

abstract

thesis subject

A Descriptive Study of the Bhaca Language

author

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The present study of Bhaca is result of my field research conducted in the Republic of South Africa. Bhaca is a Bantu-Nguni language spoken by the Bhaca people living mainly in the north-eastern part of the Eastern Cape State of South Africa. The Bantu-Nguni consists of four major ethnic groups, i.e. Xhosa, Zulu, Swati and Ndebele. There are, however, several minor groups and many of them reside in the Eastern Cape (former Transkei). These minor groups are relatively small populations and also their residential areas are small. The Bhaca is one of these minor groups.

The Bhaca area is located between the Xhosa and the Zulu cultural areas. The Xhosa and the Zulu are both major ethnic groups and both have a big population. Most Bhaca people speak IsiXhosa (the Xhosa language) or IsiZulu (the Zulu language), or sometimes the mixture of them, but a small number of them still speak their original language. Their original language is called IsiBhaca (the Bhaca language).

IsiBhaca is believed by some linguists to be a dialect of SiSwati (the Swati language), the language spoken mainly in Swaziland. The Nguni languages have a number of grammatical characteristics in common and they are almost mutually intelligible. It is curious to observe that IsiBhaca, which is spoken about 500kms south-west away from Swaziland, shows many similar phonetic and phonological features with SiSwati in spite of the distance which divides them. IsiBhaca, therefore, forms a linguistic enclave.

Because of the social manipulations and destructions by the Apartheid government of South Africa, the minor ethnic groups like the Bhaca have been ignored for many years.

They also have experienced the destruction of their cultural identity and most of the Bhaca people do not speak their original language nowadays.

The aim of this study is, first of all, to clarify the characteristics of IsiBhaca in a descriptive way. It is also hoped that this study gives a new paradigm to the study of the Nguni languages in particular and the Bantu languages in general.

This thesis is made up of 6 chapters.

Chapter 1 is a general survey of the ethnographical and historical issues of the Bhaca people. In Section 1.1, the basic geographical and population data are shown. In Section 1.2, the linguistic position of IsiBhaca among the Bantu-Nguni languages are presented. Section 1.3 deals with the history of the Bhaca people; Hammond-Tooke's ethnographic study and his description about the Bhaca history are reviewed. Hammond-Tooke's record of the Bhaca history differs from the oral history recorded by the author in some points. In Section 1.4 comparison is made about the cultural characteristics of the Bhaca with the other Bantu Nguni peoples. Section 1.5 is an explanation of the basic linguistic features of IsiBhaca.

Chapter 2 shows research result of phonetic and phonological survey of IsiBhaca. Section 2.1 is the summary of the syllable structure. Section 2.2 deals with vowels; here I examine a phonetic phenomenon called 'vowel rising'. Vowel rising is an appearance of allophones [e]~[ɛ] for the phoneme /e/ and [o]~[ɔ] for /o/ under certain environments. Auditorily it is difficult to discern them, but phonetic analysis tells vowel rising does occur. Section 2.3 explains the consonants; there are relatively many consonants in IsiBhaca in comparison to the other Bantu languages; here I make a comprehensive list of the consonants. In sections from 2.4 to 2.8, I argue some interesting phonetic and phonological characteristics seen in IsiBhaca; 2.4 for a phonetic survey of a class of consonants called depressor; 2.5 for glottal stop feature preceding to a vowel; 2.6 for bilabial implosive, 2.7 for glottal stop factor seen in voiceless unaspirated click consonants; 2.8 for the distribution of plosive and affricate (/th/→[th]~[tsh] and /d/→[d]~[dz]). Section 2.9 explains phonological processes. Section 2.10 discusses some occurrence constraints of certain consonant classes.

Chapter 3 is a grammatical survey of IsiBhaca. Section 3.1 is description of the noun; the morphological structure, classes, affixes and usage of the noun in copulative clauses.

Section 3.2 is for the verb; from Subsections 3.2.1 to 3.2.3 for the verb structure, Subsection 3.2.4 for the verb conjugation (by mood, tense and aspect). Section from 3.3 to 3.10 are for other word formatives, i.e. 3.3 for auxiliary verbs, 3.4 for independent pronouns, 3.5 for demonstratives, 3.6 for numerals, 3.7 for adjectives, 3.8 for relatives and relative verb forms, 3.9 for possessives and possessive pronouns, 3.10 for interrogatives.

In Chapter 4, tonal phenomena of IsiBhaca in general are dealt with, as an introduction to the description done in the following chapters. IsiBhaca shows a tonal opposition between H(igh) and L(ow) tones. In addition to this, Falling tone (HL) appears in certain syllables. The tonal phenomena in the phonological level, both underlying and surface, is effectively explained by positing H and L. Underlying tone do not show up as they are in the phonetic realization level; some factors such as depression by the depressor consonant, downstep, downdrift, pitch modulation of L syllables caused by neighbouring H's, etc., affect the way of tonal realization. This chapter gives a detailed description of these factors.

Chapter 5 deals with the tonal phenomena of the noun. Noun stems are tonologically subdivided into two types according to their underlying tone, i.e. stems with H (H-type) and without H (L-type). The H-type shows a number of variations and their number increases as the number of the stem syllables increases, whereas the L-type shows only one tonal pattern.

The augment carries H underlyingly but the noun prefix does not. The H of the augment moves rightward and appears on one of the following syllables in one case, but in other cases the H stays on its original position.

Section 5.1 explains the word structure of the noun. Section 5.2 is the main section of the chapter; the analysis of H tone movement patterns. Section 5.3 deals with nouns which show exceptional tonal patterns. In Section 5.4, some interesting tonal phenomena, such as downstep and depressor-shift occurring between prefix and noun stem are analyzed in detail.

Chapter 6 deals with the tonal phenomena of verb forms according to the mood, such as infinitive, indicative, subjunctive, participle, relative and imperative. The verb root of IsiBhaca shows the opposition of H-type and L-type. In contrast with the nominal

H-type stems, the verbal H-type stems show only one pattern even when the number of the syllables increases.

H tone on a verb shows up according to either Moving H Pattern (MHP) or Fixed H Pattern (FHP). Under MHP, H moves rightward from its original (underlying) syllable to a certain following syllable. The destination to which the H moves is decided by counting the number of the syllables from the end of the word. Under FHP, however, H appears in a pre-decided manner regardless of the original location of H. MHP is seen to operate in relatively simple verb moods such as present indicatives or infinitives, whereas FHP is seen in non-simple verb moods such as the negatives or the remote tense verb forms. The analysis reveals that FHP has 4 main patterns. This analysis also explains that the rule H-deletion, (the left H of two consecutive H's is deleted) functions in the formation of various surface tonal representations.