Book Review

Babaev, Kirill. Zialo: the Newly-Discovered Mande Language of Guinea. München: Lincom Europa, 2010, 253 p.

The work under review is an important contribution to the field of Southwestern Mande (henceforth SWM) language studies, and, indeed, to the wider field of African linguistics. Kirill Babaev, from his field work in southeastern Guinea, presents an extensive and well-documented description of Zialo — the first for this language. He asserts that Zialo should not be considered a dialect of the Loma (Looma) language.

Because of the scope of the book, I will not attempt to list every topic the author addresses, but will highlight areas of interest in comparison with Loma (the SWM language with which I have experience).

In chapters 1 through 3, Babaev places the Zialo language in its linguistic and geographical context. Zialo is grouped with the five Southwestern Mande languages: Mende, Loko, Bandi, Kpelle, and Loma. The author provides a map of the language area and a description of its speakers. He states that Zialo shares much vocabulary with Bandi, but that its grammatical structure and tonology are closer to those of Loma, and that it should not be considered a dialect of either. Interestingly, when three Loma friends of mine were informally asked to list the dialects of Loma, none of them included Zialo.

Chapter 4 addresses phonetics and phonology. Two areas of particular interest are syllable structure and tone. The author posits four basic syllable structures: V, CV, Vy, and CVy. Long vowels are not considered to require a separate syllable structure, and vowel sequences are said to be two distinct syllables. Evidence for this is that two vowels in sequence can carry different tones. Therefore, a CVV syllable is not posited.

I was intrigued by the Vy and CVy syllables. Prost [1967] uses *y* as a convention to represent the Loma definite article *-i*, primarily to distinguish the pronunciation of Loma syllables ending in *-Vi* from the pronunciation of similar French syllables. Babaev, however, is not simply using an orthography convention, but states that the definite marker *-i* has been reduced to *-y* in Zialo. He gives examples of *i* being reduced to *y* in postvocalic position in cases

other than the definite marker, and indicates that the definite marker -*y* loses its tone.

Babaev's work on the tonal system of Zialo is groundbreaking. The marking of tone throughout the book, as well as his tonal analysis, is a significant contribution to SWM studies. He illustrates several Zialo tonal rules including Rightward Spreading, Suprasegmental Morpheme Influence, Clitic Tone Variability, and Syntagmic Border Limit. His description of tone classes and his indication of the tone class of each item in his Zialo-English/French vocabulary list are invaluable.

Chapter 5 describes the morphonology (morphophonology) of Zialo. I found his description of Zialo initial consonant alternation fascinating. I will not detail this phenomenon here since other sources have done so for other SWM languages. Instead, I will focus on the differences between Zialo and Loma initial consonant alternation. In Zialo, the consonants *m, ŋ,* and *ɲ* participate in the alternation, whereas in Loma they do not. The Zialo *b* alternates with *w* following all vowels except *a*, in which case it alternates with *v*, but even then, *w* sometimes surfaces. In Loma, *b* only alternates with *w* before rounded vowels. It is interesting to note that of the kinship lexemes that do not participate in consonant alternation in Zialo, a few of the corresponding terms do participate in Loma. For example, *kɛɛɣɛ* 'father' and *diya* 'older sibling' do not alternate in Zialo, but in Loma they become *ɣɛɛɣɛ* and *liya*. If this resistance to alternation is the result of a suprasegmental SWM kinship prefix as the book suggests, this morpheme must operate differently in Loma.

Chapter 6 is a long chapter discussing the nominal system. Babaev's section on tone classes is very helpful; he indicates that Zialo also has the "inverted" tonal system that Dwyer [1973] describes for Loma. I also noted that the Zialo nouns mentioned above that are resistant to consonant alternation are also resistant to certain tone rules. It would be intriguing to compare the corresponding Loma words that do undergo alternation, to ascertain whether or not they are subject to similar tone rules.

One topic to which I would like to respond is the Zialo conjunction *nãbɔ wa*, illustrated by example (1):

(1) *Né   wɛ̃-gɔ̀   gà   ì-kɛɛɣɛ   nãbɔ̀   nè- kɛɛɣɛ*
    1PL.EXCL   meet-AOR   with   2SG.POSS-father   CONJ   1SG.POSS-father

wà.
CONJ

'We met your father and [then] my father'. (57)

Loma has two similar constructions, *naa ʋɛɛ[1] NP ba/ʋa[2]* and *é ɓɔ NP ba/ʋa*, for which I will provide examples from my own field work:

(2) *Duuli-iti   ti   mina ɣula   naa   ʋɛɛ   maku ɲɔuɲɔu-gi   ʋa.*
    fly-DEF.PL 3PL NEG come.out DEM add odor very.bad-DEF PP

'May flies not come out nor a bad odor.' (lit. 'May flies not come out—that, added to a bad odor.')

The following example shows that the demonstrative *naa* can be replaced by a nominal in Loma:

(3) *Tanu ʋɛɛ   nɔ̀un   ba   gi   ɓaɣa-i   mi-a.*
    Tanu add 1SG.EMPH PP 1PL.EXCL rice-DEF eat-PFCT

'Tanu and I have eaten the rice' (Lit. 'Tanu added to me').

(4) *Papa ta   kɔni-gi   ta   tamade-gi   ta   koole-i   é   ɓɔ*
    harp and guitar-DEF and tambourine-DEF and flute-DEF 3SG add

dɔɔ-i   ʋa naa-ti   ka   ta   ɗa   ta-ʋɛti-i   ɠaanɛ.
wine-DEF PP DEM-PL COP and HAB 3PL.POSS-feast-DEF enliven

'The harp, the guitar, the tambourine, the flute, and wine (lit. 'added to wine') are what   enliven their feast'.

In Loma, these constructions are based on two verbs *pɛɛ/ʋɛɛ* and *kpɔ/ɓɔ*, both meaning "to add", preceded by a demonstrative (*naa*) or 3s pronominal (*é*), and followed by a postpositional phrase containing the postposition *ba/ʋa*. The Zialo form *nãɓɔ wa* bears a strong resemblance to these two Loma constructions, and the derivation of the latter may shed light on the Zialo construction.

Babaev also describes the comitative prepositions *ná* and *wà* in Zialo, adding that "No semantic difference between *ná* and *wà* is identified" (91):

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[1] ʋ represents a bilabial fricative.

[2] Whether the "strong" or "weak" form of these types of pairs surfaces is controlled by initial consonant alternation rules.

(5) *Gè   vàà-gɔ̀   ná   Koli.*
    1SG   come-AOR   with   Koli

'I came together with Koli'. (91)

(6) *Á   li   wà   Koli.*
    2PL.IMP   go   with   Koli
    'Go (pl.) with Koli'. (91)

Loma has similar constructions in which the "preposition" used corresponds to the first person plural exclusive focalised pronoun *gá* or the second person plural focalised pronoun *wà*, showing agreement in person with the subject:

(7) *Gi   ɓaya-i   mi-a   gá   Tanu.*
    1PL.EXCL   rice-DEF   eat-PFCT   1PL.EXCL   Tanu

'Tanu and I have eaten the rice' (Lit. 'we (excl) have eaten the rice, we (excl) Tanu').

(8) *Wo   ɓaya-i   mi-a   wà   Tanu.*
    2PL.   rice-DEF   eat-PFCT   2PL   Tanu
    'You (pl.) and Tanu have eaten the rice' (Lit. 'you (pl.) have eaten the rice, you (pl.) Tanu').

The Zialo examples in the book are similar to this Loma data in that *ná* is used with the first person subject (although interestingly, Zialo apparently uses the singular form, and in fact *nà* in Loma is a focalised 1SG pronoun), and *wà* is used with a second person plural subject. Lacking further data, I cannot determine whether these two prepositions can also occur with third person subjects in Zialo.

Chapter 7 describes the pronominal system of Zialo. Of particular interest is the emphatic series, which Babaev posits to have originated from "a merger between personal pronouns and the intensifier *ya* still in use with focalised pronouns" (98). The corresponding emphatic construction in Loma uses the equivalent personal pronouns plus the copula *ɠa*. The fact that the Zialo emphatic pronouns can optionally take an affix *-gi* which resembles the nominal determination marker is evidence that the pronoun and the intensifier have become a fused form in that language.

Chapter 8 is an excellent and thorough discussion of the Zialo verbal system. Again, Babaev's categorization of verbs into tone classes is immensely

helpful. His presentation of the predicative person markers, his description of the many verbal constructions, and his discussion of diathesis and actant derivation are highly relevant to the study of SWM languages. I would highly recommend them for anyone involved.

I will mention a few specific items of interest in this chapter from the standpoint of comparison with the Loma verbal system. The optional Zialo imperative marker *le* is said to "emphasize the incentive expressed by the imperative construction" (112). In Loma, the same optional marker (which also has the variant *de* due to initial consonant alternation) is actually used to soften an imperative and make it more polite. Another topic is the formation of impersonal clauses. In Zialo, Babaev indicates that the 3rd person marker is often used to do this:

(9) *Sákpá   kpàtè-fà-y   zu, é   súwá-y   γèyà.*
    REF/sauce prepare-NMLZ-DEF PP 3SG REF/meat-DEF buy
    'To prepare the sauce, one should buy meat' (lit. 'one buys meat'). (147)

In Loma, by contrast, the 2nd person marker is used to form similar clauses:

(10) *Nu   γa   zoo pɛlɛ vagɔ lo-su   è   γaaɓa ma   é*
     person COP can house good build-IPFV 2SG watch over 3s
lɛbi.
endure

 'One can build a good house and make sure it lasts' (lit. 'you watch over it that it lasts').

Chapter 9 deals with sentence-level syntax. Babaev addresses juxtaposed and conjoined clauses, relative clauses, reported speech and quotative indexes, adverbial clauses, interrogative sentences, epistemic modality indicators, and concludes with a list of useful phrasal idioms such as greetings. I would be interested in seeing further description of how PPMs function on the sentence level.

Babaev's appendices demonstrate the vast amount of research he has put into this work, and are an informative resource. He includes, in addition to a Swadesh list, sample texts and a long Zialo-English/French vocabulary list. The list also incorporates some equivalent vocabulary from other Mande languages. He addresses the problem of variants resulting from initial consonant

alternation by providing an entry for a word in its "weak" form that refers the reader to the corresponding "strong" form entry.

I did notice one apparent error in the book on p. 135 where the same example clause was given for both the positive and negative forms (examples 411 and 412). There was also a reference incorrectly attributed to me on page 11.

In conclusion, Babaev's book is an invaluable contribution to the study of Mande linguistics and specifically SWM linguistics. The organization of the book allows a reader easily to find sections of interest. There is a generous amount of data in both the appendices and the body of the book. The thorough marking and analysis of tone are unprecedented in SWM studies. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in furthering their understanding of Mande languages.

References

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