

INTRODUCTION

Isabel Compes and Jane Akinyi Ngala Oduor
University of Cologne and University of Nairobi

The papers in this collection result from talks that were presented at the 16th Nilo-Saharan Colloquium, Nairobi, which was organized by a team of colleagues from the Institute of African Studies and Egyptology, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Cologne and the Department of Linguistics and Languages, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Nairobi from 29th to 31st August 2023.¹ The conference was entitled “Linguistic, Sociocultural, and Indigenous Perspectives” and, as the title indicates, it offered a comprehensive and expansive view on the diversity of Nilo-Saharan studies, encompassing panels on phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, as well as sociolinguistics and historical reconstruction. The panels, which promoted an indigenous perspective, treated issues such as the pragmatics of war and conflict and cattle color terms, as well as literature and heritage studies, where researchers from fields beyond language sciences and linguistics presented on topics as diverse as archeology, forgotten manuscripts, Bible translation, art, film, and architecture, encouraging lively discussions. The conference also included a special round table on “Heritage and/as language” with participants of the Nairobi-Aswan-Cologne Summer School, chaired by Heinz Felber and Anne Storch.

To our great regret, Sudanese researchers could not attend the conference due to the ongoing conflict in their country. We feel deeply with them, and we very much hope that the situation in Sudan will ameliorate so that we will be able to meet our colleagues at future conferences in the African context. We are all the more pleased that one of the Sudanese researchers was able to present her talk in written form, which is included in this volume (see Sawsan Nashid, University of Khartoum).

In this special issue of *The University of Nairobi Journal of Language and Linguistics*, we present peer-reviewed papers based on talks presented at the conference. The volume is divided into two parts. The first part is on structural topics like phonology, tone, and (morpho)syntax. The second part contains papers which undertake semantic analyses in a broad sense. Finally, the last paper of the volume is based on a keynote talk and takes a Nilo-Saharan perspective, presenting new arguments in the debate on the language family.

The first paper, titled “Segmental Reversal in Kuliak and its Relationship to Nilo-Saharan”, is by **Roger Blench**. The Kuliak branch of Nilo-Saharan has two living languages, namely Ik and So, while Nyang’I is moribund. Through published and

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unpublished data, the paper illustrates that many CV syllables in cognate forms in other branches of Nilo-Saharan are realised as VC in Kuliak. Thus, segment reversal is common in the Kuliak branch, but is infrequent elsewhere in the phylum. The author assumes that the process takes place at the interface between morphology and phonology.

The next two papers are on tone systems. Research on tone systems in African and, more specifically, on Nilo-Saharan languages is very much desired, and any up-to-date analysis enhances our knowledge of the variation in these systems. **Elsadig Omda and Isabel Compes**, in their paper titled “Tone Marking on Beria Verbs”, analyze the tone system of the Wagi dialect of Beria (Saharan), concentrating on verb forms. In the verbal system of Beria, the tone patterns of lexical tone classes interact with grammatical tones to yield surface realizations of finite verb forms. The paper presents an analysis of the processes of tonal changes that derive these surface realizations, arguing that the tone patterns of some verb forms arise due to the Obligatory Contour Principle.

In her paper titled “Preliminary Report: Deictic Tone in Nuer”, **Irina Monich** reports on Nuer (Western Nilotic). She presents new evidence for a tone system with five surface tones and three underlying tonemes. Her focus is on the nominal system in which, firstly, proximal and distal forms of common nouns are distinguished tonally, and secondly, proper nouns exhibit a distinct tonal pattern in their oblique forms. Neither of these phenomena has been recognized previously, and in both cases, she argues for the presence of non-segmental morphemes, i.e., a floating high tone that docks at the right edge of the noun in distal contexts, and a floating moraic prefix in the context of the oblique form of proper names.

In his study titled “The Conjoint/Disjoint Alternation in Bari and its Origins”, **Shuichiro Nakao** describes a morphosyntactic verbal alternation which was not analyzed in previous research on Bari (Eastern Nilotic), and which he relates to the so-called “conjoint/disjoint” (CJ/DJ) alternation in Bantu linguistics. In Bari, evidence for the CJ/DJ alternation comes from certain transitive clauses and further syntactic environments. In addition, homophonic verb forms with other readings exist, i.e., the “focus” and the “potential” form. Nakao’s analysis of the readings of these verb forms aims to reveal the emergence of the CJ/DJ alternation in Bari, which he attributes to the functional expansion of the “focus” form. In Bantu linguistics, the interrelation of the concepts of CJ/DJ alternation and focus is much debated. The Bari data presented here reveal a diachronic and synchronic connection and thus also shed new light on the phenomenon in Bantu.

The last paper in the first part, “Clause Combining in Gwama” by **Andargachew Gebeyehu**, gives an overview of multi-clause constructions in Gwama, a Koman language spoken in Western Ethiopia. The author identifies four clause types in the language: complement clauses, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, and converbial clauses. Encodings range from unmarked juxtaposition in complementation, to a head-internal non-reduction strategy in the case of relatives, to diverse connectors in adverbials, and a non-finite form in converb constructions. Although this study presents only a preliminary analysis of multi-clause structures, it is highly valuable in providing access to data on this lesser-known language.

The first two of the papers in the second part address the conceptual domain of war in two different linguistic and cultural settings. In their paper titled “The Conceptualization of War in a Dholuo Gospel Song”, **Robert Ochieng**, **Jane Akinyi Ngala Oduor**, and **Kithaka wa Mberia** analyze a song in a Western Nilotic language. The analysis is done within the framework of Text World Theory to show how grammatical structures such as noun phrases, verb phrases, adjectives, etc., relate to cognition and cultural expressions. *Yesu* ‘Jesus’, one of the referents, is the protagonist of the ongoing war and conflict. Through the authors’ linguistic knowledge of Dholuo, it is concluded that the aim of the song is religious persuasion, since the protagonist is presented using names that display strength, his actions and qualities are admirable, and he is in possession of admirable objects as well. Their paper contributes to cognitive linguistics.

Prisca Jerono, whose paper is titled “The Natural Semantic Metalanguage of War and Conflict Resolution in Kalenjin”, contributes to semantics and pragmatics using data drawn from Kalenjin languages. The paper focuses on the language of war and conflict resolution, aiming at an understanding of the cultural perspectives surrounding war and the resolution of conflicts. As the title shows, the analysis takes place within the framework of Natural Semantic Metalanguage. It shows that conflict resolution was found to be necessary only among warring factions in the Kalenjin community. It was not applied outside the community. Raiding expeditions were culturally accepted as a means of wealth creation and territorial expansion. Therefore, peace with other speech communities was not a priority, and the concept of peace was not lexicalized but entered the language later.

Sawsan Nashid’s paper titled “Strategies of Semantic Change in Loan Words in the Nilotic Languages: Dinka, Nuer, and Bari” is a comparative analysis of loan word integration in these three Western Nilotic languages spoken in Sudan. It examines the semantic fields that words borrowed into the three languages belong to and traces the strategies of semantic change found in the process of borrowing. The analysis uses data already existing in other publications but confirms their existence and meaning with native speakers of each of these languages. It reveals that the semantic strategies employed in the languages include zero change, generalization, specialization, and a radical change in word meaning. This paper contributes to semantics and language change.

In the last paper of the volume, titled “Arguments for the Coherence of Nilo-Saharan”, **Roger Blench** takes up the debate on the Nilo-Saharan phylum. He provides new evidence from three structural fields, i.e., three-term number marking, ATR vowel harmony, and *t*- and *k*- affixing. Moreover, two personal pronouns are reconstructed. Taken together, the data justifies the establishment of a coherent Nilo-Saharan phylum with twelve branches. Recently, some researchers rejected the coherence of the phylum, arguing that many of the known common features are typological in nature. The paper argues against such explanations, since the structures discussed are distinct on the phonological level as well as in terms of segmental morphology. In concluding, it summarizes its view on the Nilo-Saharan language family in a new model of its branches.

The papers in this volume are far from being representative of the broad perspectives of the conference. Nevertheless, we hope to provide a first glimpse at some of the current topics in Nilo-Saharan research by making these studies available to the public.

Authors' e-mail addresses:

1. Isabel Compes
icompes@uni-koeln.de
2. Jane Oduor
oduor_jane@uonbi.ac.ke