

Mbembe (Jukunoid) – language contact or language stability?

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Mbembe is a Central-Jukunoid language (Benue-Congo), which is spoken in the borderland between Nigeria and Cameroon. The dialects under study are spoken in the North-West of Cameroon. The language area has in former times been a refuge for many people of different ethnic origins after raids, epidemics and famines and an area of migration for other reasons. As a result, the history is characterized by language contact and language shift. Although there have been different waves of migrations from different peoples/directions at different times, the area is today largely homogenous in its language use. And despite this history, only a certain number of contact phenomena can be observed in the Mbembe language, for example a set of complex pronouns which are calques from Grassfields Bantu languages. Moreover, convergence phenomena which have been attested for a number of other Central-Jukunoid languages like verbal plural and intransitive copy pronouns cannot be found in the language. Although Mbembe – like other Central-Jukunoid languages – has undergone grammatical restructuring due to massive morphological loss, it has retained a number of structures which are lost in the other languages, especially in the noun morphology.

The aim of this presentation is to outline features of the grammar, which have been affected by language contact as well as those features, which have been retained and to give reasons for both trends in the Mbembe language.