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Juba Arabic as a Way of Expressing a Southern Sudanese Identity in Khartoum.

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"There is no truth about language and ethnicity". (Fishman 1994)

Introduction : Language and ethnic identity, a theoretical background.

The relation between language and ethnic identity have been the focus of hundreds of sociolinguistics studies. While a trend tends to emphasize the major role of language in maintaining distinctive collective entity (cf. see below the concept of E.V by Giles & al. 1977), another trend tends to qualify the role of language according to historical and social context (cf. for example Edwards 1994). Giles & al. (1977) have defined the concept of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (E.V.) as the sociostructural factors (i.e. demography, status and institutional support) that affect a group's ability to behave and survive as a distinct linguistic entity. The authors suggest a direct interaction between Ethnolinguistic Vitality and maintenance of ethnic boundaries cf. "it was proposed that the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group have, the more likely it will survive and thrive as a collective entity in the intergroup context. Conversely it was suggested that ethnolinguistic groups that have little or no vitality would eventually cease to exist as a distinctive linguistic groups" (Harwood et al. 1994). However the authors have further to distinguish between what they coin Objective Ethnolinguistic Vitality (OEV) and Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality (SEV). The OEV evaluates ethnolinguistic vitality according to the sociostructural factors while SEV reflects the individuals' perception or representation. And in many cases SEV does not match with OEV. The distinction between objective and subjective factors in conceptualizing ethnicity is in fact an old anthropological issue and Barth 1969 clearly pointed out the need to distinguish between the ethnic *boundaries* and the *cultural content* of these ethnic boundaries (i.e. members of a group can still claim to belong to a specific group while the cultural and social setup of the group have undergone drastic change). A number of sociolinguistic studies came out with cases of ethnic groups forming distinctive entities in spite of language assimilation (cf. see for example the special issue of IJSL 110). The debate clearly points out that the role of language in shaping collective identity varies according to space, time, type of society etc. The relation between language and collective identity is the output of an historical and social construction and not an universal and permanent feature.

Linguistic policies and the failure of linguistic assimilation.

However our 20th century's conception has been deeply influenced by the linguistic nationalism that prevails in many countries since the second part of 19th century. Many studies have analyzed the emergence of linguistic nationalism in Europe and in many other countries (cf. Baggioni 1997, Hobsbawn 1990, etc.) including the Arab world (Suleiman 1994) and I will not come back to this point. Suffice to say that linguistic nationalism (and the idea that language and ethnic identity are deeply interrelated) have influenced the linguistic policies of many modern Arab states. Those linguistic policies considered that national unity would come about more easily through linguistic unity. Ethnic diversity and multilingualism was perceived as a threat to national unity and Arabization of the non-Arab speaking groups was called upon. As history repeats itself this monolithic policy fueled minorities' claims¹. From Algeria to Sudan the Arabization policy led to minorities' discontent and political struggle. It failed to secure the awaited assimilation. And language became again a crucial means of identification but this time by minorities feeling threatened by an aggressive Arabization policy. Therefore identity conflicts became more and more expressed in terms of linguistic conflicts. To defend its language means to defend its culture and its ethnic affiliation against the threat of assimilation. However these linguistic conflicts reflect a dualistic view (assimilation versus non-assimilation) and forget a powerful mechanism : that of the linguistic re-appropriation, which enable a group to acquire a former 'foreign' language and adapt it to its cultural and ecological environment. While ideological discourses outline clear boundaries between languages, daily practices show numerous cases of mixing, shifting, melting etc.

In the case of the Sudan that I will briefly describe here, it's clear that the State linguistic and cultural policy failed to erase ethnic identification and on the contrary fueled ethnic claims. But it would be difficult to deny that linguistic Arabization is not taking place. More and more people, especially in the urban setting, are either speaking the dominant language (Arabic), or are code-switching or code-mixing between different languages. If the majority of the people maintain their primary ethnic affiliation, it is also clear that the language change leads or goes hand with hand with the emergence of new kind of supra-ethnic identity, mainly regional-based identities². The fact that Khartoum-based Southern bands and theatrical groups use Juba-Arabic (hand with hand with Southern Sudanese languages) in their artistic creation (drama and songs) could be an indication of such a phenomenon.

¹ The term minorities is commonly used in the relevant literature when speaking about the non-Arab groups of the Arab world. It does not express a demographic reality (cf. some of these groups can in fact form the demographic majority of a country) but a political marginalization. I will therefore use the term minority to refer to non-Arab speaking groups without any demographic connotation.

² I discuss in more details the issue of language change and formation of supra ethnic grouping in the Sudan in an unpublished paper presented at the Third International Sudanese Studies Conference held in Cairo in June 1997. This paper was the output of a common research with A.A. Abu Manga.

Displacement and Language Change

In the last decade and more precisely since 1985, one of the major event affecting the Sudanese society has been the migration and displacement of millions of Southerners and Westerners to the Central Sudan escaping the civil war and/or drought.³ Migration has always played an important role in the demographic growth of the Sudanese capital (Greater Khartoum) but the regional origin of this migration has shifted. In the 60's migrants were coming mainly from the Northern Provinces, i.e. from region where Arabic was the dominant language. Starting in the 70's but increasing dramatically in the mid 80's the main stream came from Western and Southern Sudan, i.e. from regions where Arabic is far to be the dominant language.

These events led to two related phenomena :

- the settlement of an increasing number of non-Arab (or non-Arabic Mother Tongue) people within an Arab or Arabic speaking community
- the quick arabization of formerly non-Arabic speaking communities. The term non-Arabic speaking population refers here to groups having a non-Arabic language as Mother Tongue or considered as bilinguals (For details on the language situation see Thelwall 1978, Miller 1989) but most of these groups speak a variety of Arabic as *lingua-franca*. Arabization means here that these groups are using more and more Arabic as a first language or as Mother Tongue.

The first phenomenon is illustrated by the comparison between the 1956's census and the 1993's census, the only two censuses that provide information on ethnic affiliation and Mother Tongue. The population of Khartoum was estimated to be 96,9% Arabic Mother Tongue in 1956. This figure drop to 85,4% Arabic Mother Tongue in 1993. And in 1993 more than 40% of the Khartoum State claim a non-Arab ethnic affiliation.

The second phenomenon has been illustrated by our own case study (Miller & Abu Manga 1992) and also by the 1993's census. Comparison between Ethnic Affiliation and Mother Tongue in the 1993's census give the following figures for Khartoum State⁴ :

	Arab	Nubian	Nuba	Darfuria n	Souther n	West A.	Beja	Funj
Ethnicity	57,4%	10,6%	9,6%	7,88%	6,7%	3,22%	1,3%	0,30%
M.T.	85,4%	1,02%	3,97%	2,00%	4,66%	1,69%	0,17%	0,02%

³ In Greater Khartoum itself it was estimated in 1990 that displaced people and migrants from Southern and Western Sudan formed about 50% of the population but this figure provided by NGOs seems to be exaggerated.

⁴ The figures presented in this table include only the major ethnic and linguistic cluster-groups.

Those statistic figures are just mere indication and the data provided by the census suffer from many problems that I will not detail here. But the important point here is that the correlation between ethnic affiliation and language uses (Mother Tongue) is less and less valid. A growing number of people is speaking more and more Arabic due to migration and urbanization. However while linguistic Arabization is spreading, ethnic and cultural activism is also growing.

In the 70's the dominant idea was that the linguistic Arabization will lead to the cultural and social assimilation of the non-Arab groups (cf. i.e. the assimilation of the peripheral groups into the Core North Sudanese Culture was described by the concept of *Sudanization*). This idea has now been torn apart by the political conflicts and the increasing 'ethnic revival' of the society. The 80's and the 90's witnessed an increasing mobilization and consciousness toward the defense of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Sudan. This movement was always present in the South since the 50's but has spread now to all other so-called peripheral regions. The mobilization cut across all segments of the society from intellectuals, regional-based political parties, associations, churches, local committees etc. and is illustrated by an ongoing lively debate about the cultural roots and cultural future of the Sudan⁵. This ethnic revival ranges from folk performance to mobilization for political representation. In the urban context, migration and ethnic revival lead to new form of associations and expressions and to the creation of many cultural groups. Through the example of one of these groups I'll like to show how the relation to language is both a complex issue but is also conceived in a pragmatic way.

The Kwoto and Orupaap groups⁶

A new phenomenon in Khartoum is the presence of South Sudanese musical and cultural groups that appeared following the displacement of a large number of Southerners including students and civil servants who followed the displacement of their schools and administration. Most of these groups perform during marriage, funerals, official or religious ceremonies in the suburb of Greater Khartoum where most of the migrants live. Most of them have very limited financial means and restrict themselves to few musical instruments (some drums in the cases of churches' bands, a guitar and an harmonium in the cases of modern bands performing for marriage). The Kwoto Theater group is to my knowledge one of the most singular and ambitious groups. It was created in 1994 by a group of four young Southern men graduating from the Khartoum Artistic Institute and members of the Sudanese Actors Union. As young 'displaced' Southern Sudanese they felt the need to create their own theater group. Each of these men belonged to a specific Southern tribe (Bor, Balanda, Anuak) and they recruited 45 other young non professional actors, all Southern Sudanese displaced students from different ethnic backgrounds. The originality of the group came from the

⁵ Again the debate about the roots of Sudanese identity is far to be new. But from a debate limited to a restricted circle (the intellectual elite of the 50's-60's) it spread out to become a major issue.

⁶ Special thanks to Stephen Afear Ushalla for all the information that he kindly gave to me during my last stay in Khartoum in March 2000.

idea of exploiting the ethnic diversity of the actors to create a multi-ethnic group and to speak different Southern vernaculars in the same drama, each member learning the language of the others. Songs and Music played an important role, traditional instruments and melodies were used and worked out as sources of inspiration. Gradually the group shifted from traditional songs to create new songs. References to 'African' tradition was important and the name of the group Kwoto, is itself a Toposa name for a 'sacred stone'. The Theater is not only a place for entertainment. It's conceived as a mean to attain specific objectives. Among the priorities of the group are the wish to strengthen the identity and the consciousness of the displaced Southerners and to fight against the ethnic and political division of the South.

The group started to work first with churches in the displaced quarters but also with Ministry of Social Affairs and they participated in many official gatherings. Sponsored for a time by the Ford Foundation, the met with a real success. From their experience a number of new theater groups started to appear since 1997 in many settlements and quarters of Khartoum. One of the funding member, Stephen Affear Ushala has also created the Orupaap Musical Band in 1987 with both traditional instruments (drums, xylophones) and modern instruments (electric guitar and harmonium). The success of Kwoto indicates that it found an echo among the Khartoum population, especially among the youth (and not only the young Southerners) because it answers a cultural need : the need to keep a link with the 'origin' but also to accommodate to the new urban context. And their language strategy reflects this accommodation by using both African vernaculars and Arabic.

Juba Arabic as a regional language

In both the Kwoto and Orupaap groups, vernacular African languages are used side by side with Arabic, and more specifically with Juba Arabic, the Arabic variety spoken in Southern Sudan. The choice of Juba Arabic appears here as a clearly ideological choice, i.e. Juba Arabic is defined as the regional language, the language of the South⁷. Among urban Southerners (both in South and North Sudan) Arabic appears as *de facto* the only shared language. Songs or drama in vernaculars have to be translated in Arabic to be understood by everybody. The use of Juba Arabic as the shared language of the South has been already acknowledged by different Radios⁸ and Churches. The Churches also published small prayer books written in Juba Arabic (Latin script). Musical bands based in Juba used to sing in both Vernaculars, Lingala and Juba Arabic. The Kwoto and Orupaap experiments is not new in this respect . But they participate to the 'legitimization' of Juba-Arabic as expressing a Southern Sudanese identity within a Northern context. Many Southern students have now been educated in Arabic and are able to speak Northern Sudanese Colloquial Arabic and most of the displaced Southerners may understand if not speaking well colloquial

⁷ Practically Juba Arabic was mainly spoken in the Equatoria Region and other Southern regional varieties of Arabic were spoken in Bahr al Ghazal and Upper Nile.

⁸ Juba Arabic has been used as a broadcast media by the Radio of Sudan Council of Churches in Juba, by the SPLA Radio (when broadcasting), and by Omdurman Radio (since 1993).

Arabic. Here the choice of Juba Arabic is not only a matter of communicative efficiency it's also a matter of symbolic representation. But in some drama (see text III) Northern Sudanese Colloquial Arabic can be used instead of Juba Arabic. Therefore the Kwoto group does not stick to a rigid linguistic position and uses each language according to the context and the topic of the drama. Vernaculars refer to a specific ethnic origin and culture (Dinka, Toposa etc.), Juba Arabic refers to a more global 'Southern' origin and Colloquial Arabic refers to a more general 'Sudanese context'.

An interesting point is that the drama performed in Juba Arabic have been written in the Arabic script and not in the latin script⁹ as was the tradition in the Churches. Again the use of the Arabic script reflects here a pragmatic position, i.e. young Southerners have been educated in Arabic and are more at ease to write an oral language in this script. The written version is more 'Arabized' than the oral version, i.e. the written version renders out the Arabic etymological pronunciation while the oral version conforms to the Juba Arabic pronunciation: /ħ/ rendered as [k], /ġ/ rendered as [k], /š/ rendered as [s], elision of the ayn, tonal accentuation etc. Sometimes the written version alternate between *h* and *k* cf. texte II *hūfu* ~ *kāfu* 'to fear' while the oral version sticks to [k].

But the fact of writing these texts in Arabic script does not influence the degree of Arabization of the texts. There is no decreolization trend and the main features of Juba Arabic are preserved : (invariable verbal pattern, no flexion, no gender agreement, analytic genitive construction, reduplication, Juba Arabic lexicon etc.). In fact these texts appear even 'more Juba Arabic' than the daily speech often influenced by colloquial features.

Extracts of Text 1 (a song) and 2 (a children play) given both in Arabic script and transcription provide examples of song and drama in Juba Arabic. The text III, *warniš* is performed and written in Colloquial Arabic and the same actor has no problem in rendering the Colloquial Arabic pronunciation. The topic of the drama is about street children (*šammāša* in Khartoum Arabic). The drama was performed in 1997 in the Carthage Festival in Tunisia. Street children being from all Sudanese background (West and South) do speak their own language (not reflected here) but don't speak in Juba Arabic.

Brief Conclusion

The example of the Kwoto group shows that a 'former foreign language' (i.e. Juba Arabic) once used mainly as a lingua-franca became a 'local language' for a displaced and migrant community. Juba-Arabic is now considered as part of the cultural heritage of the South. It has been localized, vernacularized and considered appropriate to symbolize a 'Southern identity'. However, Juba Arabic is not spoken in isolation. It has links with both African vernaculars and Colloquial Arabic. All these

⁹ This was for me the first time to come across texts in Juba Arabic written in Arabic script.

languages are part of the linguistic environment of the Southern communities. The 'literary' use of Juba Arabic in drama and songs is a new development in the cultural arena of Khartoum. It does not indicate necessarily that Juba Arabic will remain the main Arabic variety spoken by Southerners. In fact daily speeches are far more influenced by Colloquial Arabic.

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Text I Suzi

Súzi gí lákbat wúsa
Súzi gí bírġil wúsa Súzi karábu wúsa
Kéda áinu wúsa táki kéfin kéda áinu lún táki kéfin
Kéda áinu sékel táki kéfin kéda áinu rás táki kéfin
Mama síbu karába úkti síbu lakbáta úkti síbu langába
Eta málu ma ge saadu béled táki áinu senu táni fadelu fi béled
Eta málu ma ge saadu ahal táki áinu senu táni fedelu fi beled
Di tór ġeríma táni ya Meri eta ge arfa fi dahar ta ahal táki badín
Di minu bikáti ěnu toho bi zowġu súzi bińġúz biġa ásalu éta nyerkúk biġa ásalu éta

(Short Translation : Suzi has spoiled (*lakbat, bírġil, karabu*) her face (by using cream), See how is your face, See how is your color, See how is your look, See how is your head, Mother drop this spoiling, Sister drop this mess. Why don't you help your country. See what's remain of your country. Why don't you help your people. This is another crime o Marie that you will carry on the back of your people. Who will consider to marry Suzi, the bińġuz (?) will come to ask you, the children will come to ask you)

Text II Minu yahu ġuwa

Arnabe : tála lána háġa dakal bět tatay de... huwa aba tála uwa kōf kofw-ana ma sokol mútu gale bikatul ana wahat rabúna gawonġa saadu ana
Gawonġa : di hu minu ʿaġġib elli gi dakalu buyút ta nás sambála sambála sákit zey di bidún izin kamán... nahár de kúlu arnábe ta'abán ma kurúgu azzu núm azzu ákadu ráha toho asán ġisim toho bigeder istaġal bókra
Al-garġb : ána yahu kebír...tewíl...saáb kátar ána al ge kango kango fíl...
Arnabe: ana ge káfu sokol káfu káfu dakal ġisim tay... ya gawonġa malta ge arġal eta káf?

(Rabbit : something entered my house, he refused to go out , he make me afraid by saying he will kill me, o by God, frog help me!
Frog: Who is this strange person who enters the people' house like this, without permission, ... today the rabbit is tired from cultivation, he wants to sleep, he wants to take his rest for his body to be able to work tomorrow
the stranger : I'm big, I'm tall, I'm dangerous, I am the one who (kango?) the elephant
Rabbit : I'm afraid, the fear enters my body... o frog why are you shivering, are you afraid?)

Text III warniš

M2 : yā muwātin inta mutahim bi'innak ʿāmil fawḍa fi-l-ḥay
Al-ġamiʿ : yaʿni ʿāmil izaʿāġ li ġamāʿa děl
M3 : kullu marra tafraḥ maʿ usratik u fātaḥ ḥašmak kabīr Al- ġāmiʿ : taḍḥak ʿala kīfek
M4 : al-faraḥ w-al ḍiḥik fi bětī ġarīma ya ḥaḍra al-gādi?

(M2 : o citizen you are accused of making trouble in the quarter
the Assembly it means you are disturbing those people
M3 each time you rejoice with your family and open your mouth, your laugh as you want
M4 : the happiness and the laugh in my house are a crime o Judge?)

