

*Kathage, Birte: Konzeptualisierung von Landschaft im Mbukushu (Bantusprache in Nord Namibia)*. Southern African Languages and Cultures 1. Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Köln. 273 pp., 4 maps, 33 b/w photos, 7 graphs, 2 diagrams, 16 tables, appendix. € 34.80. ISBN 978-3-89645-600-7.

This book is a publication of Birte Kathage's doctoral dissertation on the conceptualization of landscape in Mbukushu [mhw], a Bantu language spoken in Namibia, Angola, and Botswana. (The fieldwork on which the book is based was done in Namibia.) It is a rare (unique, in fact, to the best of this reviewer's knowledge) example of a work applying empirical methods drawn from cognitive linguistics to a major semantic domain of a Bantu language. Since the geographic milieu of Mbukushu speakers is quite distinct from that of a typical speaker of, for example, German or English, this makes an examination of the Mbukushu conceptualization of landscape interesting not only from a general descriptive perspective but also from the comparative perspective of those interested in the ways speakers' environments may play a role in shaping the semantic categorizations of their languages.

Following a brief introduction, chapter 2 of the book gives both an overview of concepts from cognitive linguistics which are central to understanding the nature of the data collection and analysis described later in the book as well as an overview of relevant aspects of Mbukushu grammar and the environmental setting of Mbukushu speakers. Much of the theoretical background centers around discussion of the human conceptualization of categories and how this conceptualization can manifest itself linguistically. Important notions that are introduced include: part-whole relations; more and less prototypical members of a given categories (e.g., both robins and penguins are birds but robins have more features English speakers typically associate with birds); semantic fields and frames (sets of related lexical items which are interpreted in relation to each other—e.g., understanding the opposition between the words *buy* and *sell* requires knowledge of the frame of commercial

transaction); and the role of metaphor and metonymy in conceptualization. Kathage also, of course, discusses the notion of landscape since the nature of this semantic domain in Mbukushu is the focus of the book. A central point made in that discussion, and indeed throughout the book, is that the properties of mental maps (i.e., cognitive representations of environment), while broadly motivated by universal cognitive principles, are also be shaped by principles specific to a given culture.

The geographic milieu of the Hambukushu (the ethnonym for speakers of Mbukushu) is semi-arid and dominated by the Okavango River. The Hambukushu appear to have moved to their current area only within the last few hundred years, and their language is classified as belonging to Guthrie's zone K, which extends inland from the southern Democratic Republic of the Congo through Angola and Zambia into Namibia and Botswana. Though the scope of the grammatical description of the language in the book is limited, to this reviewer, Mbukushu looked more or less like a "typical" southern Bantu language except for aspects of its segmental phonology, most strikingly the presence of four phonemic clicks.

Chapter 3 of the book discusses methodological aspects of the data collection employed to study the conceptualization of landscape in Mbukushu. Data was gathered in three phases. The first phase consisted of collecting candidate terms for landscape concepts through the examination of a pre-existing English-Mbukushu dictionary in order to build a provisional mental map for Mbukushu landscape terms. The second phase involved showing photographs of various landscape scenes to Hambukushu consultants and asking them to describe the scenes in order to see which aspects of the photographs they focused on in their descriptions.

The third phase made use of more structured elicitation techniques in order to gather data that could be subjected to quantitative methods. One of these techniques, for example, made use of "pile sorts" wherein speakers were given index cards with landscape terms written on them or photographs of different landscape scenes and then asked to sort the cards

or photographs into different piles based on the similarity of the terms written or items depicted and give each pile a title (or something like a title). Another technique involved a free association game where individuals were instructed to name as many landscape terms as possible in a limited period of time. A third technique made use of triad tests wherein consultants were shown three pictures of landscape scenes and asked to select two of the three as being related in some way and then explain the reasons for their selection. In addition to the use of these techniques, a range of additional tests (both linguistic and non-linguistic) were employed to establish the general nature of the Mbukushu spatial orientation system.

Chapter 4, the longest and most contentful chapter of the book, discusses the results of the data collection and, based on them, gives an analysis of the Mbukushu conceptualization of landscape. From the pile sorts test, for example, one finds that some of the most common labels for the piles that consultants constructed were *rware* ‘river’, *muthitu* ‘bush, forest’, and *dighumbo* ‘homestead’, indicating that these are culturally salient high-level landscape categories for Mbukushu speakers. Similarly, from the free descriptions of the photographs, it was determined that trees (following a pattern involving vegetation in general) were especially salient to the Hambukushu since, when shown a river scene containing trees, all informants used the word *yitondo* ‘tree’ in their descriptions whereas only half used *rware* ‘river’.

Results like those just mentioned were derived from analyses involving what Kathage terms “paradigmatic” analysis—that is, from comparing results in one domain (e.g., pile sorts labels) across tokens and speakers. She also employed analytical techniques which were labeled “syntagmatic” involving examinations of how landscape terms patterned with respect to each other in short texts describing landscape terms and photographs. This analysis was used to verify salient semantic features of various landscape terms, for example, that an important aspect of the meaning of the term *mamboreya* ‘wilderness’ is that it describes an

area where there are not many (if any) people. Such results were useful in determining the prototypical characteristics of various landscape terms as well as some of the knowledge associated with the semantic frame to which a given landscape term belonged.

After discussing the results of the data collection, it was possible to give a model of the “mental map” of Mbukushu speakers—that is, a model of the Hambukushu conceptualization of the landscape they inhabit. This part of the discussion is accompanied by an appendix containing a color, pull-out graphical overview of this mental map, which effectively summarizes many of core results of the study. They indicate that the primary conceptual division the Hambukushu make of their landscape is one between *rware* ‘RIVER AREA’ and *ndundu* ‘LAND AREA’. (These glosses should not be taken to be exact translations of the relevant Mbukushu words, which can be applied to other concepts, as well.) This division reflects the importance of the Okavango River for the livelihood of the Hambukushu. On top of this two-way distinction are more fine-grained divisions involving different landscape “types”. For example, ‘RIVER AREA’ is associated with the landscape type of ‘river’ (also given the Mbukushu label *rware*) and ‘LAND AREA’ is associated with the landscape types of ‘raised area, up hill’ (also given the Mbukushu label *ndundu*), *muthitu* ‘bush, forest’, and *mamboreya* ‘the wilderness’. On top of these divisions are a set of more fine-grained divisions for landscape entities, like *mombwa* ‘embankment’, *dinonge* ‘swamp’, and *didhamena* ‘valley’ (among many others). These divisions of the Hambukushu landscape are, in some cases, further associated with more fine-grained categories like *dingengera* ‘edge of steep riverbank’ or *divava* ‘bushes, brush’. While some aspects of the Hambukushu conceptualization of their landscape reflect universal aspects of human cognition (e.g., viewing their environment in terms of part/whole relationships), others are culture specific (e.g., the distinction between “forest” areas not considered part of the Hambukushu living space [*mamboreya*] from those that are [*muthitu*].)

Chapter 4 concludes with a brief discussion on the topic of how the landscape concepts of Mbukushu correspond to the real-world landscape conditions of the area—using the landscape entities encompassed by the concept *muthitu* ‘bush, forest’ as exemplary—and the topic of conceptual/semantic change in landscape terms—focusing on words related to settlement. Chapters 5 and 6 then follow, offering a summary of the results of the study and a brief conclusion, re-emphasizing the main theme of the book that mental maps have properties which are culture specific but, nevertheless, guided by universal principles. At the end of the main text, in addition to the references, twelve appendices are included, most of which are dedicated to summarizing the results of the work or to describing the data collection in more detail than was possible in the main text.

As mentioned above, this book appears to be unique in its application of contemporary techniques of experimental cognitive linguistics to the study of a major semantic domain of a Bantu language. As such, it should be of interest to cognitive linguists, in particular those with an interest in the conceptualization of spatial relations, Bantuists, and linguistic anthropologists. A particularly interesting aspect of the study is the fact that the environment of the Hambukushu is strikingly different from prototypical Western landscapes, lending it special value for comparative research on landscape conceptualization.

One can hope that we will see more such studies of African languages in the future so that we may achieve a more precise understanding of what their landscape terms mean than is possible by simply examining translations of such terms into languages of wider communication. This will not only give us better semantic descriptions of these languages but will also open the door to sophisticated studies of the comparative semantics of the related and unrelated languages of the continent.