



SPRACHE UND ORALITÄT IN AFRIKA

Frankfurter Studien zur Afrikanistik

begründet von Herrmann Jungraithmayr

Achtundzwanzigster Band

Herausgegeben von

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in Verbindung mit

Luc Bouquiaux (Paris) und W. J. G. Möhlig (Köln)

Die Reihe »Sprache und Oralität in Afrika« hat zwei Schwerpunkte, auf die ihr Name ausdrücklich hinweist: Sie konzentriert sich auf die Erforschung und Beschreibung afrikanischer Sprachen und bemüht sich gleichzeitig um die in Afrika immer dringlicher werdende Dokumentation der mündlich überlieferten Literaturen. Afrikas Vergangenheit, seine geistigen und sozialen Institutionen, die rechtlichen und religiösen Lebensformen und -inhalte, Poesie und Musik sind Bestandteile der ungezählten Gedächtniskulturen dieses im Übergang zur Schriftlichkeit befindlichen Kontinents. Die geistige Welt des Afrikaners erschließt sich daher wesentlich aus der oralen Überlieferungstradition. Dabei sind Stil und Technik der noch heute vom »L'homme de paroles« (C. Hagège) praktizierten Mündlichkeit durchaus derjenigen früher europäischer Barden und Sänger vergleichbar. »Sprache und Oralität in Afrika« hat sich die Aufgabe gestellt, bei der Rettung afrikanischen Geisteserbes mitzuhelfen und es wissenschaftlich zu dokumentieren.

DIETRICH REIMER VERLAG BERLIN

HERRMANN JUNGRAITHMAYR
MIROSLAVA HOLUBOVÁ

THE NGAS LANGUAGE

Shik Ngas

(Northern Nigeria)

Fundamentals of Grammar • Texts • Dictionary

In collaboration with
Luka J. Jiwul and Sonja Ermisch

Including 30 photographs and a CD

2016

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In memory of

Joseph Dechi Gomwalk

– former Military Governor, Benue-Plateau State –
(born in 1935 – executed in 1976)



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CD: Folktale and Poem

Audioversion:

1. Folktale: **Kafwan đăŋ Ncəm / Hare and Monitor Lizard**, narrated by Joseph Dechi Gomwalk † (recorded on 28th March 1964; cf. pp. 143-147)
2. Words of appreciation by H. Jungraithmayr (recorded on 25th November 2011)
3. Poem: **Homage to Pankshin** by H.J., translated and spoken by Luka J. Jiwul (recorded on 25th November 2011; cf. pp. 149-151)

Preface

The history of the present work on the Ngas (Angas) language dates back to the year 1962. Since 1960 I had been working as a research assistant at the *Seminar für Afrikanische Sprachen und Kulturen* at the University of Hamburg, when Professor Johannes Lukas, the Head of the Seminar, invited me to join him and his wife on his research trip to Nigeria. The project was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, Bonn. After travelling through the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and the Niger Republic, our common journey ended in Jos, the capital city of the present Plateau State in central Nigeria. My own task within the project was to improve our knowledge of the Chadic languages, especially of those spoken on the Plateau; and, of course, to deepen my knowledge of Tangale which had been the topic of my dissertation presented in 1956. Thus, I spent the first six months (19th February to 20th August, 1962) in Kaltungo (Tangale town in present Gombe State) and the remaining three months (28th August to 29th November, 1962) in Pankshin, the principal town of the Ngas people. Here, although already two years after Nigeria's independence, I still met several members of the British Colonial Administration, including Mr Ian Williams, the District Officer, and his wife, Mr Tom Hughes, the Agricultural Officer, and the Medical Officer, Dr. Jobst Lange with his wife Erika. I wish to express my appreciation to all these people for their kindness.

On the occasion of my official visit to the traditional Chief of Ngas, HRH the Ngolong Ngas Nde Yilsu Dimlong, I requested permission to study the Ngas language and to be introduced to someone who could teach and guide me in all linguistic and cultural matters of the Ngas people. This is how I became acquainted with Mr Jahota Jiwul. At that time, he was the Headmaster of the Central Primary School in Pankshin. Thus, the basic corpus of our linguistic data goes back to this first language teacher of mine. To him as well as to the late Mr Yusufu Zumji I owe a great deal. I also owe thanks to Mr Gabriel Go'ar Jiwul, a dedicated amateur student of his mother tongue whose unpublished dictionary deserves special mention. Among the first publications resulting from this research sojourn on the Plateau in 1962 are those on Sura (Mwaghavul) of 1963, on Angas of 1964 and on the Ron languages of 1970.

After a long break, during which I mainly worked on a comprehensive research programme in the Republic of Chad, collecting data especially on Zime, Sibine, Kwang, Mokilko, Mubi and Migama, I resumed Ngas studies within the framework of the Joint Major Research Programme Frankfurt / Maiduguri (SFB 268) on *Kulturentwicklung und Sprachgeschichte im Naturraum Westafrikanische Savanne*, sponsored by the *Deutsche*

Forschungsgemeinschaft, Bonn, as well as by the *Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität* in Frankfurt am Main. In the course of several sojourns in Pankshin between 1993 and 2002, I was able to expand our linguistic data on Ngas and deepen my insight into the structure of this remarkable language.

In 2007 a lucky chance led this work eventually to become the product of not one but two authors. Ms Miroslava (Mirka) Holubová (now Grünwaldt), a former student of Petr Zima, after three short stays among the Ngas, from 2005 to 2007, approached me one day expressing her serious interest in this language and its speakers. She had collected her own language data, and gratefully acknowledges the support received from the International Office of the Goethe University and the GA ČR (Czech Science Foundation) as well as from the family of Chief Dr. A. J. Jiwul and her language assistants Luka Jacob Jiwul, Wanzam Gotom and Lokdang Gonzuk in Kanke, Pankshin and Jos. On her first encounter with Ngas speakers, they told her that there was a certain 'Dr. Haman', a white man who spoke Ngas. When she mentioned this to me, I at first feigned ignorance but eventually suggested that the person in question could be myself: Herrmann = Haman. Thus, we happily agreed to join forces in pursuing the study of the language to which we both felt particularly attracted. With the support of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* Ms M. Holubová took on the task of putting together our respective data corpuses and digitalized them in the way in which the work is presented in this book. We subjected the entire material to a careful scrutiny and compared my 1962 data with hers recorded more than 40 years later, whereby we made the surprising observation that several phonological and morphological features had changed within that relatively short period of time. This very successful endeavour was, however, unexpectedly interrupted and ended in 2010, when my partner declared that she had received a call to serve Jesus Christ in missionary work and that she therefore had to abandon our common project. This was an extremely deplorable interruption to our work. However, in spite of this grave setback, the work could go on thanks to the valuable assistance of Dr. Sonja Ermisch and Mr Luka Jacob Jiwul, a nephew of Chief Dr. A.J. Jiwul. Thanks to the support of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, Luka Jiwul was able to work on the project during three study leaves in Frankfurt from 2010 to 2012, as well as during innumerable telephone discussions from Marburg in Germany to Jos in Nigeria up until the final stage of our work.

Before I resumed work in Pankshin in the 90's, I introduced myself to the present chief of Ngas, HRH Nde Joshua Dimlong, at Ner, some miles southeast of Pankshin. I herewith gratefully acknowledge his permission to pursue our language studies in the realm of his chiefdom.

The Ngas Language is mainly an introduction to the structure and the basic facts of both lexicon and grammar. It tries to demonstrate and bring home, also to the native speakers themselves, the underlying laws and rules according to which the language functions and is thus able to meet its requirements of daily communication. That which Carl Hoffmann wrote in his Margi Grammar of 1963, “I had to keep in mind ... the needs of the linguistic layman ... and the interest of the expert linguist ... I have tried to follow an intermediate way”, also applies to the present work. This compromise becomes manifest especially in the dictionary where the lexical entries are orthographically presented in two ways, i.e. on the one hand in a manner which the Ngas community itself has been practising for the past few decades and on the other hand, in a scientific representation of the language including systematic tone-marking (low/mid/high) and the distinction of vowel length. Another concession to the practical expectations of the non-professional user of the lexicon lies in the otherwise unusual alphabetical order of certain letters. For instance, the modified phonemic sounds *mb*, *nd*, *kw* and *fy* are not listed as separate entries, but come under *m*, *n*, *k* and *f*, respectively; thus, *mb* follows *ma* and *kw* stands after *ku*, etc.

The ultimate aim and purpose of the present book is twofold: first to keep alive the language and parts of the oral literature of the Ngas people for the benefit of the young generation who are increasingly abandoning their culture-linguistic heritage in favour of Hausa, which is the spreading lingua franca on the Plateau; secondly to document this important West Chadic language for the sake of our endeavours towards comparing it with other related neighbouring languages such as Sura (Mwaghavul), Mushere, Mupun, etc. as well as with more distantly related Chadic languages in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. In this respect Gábor Takács’ comparative study of 2004 has already brought about a remarkable step forward.

Among earlier efforts to describe and analyse the Ngas language are Foulkes (1915), Lukas (1952), Burquest (1971, 1973) and Gochal (1994). It is remarkable how the latter – as the first native speaking author – has described and analysed his mother tongue in such a detailed and competent manner.

D.A. Burquest, then a SIL missionary linguist, worked on the language in the late 1960ies. I owe him thanks for sending me a first version of his Angas Phonology (1971), attached to his letter of May 12, 1969.

The authors have given their best in compiling and editing this book. Yet they are aware of numerous shortcomings and questions not yet satisfactorily answered; some of them are listed under “Open Questions” at the end of the book. It is to be hoped that they will be

treated by future students, if possible by Ngas linguists themselves. But all our efforts would have been hard to realize if there had not been official recognition and many helpful friends and collaborators whose names deserve to be mentioned here. A special word of gratitude goes back to the year 1964 when a certain Joseph D. Gomwalk, at that time a student of zoology and chemistry at the University of Ibadan, kindly assisted me by narrating the Ngas story *Kafwan daŋ Ncəm* (Hare and Monitor). It has been recorded and forms part of this present book. J.D. Gomwalk later became Governor of the then Benue-Plateau State and, as a result of the incidents of the coup d'état of the year 1976, was executed on the shores of Lagos. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

Our most sincere gratitude goes to Chief Dr. Anthony Jahota Jiwul, his dear wife Parisa and his entire family. Their generous hospitality and reliable friendship cannot be praised enough. In 1962, Dr. Jobst Lange, then Governmental District Medical Officer in Pankshin, and his wife Erika made me feel at home with their warm hospitality. Jobst also invited me to join him on one of his adventurous medical service trips to dispensaries in the barely accessible hinterland such as Wokkos and Garra. More than 30 years later he reconstructed his dilapidated former residential house, and I had the pleasure to spend several weeks there, working on my Ngas material. It fills me with happiness to acknowledge my lasting gratitude to these my friends Jobst and Shelly, his present wife.

One of my first informants with whom I still keep contact is Mr Charles Dimka, in 1962 a pupil and afterwards a teacher in the Kabwir community; he recorded dozens of folktales in various villages. I also wish gratefully to remember Mrs Rhoda Mohammed, a Nigerian Ambassador to Britain in the 1970's, who paid me a visit in Marburg. In 1967, shortly before the Biafran War broke out, I had the opportunity, together with Prof. R. Armstrong, the Idoma specialist, to pay a visit to Major-General Yakubu Gowon, a Ngas native and then Head of State, at Dodan Barracks in Lagos. A similar visit became possible to the then Governor of Benue-Plateau State, Mr Joseph Dechi Gomwalk at his Jos headquarters. We also owe thanks to Justice Iliya S. Gofwen and his dear wife in Jos who warmly welcomed us and supported our language endeavours. Justice Gofwen and the late Professor Daniel Wambudā, University of Jos, accompanied our studies with wisdom and interest. A sincere word of thanks is also due to the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust and the Centre for Ngas Bible Project and Christian Literature who have produced numerous booklets in Ngas during the past twenty years on matters of health care, Christian belief and traditional folklore. Cordial thanks are also due to the late Captain Idi and his wife, who showed much interest in our work. I also wish to remember gratefully Mrs Naomi Nafimi Pindima (†2006), whose friendship lasting

over 40 years made me feel at home in Pankshin. A special word of thanks goes to Ms Pauline Kumben (†2003), the manageress of Pankshin Hilltop Hotel, whose loving friendliness touched me deeply. Among the language assistants to whom I owe thanks are the late Mr Esly Bombom, Mr Yusuf Zumji Dimka and his wife Afiniki Zumji Dimka as well as Mr Ezra Gopep, who provided us with the recording of folktales, bible texts and proverbs. Above all, we owe special thanks to Mr Luka Jacob Jiwul, whose untiring assistance, endless patience and understanding in every area of our collaboration over several years deserve our full appreciation. The same holds true for Ms Sonja Bräscher, whose loyal and reliable assistance in the technical production of the manuscript with an indefatigable encouraging mind we highly appreciate. Mrs Grünwaldt, née Holubová, expresses her gratitude to Dr. Henning Schreiber who advised her on computer-based problems while preparing the manuscript, as well as to Dr. Erhard Voeltz for his ideas concerning Ngas grammar and for sharing his experience in matters of field work. A special word of thanks goes to Mrs Sandra Bohrmann for all her helpful kindness over so many years. With Dr. Rudolf Leger we were also able to discuss various issues of Ngas morphology. We are very much obliged to Dr. Ulrike Zoch for her painstaking and time-consuming assistance in formatting the manuscript and preparing it for press. We are grateful to them as well as to Mrs Shelly Lange, Dr. Angelika Sayer and Mrs Inge Reifenberg, who have effectively contributed to improving the English text.

Last but not least our gratitude goes to the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* for enabling us to carry out the present work.

Frankfurt/Main and Marburg/Lahn, October 2015.

H.J.

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>abs.</i> | absolute | <i>interr.</i> , | interrogative |
| <i>adj.</i> | adjective | INTERROG | |
| <i>adv.</i> | adverb | <i>intr.</i> | intransitive |
| <i>Ar.</i> | Arabic | L | low tone |
| art. | article | L.G.A. | Local Government |
| <i>attr.</i> , ATTR | attributive | | Area |
| <i>aux.</i> , AUX | auxiliary | <i>lit.</i> | literally |
| C | consonant | <i>loc.</i> , LOC | locative |
| cf. | confer, compare | <i>log.</i> | logophoric |
| CM | continuation marker | M | mid tone |
| COMPL | complementizer | m. | masculine |
| <i>conj.</i> , CONJ | conjunction | Ms. | manuscript |
| cop. | copula | <i>Mwa.</i> | Mwaghavul |
| <i>dem.</i> | demonstrative | <i>n.</i> , N | noun |
| DET | determinant | NEG | negative |
| dir. | direct | NP | nominal phrase |
| DO | direct object | <i>n.prop.</i> | <i>nomen proprium</i> |
| E | English | <i>n.reg.</i> | <i>nomen regens</i> |
| esp. | especially | <i>n.st.</i> , NS | noun of state |
| ex. | example | <i>num.</i> | numeral |
| F | focus | obj. | object |
| f. | feminine | o.s. | oneself |
| FIN | final (morpheme) | P | Plains Ngas |
| forthc. | forthcoming | part., PART | particle |
| FUT | future | Pf., PF | perfect |
| GA | <i>Grundaspekt</i> | Pfv. | perfective |
| GEN | genitive | <i>pl.</i> , PL | plural |
| H | 1. Hill Ngas; 2. high | <i>poss.</i> , POSS | possessive |
| Ha. | Hausa | <i>postpos.</i> | postposition |
| HAB | habitual (tense) | POT | potentiality |
| <i>ideo.</i> | ideophone | PPP | past passive participle |
| <i>idiom.</i> | idiomatic | <i>prep.</i> , PREP | preposition |
| iDO | indirect object | PROGR | progressive |
| i.e. | <i>id est</i> , that is | <i>pron.</i> | pronoun |
| I(m)pfv. | imperfective | <i>quant.</i> | quantitative, quantifier |
| indef. | indefinite | RED | reduplication |
| <i>intens.</i> , INTENS | intensive | rel., REL | relative |
| <i>interj.</i> | interjection | sb. | somebody |

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>sbj.</i> , <i>subj.</i> | subject |
| sg., SG | singular |
| SIL | Summer Institute of Linguistics |
| s.o. | someone |
| <i>sp.</i> | species |
| sth. | something |
| Subj. | subjunctive |
| <i>syn.</i> | synonymous |
| T | topic |
| temp. | temporal |
| <i>tr.</i> | transitive |
| V | vowel |
| <i>v.</i> , V | verb |
| <i>var.</i> | variant |
| vd. | <i>vide</i> , see |
| <i>viz.</i> | <i>videlicet</i> , namely |
| <i>vn.</i> , VN | verbal noun |
| <i>v.s.</i> | verbal substantive |
| wh | who/what/where/when |

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INTRODUCTION

The Ngas (Angas) people and their country

Ngas (**ngas**, Pl. **ngas mwá**) is the mother tongue of some 400,000 people (according to Ethnologue, following SIL 1998) who live on the south-eastern hills, slopes and plains of the central Nigerian Plateau. Politically and linguistically they are divided into two large sections, viz. the Hill or Highland Ngas (H) with its administrative centre (Local Government Area) Pankshin (**pàŋ-céen**) and the Plains or Lowland Ngas (P), extant in the present Kanke Local Government Area with its administrative centre in Kabwir (**ka-ḡwíir**). The Hill Ngas (H) speaking villages (listed in alphabetical order) are the following:

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Ballang Kalep | Kor |
| Ballang Shipang | Kuwang |
| Bet | Kwalla |
| Bwarak | Lugor |
| Chigwong | Manung |
| Dila | Munok |
| Dokpai | Mwel |
| Duk | Ner |
| Dung | Nyellang |
| For | Pangcen |
| Garam | Sum |
| Gile | Tazuk |
| Gung | Vel |
| Gurup | Wokkos |
| Jivir | Wulmi |
| Kadung | Wuseli |
| Kanyi | Yamyan |
| Kobi | Yang |

The number of villages of the Kanke Local Government Area, where the Plains variety of Ngas is spoken, surpasses that of the Pankshin L.G.A. by far. The village names are presented here:

| | |
|---------|--------|
| Amnet | Kudus |
| Ampang | Kulla |
| Amper | Kulli |
| Belbu | Kungji |
| Bolbong | Kurum |

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Bolkon | Kuwang |
| Bonga | Kwal |
| Bwir (=Kabwir) | Langshi |
| Chikan | Lepmana |
| Chikwai | Lepshit |
| Dangchor | Lerpye |
| Dankang | Licep |
| Dep | Longa |
| Dibir | Lun |
| Dinting | Lungwa |
| Dolong | Lur |
| Dumben | Mbul |
| Dungkung | Mimyak |
| Forgwang | Munok |
| Gap | Mwel |
| Gakshet | Myet |
| Garram | Nban |
| Garyang | Nenkong |
| Gigyang | Nemel |
| Gichom | Njangli |
| Goktok | Nyayit |
| Golten | Per (Amper) |
| Gomadaci | Pukdi |
| Gugur | Pwel (Dawaki/Kudum) |
| Gwang | Rong |
| Gyangyang | Seri |
| Jaksham | Shalwa |
| Jemut | Sharam |
| Jina | Shiwer |
| Kagar | Somji |
| Kagu | Songsong |
| Kagwer | Tabulung |
| Kaler | Tigya |
| Kapkal | Tiplik |
| Kazuk | Tomtom |
| Kolang | Tuwan |
| Kopgying | Wuye |
| Kudum | Zangai |

Outside Plateau State, in Bogoro L.G.A., Bauchi State, there are the following five villages with a Plains Ngas speaking population: Sasham, Gyisir, Kaye, Ndishili and Sara.

The Ngas language and its two principal varieties

The two principal varieties of the Ngas language, i.e. the Hill (H) and the Plains (P) Ngas, are distinguished from each other by a number of characteristic features. Generally speaking, H is undoubtedly the more conservative and archaic dialect variety. It has preserved many features which in P have either been lost or transformed in a different, innovative manner. Thus, the certainly historically earlier method of forming a possessive construction by suffixing the possessive pronouns directly to a noun (of possession), e.g. **wók-ná** ‘my house’ in H is generally replaced in P by an indirect construction in which the language uses a carrier morpheme **f-** (of unknown origin¹) yielding **wók fana**. Moreover, phonological features play an overwhelming role such as prenasalisation, labialisation and palatalization in P, which, on the other hand, are practically absent in H. Gochal 1994 presents a very good comparative exposition of this remarkable phenomenon; he also hints at the decisive fact that H has preserved the archaic Hamitosemitic occlusive /**k**/ in the 2nd p. pronouns, i.e. **ka**, **ki** and **ku**!

For two reasons the present study of the language almost completely concentrates on the P variety of Ngas. Firstly, from the very outset, my principal collaborators and informants have been P speakers, mainly from Kabwir and Kudum (Dawaki). Secondly, the P variety is spoken by the majority of Ngas (compare the list of villages given above), which may have contributed to the fact that most of the indigenous publications including the Ngas translation of the New Testament are written in the P variety of Ngas.

Classification and characteristic features of Ngas

Ngas is one of some fifteen West Chadic languages spoken on the southern parts of the central Nigerian Plateau and on the plains between the Plateau and the Benue valley. The other members of this group of languages, which is known as Angas-Sura or Sura-Gerka, are Mwaghavul (Sura), Mupun, Mushere, Cakfyem, Chip (Miship), Tal, Kofyar-Dimmuk, Goram, Jorto, Montol, Pyapun, Gerka, Goemai (Ankwe) and Mernyang. Ngas is certainly the most populous one among these linguistic communities.

Ngas and its close relatives on the Plateau are members of the Chadic family which counts some hundred and fifty languages spreading over northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon and

¹ Rudolf Leger, personal communication, drew my attention to the Kupto demonstrative **fa** ‘this’, which might make sense in this context.

central Chad. Chadic as a whole is the southwesternmost member of the Hamito-semitic/Afroasiatic stock, which comprises besides Chadic the North African Berber languages, Ancient Egyptian, Cushitic including Omotic in East Africa and the wide-spread Semitic language family. Of course, each of these five families is heir of a common Hamito-semitic stock heritage. And each of the 300-400 languages of the stock has in the course of several millennia preserved – as well as lost – different parts of that heritage. Each of them has also developed in different ways and at a variable speed. Moreover, the extent and degree of foreign influence must have been very different. Thus, present-day Chadic languages display extremely different inventories in their grammar-structural and lexical outfit. Each language is an individual of its own. Thus, some of them can be classified as conservative ('archimorphic'), others as particularly progressive and innovative ('metamorphic').

Ngas belongs to the most progressive and innovative members of the entire Chadic language family. There are no (more) features of gender and plural marking worth mentioning; ablaut (apophony) is practically non-existent; a three level tone system takes care of a smooth functioning of the verbal and nominal morphology; the verbal aspect system operates elegantly on suprasegmental (tonal) grounds only. Phonologically, secondary features such as prenasalisation, labialisation and palatalization have crept into the speech habits – almost exclusively of P speakers! -, comparable to Italian *nuovo* from Latin *novo* (*novum*), Danish *bjerg* and Russian *Piotr* corresponding to reflexes such as *Berg* and *Peter*, respectively. As to the speed of linguistic change, observations made in 1962 compared with speech habits of fifty years later, the differences are remarkable. Compare the following instances of a tendency towards phonological changes the general feature of which is lenition:

| | | | |
|-------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| gha | 'you' | becomes | a |
| lí | 'to say' | | lɔ |
| fana | 'my' | | fəna |
| ka | 'on' | | kə |
| gyís | 'bone' | | gís |
| etc. | | | |

Obviously, short vowels, especially **i** and **a**, tend to become centralized to **ə** (shwa), implosive stops such as **ɠ** are deglottalized. The original Chadic pronoun **ka**, which has already become voiced in standard Ngas, loses its initial consonant /**gh**/. As to the predominance of tonality in grammar, there can be no doubt that this goes back to the influence exerted by non-Chadic languages, viz. Benue-Congo or Kwa, extant in all parts of central and southern Nigeria. To give an example: Ngas lowers the tone(s) of a *nomen regens* in a genitive construction, e.g. **sɔŋ tɛŋ** (mid high) 'branch of tree', but **sóŋ** (high) 'branch'. Compara-

bly, in Efik, there it is the *nomen rectum*, which is lowered, e.g. **íkòt** (high-high) ‘bush’, but **angwâ ikòt** (low-low) ‘bush cat’.

Beside its highly progressive and historically innovative character, the language has still preserved ancient features such as the fact, that “the sentence ‘what is your name’, addressed to a man, is *me simgha*, very close indeed to the Hebrew *ma šimkha*” (Greenberg 1962: 85).

Ngas and Ron – two neighbouring but contrasting Chadic languages

Ngas and its closely related sister languages on the one hand and their western neighbours, the Ron languages on the other hand, represent the westernmost outpost of the Chadic language family. Whereas, however, the archimorphic Ron-type with its rich, predominantly segmental morphology and abundant ablaut features (cf. Jungraithmayr 1970) is historically a relic within Chadic linguistic evolution, Ngas is, on the contrary, one of the most innovative metamorphic representatives of the entire language family. The verbal binary aspect system is based – at least with the strong verbs – on the tonal opposition between a perfective (Pfv.) and an imperfective (Ipfv.) stem, e.g. **shwee** (mid) ‘s/he drank’ and (**pò**) **shwée** (high) ‘s/he is drinking’. There are no verbal suffixes whatsoever denoting tense, mood or direction as e.g. in Hausa.

As to tenses, the two basic ones, *viz.* *Grundaspekt* (aorist) and Future, and the Subjunctive are distinguished solely by different tones on the subject pronoun, thus e.g. **ḡa shwee** (mid mid), ‘I drink/drank’; **ḡá shwee** (high mid) ‘I shall drink’; **ḡà shwee** (low mid) ‘I may/should drink’. Ron, on the contrary, distinguishes such grammatical categories by means of ablaut. In Ron of Daffo the corresponding binary aspect stems are as follows:

| | Ron | cf. Ngas |
|--------|---------------|--------------|
| Pfv.: | shoh | shwee |
| Ipfv.: | shwaáh | shwée |

The aspectual stem pair **shoh/shwaáh** of Ron corresponds to the equivalent pair in Mubi, spoken in central Chad Republic, *viz.* **sfi/súwáà**. Both findings, the one in the extreme west, the other one in the extreme east, attest to the oldest stages of Chadic linguistic history. Internal **a**, **a**-infixing, being a characteristic and much applied segmental morphological feature of the Ron languages, also occurs in Ngas, though – as a relic – only sporadically in the formation of verbal plural stems, e.g. **kul**, pl. **kwaal** ‘to tie’, but never in connection with forming verbal aspect stems.

A particular constellation is found in the extraterritorially spoken Ron language of Fyer, a village a few miles northwest of Pankshin. Fyer is clearly a Ron language but does no longer apply the means of ablaut, *viz.* **shoh/shwaáh**, as the other Ron languages do. Due to its

immediate neighbourhood to Ngas it has switched from the typical Ron type to the Ngas type by replacing the segmental (ablaut) method in forming the aspect stems by the suprasegmental (tonal) method. Thus, the Ron-Daffo aspectual stem pair **shoh/shwaáh** corresponds to **sho** (mid)/**shó** (high) in Ron-Fyer (cf. Jungraithmayr 1970), exactly like Ngas **shwee** (mid)/**shwée** (high). Although the fact that Fyer has been in close contact – probably for centuries – with Ngas is a plausible argument in explaining this transformation, it still remains almost a riddle that it could happen in such a systematical manner.

Note on the history of Ngas

According to their oral traditions, the Ngas have originated from Borno in north-eastern Nigeria from where they are assumed to have set out some 5-600 years ago². Localities which people still remember that their ancestors have passed through before they reached Kabwir at the south-eastern foothills of the Plateau are **Kwàpíl**, **Búm Sùwà** and **Lep Calím**. Some sections of them will have continued their migration climbing up and penetrating into the higher parts of the Plateau Mountains where they ultimately settled down and founded places such as Pankshin, Garram, Wokkos, Ner, etc. According to Foulkes (1915) the Ngas say that their ancestors were Jukun “who came from Bornu and drove the Rems westward”. Could “Rem” be mistaken for “Ron”, who live indeed to the west of the Ngas today? As to the Jukun coming from Borno we are here confronted probably with a confusion of traditions. It is indeed generally believed that the ancestors of the Ngas came from the northeast, i.e. Borno, but these ancestors were certainly not speaking Jukun, a Benue-Congo language, today neighbouring the Plains Ngas (cf. Storch 2003; Anyanwu 2005).

The Chadic speaking ancestors of the Ngas will probably have met a section of the widespread Jukun when reaching the Plateau and will have had considerable intercourse with them. A number of lexical and, above all, phonological affinities between modern Plateau Jukun and Ngas, especially the Plains dialect (P), hint at such close contact between the two ethnic groups and languages. In this context it is also worth noting that the Ngas address the Kanuri, Goemai (Ankwe) and Jukun by the term or title **Kàká** ‘ancestor, grandmother’!

2 cf. Meek 1925, vol II, p. 138: “... the two languages, for which texts are available, Sura and Angas, diverge widely from the suffix type, which is, at least, very common among Benue-Chad languages; they are virtually isolating tongues. The question therefore arises, whether they have been affected by the neighbouring Jukun syntax, or have preserved an earlier type of speech of the Central Division; at present no answer can be given.”