

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.

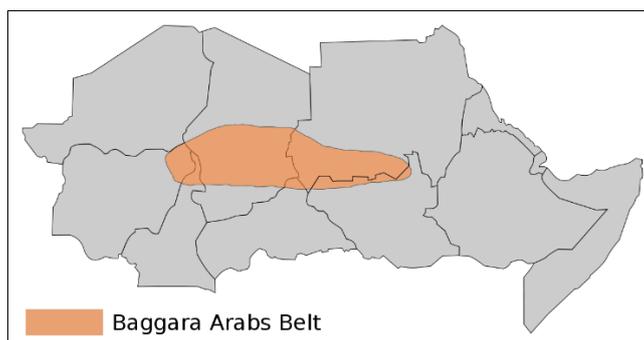


Fig.1 The Baggara Belt

References

- Braukämper, Ulrich 1993. The Origin of Baggara Arab Culture with Special Reference to the Shuwa. *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika*, 14: 13-46.
- Čížková, Martina et al. 2018. Genetic Structure of the Western and Eastern African Sahel/Savannah Belt and the Role of Nomadic Pastoralists as Inferred from the Variation of D-loop mtDNA sequences. *Human Biology Open Access*. 129. https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/humbiol_preprints/129
- Manfredi, Stefano 2012. Dialect mixing and dialect levelling in Kordofanian Baggara Arabic. In A. Barontini et al. (eds.), *Dynamiques langagières en Arabophonie: variations, contacts, migrations et créations artistique. Hommage offert à Dominique Caubet par ses élèves et collègues*. Universidad de Zaragoza, Colección Estudios de Dialectología Árabe. 141-162.
- Owens, Jonathan 1993. Nigerian Arabic in Comparative Perspective. *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 14: 85-175.
- Roth-Laly, Arlette 1993. Dialectologie comparée au Tchad et au Soudan - De quelques matériaux et discriminants. *Matériaux Arabes et Sud-Arabiques* 6: 69-102.