

A COMMENT ON "RULE INVERSION IN CHADIC: A REPLY"

Russell G. Schuh
Ahmadu Bello University

Leben (in this issue) in replying to specific claims I make about two Chadic languages is actually concerned with a more fundamental issue, viz. the form a linguistic theory should take. Leben sees inverse rules as "a middleman which it would be advantageous to eliminate in principle from the realm of possible phonological systems" (p. 265) because such rules "[do] violence to otherwise valid constraints on phonological relationships" (p. 271). It would therefore be desirable to eliminate all putative cases of rule inversion by either showing that they are specious or that there are alternative solutions using devices more generally accepted by linguistic theoreticians.

A well-tested linguistic theory is an indispensable framework in which to investigate phenomena in languages. I believe, however, that the intuitions of the native speaker and the trained linguist are worth something, and if the theoretical framework forces solutions which fail to give intuitive or formal insights, then changes must be made in the theory. In particular, I reject the notion that it is a theoretical desideratum to keep the available formal devices to a minimum by the elimination of redundancy. For example, even though the syllable can always be formalized using the independently needed symbols for consonants and boundaries, this is no reason to reject the syllable as a valid linguistic unit which should have its own formalization. Likewise, though inverted rules could probably be formally eliminated, linguistic theory would not necessarily be improved by their elimination.

Leben has registered a number of valid criticisms of my analyses using inverse rules. Even if he had successfully destroyed or given alternate solutions for all the cases I propose, I don't believe this would be a demonstration that rule inversion should be eliminated from linguistic theory. However, he has not even succeeded in countering all my proposals.

Let us take the example of 'hardened' plurals in Kanakuru (pp. 387-389 in my article [Schuh 1972]; discussed pp. 270-1 in Leben's reply).

Leben questions that the present alternations in singulars and plurals resulted from weakening in the singulars. He apparently ignored or questioned the relevance of the cognate items from other languages which I took the trouble to list. While he is correct in noting that the plural rules (which are lexically specific morphological rules) do not make rule inversion more plausible for the cases discussed earlier in the article (which are general morphophonemic rules), he presents no arguments at all, that I can see, against the singular/plural alternations being inverse rules. If they were not we would have to have an underlying stop in a word like /taka/ 'shoe' with a rule weakening the stop, giving taya (→ [təa]). But such a solution totally ducks the issue of why the stops in the plurals have all been neutralized, and moreover why even historical sonorants now alternate with stops (cf. the verb 'get out', p. 387 in Schuh [1972]). The obvious answer is that because of the historical sound changes, several stops have been neutralized to a single sonorant (and at the same time with the historical sonorant) in the singulars. I see no reason in Kanakuru to reject the general principle that plurals should be derived from singulars. This being the case, rule inversion gives an automatic and entirely satisfactory answer to why stop neutralization has taken place in plurals.

REFERENCES

- Schuh, R.G. 1972. "Rule inversion in Chadic". Studies in African Linguistics 3:379-397.
- Leben, W.R. 1974. "Rule inversion in Chadic: a reply". Studies in African Linguistics 5:265-278.