

Richard Gravina

The Phonology of Proto-Central Chadic

The Reconstruction of the Phonology and Lexicon of Proto-Central Chadic, and the Linguistic History of the Central Chadic Languages

The Central Chadic languages are a diverse and fascinating collection of languages, spoken in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. The phonologies of these languages have intrigued linguists since they were first studied, due to their minimal sets of phonemic vowels (sometimes only one), complex systems of vowel harmony, and extensive use of palatalized and labialized consonants. Analysis of these languages led to the proposal of phonemic units referred to as 'prosodies', which act on both vowels and consonants, allowing Central Chadic phonologies to be described in a neat and succinct way.

This study looks at the diverse phonological systems found within Central Chadic, and reconstructs the phonological system of their ancestor language. This system is itself simple and succinct, and includes one phonemic prosody and just three phonemic vowels. The study describes the phonological processes that led from this system to the many phonological systems that are in use today, shedding light both on the history of the languages, and on issues in the analysis of these languages.

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