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■ Introduction

In the more than 150-year-old tradition of studying African languages, West Africa has become an area of many research developments related to individual languages or language groups and families, which, nevertheless, represent particular research circles rather than a single branch of African linguistics.¹ Various scholars and institutions contributed to the knowledge of the structural peculiarities of languages with different affiliations to language families (Afroasiatic, Nilosaharan and Niger-Congo) that in West Africa are used within relatively small distances. Research on areal phenomena in African linguistic studies has begun rather late (Aikhenvald & Dixon 2001, Heine & Kuteva 2001, Dimmendahl 2008, 2011), just like studies on “contact zones and linguistic convergence areas in West Africa” (Cyffer & Ziegelmeyer, ed. 2009; Zima 2009, among others) which remain a subject of constant discussion. The issue of contact zones includes a wider reflection on the interference of genetic and areal factors as well as on linguistic tools and methodological background of comparative works, which comprise a variety of structural patterns and different attitudes to their interpretation. The descriptive works are often combined with sociolinguistic and communicative studies on languages, which set many new research directions and give them a more unified perspective.

The present volume joins two traditions, i.e. research conducted in separate linguistic circles with challenges of looking at West African languages from a broader areal perspective. It contributes to the studies on structural properties of the selected languages and corresponding methodological approaches to their analysis, but also provides some new research findings related to social and communicative aspects of the languages in West African context. Such an attitude results from interaction and exchange of ideas among scholars of African languages experienced in Chadic (or Afroasiatic) linguistics, Mande studies, Atlantic studies, and Akan studies or various working groups, dedicated to specific areas of language research.

The idea of the volume emanates from presentations and discussions conducted during the series of conferences known as Symposium on West African Languages, initiated in Naples in 2014 and continued in Vienna in 2016. Most topics present in the volume were discussed during the 3rd edition of the conference held at the University of Warsaw in 2018 (SyWAL2018).

The authors represent main centers of African studies in which West African languages are subject of research. These include universities and research institutions from Europe

¹ On comparative and descriptive African linguistics see Part II in Wolff. 2019: 137-416

(Paris, Naples, London, Brighton, Bayreuth, Frankfurt am Main, Moscow, Trondheim, Warsaw), and Nigeria (Kano, Benin, Ibadan, Makurdi, Wukari). The cooperation on institutional ground promotes exchange of views between the previously established research circles and evokes the discussion on new ideas that arise from the current state of research on West African languages.

The contributors discuss properties of West African languages having a long descriptive tradition (Hausa) and those that are subject of intensive studies in recent decades (Bambara), as well as features of less studied or endangered languages (Tiv, Lamnso', Ga, Tomo Kan). The comparative analyses are either genetic and limited to language groups (Bole-Tangale, Atlantic languages) or have an areal perspective to show their wider West African dimension. Linguistic processes are discussed along with issues concerning communication and sociolinguistics, making the relation between language and society clear and documenting the association of distinctive features of West African languages with cultural values.

1. West Africa as an area of linguistic diversity and unification processes

West Africa as a sub-region of the African continent is defined mostly on geographic and political criteria which exclude Northern Africa and the Maghreb covering the Sub-Saharan countries from Senegal to Nigeria. As a region of linguistic studies, West Africa adheres to these limits, though genetic relationship and historical contacts between languages make these conventional boundaries vague in a number of respects. The region is characterized by linguistic diversity which determines the prominence of research oriented at multilingualism and language contact. The works conducted so far has focused on identifying convergence zones rather than providing the proof of the linguistic coherence in the entire region. The term convergence zone refers to a region where many linguistic features are shared across the language boundaries. The two largest units, i.e. Macro-Sudan Belt extending from Senegal to Ethiopia (Güldemann 2008) and Wider Lake Chad Region overlap to some extent, especially in Nigeria where genetically distinct and structurally different languages meet (Ziegelmeyer 2015; Wolff & Löhr 2005; Zima 2009; Cyffer & Ziegelmeyer 2009).

West Africa is characterized by extensive societal multilingualism (Lüpke & Chambers 2010). Along with indigenous languages superimposed foreign languages such as French, English or Portuguese are used. The region has always been an area where languages brought by scholars, traders or travelers were in constant confrontation with those used locally. Muslim teachers and traders moving along West Africa brought Arabic to this region. The emergence of political centers such as Ghana in 12th century, Mali in 14th century, Songhay in 15th century or the Sokoto Caliphate in 19th century strengthened the position of Arabic as the language of courts, written correspondence, religious and legal teaching. Arabic also became an important contact language among educated and influential people living in towns and it had an impact on the major languages of the Sahel and northern savannah. The historical empires and city-states also promoted languages spoken by the ruling class such as Hausa, Fulfulde or Mande languages, pushing many other local languages aside. Due to globalization, urbanization and economic development, the number of languages

spoken not only in the entire macro-region, but also in particular towns or districts is decreasing. However, there are still places where the extensive multilingualism is the daily bread. The diversity is particularly prominent in the Nigerian Middle Belt, where the minority languages function in a wide range of circumstances. It is also present in Casamance, southern region of Senegal squished between Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, where more than ten languages are spoken. Several lingua francas of the region are: Mandinka, Peul, Joola Fogany, French, and Portuguese Creole. Other languages such as Balanta, Manjaku, and smaller Joola languages serve as lingua francas on a smaller scale. In addition, minority languages such as Bainounk cluster or Bayot are used. The national language of Senegal – Wolof, which has been spreading rapidly since the country’s independence in 1960, also made its presence in the region (Cobbinah 2010: 177).

West Africa is also perceived as an area of linguistic change mediated by social factors (Dimmendaal 2008: 855) which affect languages in their sociolinguistic dimension. Looking from such perspective, multilingualism is perceived as a threat to existence of minority languages (Blench & McGill 2012) which become endangered. However, the multilingual situation is also an opportunity to spread the linguistic patterns characteristic of the dominant languages. Hausa remains an important source of grammatical structures and linguistic patterns shared by many languages of the region. The status of Hausa in West Africa and a long tradition of research on its structural features results in the availability of data for the extensive study of the grammatical system and study of the language situation in West Africa through the lens of Hausa language data. In more recent times, it is Pidgin English which gains popularity not only in Nigeria, but also in other parts of West Africa. Studies of its structural peculiarities provide insight into the most common patterns and ways of conceptualization characteristic of the West African region (Frackiewicz 2019). They clearly demonstrate the ongoing process of unification manifested by the use of the same structural patterns and structural calques in many languages. Such is the instance of complementizer in a number of West African languages, which has the form based on the verb ‘say’. It is worth noting that in Nigerian Pidgin English it is also *say* not *that* as in English, the lexifier language.

2. The structure of the volume

The volume is divided into four parts devoted to particular aspects relevant to general linguistic studies and studies on West African languages. Part I: **West Africa as a linguistic area** presents the results of comparative studies on languages, which refer to the prominent achievements of African linguistics in phonology and diachronic studies. It also includes a corpus-based study providing methods for linguistic analysis of unstable and changing structures. In the first article, “Measuring phonological complexity in West African languages” Gian Claudio Batic summarizes the areal aspects of phonological complexity and provides evidence that West Africa can be considered a coherent phonological area. Therefore, the idea which has been already postulated in the literature and identified on the map of phonological areas in Africa (Clements and Rialland 2008) has gained the support. Another article by Sergio Baldi and Rudolf Leger “Innovative features of nouns and pronouns in Chadic languages of the Nigerian Gongola-Benue basin” refers to diachronic

investigations on Chadic. The analysis goes beyond the traditional approach and leads to identifying external influences which affect grammar. They are motivated by contact with neighbouring Adamawa and Jarawan Bantu languages.

In “Methodological and technical challenges of a corpus-based study of Naija” Bernard Caron refers to a large corpus created within a long-term project. The article provides comprehensive information on the development and functional status of Common Nigerian Pidgin (or Naija), which functions as *lingua franca* in in Nigeria. This corpus, the first for creole and pidgin studies, creates a basis for the development of language and standardization of the orthography, which requires special methodological choices in annotation to establish the link between the change in structure and the change in language use and function.

Part II: **Structural properties of languages and their theoretical frames** deals with the interpretation of structural patterns characteristic of West African languages. It includes the topics corresponding to the descriptive tradition of main West African language groups, namely Mande, Atlantic, Chadic, and Kwa languages. Valentin Vydrin in “Clause chaining in Bambara” presents a clause linking type which is distinct from both coordination and subordination. Its nature is close to coordination syntactically, and resembles subordination morphologically. Providing a rich documentation of the construction labeled a “cosubordination” construction, the author contributes to a better understanding of mono- and pluriclausality in linguistic theory. Klaudia Dombrovsky-Hahn discusses “Categorization of phasal polarity items in Bambara (Mande)”. In Bambara, the markers of ALREADY, NOT YET, STILL and NO LONGER are classified as adverbs or particles. The analysis leads to identifying their lexical sources which are found in verbs and shows how their status has been changed in the process of grammaticalization. The data for the analysis enable presentation of some structural properties of Bambara, such as the feature of transitivity and intransitivity and a variety of exponents to express the meaning ‘to be’ with their positive and negative lexical counterparts. In the following article, “Ma-causatives in Tomo Kan Dogon: Between Causatives and Passives” Vadim Dyachkov discusses the causative/passive polysemy in Tomo Kan, a Dogon language (Niger-Congo) spoken in Mali and Burkina Faso. By using syntactic tests (modification by temporal adverbs, ellipsis, reflective binding), Dyachkov shows that distant causatives formed by adding the *má-* suffix are monoclausal structures where the causing and the caused sub-event cannot be modified independently. On the basis of structural properties of distant causatives (*má-* suffix and lack of subject marker), it is claimed that the emergence of passive meaning is associated with the loss of the clausal suffix (resulting in the absence of the overt subject) rather than in terms of reflexivization or pragmatic reinterpretation.

Structural properties of languages and their theoretical implications are discussed in the following three articles. In “Overview of asymmetries in negation in the Atlantic languages” Aurore Montébrun shows that negation is a complex process involving different grammatical categories, such as person and number marking, as well as the syntactic organisation of the sentence. There are more irregularities and asymmetries between affirmative and negative sentences than the presence or the absence of the negation marker. For example, completely different TAM markers or copulas are used in negative and affirmative clauses. The heterogeneity of the negative strategies and their interactions in Atlantic languages shed more light on internal clustering of the Atlantic group.

In his article “Let’s tidy up the grammar of Hausa and analyze ‘after/behind’ in ‘*after class/after he arrives/he’s behind*’ etc. as prepositions” Phillip Jaggard tries to re-examine the existing descriptions of Hausa prepositions from theoretical perspective not used before. He provides evidence for a unified analysis of prepositions in terms of heads of phrases and their complements. The idea has its roots in early work by Jespersen (1909-49), extended in Pullum & Huddleston (2002) with reference to English. Reinterpretation of the category of Hausa prepositions takes into account the morphological and distributional criteria. Though controversial in the context of Hausa descriptive tradition, it joins together all variants and alternative interpretations of the phrasal constituents which very often have the same lexical base.

Contributing to another field of West African studies, Dorothee Beermann and Lars Hellan in “Enhancing grammar and valence resources for Akan and Ga” present data management and analysis software for endangered languages. They demonstrate how digital resources and their linguistic specification for one language are helpful in the development of resources for another language. The article provides interpretation of the notions of grammatical relations and valence in closely related languages which, nevertheless, show resource asymmetry. The comparison of *ba* having the lexical meaning ‘come’ in Akan and Ga in terms of syntactic environment and situation type explains the development of contemporary syntactic systems.

Part III: **Syntactic structures and conceptualization patterns** covers a wide range of strategies in coding the meaning, which have their motivation in pragmatic associations and culturally motivated patterns of conceptualization, along with iconic strategies petrified in sign languages. Lenzemo Constantine Yuka in his article “On the *shi-* evaluative prefix in Lamnso” presents the pragmatic values of the grammatical prefix qualified as noun class marker in systemic descriptions. The claim is that the *shi-* prefix in Lamnso’ connotes more than just the diminutive aspects of the nominal under qualification and very often portrays the speaker’s attitudinal evaluation of the noun. Therefore it is rather employed as a strategy of persuading an interlocutor to look at the object from a particular perspective.

The next two articles in this section deal with multiword expressions as new means of coding the meaning. Usually seen in terms of petrified phrases, they are presented as specific innovations which function in languages in the process of rapid development and without a stabilized linguistic standard. Vanessa Chivir Adzer in “Tiv compounds and compounding” presents both regular and specific rules of word combinations. The resulting form, which serves to convey a new message, can be classified as a noun, although the components of this multiword expression are nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Olga Frąckiewicz discusses “Nigerian Pidgin English phraseology in the context of areal influences”. The article presents various types of multiword expressions which are based on English words, but in terms of structural features and conceptualization patterns represent collocations based on native West African languages. It is shown that the most productive model for compounding is verb + noun combination. One of the verbs productively used in compounding, is *chop* ‘to eat’, e.g. *chop life* ‘to enjoy’, *chop maut* ‘to kiss’, *chop burger* ‘put on weight’. Another source domain of idiomatic expressions in Nigerian Pidgin are body-part terms, which have grammatical functions and are used to code various semantic concepts.

Topics presented in the volume also concern sign languages used in West Africa. Mary Edwards in “Lexical iconicity in Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL) and Ghanaian Sign

Language (GSL)” discusses preference for specific iconic strategies to name handheld tools such as key, hammer, comb or pen among signers of two languages specified in the title as well as rural and urban gesturers (i.e. hearing people who perform gestures) from Ghana. She notices that signers and gesturers exhibit systematic preference for iconic representation of tools choosing an action-based sign depicting how the object is held (handling strategy) or depicting features of the object (instrument strategy). Both GSL and AdaSL signers prefer the instrument strategy, while gesturers show a greater preference for handling strategy, although rural gesturers demonstrate a high preference for instrument almost comparable to their preference for handling, which may be connected with the fact that they live among the community of AdaSL speakers. The research shows that AdaSL, a rural sign language with a long history has higher consistency and agreement in the use of the same strategy for individual items than GSL, an urban sign language that emerged in 1957. In a summary, the author makes an observation that the preference for instrument strategy in naming handheld tools seems to emerge quickly in new sign languages.

Part IV: **Social and communicative aspects of languages** focuses on extra-linguistic factors determining the use of languages. In West African context, the role of vehicular languages, such as Hausa, in multiethnic communication is crucial. They affect the lexicon and structure of minority languages, being a source of borrowings and transmitting language behavior. Hausa is not only the language of broader communication, but also a language of written literature, both native and translated. Translated works of European or American writers are a rich source for analyzing systemic devices, stylistic forms and cultural norms.

The section starts with the article “Phraseological units involving body part terms: A corpus based analysis of Hausa to English translation” in which Yakubu Magaji Azare presents results of the analysis based on parallel texts from two different languages – Hausa and English. The comparison of structures involving body-part terms in the two texts from the perspective of translation shows significant differences between the status of body-part terms in the two languages due to different conceptual patterns and grammaticalization paths.

Judith Mgbemena in “Linguistic Repertoires of Refugees in Internally Displaced Peoples’ (IDP) Camps in North East Nigeria” shows a linguistic situation in Nigeria from the perspective of endangered languages. In reports and publications referring to the impact of terrorism and violent conflict on national development, the language component is usually ignored. In a similar vein, humanitarian groups helping the people in need focus on social, economic, religious or medical aid, leaving the problem of language and communication aside. The paper focuses on language use spectrum in two Internally Displaced Persons’ camps situated in east-north Nigeria showing how forced mobility resulting from violent attacks affects linguistic ecology of Nigeria. It is shown that indigenous languages are rarely used at the camps and the IDP people are exposed to other languages like Hausa and English. It poses a threat to the sustenance of the displaced languages not only locally, but also globally, as many of these languages are endangered.

The forms of direct communication involving gestures are discussed in “The function of nonverbal regulators in Hausa face-to-face interaction” by Aisha Umar Adamu. She analyses the use of nonverbal signals called regulators in Hausa social interactions taking place in schools and at wedding ceremonies. The research shows that various gestures and body postures act as conversational regulators that help to keep the flow of the conversation. Regulators mark the beginning or the end of the conversations (e.g. turning the head aside)

or function as turn-taking signals (e.g. inverting the mouth in an upside down “u” shape, akimbo, beard stroking). Depending on the communication context, regulators can function as substitutes for verbal expressions or as an emphasis of a verbal statement.

The final article of the volume deals with religious phrases of Arabic origin which are commonly used in West African languages. Nina Pawlak in “Allah expressions as a manifestation of common cultural area in West Africa” presents a set of established phrases which have phonological variants in Hausa, Kanuri, Songhay, Wolof, Bambara and many other West African languages. Reported in the dictionary as Arabic loans (Baldi 2008) they are fully integrated into the languages. They are used not only in religious context but also in everyday communication and have many pragmatic functions. The process of their secularization is illustrated with the examples extracted from spoken and written Hausa.

3. Empirical approaches in the context of West African linguistics

Although the book is divided into four parts, the topics touched upon in various parts correspond to each other. Structural, conceptual and communicative aspects of languages discussed in parts II-IV often reflect phenomena common for the entire region. They refer to a well-documented fact that not only the lexicon, but also grammatical patterns like TAM systems (Wolff & Löhr 2005) and negation (Cyffer et al. 2009), can be borrowed. As far as structural patterns of negation in West Africa are concerned, they are often characterized by two factors: asymmetry and double marking. The asymmetric negation, i.e. the structure that exhibits more structural differences than the addition of a negative marker, is not only characteristic of Atlantic languages (as presented by Aurore Montebran in this volume). For example, Kanuri applies negative markers in the Completive and Potential TAMs, which is different from the Imperfect TAM. Negative Imperfect is derived from the construction where a negative predicator and an embedded affirmative clause were applied (e.g. the English sentence ‘I will not go to Kano’ was constructed as ‘there is not [that] I will go to Kano’; (Cyffer 2009: 1). As shown in *the Word Atlas of Language Structures*,² out of 22 West African languages that are represented in the data, 16 languages have both symmetric and asymmetric negation, 6 have only asymmetric negation while only in 2 of them negation is fully symmetric. Another feature characteristic of negation is double negation-marking – a syntactic structure that combines two different markers to express sentential negation. One of them is usually situated between the subject and the main verb, the other one is clause-final or sentence-final marker (Beyer 2009). Both features: double negation marking and asymmetry function in Lobi, another West African (Gur) language representing Niger-Congo family (Winkelmann & Mische 2009: 173). They confirm the areal representation of the specific patterns in non-related languages.

Another issue touched upon in papers dedicated to the description of particular languages, but having a more areal dimension is syntactic categorization. Classifying a given lexeme

² A large database of structural (phonological, grammatical, lexical) properties of languages (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013).

as a verb, adjective or preposition is often the result of descriptive traditions of a given language rather than the result of the formal analysis. The categorization is problematic due to the fact that many lexical items are multifunctional and one word such as *kòrɔ* in Bambara can function as the verb ‘get or be old’, the predicate adjective or state verb ‘old’, the modifying adjective ‘old’ or the noun ‘elder sibling’, among others (Dombrowsky-Hahn in this volume). As noticed by Caron (this volume) in order to avoid the problem of distinguishing verbs from adjectives in Nigerian Pidgin some researchers (e.g. Mazzoli 2013) use the term “property items” while others (e.g. Faraclas 1989) state that the category “adjective” does not apply to the language; one can talk about “stative verbs” only.

Descriptions of West African languages are characterized by incoherence in the use of linguistic terminology, i.e. labels peculiar to the language structures. The articles of the volume contribute to the recognition of structural properties of languages, that may be helpful in unifying the terminology and doing comparative works with the use of compatible terms. This is exemplified by pluractionals, the term used widely in the description of Chadic verbal forms (Newman 2012), but not so common in the presentation of a very similar feature in other languages. Also, the term serial verb constructions may be subject of different theoretical interpretations and functional applications. Beermann and Hellan (this volume) notice that Ga (Kwa, Niger-Congo) makes use of multiverb expressions that subsume the so called Extended Verb Complexes, i.e. combinations of a main verb and verbs with a predominantly functional nature, like inducing deixis or path aspect. Such functional verbs precede the main verb (that is why they are often referred to as preverbs), but they can also occur post-verbally. In multiverb expressions the verb phrases may also play a role of adverbials. It shows that in areal attitude, there is a variety of methodological applications and the common basis of the interpretation is subject of further investigation.

The effect of language contact for grammatical structure finds its clear manifestation in the process of grammaticalization. Although cross-linguistically the whole African continent may be seen as one grammaticalization area (Heine & Kuteva 2015), West Africa is the region in which a set of the same conceptual schemas is used in grammatical functions, as for example, logophoric marking (Güldemann 2008) or exceed comparatives (Ziegelmeyer 2015). As shown by the authors of this volume, Philip Jaggard and Yakubu Azare, the semantic domain that functions as a rich source of grammatical markers are body part-terms. The grammaticalization of body-part terms results in the high frequency of their occurrence in texts and raises the question whether the given lexeme is still a noun or yet a pronoun or an adverb. The contributors to this volume opt for a formal solution of the problem and present various arguments towards such a claim. However, on a morphological level there is no overtly marked difference between the preposition and the noun. For example, in Hausa a single lexical form: *bayan* functions either as a noun ‘the back of (sth.)’ or a pronoun ‘at the back’.

The evidence of areal factors caused by multilingualism is most expressive in works on conceptualization patterns. The contributions go along with the statement that speakers using two languages continuously tend to minimize their cognitive and linguistic efforts to translate between these two languages. As a result, the speakers reorganize the range of meaning of words in each language so that they become closer, and reshape the way of structuring the events in the sentences (Ross 1997: 241). Multilingualism affects not only the lexical and structural part of the language. It also causes the emergence of common

conceptualization patterns. One of such patterns is defined as “African community model”, i.e. community model based on kinship (Polzenhagen 2007), characterized as the extension of the family concept to society in general (Polzenhagen 2007: 119). The semantic and conceptual extensions of kinship terms are based on metonymies, linking the kinship with the community, e.g. COMMUNITY FOR KINSHIP or KINSHIP FOR COMMUNITY (Hollington 2015: 170). For example, the term *baba*, which in Hausa and Yoruba means ‘father’, is used in Nigeria to refer to the elders in the community, to the leaders of various associations or even to the president of the country – *baba Buhari*. Another conceptualization pattern commonly used in West Africa is based on the extensive use of body-part terms. Not only are they used to refer to parts of every-day objects, but also to describe more abstract concepts like emotions, feelings or the process of thinking. Body-part terms are substantial part of idiomatic expressions or compounds in various languages spoken in West Africa. Conceptualization patterns find their exemplification in Hausa, e.g. *farin ciki* ‘happiness’ (lit. white stomach), *bakin ciki* ‘sadness’ (lit. black stomach), Pidgin English, e.g. *strong head* ‘stubborn, persistent’, *bodi du mi* ‘premonition’ (lit. body do me), *big ai* ‘ambitious, greedy’ (lit. big eye) and Tiv *shimányián* ‘anxiety (lit. red heart)’; (see the papers in this volume by Azare, Frąckiewicz and Adzer respectively)’. The contributors of the volume also confirm the feature of “semantic calquing” (Ziegelmeier 2015) which involves the verbs denoting “eating” and “drinking” in phrasal expressions (Frąckiewicz, this volume, see also Jaggar & Buba 2009).

The presentations of the volume are highly innovative when they discuss social and communicative aspects of languages, an emerging area of research in West African context. The issue of language domination in multilingual environment is presented for the Middle Belt region in Nigeria, which is characterized by the largest number of nation’s ethnic subsystems and language diversity and has a dominant local *lingua franca* – Hausa. It is shown (Mgbemena, this volume) how larger languages provide economic opportunities that minority languages do not offer. Speakers of major languages have an access to literature or text books, they can listen to radio or TV programs transmitted not only by local but also international broadcasting stations. The speakers of a larger language are privileged even in refugee camps, where they can get easier access to humanitarian and medical aid.

Some aspects of the studies on West African languages have a wider cross-linguistic dimension. Several conceptualization patterns and linguistic structures from West Africa are found in Caribbean languages. It is not possible to understand certain structures of Jamaican English such as serial verb constructions without looking at West African languages (Hollington 2015). The similarity is also evident in conceptualization patterns. As noticed by Ameka “[t]he connection between red eyes and envy and related emotions is not only an Ewe phenomenon but seems to be an areal feature in Ghana and West Africa (Ameka 2002: 29)”. The underlying conceptualization has been calqued into Ghanaian English, but also transferred to Caribbean languages. In Jamaican English the abstract concept of ‘envy’/‘jealousy’ is linked to ‘red eyes’ as in the expression: *di man dus tuu red yai* ‘the man is too envious’ (lit. the man has too red eyes; Hollington 2015:118). Due to mobility factor, the pidgin variety spoken in West Africa is not only spread locally but also internationally. It forged its path to Europe via broadcasting stations that have started offering news in Pidgin, recognizing its significance or to East Africa via Nigerian and Ghanaian films that are getting popularity in Kenya or Tanzania (Krings 2010).

The monograph presents salient features of West African languages and contributes to their interpretation in terms of typological distinctiveness. It is shown that the development of digital resources for West African studies and methods of their analysis allows comparison of similar structures in different languages and better understanding of their structural peculiarities. The discussion on particular features usually contains extended information about structural properties of the language, especially when they are less known in linguistic literature, and includes a note about its sociolinguistic status. The presentation vary in topics and methodological approaches, but the presented data provide evidence for identifying West Africa as an area of linguistic convergence and common cultural background.

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