The two-proto-language inventories of verb-initial segments are much more similar to each other than the present-day inventories as arrived at on a strictly synchronic level. Typological in nature as it is, the comparison of reconstructed inventories may, nevertheless, turn out to be a reliable indicator of common genealogical relationship between Maba and Fur, distant as it may be. Future comparative work involving these two languages and others in the region should take such deep-level characteristics into account, helping to identify cognates and dismiss lookalikes.

NOTE

*The first part of this paper, which is based on unpublished materials collected by G. Nachtigal and J. Lukas, was presented at the Third Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, KiLumu, Kenya, Aug. 5-8, 1986.

REFERENCES

Barth 1862-66; Von Funck 1986 unpub.; Jungraithmayr and Mohlig (eds.) 1983; Lukas 1933, 1936, 1937, 1939, 1952, 1953, n.d.; Schadeberg 1981b; Trenga 1947; Tucker and Bryan 1966.

5. "NILE-NUBIAN" RECONSIDERED

Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the century it has been claimed that there is a genetic Nubian language family consisting of Nile Nubian, Hill Nubian (Kordofan), Birgid (formerly spoken in Southern Darfur and now extinct), and Meidob (spoken in Northern Darfur). Research on the internal classification of the group, based on regular phonological correspondences, lagged until 1949/50, when E. Zyhlarz made a first attempt to show the reconstructability of a proto-Nubian consonant system. He more-or-less restricted himself to consonants in word-initial position, not dealing with vowel phonemes at all. Zyhlarz's work has to be regarded with caution because of the sometimes obscure data base for reconstructions he is dealing with. The second attempt was undertaken by the author in 1983 as part of an M.A. thesis on linguistic and historical reconstruction in the field of Nubian (Bechhaus-Gerst 1984/85 is a revised version of the thesis). Although going beyond Zyhlarz to reconstructions for consonants and vowels, word-initial as well as non-initial, this study has to be regarded as preliminary by the nature of the data at hand. This did not cause any problems in case of the Nile Nubian languages, but Hill Nubian, Birgid, and Meidob are still badly documented, though this situation may change soon.

Classification work has always been focused on the Nile Nubian branch, which was known to the scientific world much longer than other Nubian languages. The implicit assumption of an opposition between Nile Nubian and the 'rest' became explicit in the discussion of the homeland of the Nubians: have the Darfur and Hill Nubians been something like 'fugitives' from the Nile Valley after the breakdown of the Meroitic Empire or the Islamic conquest of Northern Sudan, or did the Nile Nubians migrate to the Nile from an original homeland somewhere in the region between Darfur and Kordofan? This problem will not be discussed here. Recent works (Behrens 1981, Thelwall 1982, Bechhaus-Gerst 1984/85) have shown in detail that the original homeland of the Nobiin, as well as the Kenuz/Dongola speakers, has to be sought somewhere outside the Nile Valley region. What has to be noted, however, is that in spite of the realization of at least two separate waves of migration into the Nile Valley (Zyhlarz 1949/50; Behrens 1981: 24ff.; Thelwall 1982: 49f.), the speakers of Nobiin reaching the area before the speakers of Kenuz/Dongola, it was held as beyond question throughout scientific research on the classification of Nubian that there exists a valid, genetically defined subgroup called Nile Nubian.

This paper will once more focus on Nile Nubian, but this time giving evidence for the non-existence of the group as a genetic unit of its own. Starting with the representation of Nubian proto-phonemes, the paper will concentrate on the close relationship between Kenuz/Dongola, Hill Nubian, Birgid, and Meidob in lexicon and grammar on the one hand, and the separate-

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ness of Nobiin on the other hand, which can be exemplified by lexical innovations restricted to the latter.

2. Reconstructing Proto-Nubian

The following charts with proto-Nubian consonant and vowel phonemes are based on Bechhaus-Gerst (1984/85: 25ff.; all the phonological changes are presented that gave rise to the modern sound systems, as well as an extensive proto-Nubian vocabulary). They are presented here to show that it is by no means the genetic unity of Nubian itself that is in question and to give a point of reference for the further discussion.

On the basis of regular correspondences, the following inventory of proto-phonemes can be reconstructed:

SEGMENTAL PHONEMES OF PROTO-NUBIAN

CONSONANTS

	labial	dental/alveolar	palatal	velar	labiovelar
plosive	b p	d t	j	g k	g ^w (a)- k ^w (a)-
fricative		s	ʃ		
nasals	m	n	-ɲ	ŋ	
semi-vowels	w-				
liquid		-r, -l			

Note that w-, g^w(a)-, and k^w(a)- are initial only, -r, -l, and -ɲ non-initial.

VOWELS

	front		back
high	i		u
mid	e	ə	o
	ɛ	ɔ	
low	a		

What is found as an outcome of this in present-day Nile Nubian is nearly identical phonological systems, although the two languages (N: Nobiin, KD: Kenuz/Dongola) are said not to be mutually intelligible. The only differentiation that can be detected with regard to the consonants is the shift of *p to N f, KD b. With the vowels the situation is a bit more complex:

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identical systems, but many irregularities. This reflects the complex and sometimes confusing vowel correspondences among the Nubian languages. In the Hill Nubian group, at least the same range of differentiation occurs today, although this group consists of closely related dialects that separated only a few centuries ago. The following example gives the phonological changes starting with proto-Nubian *p:l

PN	*p >	PNN	*p	KD	bee, bai	'to kill'
				Nobiin	faa, fay	
>	PHN	*f	Dilling	hur		
			Dulman	hur		
			Kadaru	wur		
			Debri	wur		
			Gulfan	wuu		'to slaughter'
>		f	Birgid	filaale		'to kill'
>		p	Meidob	per		

PNN: Proto-Nile-Nubian; PHN: Proto-Hill-Nubian

Based on the identity of the phonological systems of Nile Nubian, which is surprising even if we assume a separation of not more than a thousand years, the following is proposed: heavy borrowing (or better "sound and speech imitation") has taken place between Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola at some time in history when the two languages were very similar and maybe mutually intelligible.

3. Lexicostatistics

Several attempts have been made to classify the Nubian languages on a lexicostatistical basis (Thelwall 1977, Thelwall 1982, Bechhaus-Gerst 1984/85), still the main method allowing a quick overview on subgroup relationships. A lexicostatistical classification of Nubian does not cast any significant light on subgroup relationships within the family. Looking closely at the computed percentages, however, reveals some inconsistencies with regard to the relationship of the two Nile Nubian languages with each other compared to the out-group relationship of Nile Nubian with the Hill Nubian languages, Birgid, and Meidob. These inconsistencies have to be accounted for and might be regarded as a first hint at the invalidity of the Nile Nubian subgroup as such.

The following figures are the result of a lexicostatistical comparison in Bechhaus-Gerst (1984/85: 15ff.). It included seven languages and used a 102-item list.²

Nobiin and KD show 70% resemblance, the closest relationship in the chart next to Hill Nubian, which consists of the closely related dialects Kadaru, Debri, and Dilling. What is interesting is the discrepancy in the relationship of the two to

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Meidob	-						
Birgid	47	-					
Kadaru	52	58	-				
Debri	49	55	92	-			
Dilling	53	58	93	94	-		
KD	54	48	58	57	58	-	
Nobiin	40	37	43	41	43	70	-
Meidob	Birgid	Kadaru	Debri	Dilling	KD	Nobiin	

all the other Nubian languages. KD is much more closely related to the others than is Nobiin by percentages of 11-16% above the ones calculated for Nobiin. On the other hand, Nobiin shows the lowest figures of all languages, including Meidob, which is usually regarded as the first split within the Nubian family. It is only the close relationship between Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola that seems to be inconsistent. Setting apart this relationship, Nobiin has to be regarded as the first split within the Nubian language family. Translating this into glottochronological data indicates the separation of Nobiin about 3000 years ago, ten centuries before Kenuz/Dongola left their relatives. The relatively high figures within Nile Nubian might again be interpreted as a result of later contact between the two languages (as was previously proposed by Thelwell 1982: 48).

There is no need to reproduce the entire 102-item list, but it might be interesting to see examples of how the lexical innovations of Nobiin are spread through the core of the so-called basic vocabulary, where the other Nubian languages retained the common or proto-Nubian items (one exception is Birgid 'fat', also apparently an innovation).

	Meidob	Birgid	Kadaru	Debri	Dilling	KD	Nobiin
blood	eger	iigir	ogor	oor	ogur	geu	diis
dog	peel	msel	bool	bool	bol	wel	mug
eat	el	kire	koli	koli	kol	kal	kab
fat	tessi	kepaladin	teje	aper	tej	des	noi
hair	teedi	tille	tiltu	tiltu	teliti	dilti	sigirt
heavy	tille	tindin	tildr	tilu	tili	dullo	dawwu
louse	iidi	-	-	-	itid	issi	kid
meat	osini	koozi	kwaje	kwai	kwaje	kusu	arrij
water	eesi	eeji	oto	otu	oti	essi	aman
white	adde	eele	orru	orri	ori	aro	nulu

There are additional items separating Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin, Nobiin being isolated where Kenuz/Dongola has correspon-

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dences in at least one subgroup of Nubian:

	KD	Nobiin	Birgid	Debri	Meidob
cloud	nicci	gem	naaasidi		
dry	sowed	sama	suudi	suadu	
eye	missi				
skin	ajin	nauwa			pidi adangi

It is interesting to note that out of 18 items denoting body parts, seven are not cognate among the Nile Nubian languages.

4. Non-basic vocabulary

Outside the so-called basic vocabulary used for a lexicostatistical calculation, the Nile Nubian languages show variations in cultural vocabulary that can be used as a basis for historical interpretation. As has been elaborated before (Behrens 1981: 23ff., Bechhaus-Gerst 1984/85: 99ff.) the two Nile Nubian languages do not share a common vocabulary for denoting their Nile fauna environment. Consisting dominantly of composite nouns (in the case of Nobiin, mixed with Berber loans) this gives evidence of a separate migration of the two groups into the valley from a non-riverine environment. The following examples point out the scope of diversification within the cultural vocabulary:

goat	KD	berti	Nobiin	fag	Dilling	h lti
milk	KD	icci	Nobiin	suu	Meidob PHN Birgid Meidob Birgid PHN Birgid Meidob	pel *ej ešši išidi uldi *kol kildi ed
charcoal	KD	ulud	Nobiin	girgid		
house	KD	ka	Nobiin	nog		
god	KD	arti	Nobiin Old N.	noor god		

With the exception of 'god' arti, the Kenuz/Dongola items have cognates in one or more of the other Nubian languages, whereas Nobiin again shows an isolated status.

The two most interesting items, however, are the ones denoting 'iron' and 'horse'. Iron and horses are two goods whose arrival in Egypt and Sudan can be dated on archaeological grounds. The oldest findings of a horse skeleton in Nubia has been dated to 1675 B.C. (Hofmann 1967: 250). One can assume that the Nile Nubians, becoming acquainted with the horse at a time they still constituted one uniform group, would have adopted one uniform designation for this animal. The following two designations are, however, to be found in the Nubian languages:

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KD	kaj	Nobiin	murti
		Old N.	murti
Dair	koj	Meidob	porrpi
Dilling	koj		
Dulman	kuujug		
Garko	kaje		
Gulfan	kooj		
Birgid	kizi		

Again Kenuz/Dongola show cognate items with Hill Nubian and Birgid. Nobiin has an item of its own that might or might not correspond to Meidob. A correspondence can be detected between Nobiin and Meidob in denoting another domestic animal: the donkey.

Nobiin	kaj	'donkey'
Meidob	acci	'donkey'

It is this animal that originated in northern Sudan and whose domestication goes back to the fourth millennium B.C. (Herzog 1957: 144). This leads to the assumption that the meaning 'donkey' is the primary one and that the use of the item for denoting 'horse' is a secondary one, the result of a semantic shift.

Iron is a product that came to be known in northern Sudan at about the same time as the horse. The distribution of the designations for iron corresponds to the one for horse.

KD	sarti	Nobiin	tirissi
Dair	sirto	Meidob	tessi
Dilling	sirti		
Gulfan	sirtu		
Kadaro	sirti		
Birgid	sirti		

The item tessi in Meidob can be regarded as an eroded form of Nobiin tirissi. The name for iron found in the rest of Nubian has its cognate in Nobiin sarti 'lance'. This is interesting insofar as the oldest findings of ironware in Nubia are iron lances. It is much later that tools not used for warfare were produced in the region.

The evidence given above leads to the following interpretation: Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin did not constitute a uniform community when iron and the horse were introduced to Sudan. Because of this the separation of the two has to be dated back to at least the 15th century B.C.. The Hill Nubians and the Birgid may have gotten to know iron through the Nobiin, expanding the name for the iron tool typical at that time to the name for iron in general. Meidob and Nobiin had an obviously closer relationship, the Meidob being the group which borrowed the designation

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from the Nobiin.

5. Some evidence from morphology

Up till now not much research has been done on comparative morphology of Nubian, partly because of the lack of data outside the Nile Nubian group. Filling this gap is still not possible. What can be done at present is only a pointing out of the necessity of dealing with morphology in any future work on comparative Nubian for two reasons: (1) recent common innovations in the Nile Nubian languages as well as borrowings show up better in morphology than in phonology and lexicon, (2) the separateness of Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola may become clearer in morphology than in lexicon. This should become even more obvious with our increasing knowledge of Old Nubian, the earlier stage of Nobiin.

Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin share many common innovations, especially in the field of verbal derivations, tense, and aspect, innovation in these cases meaning that there is no trace of these elements in Old Nubian. One example is the following: Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin have a derivation called 'stative' that is marked by a suffix -buu in KD, and -fi in Nobiin, initial f being the regular correspondent to KD b.⁴ In Old Nubian this derivation was not present, the stative being marked by a suffix -en. This can be interpreted in two ways. Either this is a common innovation for the two languages, or it is an innovation of only one of the languages (of Kenuz/Dongola most probably), borrowed by the other one at a later stage. Many more examples can be found.

With regard to the separateness of Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin, another two examples can be given. In Nobiin an object is marked by a suffixed -ga which is not shared with any of the other Nubian languages. In Kenuz/Dongola the corresponding suffix is -gi, as in all the Hill Nubian languages as well. An example coming from verbal morphology is the marker of a plural object in the verb. In Nobiin a suffix -j can be found that was already present in Old Nubian. Kenuz/Dongola have a functionally corresponding suffix -ir which has its Hill Nubian counterpart in Dilling -er. Again these examples show that Kenuz/Dongola are still more closely related to Hill Nubian than Nobiin is. A great part of the morphology that Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola have in common was innovated recently at a time when - and this seems quite important to note - everyone believes them to have completely separated.

6. Preliminary conclusions

The above paragraphs present a collection of evidence for the non-existence of a genetically defined Nile Nubian subgroup. Taken individually no piece of evidence can prove the original conjecture. Considering them together, however, gives a fairly consistent picture that seems sufficient for disintegrating the Nile Nubian group. To summarize:

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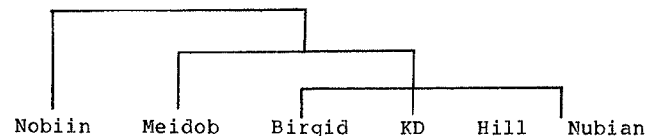
(1) Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin show more or less identical phonological systems that are suspected of being the result of borrowing or speech imitation on the Kenuz/Dongola side. The reason for this is easily to be found. Nobiin was a language of prestige during the Sudanese Medieval Period, when it was the language of policy and religion and - even more importantly - a written language. This argument from prestige also accounts for the next point.

(2) The percentage of cognates between Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin seems discordantly high, considering the low number of cognates Nobiin shares with the rest of Nubian. Again it is the effect of Nobiin prestige that would explain continuing lexical influence from Nobiin throughout the Medieval Period, resulting in a high proportion of Nobiin loans in present day Kenuz/Dongola. One additional argument was already advanced by Thelwall (1982: 48). In the first millennium A.D., Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin might still have been sufficiently mutually intelligible for the selection of alternative lexicon on the basis of prestige without causing problems. Disregarding the high score of Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin shows the latter as the first split within the Nubian group, Kenuz/Dongola remaining united with the rest of Nubian for a much longer time.

(3) Cultural vocabulary serves as a basis for the dating of the separation of Nobiin. The distribution of the designations for 'iron' and 'horse' makes highly probable the migration of pre-Nobiin speakers not later than 1400 B.C..

(4) The great deal of morphology that Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin share was innovated at the time of "rapprochement", of the two. The portion not shared by the two again shows Kenuz/Dongola in close relationship with Hill Nubian, and Nobiin as the innovating language with an isolated status.

On the basis of the above items of evidence, the following classification of Nubian is proposed:



The term 'Nile Nubian' should be dropped when speaking of historically or genetically defined subgrouping within Nubian. As a result some new designations are offered:

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1. Northern Nubian (= Nobiin)
2. West/Central Nubian
 - 2.1 Western Nubian (= Meidob)
 - 2.2 Central Nubian
 - 2.2.1 Birgid
 - 2.2.2 Kenuz/Dongola
 - 2.2.3 Hill Nubian

Whether Birgid, Kenuz/Dongola, and Hill Nubian are really coordinated branches has to be the subject of further investigations on the basis of new material.

7. A new start with 'irregularities'

If we regard Nobiin as the earliest split within Nubian, the question remains open whether this split is also traceable in phonological innovations. Does the comparative method help us in detecting what has actually happened with regard to phonological shifting in Nobiin in opposition to the rest of Nubian including Kenuz/Dongola? As has been stated before, Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin nowadays have more or less identical phonological systems, which at first sight give no hint whatsoever regarding an actual differentiation that has been neutralized by a later "rapprochement", of the two languages. What has been disregarded to this point, however, are the so-called 'irregularities' that show up within the otherwise one-to-one correspondences of Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola. It might well be that these 'irregularities' are the remnants of the phonological developments before Nobiin and Kenuz/Dongola speakers met again in the Nile Valley region. In the following some examples of 'irregularities' are given:

'old'	No	duwi	'rain'	No	awi	'path'	No	dauwi
	KD	duru		KD	aru		KD	darub
	Di	toore		Di	are			
	Da	tora		Da	are			
	Ka	tura		Ka	ara			
	Ga	toore		De	are			
	Md	tori		Md	are			
				Bi	aale			

(No: Nobiin, Di: Dilling, Da: Dair, Ka: Kadaru, Ga: Garko, De: Debrî, Md: Meidob, Bi: Birgid)

The correspondence Nobiin w: KD r is by no means regular. The three examples, however, show the retention of a presumed proto-Nubian *r in Kenuz/Dongola together with Hill Nubian and Meidob, and a shift *r > w in Nobiin. The same applies to the next example with the addition of a correspondence Old Nubian (= Nobiin)

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g: Kenuz/Dongola and Hill Nubian k.

'shield'	ON	gouwi	KD	karu
			Da	kori
			Ga	koru, karu

In this case Old Nubian may be the language retaining the proto-phoneme *g, this being regularly merged with *k in Hill Nubian. There is another example of this in the next item, together with a correspondence Nobiin r: KD/Hill Nubian/Birgid d.

'bone'	No	gisir	KD	kiid, kihid
			Di	kɔɛd
			De	kweɗu
			Ka	kweɗe
			Bi	kizidi
			Md	ærdi

There is a large group of 'irregularities' concerning vowel correspondences between Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin.⁴ The following examples show that in these cases also Kenuz/Dongola share a common heritage with other Nubian languages and are therefore separated from Nobiin.

'to break,	No	fart	'go out,	No	fale
to divide'			come out'		
	KD	birt		KD	bel
	Di	hirt		Di	hel

The following gives a small sample of 'irregularities' that seem to be isolated at present, but might turn out to be 'regular' with some further investigation.

'long'	No	nassi	'foot'	No	oiy
	KD	nosso		KS	ossi
	Di	dɔji		Bi	ose
	Da	dɔji		Mi	otti
	Ka	dɔjju			
	De	dɔjji			
	Bi	nizze			
	Md	tasse			
'fear'	No	jag	'pound'	No	jakki
	KD	sarki		KD	šakki
	Bi	salge			

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	Di	šolk		
	De	šilki		
'rope'	No	alli	'short'	No
				urad
	KD	iri		KD
				urtina
	Di	jri		
	De	ori		
	Ka	oru		
	Bi	ddi		
'star'	No	winji	'throw'	No
	KD	wissi		KD
				wirk
				arki
'worm'	No	wirki		
	KD	wigid		
'breathe'	No	sewe, seijsi	'right'	No
	KD	newe		KD
				iyon
				in

The sample given must be regarded as too small to be fully convincing. The further search for 'irregularities', however, will help to detect new 'regularities' concerning the phonological correspondences between Nobiin and the other Nubian languages. In the long run, this may even lead to a revised reconstruction of proto-Nubian phonology and lexicon. A first step has to be the adoption of a new viewpoint, with a concentration on the West/Central group of Nubian that includes Kenuz/Dongola but excludes Nobiin for the time being. Perhaps the whole picture will change again, on further investigation.

NOTES

1. Kenuz/Dongola and Nobiin are quoted from Armbruster (1965) and Hohenwart-Gerlachstein (1979) respectively unless noted otherwise. Dilling is taken from Kauczor (1929/30), Kadaru and Debri from Thelwell (1977), Birgid and Meidob from Thelwall (1978, n.d.). Other Hill Nubian quotations are from Meinhof (1918/19).

2. The comparison was based on Thelwell (1977: 276-281), but many modifications have been made. One has been the inclusion of Dilling, which belongs to a dialect cluster different from that of Kadaru and Debri according to Stevenson (1956: 112).

3. Interestingly, Nobiin murti 'horse' has many correspondences outside the Nubian group, e.g. Daju murtane, Shatt moxta, Fur murta, Fertit murta, Berti burto.

4. The variation in vocalization is irregular but frequent.

REFERENCES

Armbruster 1965; Bechhaus-Gerst 1984/85; Behrens 1981; Herzog 1957; Hofman 1967; Hohenwart-Gerlachstein 1979; Kauczor 1929/30; Meinhof 1918/19; Stevenson 1956; Thelwell 1977, 1978, 1982, n.d.; Zyhlarz 1949/50.

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1. Introduction

Majang is a Surma language, spoken by 15-30,000 people in southwestern Ethiopia.¹ There are only two published linguistic descriptions by previous authors, one by Cerulli (1948) and the other by Bender (1983a), the latter being far more detailed and reliable. Both of these dealt with phonology and morphonolgy, and to a certain extent lexicon. I am in general agreement with Bender, so I will build on his work, presenting some of the main points of syntax, with additional points of morphology where relevant. Since the focus of this book is comparison and historical reconstruction, some comparative comments will be made to show parallels or innovations between Majang and other Surma languages. This article will follow Fleming's classification of Surma languages (1983a).

By way of general overview, Majang modifiers follow their heads, there is no marking of gender in affixes, modifiers agree in number with nouns, noun phrases are marked by suffixes, and word order is VSO. Typologically, Majang is anomalous. Majang has several VO characteristics, such as nouns followed by genitives, modifiers, and relative clauses, but it also has several OV characteristics, such as postpositions, question words that are sentence-final, and suffixes predominating over prefixes.

What makes these typological anomalies even more interesting is that at least two other Surma languages share this same combination of traits. Murle is also VSO, with genitives, modifiers, and relative clauses following nouns. It also has OV features, such as postpositions, sentence-final question words, and a preponderance of suffixes over prefixes. Didinga, closely related to Murle, is also VSO with genitives, adjectives, and relatives following their nouns. Didinga also shares the OV features of postpositions, sentence-final question words, and a majority of suffixes rather than prefixes. This suggests that Proto-Surma itself possessed this unusual combination of traits, in opposition to current typological theories, which argue against such constructions.² (In this connection, see Hock 1986: 617-626, who cautions against uncritical acceptance of a uniformity criterion in linguistic reconstruction).

2. Noun phrases

Noun phrases in Majang consist of a head (usually a noun) and an optional series of following affixes and/or modifiers. No element of the NP can precede the head of a noun phrase.

2.1 Word classes

Several classes of words can be found in the noun phrase. Each class is discussed below, followed later by an explanation of ordering.