CHAPTER TWO

KNOWING, SMELLING AND TELLING TALES IN LUWO¹

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates expressions of perception and cognition in Luwo, a Western Nilotic language of South Sudan, spoken in the rural area around the town of Waw, but also by people who live in large cities such as Khartoum, Juba and Kosti. Luwo has a relatively large group of perception verbs, which exhibit some unusual polysemous extensions, whereby KNOW and SMELL play particularly interesting roles. Besides these verbs, there are dedicated word classes that denote specific sensations: words that denote smells constitute a class of their own in Luwo, and another separate word class, ideophones, is semantically specialized as well: ideophones tend to exclusively describe visible events such as motion and gestures, but hardly ever perceptions of sound, smell, or intensity of perceivable qualities. This chapter will first present data on the various predicative expressions of cognition and perception, which in some contexts also have evidential meanings. Then it will concentrate on smells, and finally on ideophones, also taking a look at their relevance for narrative speech styles. Whether the way in which grammar of perception is organized in Luwo has something to do with cultural and social practices of its speakers will be addressed in the last section of the chapter.

There is relatively little linguistic and ethnographic material on Luwo and its speakers. This is surprising, as Luwo as a salient vernacular language of the Waw area had also been used in market economies, Western education and missionary work throughout colonial (and postcolonial) times (Santandrea 1946, 1977).

¹ I am grateful to the speakers of Luwo who taught me their language and shared their insights into it with me: Pierina Akeelo Zubeir, Joseph Modesto, Henry Malual, Mohamed Lino, Albert Apai. My thanks are due to Sasha Aikhenvald, Gerrit Dimmendaal, Beatrice von Heyking, Marilena Thanassoula and two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful and inspiring comments. Fieldwork in Sudan and Uganda was sponsored by the German Research Society, to whom I remain grateful.
Map 2.1. Luwo and its neighbours