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PROFESSOR KEY in the Chair.

The following Paper was read :—

“On the Languages of Western and Southern Africa;” by
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Having visited the coast of Western Africa, and being about to leave Europe with the intention of making philological researches in Southern Africa, I desire to draw the attention of the Philological Society for a few moments from their classical studies, to these barbarous regions, while I try to point out some of the facts which seem to me to render African philology of great importance to general philology. These facts are :—1, the classification of the nouns ; 2, the formation of their plurals ; 3, the affinities of some of the African languages.

The languages to which the following remarks apply are those of *West* as well as *South* Africa, namely :—

South African,—

1. *Herero*, the language of the Damaras northward of the Namacquas.
2. *Zulu*, spoken from Natal to Delagoa Bay.
3. *Tsuana*, the language of the Bechuana tribes, in the centre of the country, from 25° to 28° S. lat.
4. *Kafir*, the language of the Kosa Kafirs, adjoining the Cape Colony.

West African,—

1. *Wolof*, spoken between the Senegal and the Gambia.
2. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} a. \textit{Timneh}, \text{ spoken by a tribe close to Sierra Leone, on} \\ \text{the east.} \\ b. \textit{Bullom}, \text{ spoken by a tribe close to Sierra Leone, on} \\ \text{the north.} \end{array} \right.$
3. *Odzi*, spoken by the Ashantees, Fantees, Aquapim, &c.
4. *Fulah*, spread extensively, as mentioned in the text, p. 45.

I regard Southern Africa as the key to the whole central portion of the continent, because I believe that the most ancient types of African life have been best preserved here, as well in respect to language as to religion, manners, and customs. A scholar intimate with the Hottentot and Kafir manners of thinking, will easily find his way through the enormous bulk of different national and tribal distinctions spread over the widely-extended area which the middle portion of this continent contains. One of the main results of the inquiries that I was enabled to make during a short voyage along the coast of Western Africa*, was that the apparently great variety of languages spoken near that coast, seems reducible to *one* family; and this family is no other than that to which all the different dialects of Southern Africa—with the exception of those of the Hottentots and the Bushmen—are acknowledged to belong. Those striking features, indeed, which make it so very easy to trace the consanguinity of the South African languages, have for the most part disappeared from the languages of Western Africa, in consequence of the much closer contact of the more crowded population there. However, where it was possible to get a full and accurate grammatical view of any of the languages spoken near the coast of Western Africa, there were evident traces of them to be seen, showing that the present state of every such language

* I left England in the latter part of May 1854, to join the expedition sent out to explore the Tchadda river, but having been taken ill on the road from Sierra Leone to Fernando Po, I was obliged to leave the exploring party. Next month I hope to sail with the Bishop of Natal to his diocese, for the purpose of compiling a grammar of the Zulu language.

is derived from an ancient structure, similar to that still prevailing among the South African languages, and that the Western languages agree with the Southern in such points as it would be impossible to consider accidental.

The chief characteristic of the great African family of languages is known to be, the distribution of the nouns into classes, which, with the exception of two, are restricted to persons, and do not agree with any natural distinction, but depend entirely on the use that is made of the derivative prefixes to the nouns, such prefixes being pronouns, and being considered as representatives of the nouns to which they are respectively prefixed. Therefore, nouns with the same derivative prefix belong, as represented by the same pronoun, to the same class; and there are, of course, in every language of this structure, as many classes of nouns as there are different derivative pronoun-prefixes agreeing with them. Thus, the Herero language (more generally known as the dialect of the Damaras of the plains) possesses eighteen classes of nouns. Of these, sixteen, at least, are to be found in the allied languages, while two may perhaps be regarded as later subdivisions of other classes,—just as the fourfold gender of nouns in the Danish language has sprung from a primitive threefold division. Conversely, the Kafir language, which in general must be acknowledged to have best preserved the ancient features of the structure, has lost three even of the sixteen, and is thus, in its present state, restricted to thirteen only. But of two of these lost classes there are still undeniable traces to be found. The Tšuana dialects agree in this respect with the Kafir languages, while the more Northern tongues preserve the whole of the original sixteen classes of nouns.

This rather perplexing structure is, however, easily explained, if we suppose that every one of these prefixed derivative syllables originally possessed the value of a noun. It is not at all uncommon for us to use instead of a compound noun, as for example ‘steamboat,’ the simple word ‘boat’; but it would seem strange to us, if in the case of derivative nouns, like ‘kingdom,’ we heard said, ‘the dom is great,’ ‘I saw the countries of the dom.’ But in former times, when this syllable

still maintained its value as a simple noun, and had not merely that of a derivative suffix, such a construction could not have been offensive. The only peculiarity in these derivative prefixes of nouns in the Kafir, Herero, and other South African languages, therefore is, that although they have lost their value as simple nouns, they have retained the power of recalling and representing such nouns as are compounded with them. It would certainly be very odd to hear the Herero sentence ‘*o-u-hona [o-]u-nene*’ (=Kafir *ubukosi [o]bukulu*=Tšwana *bogosi yo bogolu*=Bunda *kifú tši kiněne*=Kamba *utsumbe unene*, etc.), translated literally, ‘the kingdom, the great-dom,’ but it would not be thought strange if translated by ‘the king’s empire, the great empire.’ Suppose now, that in the course of time, the word ‘empire,’ as a separate noun, should cease to exist, but were to continue to be used as a representative for the nouns compounded with or derived from it, then you will have just the case of the Herero ‘*ouhona ounene*, the kingdom, the great-dom,’ and ‘*omuhuka omua*, the morning, the fine -ning,’ &c.

I have already mentioned that two of these classes of nouns are so far coincident with a natural division that they are restricted to personal nouns, including, in some languages, the names of certain animals. Whether this has arisen from the original signification of these nouns, or must be attributed to a later combination of grammatical and logical classifications, we are not yet able to decide. But an important use has been made of the grammatical classification for distinguishing, by the correspondence of different classes of nouns, the difference of Singular and Plural. To illustrate the distinction of number, I again take the Herero as an example, and give the following prefixes for the two numbers:—

Singular; *omu, omu, e, otji, on, oru, ou, oka, oku.*

Plural; *ova, omi, oma, ovi, ozon, otu, omau, ou, apa.*

The obsolete nouns from which the pronominal prefixes are descended must have originally formed their plurals by using collective terms, just as in English we alter *man* to *people*, *tree* to *forest*, *soldier* to *army*, &c., instead of the grammatical plurals *men, trees, soldiers*, &c. This will explain why,

in most of the South African languages, the distinction of number is not marked in the same way in all the classes of the nouns; why often one and the same plural class corresponds to several singular ones, and not seldom one singular prefix stands in opposition to two plural prefixes. Nor can we wonder that, in some classes, the numerical value is not fixed by the correspondence of any other class, and that in several of these languages, one prefix has in some nouns a singular, in others a plural value*. We find, besides, that in some cases a plural prefix, instead of being put in the place of a singular one, is placed before the full singular form with the prefix. The latter method has prevailed in the Wolof language, where one prefix only has a plural signification, and is used with all the different singular forms, so that one plural class corresponds to at least seven different singular classes of nouns.

* Table of the derivative prefixes of the nouns, in their numerical correspondence; and a list of Zulu words in their singular and plural forms, adding numerals to each word referring to the class to which it belongs.

In the Zulu Dialect (with the article). From Schreuder, Grout and Bryant.

Sing. . .	1. u-Mu-, u- u-M-	3. u-Mu- u-M-	5. i-Li-, i-	7. i-Si- i-S-	9. i-N- i-M-	11. u-Lu-, u-
Plur. . .	2. a-Ba-, o a-B-	4. i-Mi-	6. a-Ma- a-M-	8. i-Zi- i-Z-	10. i-Zin- i-Zim-	10. i-Zin- i-Zim-
	6. a-Ma-				6. a-Ma-	6. a-Ma-
		14. u-Bu-, u-		15. u-Ku-		

Singular (1) *umuntu*, man.

(3) *umtini*, adder.

(5) *ilike*, stone.

(7) *isika*, tub.

(9) *inlu*, house.

(11) *utango*, fence.

Plural (2) *abantu*, men.

(4) *imitini*, adders.

(6) *amake*, stones.

(8) *izika*, tubs.

(10) *izintlu*, houses.

(12) *izintango*, fences.

Some of the West African languages got rid of this rather troublesome variety in the formation of the plural of nouns, by simply discarding almost every difference between the singular and plural forms of their nouns; but a few have gone still further with their complications. Amongst these is chiefly to be remarked the Fulah, a language of great importance; for it is spoken through nearly the whole extent of the interior of Western Africa, from Sierra Leone to Adamau and Mandara. I thought it, therefore, a great pity that, for the use of the Tchadda expedition, I was not able to take out with me anything about this language, except a copy of a manuscript grammatical sketch (with a small vocabulary) by the Rev. R. Maxwell Macbrair, and a few words to be met with in different authors. On my return to England, however, I was very agreeably surprised to find that my friend Mr. Edwin Norris had, in the mean time, at the request of Captain Washington, and at the cost of the Admiralty, prepared an edition of Mr. Macbrair's manuscript, corrected and enlarged from other sources. To these, I was then able myself to add a manuscript vocabulary of considerable extent, collected by the late Mr. W. Cooper Thompson, which I had been so fortunate as to procure at Sierra Leone.

From an examination of these materials, the conviction I have got, is:—

1. That in the Fulah language the nouns began formerly with prefixes, which are now almost universally dropped, but have often influenced the first radical letter.
2. That these prefixes of the nouns were originally used also as pronouns of the nouns formed with them, and were suffixed to their nouns as such, and with the force of an article*.

* With regard to these two points wherein the Fulah most particularly agrees with the Wolof, a comparison of the two languages with each other would probably be of great importance. It is most likely that the grammar of the Wolof, which the Bishop of Dakar (Cape Verde) is about to publish, will give a good deal of additional information and a more exact description of the language than the old works of Mr. Dard and the Baron Roger. His Catechism (Ndakaru, 1852) shows—at least by an application of a more simple and consistent orthography—a great improvement.

3. That this use of the prefixes, which by their mutual correspondence showed the distinction of singular and plural, will serve to explain the double inflexion, which we find frequently in the plural forms of nouns, affecting their first as well as their last elements.

4. That as nearly all names of persons have *-bi* as their plural termination, and most of them *-o* as their singular one, these syllables must be considered as articles referring to former prefixes of the nouns.

The *bi* may be recognized in the *w-*, with which many of these nouns begin in the plural, and we conjecture that the original form of *o-* was *go-*, from a comparison of some of these personal nouns with their roots, as *gainako* 'keeper,' pl. *ainabi*; (cf. *ainu* 'to keep watch';) *gudšo* 'a thief,' pl. *wubi*; (cf. *gudšu* 'to steal.')

That we are right in this supposition, is shown also by the forms of the pronouns, *kan-ko* 'he, she,' pl. *kan-bi* 'they,' and *o* or *mo* 'him, her,' pl. *bé* 'them,' which refer to rational beings only.

Whilst this *go* or *ko* agrees very well with the South African *mu-*, the prefix of the first class of nouns, which, used as a pronoun, is found also in the form *gu-* (as Herero *ingui* 'this'), the plural form *bi* is rather perplexing; as generally in languages of this family, the prefix and pronoun *ba* (*va*, *a*) is found to correspond to the *mu* (*mo*) as the pronominal prefix of personal nouns, while the prefix *mi-* (*me*, &c.) is applied in South Africa, merely as the plural prefix of such inanimate nouns as in the singular take the prefix *mu-* (*mo-*). The Timneh and Bullom dialects, in and about Sierra Leone, and also the Odži, the language of the Ašante country, agree, in this respect, with the South African tongues. In the latter language, the plural prefix *a-* (which is chiefly restricted to personal nouns), and the pronominal-plural prefix *vo-*, are both to be derived from an original form *va-*. The form of the corresponding singular prefix is, in the Odži, as well as in the Timneh, *o-*, which mutilation of the ancient form *mu-* or *mo-* is also frequently to be met with in Southern Africa.

But we find that the Ga or Akra quite agrees on this point

with the Fulah, as is clearly shown by an extract from the Manuscript Grammar of the Basle Missionary, the Rev. J. Zimmerman, for which we are indebted to the Rev. F. G. Christaller of the same society. In this language, with a plural value, *mei* corresponds to the singular *mo* or *o*. Where these particles are found suffixed, they cannot be regarded as derivative syllables, but without doubt they originally stood as articles only, while the derivative prefixes they have sprung from are mostly dropped, as in *gbo-mo* 'person, man,' pl. *gbo-mei*, *blo-fonyo*, pl. *blo-fomei*, &c. But still, by prefixing *mo*, pl. *mei*, adjectives and numerals can be turned into personal substantives, &c., as *mo-kpakpa* 'a good man,' pl. *mei-kpakpa*; *mo-fon* 'a bad man'; *modin* 'a black man'; *motšaru* 'a red man'; *mokome* 'one man'; *moko* 'somebody,' pl. *meikomei*, &c. The same pronouns are discernible in *mone* or *mene* 'this,' pl. *meine-mei*, which only refer to persons, and to which the relative pronouns *moní*, pl. *meinei*, correspond.

Having thus found a coincidence between the Fulah and Ga languages in a very essential point, I cannot but suppose that a more extended comparison will show a closer alliance between these two languages, than either of them will evince with any South African dialect, or with the Odži, Bullom, and Timneh, although all these languages are to be regarded as members of the same family. As a mere conjecture, I may add my opinion, that the Wolof will prove more akin with the Ga and Fulah than with the other West African branch of this great family of languages.

The relation which such a language as the Odži claims with the Kafir and Herero tongues, may best be compared with that existing between the French or English on the one side, and the classical languages or the Sanskrit (or-if the example of a living dialect seems preferable, the Lithuanic) on the other. It would be impossible for us to prove the consanguinity of the Kafir and Odži tongues, if we were not able to trace the history of this family of languages by means of a comparison of a great many of its variously developed members. On the other hand, it is the apparent similarity with the Odži which makes us suppose that the Yoruba and

other languages, spoken about the lower course of the Kworra, derive their still more broken and simplified structure from the complex one of an originally great African type. Even if every trace of the ancient classification of the nouns have disappeared, we must not wonder; for just the same is the case with the modern Persian language, which evidently is to be derived from the old Indo-European type possessing a three-fold gender of nouns. I consider it, therefore, not at all as yet proved that the Efik or Old Calabar language (which is indeed very different from the adjacent dialects of the Isubu and Dualla people) will not prove as nearly akin to them as many of the South African languages. The Efik Grammar and Dictionary, which the Rev. Mr. Goldie, a Scotch missionary, is just preparing for the press, will certainly afford materials enough for deciding whether this supposition, derived from a very imperfect knowledge of the tongue, has a real foundation or not.

Still more uncertain is the position to be assigned to the Mani and Mina families of languages. The scantiness of the materials I have as yet been able to get access to, does not enable me to give an opinion on the affinities of the Mina family (which includes the dialects spoken by the Krumen, the Grebo, Basa, Dewoi, &c.). We learn, indeed, from the 'Brief Grammatical Analysis of the Grebo Language' (Cape Palmas, 1838, pp. 36, 8vo), that there exists a sort of classification of the nouns in the language, the pronouns *no* and *o*, pl. *oh* and *no*, being used for large and important objects, while *ěh* and *ně*, pl. *eh* and *ne*, refer to diminutive objects. Little accurate as this statement may be, it induces the supposition that the Grebo is a pronominal language, and most likely one of the Great African family*.

Of the Mani family three members are already grammatically

* Upon the plural forms of nouns in Grebo we find the following remarks:—"The plural form of nouns is generally made by a change of the final vowel, and in some cases by the addition of a syllable. *U* final generally becomes *i*, *i* becomes *e* or *ě*, *e* final becomes *o*, and *o* final becomes *e*; *ō* becomes *ě*. These changes, however, are not sufficiently uniform to constitute general rules. In some cases the consonants, particularly the

tically described; the Susu by Brunton, the Mandingo by Macbrair, the Vei by Norris and Kölle. But we must express our disapproval of the manner in which the Rev. S. W. Kölle, to whom African philology is indebted for many useful and important contributions, tries to make out affinities of the Vei with the Indo-European and Semitic languages*. The same remarks refer, of course, not less to the comparisons to be found in his most valuable Bó'rnú Grammar, although I do not think it impossible that the Kā'nuri language may prove to be a member of this other great family of pronominal languages, in which the pronouns do originally agree with the derivative *suffixes*,—and not, as in the great African family, with the *prefixes*—of the nouns, and the classification of the nouns is brought into some reference to the distinction of male and female, as seen in nature. That the present state of the Bó'rnú language does not show any characteristics of what is generally called the gender of nouns, is, as we mentioned before, no proof of their non-existence in former times.

With the Bó'rnú language we have already exceeded the limits of our task, passing from the languages spoken near the coast to the centre of the continent. Here the *territorium* of Adamaua—from which we may expect that the Tchadda expedition will bring home a large amount of valuable information—seems to offer a very interesting field for philological researches. Besides the Fulah, Bó'rnú, and Haussa (a Semito-African language), this country, according to Dr. Barth's

second one, undergo a change, but this is rather to be ascribed to the ever-varying nature of all their sounds, than to any established principle of the language(?). A perfect knowledge of all the plural forms can be obtained only by attending to individual cases."

* As to the native invention of the Vei syllabic alphabet, I am still convinced that it sprung from a sort of pictorial writing, which certainly is to be found in Western Africa no less than on the banks of the Congo river, and in the caverns of the Bushmen in Kafirland. The Yoruba, at least, possess pictorial records of the deeds of their ancestors, and I cannot consider that Mr. Kölle's intercourse with the Vei people was sufficiently long to enable him to be fully assured of the non-existence of such things among them, as the aborigines generally take great care to conceal them from the eyes of a missionary.

reports, is crowded with a great variety of different languages and dialects. Probably one part of these, at least, will be found to be members of the Great African family of languages. Farther to the north-east, the Tumali language in Darfur has still preserved some of the most striking characteristics of the ancient great African type, although the vicinity of the surrounding Semitic and sub-Semitic tongues has exercised an undeniable influence upon the Tumali, as well as upon the Engútuk Eloiköb, the language of the Kuafi nation, in the interior of equatorial Africa, close to the supposed sources of the Nile. We may compare that foreign influence upon this Nilotic branch of the Great African family of languages with the manner in which the Roman element has been introduced into the English language. It has contributed principally to the dictionary of the language and also worked upon the construction; but as to the grammatical forms, few, if any, can have been derived from this source.