

Caroline Roset. 2018. *A Grammar of Darfur Arabic*. Utrecht: LOT. xiii + 335 pp.

Reviewed by Andrei A. Avram*

The book under review, Caroline Roset's PhD dissertation, defended in 2018, at the University of Amsterdam, is the first descriptive grammar of Darfur Arabic. The book consists of "Acknowledgements" (pp. xi-xii), an "Introduction", six chapters, "References" (pp. 303-314), two Darfur Arabic texts (pp. 329-330), a "Summary in English" (pp. 329-330), and a "Samenvatting in het Nederlands" (pp. 331-333).

In "Introduction" (pp. 1-16) the author first provides some background information about Darfur and the Darfurians, their numbers, lifestyle and the main ethnic groups in addition to Arabs, such as the Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, and also the smaller ones, such as the Daju and the so-called "Fallata", i.e. West Africans mostly of Hausa and Fulbe origin. Next, the complex sociolinguistic situation in Darfur is presented. The languages spoken in Darfur include Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, Daju, Meidob, Tama, Kanuri, Yulu, Bagyo, Gbaya, Gulu, which belong to the Nilo-Saharan phylum, Hausa and Fulfulde, which belong to the Niger-Congo family, and varieties of West Sudanic Arabic, one of which is Darfur Arabic. The following section is a brief overview of the literature on Sudanic Arabic, Sudanic Arabic-lexifier pidgins and creoles, and on the relevant Nilo-Saharan languages. The aims and organization of the study are outlined in the next section. The last section presents the methodology, with information (ethnicity, place of origin, sex and languages spoken) about the Darfurian informants and key informants, the transcription, spelling and glosses, which ends with the list of abbreviations and symbols used.

Chapter 2, "Phonology"¹ (pp. 17-42), starts with a section on the consonant phonemes of Darfur Arabic. Particular attention is paid to the phonemes /tʃ/, /ɲ/ and /ŋ/, which have a limited distribution, and to the phonetic realizations of the phonemes /dʒ/, /f/, /b/, and /ʃ/. In the subsection (p. 19) on the phonemes *p* and *b* the author writes that "Darfurians from the Fur tribe sometimes use *p*, *b* and *f* as allophones, just as they are in the Fur language". This is illustrated with the following examples²: *japturu* ~ *jafturu* 'they have breakfast', *arpa* ~ *arba* 'four', *fi* [ɸi] ~ *fi* [fi] 'in', and *nadi:p* ~ *nadi:f* 'clean'. Several remarks are in order here. First, /f/ does not figure among the consonant phonemes of Darfur Arabic (p. 17). Second, the phoneme whose allophones are [p], [b] and [f] is not specified. According to Jakobi (1990: 31), Fur has the phoneme /f/, which "is most frequently realized by the fricative [f] and rarely by the optional variants [ɸ] and [p]. Third, Jakobi (1990: 31) further writes that "there are some cases of /f/ ~ /b/ [...] variation" in word-initial position, e.g. [fis] ~ [bis] 'enough, full' < Ar. [bas(s)]. The variation [f] ~ [b] also occurs in intervocalic position, e.g. [lufo] ~ [lubo] 'unfold.3SG.PERF', including in Arabic-derived loanwords, e.g. [sàfàr] ~ [sàbàr] 'travel' (Jakobi 1990: 33). On the basis of Jakobi's (1990) description of Fur phonology and of the Darfur Arabic data, the formulation doing justice to the latter appears to be the following one. With Fur users of Darfur Arabic, the phoneme /f/ may be realized as [f], [ɸ] and [p]. This would account for e.g. *japturu* ~ *jafturu* 'they have breakfast' and *fi* [ɸi] ~ *fi* [fi] 'in'. Forms such as *arpa* ~ *arba* 'four' are manifestations of /f/ ~ /b/ variation, where [p] is one of the possible phonetic realizations of /f/. Next, the vowels and their allophonic realizations are discussed as well as the diphthongs found in Darfur Arabic. The third section illustrates a number of phonological processes occurring in Darfur Arabic: assimilation with the

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¹ A previous version appeared as Roset (2015).

² All the examples are reproduced in the transcription system used in the sources mentioned.

definite article *al* (p. 25); place of articulation assimilation of /n/ before /g, k and b/ (pp. 25-26); voicing assimilation (p. 27); deletion of unstressed /i/ and /u/ (p. 28); epenthesis (pp. 28-30); metathesis (p. 30). In what follows I would like to comment on the author's analysis of voicing assimilation and vowel harmony, respectively. The author notes (p. 27) that "voiceless consonants tend to become voiced before another voiced consonant". One of the examples given, however, is *wagt* > *wakt* ~ *wakit* **wqt* 'when', in which, in fact, a voiced consonant becomes voiceless before another voiceless consonant. This devoicing is also mentioned by the author (p. 27): "Darfurians tend to devoice consonants [...] when succeeded by another voiceless consonant" and illustrated with the following examples: *takta* **qtʃ* 'you cut', *makfu:l* **qfl* 'closed'. While this is certainly correct, a reader not familiar with the Sudanic varieties of Arabic would not know that the reflex of the Arabic voiceless uvular **q* is the voiced velar *g*. It is only later that the author refers to this phonetic realization, when writing first rather indirectly (p. 34) that "in other Sudanic varieties of Arabic, *q* is generally realised as velar voiced *g*" and explicitly only in the last chapter (p. 292) that "Darfur Arabic [...] has *g* as the reflex of Old Arabic *q*". Vowel harmony in Darfur Arabic is described as follows (p. 28): "low vowels like *o* or *u* occur in a word with other low vowels" while "high vowels like *i* or *e* [...] go along with other high vowels", and "phoneme *a* plays a neutral role in this process and can be combined with both low and high vowels". First, /u/ and /o/ are not low vowels, but high and respectively mid. Second, /e/ is not a high vowel, but a mid one. Third, as shown by the examples provided, *tirak:i'b-i* 'you put it on fire' vs. *birak:u'b-u* 'they put it on fire', it is not vowel height, but frontness and backness that determine the quality of the vowel. Therefore, the correct formulation of vowel harmony in Darfur Arabic would be front vowels occur with front vowels, back vowels occur with back vowels, and /a/ occurs with both. The author rightly states (p. 28) that "vowel harmony is a typical feature of the area" and refers the reader to, among others, Jullien de Pommerol (1999: 30 and 130), for Chad Arabic, and Owens (1993: 38-41), for Nigerian Arabic. It is worth noting, however, that vowel harmony in Chad Arabic, as described by Jullien de Pommerol (1999: 30 and 130), appears to differ significantly. First, it seems to be only "une tendance à l'uniformisation des voyelles à l'intérieur d'un mot" (Jullien de Pommerol 1999: 30). Second, there are multiple triggers: "c'est la voyelle postérieure ou finale, la voyelle longue ou répétée qui, le plus souvent, donnent le ton" (Jullien de Pommerol 1999: 30). If *yaxdumu* 'they work' (instead of *yaxdimu*) parallels the case of Darfur Arabic, forms such as *ma'arras* 'pimp' (instead of *mu'arras*) or *magâbil* 'in front of' (instead of *mugâbil*) do not. It is Nigerian Arabic vowel harmony that is almost identical to that occurring in Darfur Arabic. According to Owens (1993: 38), "within a stem, front vowels, *i*, *e*, *ii*, *ee* form one co-occurrence set, back vowels, *u*, *o*, *uu*, *oo* another" and "low vowels *a*, *aa* occur with both and can be designated the neutral set". In Owens's (1993: 38) formulation of Nigerian Arabic vowel harmony, "a stem has either vowels of the front set or back set, the neutral set occurring with either". The next two sections (pp. 30-33) are concerned with syllable structure and word stress, respectively. This is followed by a section entitled "Historical considerations" (pp. 33-41), which illustrates the various Darfur Arabic reflexes of the Old Arabic phonemes /dʒ, q, x, ɣ, ħ, ʕ, h/, and the velarized/pharyngealized consonants (pp. 33-41). The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the homonyms obtaining from the absence or confusion of gutturals as well as a consequence of the phonological processes operative in Darfur Arabic.

In spite of its title, chapter 3, "Morphology: pronouns and particles" (pp. 43-124), is also concerned with adverbs. The chapter is divided into three sections, on pronouns, adverbs, and particles, respectively. The issues covered in the first section are: independent personal pronouns, which contain remains of gender distinction; pronominal suffixes; the proximal and distal demonstratives *da* ~ *di* ~ *de*.SG, *de:l*.PL and respectively *da:k*.SG and *de:lak*.PL; the presentatives *da:ku* and *da:hu* and *ja:hu*; the invariant relative pronoun *al*; the interrogative pronouns *ja:tu*

‘who; which’ and *fənu* ‘what’. The second section focuses on adverbs: adverbs of time, including the names of the days of the week, seasons, and months; adverbs of manner; adverbs of place (; the intensifiers *fadi:d*, *sa:kit*, *bile:n*, *xala:s* and *jinis* – all ‘early’ – and *kullu* ‘not at all’; the interrogatives *ka:m* ‘how many’, *gadur fənu* ~ *gidre:f* ‘how much’, *wen* ‘where’, *fige:f* ‘to where’, *ke:f* ‘how’, and *ma:lu* ~ *(a)fa:n fənu* ~ *le f(ə)nu* ‘why’. Let me note in passing that rather than Chadian *ma:la* as parallel with Darfur Arabic *malu* ‘why’ (p. 79), a better parallel would have been Juba Arabic *malú* ‘why’, (see Manfredi 2017: 185). The third section covers the following: the article; the object-introducing *le*; the genitive particles *bita:*, *hag:* ~ *he:l* and *hana*; the negation particles *la* ‘no’, *ma* ~ *wala* ‘not’, *bas:* ~ *il:a* ‘only; except’; the question and answer particles *wal:a* and *mif* ~ *mu:f*; existential *fi:* and *ma fi:*; prepositions; quantifiers; conjunctions; the focus and topic particles *za:t* and *ma*.

In chapter 4, “Morphology: the noun and the noun phrase” (pp. 125-173), the author describes the following: the patterns of singular and plural nouns; suppletive plurals, e.g. *walad* ‘child.SG’ – *ija:l* ‘child.PL’, *ija*³ ‘mother.SG’ – *uma:t* ‘mother.PL’; the collectives and singulatives; the diminutives; the suffix *-a:j*; dual nouns and the suffix *-e:n*; the patterns of adjectives: *Caci:C*, *Ca:ciC*, *maCCu:C*, adjectives starting with *mu-* ~ *mi-*, *CaCCa:n*, other patterns; relation, origin and the suffix *-i*; proper names; colours and deficiencies; the degrees of comparison; the genitive construction and the compound nouns with *abu* and *am*; the cardinal numerals, the multiple meanings of *wa:id* ‘one’, and the ordinal numerals.

Chapter 5, “Morphology: the verb and the verb phrase” (pp. 175-271), is a detailed description of verbs and verb phrases in Darfur Arabic. The issues covered are: the perfect and respectively imperfect conjugation of basic regular verbs; the morphophonological features of verbs and covers: vowels and transitivity; the perfect SG verbs ending in *-a*; the imperfect SG verbs ending in *-i*; syllable reshuffling; roots with historical pharyngeals; tense, mood and aspect of the perfect and respectively imperfect conjugation; number, gender and type of verbal paradigm; irregular roots: *wvCVC*, *yvCVC*, *aCaC*, *CV:c* – including notes on *fa:f*, *bafu:f* ~ *bafi:f* ‘to see’ and *ga:l*, *bagu:l* ‘to say’, *CVCV* – with notes on *biga*, *babga* ‘to become’, *CVCCa*, other irregular verbs; derived patterns: *CaCa:c* as well as primae *wa:w* and mediae infirmae roots, tertiae infirmae roots, *Ca:CaC* as well as primae *wa:w* and mediae infirmae roots, tertiae infirmae roots, *Co:CaC*, *biCo:ciC* and *Ce:CaC*, *biCe:Cic*, *aCCaC*, other patterns; four-consonant roots; the passive voice, reflexivity, detransitivization, reciprocity and the prefixes *it-* and *in-*; the imperative; the participle; serial verb constructions: consecutive action, with a semi-auxiliary, with a participle, with an auxiliary; verbal nouns.

Chapter 6, “Selected topics in syntax” (pp. 273-290), first looks at word order in nominal, verbal, prepositional and existential sentences. In her discussion of word order in verbal sentences, the author writes (p. 274) that “the verbal predicate is often found at the end of the sentence with an object preceding that predicate, i.e. with SOV word order”. Consider, however, two of her examples. In *fasa:d ma fi ka:n. mamnu: fi balad* depravation NEG EXS PFV.be.3SG PASS.PTCP.forbid.SG in country ‘There was no depravation. It was forbidden in Darfur’ there is no object, while in *jal:a dinja darat big-it* then world rainy season PFV.become-3SG ‘Then it had become the rainy season’, the noun *darat* ‘rainy season’ is a predicative, not an object. The next section focuses on agreement, which, as put by the author (p. 279), “is inconsistent to a degree that it is hard to establish rules”. The issues covered are: definiteness, gender, and number agreement. The last two sections discuss possession and the expression of the passive.

Chapter 7, “Linguistic status of Darfur Arabic” (pp. 291-301), is an excellent summary of the findings and of their implications. It is first demonstrated (pp. 292-295) that Darfur Arabic

³ A Fur loanword.

exhibits a number of features typical of West Sudanic Arabic, such as: the absence of the pharyngeals (with the exception of Kordofan Baggara Arabic): the occurrence of the adverbs and particles *ke* ‘like that’, *fīu* ~ *fīa* ‘a little’, *ʔat*: ‘all’, *ha:j* ‘hey’, and *tara* ‘that is, you see’; the names of the Islamic months of the year; the many compound nouns with *ab(u)* or *am*. In this context, the author discusses the similarities and differences between Darfur Arabic, on the one hand, and Nigerian Arabic, Kordofan Baggara Arabic and Chad Arabic, on the other hand. A number of features identified by the author (pp. 295-297) suggest that, in spite of the commonalities, Darfur Arabic is a variety in its own right, which can be set apart from Wadai or Abéché Arabic on the basis of several features. These include: the more variable realizations and, hence, the instability of the Arabic gutturals; the occurrence of the 1SG pronoun form *ani* as a synonym of *ana*; the occurrence of three genitive particles; the fact that *and* ~ *ind* is restricted to expressing possession; a more pronounced tendency towards the absence of the definite article and neutralization within the pronominal system; the absence of the *al*- prefix to express reflexivity and reciprocity; the virtual absence of the prefix *t*- as a marker of the historical 3SG.F imperfect verbs; the occurrence of the suffix *-i* in all persons of transitive SG imperfect verbs; the absence of verbal nouns ending in *-i:n*; the absence of gender distinctions; the preference for *ad:a*, *bad:i* instead of *anta*, *banti* ‘to give’. In the next section the author convincingly argues that Darfur Arabic cannot be considered an Arabic-lexifier pidgin or creole. Darfur Arabic does exhibit a number of features which are, as put by the author, “reminiscent of creoles”: the loss of the pharyngeals and pharyngealized consonants; weak lengthening of vowels and consonants; some degree of distinctive stress; the realization of Arabic /ʃ/ as [s]; the frequent absence of the definite article *al*; neutralization in the pronominal system; the absence of gender distinctions; irregular number agreement. However, unlike Arabic-lexifier pidgins and creoles, Darfur Arabic does not display reduced morphology: nouns and adjectives have singular and plural forms: it has dual forms of nouns and pronominal suffixes; it does have distinct imperfect and perfect conjugations and personal endings; it does not have pre-verbal tense, aspect and modality markers. I definitely concur with the author’s conclusion (p. 299) that Darfur Arabic “takes a middle position between an Arabic-based pidgin or creole [...] and a full-fledged Arabic dialect on the other” and that “it would be appropriate to label [it] a contact language”.

In conclusion, *A Grammar of Darfur Arabic* is a noteworthy and very welcome contribution to the study of a hitherto under researched variety of Arabic for which the author is to be commended.

References

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