

## A new analysis of linkers in Jimi (Cameroon)

Jimi [jim] (ALCAM [211] (Dieu & Renaud 1983)), is a thriving minority language spoken by several thousand people in the Far North of Cameroon along the border with Nigeria (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig 2021). This paper presents an initial analysis of limited fieldwork in this language which is part of the Central Chadic branch of the Afroasiatic language family, focusing on what were identified as the indirect and direct object markers in the Jimi verb phrase (Gnintedem & Viljoen 2020). After a brief overview of the verb phrase, I propose an alternative interpretation for the direct object marker, *də*, and the indirect object marker, *ka*, as linkers due to the additional roles that these words play in Jimi syntax. Linkers are function words that fill a range of syntactic roles related to not only linking nouns and verbs and their complements or adjuncts, but also clauses (Baker & Collins 2006, Philip 2012, and Schneider-Zioga 2015).

From the Jimi language data I have collected and analyzed up to this point, I present evidence for *də* and *ka* as linkers in Jimi. They are distinct from prepositions, which fill a more limited role in Jimi, and they select a specific form of the nominal complement. Prepositions head locative and possessive phrases, and they can only merge with referential nouns or with the pronouns with the possessive suffix. Both *də* and *ka* act as functional heads that do more than indicate objects of the verb as seen in the following example, where *ka* introduces the subordinate clause and a temporal phrase.

(1) *Wak sha di ka mta fitən wa tagu'uŋin kə-diəb*  
3SG.ANT REL do.PFV LINK another day SBJ chameleon.PL ANT-gather.PFV

*də yinən ka hən a-dzə ka ŋgi-aft bilən*  
LINK head LINK 3PL AOR-go IPFV see-REFL forest

Once upon a time, the chameleons gathered together to go see the forest.

These two linkers merge with the unmarked personal pronouns. In Jimi, they also coordinate noun phrases, verb phrases, and clauses, as well as introduce a wide variety of complements and adjuncts. The linker, *də*, changes the valency of the verb, by allowing additional arguments or demoting arguments to adjuncts with the use of this linker. It is also vital in comitative phrases and coordination. *Ka* links the indirect object to the verb and also links subordinate clauses with a meaning of goal or benefact. Both of the linkers are also used in temporal phrases and in instrumental or locative phrases.

## A new analysis of linkers in Jimi (Cameroon)

Keywords: Chadic, syntax, linker, preposition, object marker

### Abbreviations

3	third person		PFV	perfective
ANT	anterior		PL	plural
AOR	aorist		REFL	reflexive
IPFV	imperfective		REL	relative marker
LINK	linker		SBJ	subject
LOC	locative		SG	singular

### References

- Baker, Mark, and Chris Collins. 2006. "Linkers and the Internal Structure of VP." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 24: 307–54.
- Dieu, Michel, and Patrick Renaud. 1983. "Atlas Linguistique de l'Afrique Centrale (ALAC), Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM). Situation linguistique en Afrique centrale, inventaire préliminaire : le Cameroun." Yaoundé: CERDOTOLA et DGRST.
- Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. 2021. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-Fourth. Dallas, TX: SIL International.  
<http://www.ethnologue.com>.
- Gnintedem, Jean-Claude, and Melanie Viljoen. 2020. "Résumé de caractéristiques des textes narratifs Jimi."
- Philip, Joy Naomi. 2012. "Subordinating and Coordinating Linkers." PhD Thesis, London: University College London.
- Schneider-Zioga, Patricia. 2015. "The Linker in Kinande Re-Examined." In *Selected Proceedings of the 44th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, edited by Ruth Kramer, 264–76. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com), document #3144.