At the crossroads of the 'Bec de Canard' (Cameroon / Chad) – Linguistic interference between the Masa Group (South Chadic; AA) and the Kebi-Benue Group (Adamawa, N-C)

Abstract

I would like to describe / discuss certain types of construction that characterize the Chadic Masa language / the Masa Group spoken in the northern Cameroonian and adjacent Chadian borderland. The question arises as to whether these traits − rather uncommon for the Chadic languages − are due to

(a) genetic origin,

(b) internal, i.e. typological motivation, or

(c) language contact with languages belonging to a different stock.

The last possibility puts in focus neighbouring Adamawa languages and explains the choice of the 3 languages to compare – Tupuri, Mundang and Mambay; these languages are also quite well documented.

After introducing the geographical situation of the region and the genetic classification of these languages as well as others to be cited, a few remarks on the characteristics of each language group will be given. This will be followed by a short comparison of the phoneme inventories involved and a few comments on the extent of lexical borrowing. (Lexical issues and autosegmental issues, e.g. distinctive tone, can be taken up in the discussion.)

As regards morphosyntax: The interest focuses here on t y p e s of construction and not so much on tokens – it is not the single etymon/cognate that is examined, rather it is the nature and distribution of the grammatical structuring involved: structural correspondence (calques) instead of sound correspondence. The 4 selected linguistic parameters are:

1) Clause-final negation,

2) Postural deictics / demonstratives,

3) Verb focus construction, and

4) Formation of the agent noun.

6 languages and/or dial. clusters will primarily be looked at. 4 Chadic ones: Masa, Gizey and Zime/Lamé from the Masa branch as well as Kera (and Lele) from the East Chadic branch and the 3 Adamawa languages: Tupuri, Mundang and Mambay. (Mbum ...)

– The data are taken from the well-known grammars and the Lamé dictionary respectively, the Masa data – as far as the Yagoua dialect is concerned– is my own; but I also cite examples from other sources [Barreteau Caitucoli, Melis and Ajello et al.].

Why do I make this particular choice of <u>morphosyntactic parameters/construction types</u> and why just these languages?

<u>Firstly</u>, the structural features enumerated are rather conspicuous in the Masa system, so it could be interesting to check whether these are only typical of Masa or have a wider distribution in the area. If the latter is the case, then the question can be put in how far each of these morphosyntactic or semanto-syntactic constructions are 'typical' of Chadic:

The presentation of the 4 <u>topics</u> I will put in the following order: start with Masa, continuing with the other Masa Group languages and switching to the two East Chadic ones, to end with Tupuri and Mundang.