Toward a dialect history of the Baggara Belt

The Baggara Belt constitutes the southernmost periphery of the Arabic-speaking world. It stretches over 2500 Km, from Lake Chad in the west to the White Nile in the east, and it is primarily inhabited by Arab semi-nomadic cattle herders. Despite their common cultural background (Braukämper 1993), the ethnography of Baggara nomads is complex, being the result of a long series of longitudinal migrations and contacts with various ethnolinguistic groups (Čížková 2018). Thanks to a number of comparative works (Owens 1993, Roth-Laly 1993), there is broad agreement on the inclusion of Baggara dialects within Western Sudanic Arabic. However, due to the paucity of descriptive studies, little or nothing is known about their internal classification (Manfredi 2012).

This paper seeks to explore linguistic convergences and divergences within the Baggara Belt and aims to demonstrate how structures and functions of the Baggara dialects of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Sudan have been shaped by the interplay of internally and externally-motivated diachronic changes. The study mainly focuses on the geographic distribution of phonological (e.g. implosive consonants; pre-pausal imāla), morphosyntactic (e.g. 1SG/1PL marking in the imperfective paradigm; order of numeral and noun), and lexical features (e.g. question words; analytic genitive exponents). Besides, it takes into consideration the diatopic variation affecting the functional productivity of certain grammatical categories (e.g. ideophones). By intersecting historical and first-hand linguistic data, the study eventually proposes a unified historical hypothesis for the diffusion of dialect features within the Baggara Belt and it tackles the assumption that Baggara dialects form a homogeneous dialect area.

Fig.1 The Baggara Belt

References