

Review of *A Descriptive Grammar of Bafut* by Pius N.  
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**Abstract**

This book is a comprehensive description of the Grammar of Bafut, a Grassfields Bantu language spoken in Mezam Division of the NorthWest Region of the Republic of Cameroon and is intended for all language practioners. It comes in like a support to tangible but insufficient efforts made by the Government of the Republic of Cameroon and the Civil Society so far in favour of the promotion of indigenous language use in public life.

**Key words:** Cameroon, Bafut, Descriptive Grammar, Understudied African language, Indigenous language

This book contains 228 pages and is made up of 12 chapters preceded by a foreword (written by Roland Kiessling) and followed by references and a subject index. On the cover page there is a color photograph of, I presume, a Bafut traditional house. Each chapter has an introduction, a conclusion and the body is divided into sections and has many tables.

Chapter one is aimed at presenting the Bafut sound system and syllable structure from various segmented fields which are; the consonants, vowels and tones. These areas are clearly portrayed from the chapter's title: *The Sound System*. The chapter intends to highlight the complexity of the language's sound system. The undetermined number and quality of the language's vowels, the undescription of many tone processes, contribute to enhance this assertion.

Chapter two is entitled: *Noun Classes and Structure*. Its main and primary concern carries on the classification and constituency of the Noun in the Bafut Language. Segmented in four sections, the first is concerned with the description of the syllable and the tone patterns of the Bafut nouns. The second section deals with the classification of nouns into different morphological classes and suggests ways of handling some irregular nouns. Equally underlined in this section is the evidence that the classification of nouns on semantic criteria is relatively different in both Pro Bantu and Bafut languages. Section three examines and partly handles the gender system whereas section four presents the concord system.

Chapter three on its part tackles the processes of noun formation in Bafut. It introduces and defines the processes of Derivation and Compounding. The process of derivation comprises affixation (prefix) and is sub divided and classified into five categories called: deverbatives, agentive nouns, augmentatives, diminutives, and negative nominals. On the other hand, Compounding, as a process of word formation, involves the combination of any two parts of speech e.g. verb+ noun combination. Apart from the standard processes used in noun formation, Bafut makes use of different methods as: Ideophonic nouns; that is nouns derived from ideophones, Reduplication; that is nouns formed via verb reduplication, Generic compounds and Sex gender. However, from this chapter, one can clearly understand that derivation stands to be more productive and mostly used compared to the other processes in Bafut. Compounding, however, tends to be unproductive in Bafut as a word formation process

Chapter four explores the area of pronouns in Bafut. In this chapter, emphases are principally laid on their distribution and function. As concerns the aspect of distribution, we come to know that pronouns in Bafut are grouped into eight main classes which are: absolute pronouns, logophoric pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, possessive pronouns, interrogative pronouns, relative pronouns, emphatic pronouns and reflexive pronouns. The author does not stop at the stage of listing them but also goes beyond to discuss in detail the internal constituency of the pronouns particularly that of the personal pronouns. From the author's analyses, we come to notice that the issue of pronouns in Bafut is not that different in other languages such as the English language. He uses the term "pronouns" to refer to those forms that are in themselves complete words and which can stand instead of a noun, or which may be used in opposition to a noun, either before it or after it.

Chapter five focuses on the Noun phrase, the noun phrase which refers to a group of words made up of a noun and some other word which specifies, qualifies, or describes the noun. The author equally presents the modifiers of the noun such as adjectives, determiners, pronouns, genitives. He equally categorizes the noun phrase into simple and complex noun phrases. The simple noun phrase is ranged in basic categories: the first category containing a noun modified by simple modifiers such as determiners, adjectives, and genitives on which emphasis is laid in this chapter. Discussions equally focus on the form, meaning, and distribution of the modifier rather than on the noun since it has already been tackled in chapter two. On the other hand, the complex noun phrase makes use of genitive phrases and the relative clause as modifiers. Genitives are grouped in genitives of possession, compound genitives, and dependent genitives and are used as cover terms to refer to second nouns in N of N in Bantu grammar. Whereas the relative clause in Bafut functions to complement an antecedent noun by describing or delimiting its potential domain of reference, and equally plays a post nominal role. It is categorized into subject, object, and oblique relatives.

Chapter six explores the verb group in Bafut that is; the verb stem and all the grammatical elements that are closely linked to the verb like: tense, aspect, mood, agreement, extensions, etc. The Bafut verb group follows a linear order: first we have the subject marker followed by the tense, aspect and mood (TAM) then the verb stem followed by extensions. Only one type of concord is used with the verb in Bafut which is the subjectival concord. The nature of the Bafut verb is clearly shown and discussed in this chapter. The verb is generally composed of a stem which may take various inflections especially suffixes. Explanations on the tone pattern of the verb stem are not omitted. Verbal derivatives equally exist in Bafut in that verb stems take various kinds of suffixes to form derivative verbs denoting past, present or future action.

Chapter seven deals with a combined discussion on tense, aspect and mood since separating them would lead to some inadequacies in the description. Accent is put on the two non-finite forms employed by the verb system in Bafut and the five moods: infinitive and imperative, indicative subjunctives, conditional simultaneity and potential, respectively. The moods employ a variety of tense morphemes to mark past, present, and future states. Some verbs in Bafut do not have the infinitive form “*per se*”. The infinitive is generally used to mark *means-purpose* or *truth-value* statements. The indicative mood is sub-categorized into: the present tenses positive indefinite definite and the perfective and the present tenses negative definite, indefinite and the perfective. The past tenses are not set apart; they are subcategorized as immediate past, today past, yesterday past, remote past. The future tenses are equally part of the show and are simple future, today future; tomorrow future, and the remote future.

Chapter eight deals with compound tenses and deficient verbs in Bafut. The author defines the term *compound tenses* as tenses marked by more than one element and are characterized by the use of a large number of deficient verbs. Deficient verbs on the other hand are those that are not associated with a specific meaning instead the meaning is determined from the context in association with another main verb irregular in its form. The author voluntarily terms the verbs “Deficient” because their behavior is fundamentally different from that of

what we know as auxiliary verbs in English and French. This category of verbs includes the verbs “to be” and “to have”. However, the author goes further to explore in detail the deficient verbs in Bafut. The author explains that the verb “to be” in Bafut has three finite forms: *à ni*, *à be* and *tsi* and non finite forms *à mbe*. The author proceeds by identifying, describing, locating and establishing the dependent relation of the verb. The exploration and analyses of the verb *to have*” are not set apart.

Chapter nine explores Adverbs and Prepositions in Bafut. The author treats both items together because their formation and use are intricately linked. In this chapter, the author helps us by means of explanations to understand that pure prepositions are rare in Bafut and differ in form and function depending on the verb with which it is associated. There are only two elements which he can term genuine prepositions in Bafut: *à* which can function on its own to mark either location or direction and *ni* which normally encodes the meaning of instrument and accompaniment. There equally exist other prepositions such as; Derived prepositions, the definite preposition, etc. Adverbs, on other hand, are used in Bafut to describe a predicative or a qualificative with respect to time, manner or place. Pure adverbs are rare in Bafut that is why other word categories, especially substantives and deficient verbs, are employed adverbially. As a result, manner adverbs can be formed from nouns, adjectives, numerals, and ideophones. This is exactly what the author describes and discusses in this chapter.

Chapter ten focuses on the formation of questions and focus constructions. The similarities and differences between content focus formation and focus marking is described in this chapter. The formation of questions involves very similar, if not identical prosodic, morphological, and syntactic means as in focus. Questions in Bafut are divided into four major categories which are :(a) yes-no questions (b) content questions (c) alternative questions and (d) confirmation questions. The content questions are sub divided into (a) The simple content question (b) The passivised question (c) The focus question amongst which: (i) in situ focus questions, (ii) Cleft questions. Four principal means are employed in Bafut to mark focus. They are: word order, a special particle *à*, cleft sentences and pseudo cleft sentences.

The author’s efforts aim at drafting out a conclusion from the explanations in the chapter that, both constructions are sub parts of the same process in Syntax, since in both construction types, the questioned constituent and the focused constituent can occur in situ; marked by rising intonation or a preceding emphatic marker, both constituents can occur in a cleft, both receive primary and secondary stress.

In Chapter eleven, the author examines the structure of complex constructions. Complex constructions are understood to be phrases and clauses with more than one syntactic unit which have been joined together either via coordination, serialization, or subordination. To conjoin phrases and clauses Bafut employs two major strategies which are (i) the overt strategy where the conjuncts are united by an overt coordinating conjunction and (ii) the covert strategy, where the conjuncts are not united by any overt coordinating conjunction.

Subordination encloses subordinate clauses and is marked in Bafut by special coordinating

morphemes which denote time, purpose, condition, and concession. There are various types of subordinate clauses and are marked in Bafut by special coordinating morphemes which are (i) complement subordinate clauses, (ii) Time subordinate clauses (iii) conditional subordinate clauses, and (iv) concession subordinate clauses.

The distinguishing features of serialization are equally described in this chapter. In the serial verb construction in Bafut, two or more verbs which all refer to sub parts or aspects of a single overall event occur in a series in the same construction. Morphologically, the serial verb construction (SVC) is marked by an initial homorganic nasal consonant on the second verb (or subsequent verbs) when the construction is in the past tense. In order to highlight this morphological marker, the author uses mostly examples in the past tense. Four major categories of the SVC have been identified in Bafut. These are (i) Locative/Directional SVC's, (ii) Manner SVC's (iii) Resultative SVC's, and (iv) Comparative SVC's. Each category clearly explained in this chapter.

Chapter twelve is of course the concluding chapter. The main point in this chapter entitled *Curiosities* is to draw the attention of readers to phenomena in the grammar of Bafut. By “curiosities” the author points at or terms the phenomena to which he could not provide straightforward descriptions. These phenomena include reduplication, homorganicity, and anaphora.

Reduplication is sub divided into (i) Partial reduplication (ii) Total reduplication which is observed in Bafut in a variety of functions affecting nouns, adverbs, locatives adjectives, and verbs.

Homorganicity is another curious aspect in Bafut Grammar. The homorganic nasal consonant usually occurs in the initial position of nouns. It equally occurs in the verb category and focuses on (i) Tense marking, (ii) Verb serialization and consecutivisation, (iii) coordination and (iv) reduplication.

Anaphora on its part, even though earlier discussed in section 2.1 of chapter 4, is still a centre of interest. It entails various forms such as nominal forms. The author discusses The anaphoric adjunct “yu”, the anaphoric demonstrative preposition, the anaphoric definitiviser “lâà” in details for a clear comprehension.

In sum, this work is a significant in-put to the knowledge and understanding of the structure of an understudied African language as it creates a direct and full contact between the reader and the Bafut. The amount of materials on the language studied is impressive and clearly exposed. One does not need to master any theoretical background to grasp the pertinent analyses gradually, methodologically and pedagogically unfolded in this work. The author, who is generativist, made an effort to set aside theoretical considerations, to solely present and insist on facts about Bafut just like they appear to him as a linguist. This book is a gift to all those interested in language issues and as such is strongly recommended.