

Book Reviews / Рецензии

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Rainer Vossen (ed.).

The Khoesan Languages (Routledge Language Family Series).

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The last 20 years have seen a veritable explosion of new, groundbreaking research in the field of Khoisan studies, somewhat neglected, as it may have seemed, in the interim between the publication of Dorothea Bleek's *Bushman Dictionary* (1956), which managed to summarize most of the data accumulated on Khoisan languages up to that point, and the appearance of the first truly detailed and adequately transcribed dictionaries of various San languages in the 1990s (such as Dickens 1994, Traill 1994, etc.). Although, sadly, many of the languages that were still spoken in the early or mid-20th century had already become extinct or moribund by that time, those that persisted finally managed to gain proper attention from professionally trained and equipped linguists, and some, like N|uu, were even rediscovered after being considered completely extinct for almost fifty years (Crawhall 2004). As a result, we have gained access to quite an impressive amount of new grammars, dictionaries, and research papers on all sorts of synchronic and diachronic issues in the field of Khoisan studies. The only thing missing so far was a handy reference book to tie all these publications, old and new, together, and provide the average scholar with a general modern perspective both on individual Khoisan languages and the "Khoisan issue" in general.

Now, finally, after about 20 years in the making (!), as we learn from the "Editor's Note", comes "The Khoesan Languages", a volume in the renowned Routledge Language Family Series that promises to fill in this annoying gap. (The traditional spelling of *Khoisan* has been amended to *Khoesan* both in the title and throughout the volume, since the transcription *Khoe* is a more accurate reflection of the actual pronunciation by native speakers; in this review, however, I will retain the traditional spelling outside of direct quotations from the book, since it is not likely that the amendment will be quickly adopted for general usage, and most people outside the field are quite accustomed to *Khoisan* anyway). The volume has been

edited by Rainer Vossen, one of the world's leading specialists on Khoisan languages — particularly the Khoe family, on which he has published extensively, including a comprehensive comparative-historical survey with a reconstruction of Proto-Khoe (Vossen 1997). It compiles the most up-to-date information on the typological, historical, and sociolinguistic characteristics of the various groups commonly known as "Khoisan", as well as relatively detailed descriptions of individual languages (usually living ones), compiled by experts in the field, most of which have engaged in actual fieldwork on these languages: Bonny Sands (Hadza), Edward Elderkin (Sandawe), Amanda Miller (Ju), Wilfrid Haacke (Nama), Hessel Visser (Naro), Rainer Vossen himself (various "minor" Khoe languages of the Kalahari area), and others.

Like most volumes in the Routledge series, this one opens with a general overview of the "Khoisan issue", discussed in the introduction by Vossen (who provides a general background and briefly sets the Khoisan languages in an overall African context), and in two chapters, written respectively by Henry Honken and Tom Güldemann, that provide basic information on the genetic / historical connections between Khoisan languages and on their general typological properties. These introductory chapters are then followed by individual language and language group descriptions.

For some reason, "The Khoesan Languages", unlike most volumes in the Routledge series, instead of devoting complete chapters to cohesive descriptions of languages, prefers to organize its contents based on sub-areas of linguistic description ("Phonetics and phonology", "Tonology", "Morphology", "Syntax"). This means that, for instance, a complete description of Hadza is stretched over four different locations in the volume: Hadza /segmental/ phonetics (pp. 38–42), Hadza tonology (pp. 89–90), Hadza morphology (pp. 107–124), Hadza syntax (pp. 265–274), and so on. As far as I can tell, such an approach may be of certain

limited use for areal typologists, who can get easier access to comparative data on various aspects of Khoisan languages, but offers a logistic disadvantage for readers interested in particular languages or language groups as such, and, in doing so, begs the question of what is more important: cross-linguistic typological ties between various levels of geographically adjacent languages, or intra-linguistic ties between various levels of the same language? It would seem to me that, at least up until recently, the second option would be the default preference for the average reader, but perhaps this is no longer the case.

It would certainly help if the integration of this principle were consistent throughout the book, but, unfortunately, this is not always true. For instance, the section “North Khoisan morphology” on p. 141 consists of one line: “The description of the morphology of !Xun is incorporated in the Chapter 7” (i.e. the chapter on syntax, which, in the case of !Xun, becomes *morphosyntax*). This decision is understandable, since the morphology of !Xun is far less complex than that of Central Khoisan, for example, but it certainly disrupts the already questionable structure of the volume. Particularly dubious is the decision to separate “Tonology” from “Phonetics and phonology”, since tonal characteristics in Khoisan languages are not infrequently tied in with segmental phonetics (e.g. recent tonogenesis in Namibian Khoekhoe, briefly described on p. 96), not to mention that knowledge on some tonal systems (e.g. Eastern †Hoan) is so scarce that an individual subsection may consist of a single paragraph.

Luckily, the descriptions themselves, even though dissected and scattered throughout the volume, are beyond any general reproach, and provide most of the relevant information on phonetics and grammar that could be of use to general typologists or Africanists from a comparative perspective. We should particularly stress the detailed sketch of Hadza grammar by Bonny Sands, currently the world’s leading expert on this extraordinary language isolate of Tanzania, since most of the previously published information on Hadza was either highly obsolete or extremely patchy; the late Henry Honken’s description of Eastern †Hoan (†Hōā), a language previously known to the linguistic community at large only through a series of disjointed papers dealing with its various aspects; and the results of Tom Güldemann’s meticulous attempt to present the old data on extinct South Khoisan (Tuu) languages, such as |Xam and ||Xegwi, in a modern descriptive framework — not an easy feat, considering that most of the old descriptions suffer from various degrees of inadequacy. These sections of the volume are not there simply for reference purpose, but con-

stitute important new research that makes the book a valuable acquisition for professional Khoisanologists, not just the general reader.

The volume closes with another “general” section, “Language contact and sociolinguistics” (pp. 434–481), which appears to be less systemic than the rest and consists of a series of very brief sketches on various types of contacts between Khoisan and non-Khoisan languages (usually Bantu or Afrikaans). These are quite useful, but it is strange that the important issue of internal contact between various Khoisan families is only mentioned *en passant* (a two-page general note by Tom Güldemann), despite the existence of quite a large body of literature on the subject (papers by Anthony Traill, Henry Honken, and others, published over the past 20–30 years and describing various “contact zones”, illustrated by numerous examples of internal borrowing; for the record, much of this information is succinctly summarized in Sands 2001).

Special caution must also be exercised in reading the exciting, but highly speculative chapter on “The extinct Khoisan languages of Eastern Africa” (pp. 465–479), contributed by Christopher Ehret. The main idea of the chapter — namely, that certain extinct languages of a “Khoisan” nature, i.e. related to modern day Hadza, Sandawe, or some of the South African Khoisan families, may have left behind traces in the shape of occasional lexical borrowings in the local Cushitic or Nilo-Saharan languages — seems pretty much indisputable, but the specific evidence adduced by the author is widely varying in quality, and not all of the comparisons in Ehret’s original research should be taken at face value. In particular, quite a few of the parallels that involve the South Cushitic click-containing language Dahalo seem to be seriously forced from a semantic point of view; historically, Dahalo may well have gotten its clicks from a “Khoisan-type” language, but that does not imply the necessity of comparing Dahalo /àβà ‘nice smell (of oil)’ with Khoekhoe /āwà-p ‘smell of blood’, or Dahalo n/ákwi ‘deserted homestead’ with Sandawe !naxi ‘fallen tree trunk’ (admittedly, some of the other examples are more convincing, e.g. Dahalo /u’u ‘excrement’ vs. Khoekhoe /üü-s id., etc.). The subject raised by Ehret in this chapter is extremely important in many respects, primarily since it promises vital insight into very deep layers of African prehistory; but it may actually take decades of hard work on the historical analysis of Khoisan, Cushitic, and Nilo-Saharan linguistic data to substantiate some of the author’s suggestions on that prehistory.

The relatively small bibliography (pp. 482–496) covers the basic needs of all individual sections, but

does not strive for completeness; this will be of no great harm to the general reader, but it is somewhat lamentable, since valuable publications on Khoisan languages and linguistics are few and far in between compared to the linguistic literature on the rest of Africa, and it couldn't have hurt to make the list more exhaustive — at least by including references to all the old sources that contain original linguistic data (such as a series of short papers from the late 19th / early 20th century on extinct North and South Khoisan languages) as well as important publications that reflect current progress in comparative and historical Khoisan studies, such as Vossen et al. 1988 or Honken 2006.

Readers that have relatively little interest in particular details on the phonetic or grammatical structure of individual Khoisan languages will probably want to concentrate most of their attention on the first three chapters — general introduction (Vossen), notes on genetic relationship (Honken), and overall typological characteristics (Güldemann). In my own case, having accumulated some experience while working on the intricate network of connections between the various Khoisan languages, I would deem it useful to offer some brief additional comments on Honken's and Güldemann's chapters in particular, with the goal of complementing the authors' perspectives where, as I believe, they may come across as slightly misleading or incomplete.

The late Henry Honken, whose research, unlike that of most Khoisanologists, consistently focused on comparative-historical studies throughout his life, started out from a “pan-Khoisan” perspective, departing from Joseph Greenberg's assumption of all “Khoisan” languages being genetically related (Honken 1977, 1988), then gradually drifted towards a more cautious and skeptical position (Honken 2006), becoming convinced that the chaotic nature of phonetic correlations between similar morphemes in various putative “branches” of the “Khoisan macrofamily” was more in line with an areal interpretation than a genetic one, i.e. that the similarities between various “Khoisan” groups of languages reflected millennia of linguistic contacts rather than descent from a single ancestor. Since this point of view tends to be shared by certain other leading Khoisanologists as well, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the chapter on “Genetic relationships” is written in full accordance with the “cautious” model.

According to the scheme presented by Honken on p. 23, the “Khoisan unity”, still supported by a small handful of Greenbergians (such as Merritt Ruhlen), should rather be dissected into the following unrelated units: (a) Hadza (language isolate); (b) Sandawe

(language isolate, with a dubious connection to Khoe-Kwadi); (c) Khoe-Kwadi (Khoe languages are undoubtedly related; the connection with the extinct Angolan isolate Kwadi is definitely not accidental and quite likely genetic, but could also be interpreted in areal terms); (d) Kx'a (a new term suggested in Heine & Honken 2010 for the newly demonstrated linguistic family that unites the Ju, or North Khoisan, languages with the †Hōā isolate); (e) !Ui-Taa (Tuu), or South Khoisan (the connection between !Ui and Taa, discussed on p. 19, is also defined as potentially, but not necessarily, genetic).

The possibility of some or all of these units being genetically related at some level is discussed very briefly; the author seemingly does not rule out this possibility, but states that “...no formal demonstration of the genetic unity of Khoesan has been made which is convincing and satisfying to all Khoesanists” (p. 23). This “splitter” model does indeed seem to be currently favored by several scholars who have engaged in comparative Khoisan studies (Sands 1998), but the paper fails to clearly indicate that in between the clearly opposed Greenbergian view (all Khoisan languages can be shown to be related) and the “splitter” view (none, or almost none, of the various “Khoisan groups” can be shown to be related), there are alternate, more complex scenarios to linguistic history in the Khoisan zone.

In particular, the author of this review has previously suggested the existence of “Peripheral Khoisan”, a genetic grouping consisting of Ju-†Hōā (= Heine & Honken's “Kx'a”) and !Ui-Taa, illustrated by multiple series of regular correspondences and supported with numerous etymologies from various lexical strata, including basic items (Starostin 2008). Although the etymologies were of varied quality and some of the correspondences could possibly reflect later areal links rather than genetic connections, the assembled evidence clearly spoke in favor of a much tighter connection between these families than between any of them and Khoe-Kwadi, not to mention Sandawe or Hadza. This relative proximity has also been indirectly supported in a later study that combined etymological research with automated and manual lexicostatistics (Starostin 2013), and although the issue remains far from settled, it seems evident that careful application of the comparative-historical method to a hypothetical unity like “Peripheral Khoisan” holds more promise than its application to an even more hypothetical “Khoisan” as a whole.

In fact, the idea of a “Peripheral Khoisan” as opposed to a “Khoe-Kwadi” family brings a whole new light to the typological evidence and conclusions pre-

sented by Güldemann in Chapter 3 (“Typology”). Included in the chapter are two extremely useful comparative matrices, one of which deals with various elements of morphosyntax, while the other compares the phonetic characteristics of various “Khoisan” languages. Analysis of the matrices shows that morpho-syntactic parameters split the selected languages in two categories: “Sandawe and Khoe-Kwadi on the one hand vs. Tuu, ꞤHoan, and Ju on the other” (p. 30), whereas the phonetic matrix does not show any such splitting — at best, it singles out Hadza and Sandawe as slightly more distinct from the “South African Khoisan” type.

Although Güldemann’s conclusion is that “...the distribution of some linguistic characteristics across Khoisan shows areal patterns not following genealogical lines”, the results of the conducted typological survey in general seem to be highly compatible with the following historical scenario:

(a) disintegration of an original “Proto-Peripheral Khoisan” (or “Non-Khoe”, which is Güldemann’s designation for the typological unity of Ju-ꞤHōã and !Ui-Taa), with the daughter languages retaining not only a significant number of the protolanguage’s morphemic stock, but many of its basic morphosyntactic characteristics as well;

(b) disintegration of an original “Proto-Khoe-Kwadi”, or perhaps even “Proto-Sandawe-Khoe-Kwadi”, whereupon the “Khoe-Kwadi” branch underwent some typological assimilation in the sphere of phonetics to its “Peripheral” areal surroundings, but has retained many of its original structural characteristics.

Under such a scenario, two main lines of research could be undertaken — one that would strive to increase and fortify the already assembled genetic evidence for “Peripheral Khoisan”, and another one that would concentrate upon an exhaustive, well-annotated inventarisation of isomorphisms between “Peripheral” and “Central” Khoisan that should be explained by a prolonged history of language contact (even though the possibility remains that some of these isomorphisms could be indicative of an even deeper relationship — which requires setting up a complex system of criteria to separate “certified” arealisms from items that could be explained ambiguously).

A common goal of Honken’s and Güldemann’s chapters could be defined as trying to convince the reader that, apart from the obvious argument that all these languages share sub-systems of click phonemes, there is really no “Khoisan” (“Khoesan”) as such — i.e., that the internal diversity of “Khoisan” languages largely exceeds their commonly shared elements (typological features as well as morphemic / lexical simi-

larities). The point is well made, but it is also important that the somewhat extreme “lumper” attitude of Joseph Greenberg not be replaced by an equally extreme “splitter” attitude: Honken, for instance, goes as far as to put under doubt even the genetic relationship between !Ui and Taa (p. 19), simply because it is not easy to find shared morphology between the two language groups — despite the fact that basic lexical isoglosses between Proto-!Ui and Proto-Taa number in the dozens (Starostin 2013), while morphological isoglosses between these languages are predictably harder to find since, first of all, as Honken himself points out, most of the languages lack reliable grammatical descriptions and, second, since all !Ui-Taa languages, apart from some complex patterns of forming nominal plurals, tend to have very little paradigmatic morphology at all.

Consequently, I believe that the reader should understand that “Khoisan-internal” diversity, while undeniably greater than could be surmised from browsing through the fifteen pages of the Khoisan section in (Greenberg 1966), is still significantly smaller than could be expected from a linguistic area that had thousands (if not *tens* of thousands!) of years at its disposition to multiply and diverge. Regardless of whether we reduce that diversity to three families and two isolates, or to two “super-families” and one isolate (Hadza), this lack of diversity remains a historical paradox, unexplainable properly even by linguistic assimilation upon the arrival of Bantu and then European speakers, that should be subject to further investigation.

One can only hope that, perhaps, the long-awaited arrival of the volume under review — most likely destined to become the default reference book on Khoisan languages for quite a long time — will help aspiring scholars stimulate some additional interest in resolving this paradox, as well as draw additional (and much required) attention to the necessity of properly documenting the relatively few Khoisan languages that are still spoken today.

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