

Review of Les Ngbaka de la Lobaye and Le Parler Ngbaka de Bokanga: phonologie, morphologie, syntaxe, by Jacqueline M. C. Thomas. American Anthropologist, June 1965, pp. 789-791.

of the "operations" that define them in various societies. He continues with an analysis of the Maori *hapu* and concludes that it can properly be called a descent group, in spite of the fact that, in addition to kinship, certain optative features may be used to define membership. He closes by suggesting that even in groups termed exclusively unilineal, there may be "some elements of ambiguity" in the assignment of individuals to groups (p. 36). Forde reviews the Yakö data to show that the composition of both patrilineal and matrilineal units has "been considerably affected by interests and ties extraneous to unilineal kinship. Thus affiliation to them has recurrently . . . included a considerable non-unilineal element through cognatic, affinal and non-kin links that have been optative on the part of the adopters or the adoptees or both" (p. 56). Some British anthropologists are unwilling to call "non-unilineal descent groups" descent groups because some criterion in addition to descent is used to define effective membership. Firth argues that in most respects these groups act like descent groups and questions whether unilineal groups are simply defined by reference to descent. Forde demonstrates that for one double unilineal system these non-descent elements can be clearly discerned. American devotees of the term "non-unilineal descent group" will be relieved.

It is evident that a number of these essays repay close attention.

[Editor's note: Brenda Z. Seligman died on January 2, 1965, since this review was written.]

Les Ngbaka de la Lobaye: Le dépeuplement rural chez une population forestière de la République Centrafricaine. JACQUELINE M. THOMAS. (Le Monde D'Outre-Mer Passé et Présent, Deuxième Série, Documents XI.) Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963. 494 pp., bibliography, 53 figures, glossary, 8 maps, plates, 70 tables. n.p.

Le Parler Ngbaka de Bokanga: phonologie, morphologie, syntaxe. JACQUELINE M. C. THOMAS. (Le Monde D'Outre-Mer Passé et Présent, Première Série, Études XXII.) Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963. 307 pp., bibliography, map, n.p.

Reviewed by DANIEL BIEBUYCK, *University of California, Los Angeles*

Few students of African culture are to be found those days who, as Jacqueline Thomas, present simultaneously in two monumental volumes a socio-demographic and linguistic study on a tribal group. For this achievement the author has to be congratulated. Whatever the shortcomings in both volumes may be, we are presented here with an impressive set of fresh scholarly data, based on a major piece of intensive and multifaceted field research, which are a valuable addition to our understanding of the little known cultures and languages of the peoples of the Central African Republic.

The volume, dealing with the various aspects of depopulation and destructuration among the Ngbaka, combines an analysis of census data provided by the French colonial administration with one year's intensive field study of Bobua. This village, whose residential population was 265 at the time of the study, is considered to be fairly representative because of its ethnic homogeneity, its central location in Ngbaka-land, the nature of its demographic and destructuration patterns. The village itself is the result of administrative regrouping, which brought together the scattered extended families of three lineages, the relationships between which are not discussed. Some personal research, the extent and importance of which is not clear, was also devoted to the nine villages which make up what came to be called in administrative jargon "la terre Bokanga" (unit within which traditionally most matrimonial exchanges take place) and to the 14 "terres" represented in the ethnically heterogeneous Mbaiki district. The Ngbaka immigrated from the Congo Republic (Léopoldville) and established them-

selves as hunters, fishermen, food-gatherers, among whom until recently shifting cultivation had remained at its barest level. Forty years of labor coercion, combined with the growth of neighboring cities, plantations, commercial enterprises, and the very low level of the local economy, seriously disrupted Ngbaka society; various types of population movement, demographic disequilibrium, economic stagnation, dissolution of most social institutions, to the exception of the vital kinship and lineage system, are some of the consequences. At the time of the study, coercion had ceased and in the village of Bobua a new period of fluctuations and search for equilibrium had begun to manifest itself.

The volume comprises nine chapters of unequal length and uneven quality. The chapter, e.g., in which the quality and usability of administrative documents are evaluated, comprises many incisive criticisms. The chapter on social structure is generally weak; the analysis of the kinship and lineage system is sketchy and confusing; the involved system of selective filiation with father's or mother's group is inadequately discussed. The long chapter which gives a detailed analysis of the demographic structure of Bobua, and its evolution before 1957, contains invaluable data, although the now lacking analysis of the actual composition of the three lineages in Bobua and the clarification of the criteria used for identifying the non-resident population of the village would have given more scope to the study.

The reading of the book, which is otherwise written in lucid French, is hampered by the vast amount of repetitious statements and the dispersal of data which belong together. Another moot question relates to the validity of conclusions built on a combination of extensive, but imprecise and lacunar, administrative documents with precise, but geographically highly restricted, personal data; this is all the more disturbing in the light of the apparently very complex ethnic situation that prevails in this central African area. The author repeatedly expresses her concern about this point and therefore stresses the limited scope of her study to be used only as an exemplary model. It is, however, not clear to me why more sampling was not done in the adjoining villages, "terres," and districts, since the field work extended over a sufficiently long period (June, 1956–September, 1957). Many of the positive conclusions to which the author is led have been recognized widely for other African areas. What is clearly brought out, however, is the role played by labor coercion on the life and structure of a rural group: how the flight from the village to escape it accelerated and amplified many processes; how the present demographic disequilibrium is affected by the exodus of the male population, combined with the delays in marriages and the high mortality rate in certain age groups among which the rubber collectors were recruited; what presently the social and economic problems are that face the essentially youthful population of Bobua.

The volume of Ngbaka Ma'bo language is restricted to the dialectal variant spoken in Bokanga, and more particularly in Bobua village. No attempt is made to assess to what extent its patterns are represented in the rest of the Ngbaka cluster. Various typologies, into which Ngbaka has been inserted, are enumerated without critical appraisal.

Studies on the syntax of African languages are rare; the book helps to fill a tremendous gap, and here again we can but admire the scholarly effort, skill, and perspicacity of J. Thomas. The work, which is careful, rigorous, systematic, heavily draws upon A. Martinet's views on functional syntax, his methods and terminologies. Most of the analysis assumes that one is familiar with them, since a great many concepts and methodological procedures are only cursorily identified or clarified. A glossary and some

better evaluation of the methods used would have contributed greatly to the readability of the volume. The phonology is discussed in only one chapter, but there is some compensation for this in an earlier work published by the same author. Much of the chapter is taken up by unduly long lists of words selected to prove the existence of the 36 phonemes in Ngbaka, and their phonological value. The treatment of tones is sketchy, and we are left uncertain about the exact status of such "phonemes" as mb, nd, ngb. The rest of the book is devoted to syntactical analysis, which also incorporates some treatment of the morphology. Most of the argument revolves around the concept of "*énoncé minimum*" (minimal utterance)—and its expansions—which is defined as "the combination of the smallest possible number of terms which in this language are apt to form a complete normal utterance . . . which can be completely understood in reference to the semantic value of the monemes used" (p. 69). Utterances in the form of questions, answers, exclamations, injunctions, and all subjective indications are excluded from it. The normal, out-of-situation minimal utterance is said to comprise always at least two monemes (p. 73) and to present two types of functions (predicate without which there is no utterance, and subject) (pp. 214–215), but this postulate would require further investigation and seems not to hold for certain examples given by the author. The examination of this minimal utterance, and of its expansions up to four monemes, leads to the construction of an inventory of lexical and grammatical monemes (defined as minimal significative units). The relationships between these categories of monemes are then examined in great detail: the different functions that occur in the language, the various functions performed by each category of monemes, the nature of the functions that can be performed by different categories of monemes, the arrangement of the most complex elements in the utterance. Of particular interest is the discussion of the link between form and function (ch. 3) and the role of determinant played by the pause (*passim*).

On the whole the reading of both volumes is gratifying because of the wealth of data provided on a little known group, the consistency with which they are scrutinized, the originality of many viewpoints.

Language-Switching as an Index of Socialization in the Republic of the Sudan. PETER F. M. McLOUGHLIN. (University of California Publications in Sociology, Vol. 1.) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964. iv, 72 pp., appendix, 7 maps, 20 tables. \$2.00.

Reviewed by ANDREAS KRONENBERG, *Sudan Government Antiquities Service*

Dr. McLoughlin has written a stimulating booklet with serious faults. His argument is that some peoples change their language more readily than others, and that among the reasons for doing so are various economic and social forces. Measurements of the number of persons who no longer speak their original tongue are therefore in a sense simultaneously appraisals of the economic and social forces which have caused the change. Differences in language-switching between nationality or tribal groups on the one hand and economic regions on the other may be attributed in two directions: willingness to adopt a new language, and the strength of the pressures forcing the change.

To measure language-switching Dr. McLoughlin uses the data on "Tribal and Nationality Groups" and "Language Spoken at Home" from the 1955–56 Sudan Government Census. Unfortunately the census gives no data on bilingualism or multilingualism—both very frequent phenomena in the Sudan—and is further biased be-