

Wilhelm J.G. Möhlig and Jekura U. Kavari 2008. Reference Grammar of Herero (Otjiherero). Bantu Languages of Namibia. With a Glossary Otjiherero-English-Otjiherero. Southern African Languages and Cultures, Vol. 3. Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Köln. 372 pages; 5 Parts – including Glossary and Texts; 12 Chapters; Several Tables and Illustrations; 1 map; Index

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First and foremost one should note that the book under review needs to be treated as the leading book for the description of Bantu languages and that other authors, for Bantu languages at least, will get enlightened by this book. The large part of the book contains the description of the grammar of Herero (R30, Guthrie's 1967-71), a Bantu Language spoken mainly in Namibia, respectively Angola and Botswana; but there are two chapters, one containing Otjiherero texts and the other containing the glossary of Otjiherero-English-Otjiherero. The cry from linguists and Bantuists for the lack of detailed and well described data for specific Bantu languages has been heard over a century now, and we have been witnessing Bantuists for some decades embarking and continuing to board on a train of analysing and describing Bantu languages to cater for this need. But of recent (within this decade or so), several reference grammar books have been produced, although the exercise cannot claim to have managed half the demands as it needs resources, both human and material, to cater for the grammars of about 500 Bantu languages (Maho 2003; Nurse 2008) scattered over a vast area south of the Sahara desert. The book under review at least reduces the number of Bantu languages to be prescribed in the contemporary outlook. Also, one notices that the grammar books differ significantly with respect to the organization of the materials, content, and tackling of problematic issues like tone, among others. The *Reference Grammar of Herero (Otjiherero)* has appeared and will become a standard that others should mirror.

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The book under review is organized, although not explicitly stated in the book, into five major parts, namely (i) phonology and prosody which are covered in chapters 1 to 4; (ii) morphology embraced in chapters 5, 6 and 7; (iii) syntax with five chapters – 8 to 12 – covering a good deal of issues patterning word order from basic sentences to complex ones in Herero; (iv) Herero texts follow; and (v) a word list in Herero-English-Herero is given. Although the structuring of the book reflects the traditional chaptering in Bantu – phonology-morphology-syntax – it adds value to its layout as it is structured in a way that the preceding chapters help the reader to follow clearly detailed issues/facts in the following chapters. The main table of contents with pagination and two lists, one of symbols, another of abbreviations used throughout the book are provided (pp. 7-14); as well as each part and/or chapter is provided with a min-table of content with complete pagination. Also, an index provided (pp. 349-353) and the appendices containing mainly tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 showing noun class and agreement patterns as well as tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 containing paradigms of tense and aspect (pp. 375-371) really make the book scientific and a source of data for other interested allies as far as documentation, description and analysis of Bantu languages is concerned.

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One would judge that the book is a typical eclectic in that it has several faces. On the one hand it is characteristic of a pedagogical reference grammar book because the organization itself reflects that. The definition of terms and description of linguistic issues are quite straightforward, illustrative and instructive all given in simple to grasp English with well filtered terminologies.

Also, the introduction of pragmatics and language use through intonation and focus widens the number of readers from linguists, researchers and students of linguistics – as it is the tradition with the provisioning of the other authors, (e.g. Rugemalira 2005; Petzell 2008), – to include school children and lay-people. Secondly, the book is historical in that the reconstruction of the linguistic proto-forms present in Herero establishes the link Ovaherero have to communities surrounding them, example Nama and beyond, as far as Lake Corridor and Lake Zone in Central and East Africa (p. 67). The book is theoretical as it presents the traditional frameworks available in Bantu and then propounds new ones for example theories surrounding tone patterns and movements. Further, it borrows approaches – for example phrasal analysis as in Prepositional Phrases – from the traditions available in European languages into Bantu linguistics.

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Otjiherero received a lot of attention in Bantu (it might be second or third after Swahili and Zulu). In totality the book profits from the presence of the bulky stock of texts available both published and unpublished resources of Herero. In the reference list given (pp.309-314) for instance, 38 are published sources and only five unpublished. Also, the authors had the opportunity of meeting several native speakers as Otjiherero is taught in schools and thus it is empowered, well preserved and the number of speakers – totaling about 180,000 (p. 5) – is actually promising. This makes the analysis easier as opposed to endangered languages like Mbugwe (Mous 2004) or fairly undescribed languages like Kagulu (Petzell 2008). In the following the contents of the book under review are briefly presented and discussed, starting with part one in three paragraphs below.

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A survey of the whole book, part to part and chapter to chapter, accredits it of the following: One, the phonology and prosody part of the book is wide and well presented. The phonological analysis is very good because several Bantu associated phonological processes are well tackled using extensive Herero data. Any idea and explanation put forth – phonemic and/or tonemic – is supported by extensive illustrations and explanations as occurring across the segments of the language. For example, vowel height assimilation, commonly termed vowel harmony in Bantu, is supported by evidence from verbal extensions like *ronga* ‘admonish’ – *rong.era* ‘admonish for’ (pp. 30-31). But two lines need clarification: (i) are lengthened vowels the same as long vowels? I would propose, following Odden (2005) that a vowel is a distinctive unit of sound irrespective of phonological modifications. (ii) Herero allows several vowel sequences, a feature distinct from other Bantu languages. Now do we have V-syllables in word medial in Bantu languages?

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The bank of tonemic behaviours in Otjiherero is intensively provided (pp. 40-79). Such behaviours range from distinctive tone patterns, examples the lexical tones H-H *-hórá* ‘to ripen’, H-L *-hóra* ‘to remove hair’ and L-L *-hora* ‘be stiff’ (p.41) to an extra high tone occurring in the language, exemplified by *o.mbwá* ‘dog’ and *Ō.mbwá* ‘it is a dog’ (p. 45). Moreover, the introduction of pragmatics and language use through intonation and focus into contemporary Bantu grammars by the authors is highly recommendable (pp. 47-50). This widens the number of readers from typical linguists through school children to lay-people. As one may note, most Bantu grammars miss it. Furthermore, Möhlig and Kavari make sure that the origin of each sound has been traced either in isolation or in a group of a couple of sounds. Both segmental and prosodic features are integrated to draw the best picture, except that Möhlig and Kavari do not explicitly use terms like spirantization and glide formation traditionally used across Bantu grammars.

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Also, in the prosodic analysis as in other tonal Bantu where grammatical tone is used to mark tense distinction (Nurse & Philippson 2006) the authors present various tonemes in Herero. New

terms are coined for example, ‘prosodemes’ they suggest, resembles phonemic function in Herero and is used to designate distinctive tone patterns. But one would ask, does it not alienate from the norm across Bantu? Also, the use of the labels High, Low for tonemic symbols á and a are quite fine but the term “falling” for á is quite misleading (p. 40). In Bantu this is usually called the Rise-Fall tone. The authors describe the usage of the extra high tone, marked (ˊ), well. For example, it is used for conjunctions. However, illustrations given make use of the morphemes *na-* and *wa-* (p. 46). To me, it looks like the morphemes are the connectives and not extra high tone.

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Part two of the book is also broad embracing a good deal of linguistic issues surrounding Otjiherero morphology. It opens with the description of the semantic change of nouns due to change of the noun prefixes and the description is outstanding (pp. 90-92). Although this is not a comparative review, a quick glance at other contemporary Bantu grammar books produced within this decade or so – Massamba *et al.* (1999), Mohamed (2001), Ngonyani (2003), Mous (2004), Rugemalira (2005) and Petzell (2008) – Möhlig and Kavari’s work is in fact superior. The way each individual element is treated for noun classes, gives even a blind reader chance to grasp what is available in Otjiherero language and documented within the text. Several syntactic issues surrounding a noun are succinctly covered i.e. predication, case, connective, to mention but three (pp.92-104). Also, nominal derivation by prefixation and suffixation is well covered and structured and therefore easy to follow. The semantics associated with each derivation is given in isolated sub-sections (pp.100-105). Moreover, nominal compounding as one of the word formation processes is introduced. Again, a quick glance at other contemporary grammars reveals that compounding was hidden as a word formation process in Bantu. Möhlig and Kavari succinctly bring it into light. But a turmoil between the book and a linguist reader is likely to fire out as the traditional diminutive class with noun class prefixes *-ka-l-tu-* (cl. 12/13) across Bantu is either missing or not explicitly stated in Herero, rather such noun class prefixes are used for singular and plural as in *okakambe* ‘horse’ *oukambe* ‘horses’ (p. 83).

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The other chapters of part two embrace facts that surround the noun phrase (NP) and linguistic issues around it in Herero. First, several pages – pp. 115-144 and 208-213 – have been set aside specifically for it. This is the broadest space given only for NPs in Bantu grammars available (cf. Ngonyani 2003 only page 74; Mous 2004 only page 22; Mchombo 2004 just 24-27; Harjula 2004 some 130-134; Rugemalira 2005: 83-88; but at least Petzell 2008: 76-95). What matters a lot here is Möhlig and Kavari’s description of how the stringing of noun dependants work in Herero. They present several options, as long as five words in a noun phrase (pp. 211-212), and constraints around such orders. Second, several word categories that occur after a head noun as noun dependants are analyzed, viz. quantifiers (numerals, and indefinite ones like *-ingi* ‘many’), qualifiers (appositions and adjectives), determiners (demonstratives), as well as subordinators (possessives and genitives). The authors define these elements succinctly bearing in mind how such items pose difficulties across world languages (Dryer 2007). Furthermore, the authors borrow the tree diagram approach and phrasal analysis exemplified by Adverbial Phrase and Preposition Phrase which are commonly used in European languages (pp. 208-213). Such a practice is rare in Bantu but a few exist. For example, the tree diagram is used in Swahili grammars (Massamba *et al.* 1999). However, the rules surrounding the stringing of more than one noun dependant is yet to be fully explored and the statement that the rules for orderings of the noun dependants are not water tight need to be checked using Otjiherero.

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Chapters on the verbal morphology – the whole of chapter 7 and section 8.3 of chapter 8 – provide well structured and detailed contents of the verbal complex, derivation processes surrounding it as well as inflection affixation and the semantics of tense, aspect and mood. I

would rather review this chapter in two sections, derivation on the one hand and inflection on the other as follows. First, the book provides a detailed description of each derivation through verbal extensions associated mainly with ten affixes, namely the passive *-wa*, applicative *-era*, neuter *-ika*, intransitive *-aka*, causative *-isa*, reversive and intensive *-orora* and *-urura*, reciprocal *-esana*, denominal *-para*, static *-ama*, as well as frequentative through reduplication. Möhlig and Kavari emphasize the presence of the final vowel at the end of each extension for semantic purposes. The co-occurrence of the extensions is provided (pp. 157-161). So far, only the applicative (p. 151) and causative (p.153) introduce a participant in a construction. Therefore, following Matsinhe & Mbiavanga (2008: 333), I would suggest separation of verbal extensions from other types of verbal suffixes, because in descriptive grammar verbal affixes are misleadingly regarded as extensions by many scholars. As Matsinhe & Mbiavanga contend, not every extension attached to the verb root increases argument structure. Some verbal affixes, namely passive, reciprocal, reflexive and stative reduce the argument structure of the verb in question. Taking into account their effects on the predicate argument structure, adding up the fact that they can be lexicalized to give rise to nominalized forms, such morphemes are better regarded as affixes rather than extensions. Schadeberg (2003) claims that some verbal extensions are non-productive in Bantu languages, viz. denominal *-para* and static *-ama* in Herero's list; although not confirmed nor denied by Möhlig and Kavari. This, in my opinion needs to be mentioned, at least in passing, in the book. The authors illustratively demonstrate that the co-occurrence of verbal extensions adheres in most cases to Hyman's (2003) CARP (Causative-Applicative-Reciprocal-Passive) principle.

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On the side of inflections, much of the matters are well documented and described (pp. 164-206). The tense division that the authors follow is the past and non-past division. Personally, I accredit this book on inflections with three facts. One, several divisions have been drawn and each tense, aspect and mood (TAM) mentioned is supported by illustrations both in affirmative and negative constructions that cement morphemes established to designate that type. Two, grammatical tone, which is claimed to function as a TAM marker and that data are least available across Bantu (Nurse & Philippson 2006; Nurse 2008), is analyzed in the book. It is widely exemplified in the book, for instance the verbal stem *rwa* 'fight' becomes H-L *rwire* for recent past perfect but H-H *rwíré* for remote past perfect (pp. 190-192). And three, Möhlig and Kavari clearly establish that what Bantuists traditionally term a default final vowel (usually abbreviated FV) is part of the verbal stem as it binds the semantic content of the verb (p. 171). Also, the vowel bears tone distinctions to designate a lexical function of the verb stems as in *-hora* discussed above.

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Part three is well structured and detailed. It details the syntax of Otjiherero with basic sentences in chapters 8, short predicates in chapter 9, questions in chapter 10, compound sentences in chapter 11 as well as focus in chapter 12. I have presented syntactic matters for noun phrase above, thus the rest, which concerns the predicate part of the sentence, is contained in this paragraph. The authors provide statements concerning the verb phrase and phrases it takes as its complements in Otjiherero. Furthermore, an intriguing proposition is that the verbal phrase is extended by the prepositional phrase introduced by six specific prefixes, for example *nálnó* as in *nokúrama* 'with the leg' (instrument) and *mú* as in *mondjúwo* 'inside the house' (location) (pp. 219-222). This is a contribution that needs to be accentuated because former Bantuists claim that there exist almost no prepositions in Bantu languages. Another issue, focus, which is one of the contents of pragmatics mentioned in this review, is presented in the book (elsewhere but specifically pp. 279-287). It offers the way native speakers of Otjiherero employ linguistic features – extra high tone and intonation – to accentuate new information in the discourse.

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Before finalizing the review by three matters below, the book contains Otjiherero texts which are well selected from various genres (p. 289). The book contains an index before the appendix. The index however misses some technical terms employed like tone and prosodemes. Now I will better give caution below.

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A word of caution on one of the illustrations provided: Glide formation is a common morpho-phonological process across Bantu languages and Möhlig and Kavari recognize it. But they contend that *w* and *y* will be treated as consonants. Illustrations given, for example verbal stems *nwa* ‘drink’ and *rya* ‘eat’ in Herero would misleadingly produce roots *nw-* and *ry-* (p.26). But the proto-forms **nua* ‘drink’ and **dia* ‘eat’ suggest historical change to *nua* and *ria* in Herero and then proto-super high vowels *u* and *i* gliding to *w* and *y* respectively before a low vowel *a*.

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A word of caution on the book’s layout: The provided main table of contents with pagination and lists of symbols and abbreviations used throughout the book (pp.7-14) is satisfactory; but providing each chapter and section its own table of content with pagination, as indicated above, although it is a personal opinion, is repetition and a waste of space. I personally understand that the authors succumb to the traditions of the forming of the reference grammars of English (cf. Collins Cobuild (1990)). However, a glance at other distinguished reference grammars beyond Bantu languages – Martin (1975), Schiffman (1983) and Yadawi (1996) – would support that such a practice is redundant. If that should be kept, then I would suggest a brief main table of contents – at least with main titles and pagination – then a detailed one for each chapter within the body of the book – as with Collins Cobuild (1990). Second, there is a big mismatch of the separation of the parts, chapters, sections of chapters, texts as well as appendices in the book. For instance, six areas are separated by blank pages, viz. part two (p. 80), section II of chapter 7 (p. 162), chapter 11 of part two (p. 254), part four for texts (p. 288), an index (p.341) and appendix (p.354). The rest (ten in total) are not demarcated by blank pages although they differ significantly in weight. For example, part three (Syntax) (p. 207), the bibliography (p. 309) and the glossary (p. 329). I would suggest, if any at all, the main segments of the book, namely the five parts – Phonology and Prosodology, Morphology, Syntax, Texts, and the Word list – to be separated by blank pages and the rest not (by blank pages). Third, section 8.3.3.1 contains direct object (p. 215) and a reader who is a linguist would expect thereafter, say in section 8.3.3.2 to have an indirect object, as it is the tradition. The chapter, however, does not feature this and it is hardly available throughout the following sections.

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It is neat, only few typological mistakes stain the book. One, the gloss for *omúrise* = *hersman* is missing a spelling ‘*d*’ (herdsman) (pp. 48). Two, in the text reference is made to the source Möhlig (1967) (p 50) but the reference does not feature in the bibliography. Three, an abbreviation CB is used on page 60 but misleadingly footnoted later on page 62. Four, there are numerical disorganizations, exemplified by 5.7 Nominal Loans that could well take sub-sections 5.7.1 Loans from other Bantu, 5.7.2 Loans from Nama and 5.7.3 Loans from European Languages. Also, throughout the text there are a number of bolded sub-sections that are not referred to numerically.

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To conclude, all the stains mentioned in this review could never, in any how, disqualify the book from being the best reference grammar book produced. Matters presented are typical issues in Bantu languages and the handling of difficult issues like tone by Möhlig and Kavari makes the book the best. Linguists and Bantuists in particular are encouraged to follow the structuring of the contents as well as the description contained therein.

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