Syllable weight is found among linguistic concepts which are both obvious and self-evident as well as unclear in terms of their constituent features. Identified as an opposition between heavy and light syllables, it has many structural variants with regard to what constitutes a heavy syllable. It differs from language to language and for theoretical analysis, it must be regarded as a higher level concept which captures various aspects.

The monograph on syllable weight edited by Paul Newman discusses the theoretical aspects of syllable weight in linguistic analysis and presents how the concept is manifested in African languages. The monograph includes evaluation of the concept from different perspectives and presents syllable weight in genetically, geographically and typologically different languages. The volume is published by John Benjamins Publishing Company in the series Current Issues in Linguistic Theory as its 338th volume.

The book is organized in twelve chapters which focus on either theoretical interpretation or exemplification of the syllable weight concept in particular languages. The focus is put not only on its segmental constituents but also on its relation with moraic structure, accent, rhythm, tone and phenomena such as reduplication or sonority. A lot of attention has been paid to the languages from North and West Africa (mostly of Afroasiatic family) where the idea of syllable weight in its linguistic dimension is connected with the well-established canon of meter in poetry. The volume ends with an index which includes authors’ names, names of languages and linguistic terms.

The presentation of syllable weight starts with an introductory chapter in which Paul Newman discusses the concept in historical perspective with reference to his own contribution to African linguistics and linguistic theory which consists in introducing syllable weight (both as the concept and the term) to modern phonology. The idea is more widely developed
in Chapter 1, *Syllable weight as a phonological variable*, this chapter being an abridged version of Newman’s paper published in 1972 where it was first proposed as a new variable relevant for linguistic description. The theory which relies on heavy/light syllable dichotomy is illustrated by Hausa and other Chadic languages (Bole, Kanakuru) and includes data from Arabic and some European languages. The author shows cross-language validity for the concept of syllable weight and its significance for understanding various processes in individual languages. One of the main claims is that there is one and only one type of light syllable, namely Cv, but what constitutes a heavy syllable is connected with language-specific phenomena. In Chadic, the form of heavy syllables is Cvv or CvC and the contrast between heavy and light syllables is correlated with morphological processes. The paper focuses on presenting the concept of syllable weight in its segmental manifestation, but it also discusses interaction between syllable weight and tones, functioning as morphological variable or as the prohibition against falling tones on light syllables.

The discussion about syllable weight as a theoretical and typological concept continues in Chapter 2. Matthew Gordon in *Syllable weight: A typological and theoretical overview* shows that the weight criterion employed in languages may be different and the phonological representation of weight found across languages is not uniform. From this perspective, syllable weight is defined as “the property that differentiates syllables with respect to their prosodic behavior” (p. 27). Stress is indicated as a phenomenon which is sensitive to syllable weight, but it is also admitted that tonal languages have their rules of tonal assignment which are associated with heavy syllables. Phenomena in which syllable weight plays a role make the list longer and include metrical feet that are templates governed by syllable weight.

The Author demonstrates how various processes usually analyzed as distinct phenomena (compensatory lengthening, reduplication, some specific instances of prosodic morphology) are connected with syllable weight. He also presents the results of studies on relationship between phonological properties of weight and its phonetic exponents which also have its language-specific manifestation. The importance of syllable weight in the development of moraic theory is also indicated.
The presentation of the function of syllable weight in particular languages begins with chapters discussing the data of Afroasiatic languages. In Chapter 3, *Syllable weight and morphophonologically induced resyllabification in Maghrebi Arabic* Lameen Souag demonstrates how the notion (and the term) of syllable weight allows for interpretation of diachronic changes that account for alternations in morphophonology of modern Arabic dialect. Contrary to earlier interpretations, basing mostly on phonological representation of the syllable, it is shown how the category of syllable weight (including the light, heavy and superheavy distinction) can justify the processes responsible for the deletion of short vowels (or schwa – zero alternations) more widely in North African Arabic. The process is perceived as a tendency towards avoiding vowels in light syllables which is presented as a possible Berber influence.

In Chapter 4, *Syllable weight in Amharic* Hannah Sande and Andrew Hedding analyze the role of coda consonants in determining syllable weight. With reference to the typology of the syllable weight system, in which CVC syllables are either heavy (type A) or light (type B), the authors identify Amharic CVC syllables as light unless the coda is geminate. This CVG system is distinguished as another pattern (type C) in which geminate consonants in coda position affect the perception of syllable weight. In Amharic, geminate consonants are results of the reduplication process which is motivated by the stress system.

In the next chapter, *Syllabic weight in Tashlhiyt Berber*, François Dell and Mohamed Elmedlaoui provide a summary of the existing knowledge of various aspects of syllabification. Using data from Tashlhiyt Berber, they discuss the status of geminates in a coda position that are related to weight. A large part of the article is devoted to the relationship between the syllable structure in its textual representation (i.e. grammatical syllabification) and the syllable segments which are realized in traditional singing. It is also shown how the notion mora which is significant in the analysis of heavy/light contrast finds its application in songs (as meter patterns) and in grammatical forms (as templatic plurals). The long tradition of research on syllable structure in Tashlhiyt from various theoretical perspectives is reflected in specific terminology and numerous references that make the description hermetic. For example, the authors use
abbreviations H/L to mark heavy and light syllables respectively, whereas these symbols are commonly used in linguistic works to mark (H)igh and (L)ow tones.

The question of relationship between textual and poetic material is further discussed in the Hausa data. In *The psychological reality of syllable weight* (Chapter 6), Russell G. Schuh demonstrates how the distinction between light and heavy syllables accounts for regular patterns of versification. Relating the category of syllable weight to the feeling for one’s own language, he analyses the metrical properties of Hausa poetry (*waka*) in syllabic, musical and psychological dimensions. The comparison of written text and its oral performance (in sung form) shows that the musical settings manifested in the division into musical bars are faithful to the syllable weights of the text even if the durational distinction between syllables is actualized differently. The Author concludes that Hausa speakers are aware of the syllable weight distinction and the singers preserve this distinction in sung duration of light vs. heavy syllables.

Chapter 7 by John M. Keegan (*Syllables and syllable weight in Sara-Bagirmi languages*) initiates the presentations of Nilo-Saharan data. In the languages under discussion (Mbay, other Sara languages, Sara Kaba languages, Bagirmi and Kenga) the categories of syllable weight follow the pattern based on the sequence of CV (for light syllables) or CVV and CVC (for heavy syllables). However, the option of non-consonantal onset, consonants of complex articulation (e.g. prenasalized stops) and distribution rules that affect the final syllable position make these patterns largely differentiated and allow distinguishing the third superheavy types (C)VVC, (C)VVV, and (C)VCC. What supports the differentiation between heavy and light syllables is tone which contributes to the rules of syllabic readjustment, especially in the course of morphological processes which are helpful in the reconstruction of language development.

Another Nilo-Saharan language, Fur, provides data for discussing the importance of syllable weight in relation to reduplication. The study by Ashley L. McKeever *Reduplication in Fur: Prosodic structure and sonority* (Chapter 8) presents patterns of reduplication in which syllable weight is one of the factors determining its output, but they also include sonority principles of the coda consonant.
In Chapter 9 *Non-uniform syllable weight in Southern Kenyan Maa (Maasai)* Richard Griscom and Doris L. Payne investigate syllable weight in Maa (Maasai) from Kenya in relation with some phonological phenomena which determine a different categorization of syllable weight. The differentiation starts from the definition of syllable which is grounded in a combination of the sonority hierarchy and extends to phenomena such as distribution of contour tones, restrictions on syllable templates and minimal verbal root requirements. The data from Maa do not confirm the binary categorization between ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ syllables and therefore the manifestation of the category is identified as non-uniform.

Chapter 10 Fiona McLaughlin and Caroline Wiltshire *Syllable weight in the phonology of Pulaar* examines the role of syllable weight in stress assignment. Based on the data from Fuutankoor Pulaar, a Senegalese dialect of Fula, it investigates the correlation between syllable weight and stress in connection with other processes such as compensatory lengthening, patronymic reduplication, minimal word requirement. The question of the ‘salient’ syllable which is correlated with stress is discussed from the perspective of various (up to four) levels of weight. In addition, cross-dialectal comparisons of the role of syllable weight in Fula shows that the criteria for stress assignment differ between dialects.

Chapter 11 by A. Agoswin Musah *Syllable weight and tonal patterning in Kusaal: A moraic perspective* poses new challenges to the interpretation of light/heavy syllable contrast. It investigates the syllable types and structures in Kusaal (Gur language) which is tonal. The specific feature of this language in which the final syllable consonants are not moraic and do not contribute to syllable weight (therefore the CVC syllables are light) sheds more light on the studies of moraic structure and the role of tone in syllable/mora division.

The Interaction between tones and syllable weight is further discussed in Chapter 12, *Syllable weight and tone in Mara Bantu languages* by Lotta Aunio. Weight-related tone placement is discussed for some Mara Bantu languages spoken in Western Tanzania which represent the Niger-Congo phylum. Whereas segmental structure of nouns and verbs have been presented as a common areal feature, variations in the prosodic systems are discussed for Ikoma, Isenye, Nata, and Ngoreme separately.
As these languages have restricted tonal systems in which only one high tone per word is allowed, the discussion extends into other aspects related to the “stress-tone scale” and pitch prominence relevant for linguistic typology.

The book *Syllable Weight in African Languages* is a unique monograph discussing the concept of syllable weight, which is manifested in language in relation to complex phenomena, including stress, tone, reduplication, sonority, germination, vowel length, minimal word requirements, and metrics. African languages enable discussing this complexity from both a theoretical perspective and as a representation of typologically, genetically and geographically different languages. The authors of these particular presentations are renown specialists in theoretical and/or African linguistics, focusing on the language of their long-term and exhaustive studies.

The volume is organized so that chapters highlight particular aspects related to syllable weight and develop the ideas by complementing each other. In this approach, the understanding of syllable weight goes beyond the ‘classic’ opposition between light and heavy syllables which is based on the contrast between Cv and Cvv/Cvc syllables and extends it to many other types and variants that include other features. Since its establishment as a linguistic concept on the basis of Chadic languages, syllable weight has gained a new dimension due to going beyond the previously analyzed circle of languages, especially including tonal languages.

The monograph on syllable weight edited by Paul Newman gives linguistic investigations new directions, possibly not related only to syllable weight. The discussion on the psychological reality of syllable weight includes the question of correlation between the abstract concept invented by linguists for analytical purposes and the speakers’ feeling for language that escapes the frames of linguistic investigation.

*Nina Pawlak*