Language, identities and ideologies : a new era for Sudan

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LANGUAGE, IDENTITIES AND IDEOLOGIES : A NEW ERA FOR SUDAN ?

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Introduction.

Conflicts about language issues and language planning in the Sudan have accompanied the Sudanese political life since the early 20th century. Until the mid 1980s, these linguistic conflicts were mainly reflecting the South/North polarization (cf. The Rejaf Conference of 1927, The Addis Abeba Agreement of 1972). From the mid 1980s, and with the spread of the regional conflicts to many « Northern » Sudanese Areas (Darfur, South Kordofan, Ingessana, Eastern Sudan etc.), linguistic claims have progressively emerged as one of the aspects of the cultural diversity of the whole Sudan. Therefore since 1997 a number of constitutional and political decrees have reconsidered the status of the Sudanese languages (cf. the decree of 22th November1997) including the May 26th 2004 Naivasha Peace Agreement (For an analysis of this agreement see the paper of Ashraf Abdullay in this panel) and the current amendment of the Sudanese Constitution. The Naivasha Agreement can be considered as an historical landmark in this respect. For the first time since Independence, all Sudanese vernaculars (and not only Southern Sudanese vernaculars, as it was the case in the previous Addis Abeba Agreement) are recognized as potential national languages.

This political and official recognition is extremely important because it provides the legal bases for a multilingual linguistic policy. But we know that between the enactment of a law or a decree and its concrete implementation there is always a huge gap and a very long span of time. Respecting language plurality and implementing fair multilingual language planning are not easy tasks, even within economically wealthy countries. This is because language planning involves both symbolic and pragmatic aspects. Language is one of the main symbolic flag of collective identity but there are often huge discrepancies between the symbolic importance of a language for a given collective identity (nation, region, ethnic group etc.) and the very role of this language in the socio-economical life of the citizen. Moreover, despite good will, lack of economical means often hamper the implementation of a multilingual policy.

In Sudan, the last decade has witnessed a progressive shift from a dominant state discourse and an active state policy supporting a pro-Arabization policy to a new emerging discourse supporting (at least theoretically) a multilingual policy. This shift occurs in a world-wide context where linguistic rights tend to be more and more considered as one of the basic universal human rights. It occurs also in an African Horn-regional context where new political powers (like in the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea) tend to implement an ethno-regional linguistic policy, each region being associated with a dominant ethno-linguistic group. Therefore while the new political context of Sudan can raise many hopes concerning linguistic rights and cultural equality, it can also lead to many disappointments and ideological adventures.

One of the urgent tasks is to assess the present language situation of the Sudan and to highlight its complexity and its main dynamics. This is the main objective of the language panel presented in this conference. In this paper, I would like to briefly address the following issues:

Which tools do we have to assess the main dynamics of the language situation in the Sudan?
What are the main factors behind such dynamics?
How far do linguistic categories match with ethnic categorization?
Can language planing escape the trap of linguistic nationalism and linguistic ideology?

I Sociolinguistic dynamics : Trends and Tools

Studies concerning languages in the Sudan can briefly be categorized in two main fields:
One is dedicated to the linguistic description of a number of Sudanese languages and eventually the classification of these languages within broader language families. This kind of studies have resulted in the publication of a number of books and articles concerning various Sudanese languages (no updated bibliography). It contributes to our knowledge of the Sudanese cultural and linguistic heritage but yet a lot remains to be done in this domain (see the papers of Vanhove, Quint, Jakobi in this panel). It often tells little about the actual status of these languages, some being endangered. It may be noted that most of the serious linguistic descriptive works have been done by Africanists (Foreigners or Sudanese) on African Sudanese languages and far less on the various varieties of Sudanese Arabic, whose most accurate descriptions remain unpublished PhD theses on Khartoum Arabic (to the notable exception of Reichmuth 1983 on Shukriyya Arabic and a number of publication on Juba Arabic).

The second field concerns the sociolinguistic status of the Sudanese languages and tries to analyses the main dynamics of language change, language maintenance and language death. Since the early 1970s, a number of language surveys have been undertaken in the Sudan, mostly under the umbrella of the IAAS, using quantitative and questionnaire-based methods (Bell 1976). Starting from Jernud's preliminary study (1979), several volumes have been published under the supervision of Herman Bell (1979-1981) as well as many unpublished MA and PhD (see some enclosed references). Most of these language surveys provide detailed data on language uses (Mother tongue, first language, degree of multilingualism, languages uses inside and outside home, across generations etc.). However the questionnaire have mainly been distributed to school students and rarely to ordinary citizen. They may therefore over evaluate the shift to Arabic. The questionnaire method raises some additional methodological concerns which will be discussed below.

Briefly speaking, almost all language surveys undertaken in the Sudan have pointed out to the increasing dominance and spread of Arabic as the main lingua franca or even first language (or mother tongue = MT) not only among the non-Arab migrant population of the northern cities like Khartoum (Miller & Abu Manga 1992, Mugaddim 2002) but also among the non Arab population of Darfur (Doornbos 1984, Salih 1989, Jahallah 2001+ an unpublished survey undertaken under the supervision of U. Mahmud in the late 1970s-early 1980s), and the Nuba Mountain (Bell ed. 1979, Salih & Rothman 1988, Jahallah 2005), the Southern Blue Nile or in the main urban centers of Southern Sudan like Juba (Mahmud 1982), Dem Zubeir (Mahmud 1978),Wao or Malakal (as recorded until 1984, after this date no study on Southern Sudan has been available due to the war).

The spread of Arabic in Sudan is an old story, which still needs additional historical researches concerning the respective role of Islamization, trade roads, establishment of Muslim kingdoms, settlement of Arabic speaking groups, etc. (The spread of Arabic has been too systematically associated with Islamization, there are evidences that Arabization has been a slower process than usually described). During the colonial period, the spread of Arabic was not halted in spite of the British policy in Southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains between 1930 and 1946 (see Beshir 1969, Hurreiz and Bell eds. 1975, Hurreiz and Abdel Salam eds 1989, Mahmoud 1983, Sanderson & Sanderson 1981). The Arabization trend increased after Independence and seems to have considerably speed up in the last three decades due to the combination of several factors including urbanization, migration, mobility, schooling, pro-

Arabization state policy, media etc. Among all these factors, we can say that socio-economic factors have been more influent in the spread of spoken colloquial Arabic than political and educational factors which foster the spread of Modern standard Arabic.

The spread of Arabic is also recorded in the data provided by two national censuses (1956 and 1993). The data of the 1956's census have been analyzed by a number of linguists (more particularly Thelwall 1978) and are still mainly referred to when people are looking for statistics on language and ethnicity. The ethno-linguistic data of the 1993's census, (which includes data on the Northern Sudan only but uses the same ethnic and language categories than the 1956's census) have, so far, not been widely circulated and I would like to thank my colleague François Ireton from the Cedej (Cairo), who provided me with a copy of the Census' tables and helped me in the computerization of the data.

The data of the censuses and the language surveys highlight the following phenomena:

1. The increasing discrepancy between ethnic affiliation and ethnic mother tongue, at least in Northern Sudan. This can be seen in the 1993's census (see table 1) and has been reported in all the studies of the language Survey, particularly among the young generations (see Mugadim's paper in this panel also)

Table 1: Ethnic Affiliation and Mother Tongue in Northern Sudan according to the 1993's census

	Arab	Nuba	Beja	Nubiyin	Darfurian	West A	South Sud	Funj	Foreigners	Not Stated
Ethnicity	51,79	4,71	6,41	3,22	22,12	7,42	1.74	1,31	0,77	0,50
language	73,84	2,49	4,55	0,94	9,99	5,22	1.59	0,74	0,21	0,43

(Note : the Census' categories have been clustered in major ethnic and language groups)

2. The shift to Arabic varies according to region and ethnic groups. If we compare between claimed ethnicity and claimed language uses in what can be considered the home-land of each major ethnic group, we notice that the Nubiyins (in the Northern S.), the Nuba (in South Kordofan) and the Darfurian speaking groups (in Darfur) appear more affected by language shift to Arabic than the Beja in Eastern Sudan and the West Africans in most regions (table 2 and 3).

Table 2 Distribution of major ethnic groups by Northern States

State	Arabs	Beja	Nubiyin	Nuba	Funj	Southerners	Darfurian	West African	Foreigners	Not stated
Northern	44,07	0,98	46,66	4,50	0,01	2,34	1,05	0,04	0,12	0,22

Nahr al Nil	82,28	10,12	3,22	2,01	0,03	0,53	0,74	0,32	0,06	0,67
Red Sea	15,00	66,49	4,77	4,39	0,10	1,43	1,37	4,32	1,53	0,60
Kassala	18,37	48,90	5,29	1,91	0,09	0,67	9,51	11,51	3,19	0,56
Gedarif	46,37	7,28	0,54	4,04	0,31	1,08	20,22	16,94	2,79	0,44
Khartoum	57,24	1,31	10,69	9,64	0,30	6,74	7,88	3,22	1,28	1,70
Gezira	83,26	0,96	2,31	2,16	0,15	0,88	5,47	2,82	1,45	0,54
Sennar	62,04	0,60	1,76	2,38	2,02	1,54	6,22	22,75	0,20	0,50
White Nile	76,86	0,68	2,30	2,46	0,23	2,54	8,48	5,86	0,14	0,45
Blue Nile	25,77	0,35	1,14	4,54	37,46	2,60	6,27	20,83	0,37	0,67
North Kord	81,09	0,26	0,62	2,71	0,06	0,66	6,65	7,46	0,22	0,27
West Kord.	79,33	0,29	0,18	0,87	0,35	4,97	10,51	3,25	0,15	0,09
South Kord	31,84	0,38	0,15	37,83	0,03	0,97	10,15	18,09	0,33	0,24
North Darf.	12,97	0,17	3,64	0,18	0,56	1,21	78,20	2,70	0,06	0,32
West Darfur	10,47	0,80	0,04	0,44	0,02	0,35	85,80	1,11	0,66	0,31
South Darf.	38,54	0,53	0,09	0,39	0,13	1,96	49,27	8,76	0,06	0,26
Total	51,79	6,41	3,22	4,71	1,31	1,74	22,12	7,42	0,77	0,50

Table 3 Distribution of major language groups by Northern States

State	Arabic	Beja	Nubiyin	Nuba	Funj	Southern	Darfurian	West African	Foreigners	Not stated
Northern	76,81	0,01	17,74	3,35	0,00	1,88	0,08	0,01	0,00	0,00
Nahr al Nil	97,44	0,56	0,48	0,78	0,11	0,26	0,12	0,09	0,01	0,01
Red Sea	25,91	63,77	1,60	2,83	0,01	1,00	0,42	3,24	0,80	0,05
Kassala	30,67	43,93	3,65	1,44	0,04	0,72	7,92	10,27	0,82	0,04
Gedarif	63,98	5,22	0,27	1,98	0,02	0,82	8,50	18,12	0,61	0,01
Khartoum	85,44	0,17	1,02	3,97	0,02	4,46	2,00	1,69	0,41	0,09
Gezira	93,80	0,06	0,06	0,50	0,00	0,31	1,79	3,15	0,06	0,00
Sennar	75,48	0,04	0,03	0,85	0,02	1,11	2,81	19,38	0,03	0,00
White Nile	90,03	0,01	0,11	1,06	0,00	1,94	1,23	5,35	0,01	0,01
Blue Nile	40,38	0,10	0,13	3,09	29,36	3,39	2,61	20,34	0,04	0,00
Northern K.	95,82	0,02	0,02	0,43	0,00	0,36	0,04	3,15	0,00	0,00
Western K.	90,60	0,00	0,01	0,22	0,00	3,25	3,12	2,28	0,00	0,00
Southern K.	64,71	0,03	0,86	23,13	0,01	0,75	0,49	9,86	0,01	0,03
Northern D.	66,89	0,00	0,09	0,04	0,01	0,89	31,68	0,17	0,00	0,00
Western D.	22,86	0,57	0,01	0,19	0,00	0,22	72,64	2,24	0,11	0,00
Southern D.	76,66	0,06	0,00	0,45	0,00	1,07	18,13	3,24	0,00	0,00
Total	73,84	4,55	0,94	2,49	0,74	1,59	9,99	5,22	0,19	0,02

This difference according to ethnic group and region is due to a number of factors such as older processes of Arabization, higher mobility (urbanization and migration),very high linguistic diversity, lower demographic weight, etc. But the factors behind language maintenance and shift deserve further careful investigation. A recent studies on El Fashir (Jahallah 2001) indicates for example than the members of the Zaghawa ethnic groups appear far more resistant than all other ethnic groups, in spite of being a minority group in this city. In urban context, ethnic clustering can help language maintenance as it is the case for the Haussa community of Dem Bakor in Gedarif town.

3. The linguistic impact of migration and urbanization cannot be summarized to language shift in favor of Arabic only. If the "Sudanisation process" (i.e. dominance of the Northern Riverain Urban culture in most Northern urban centers) described by Doornbos in the 1980s is still taking place, it is also clear that increasing language and cultural diversity characterize now the Northern Sudanese urban centers. In areas like Central Sudan and Khartoum, which were almost 90%-100% Arabic speaking in 1956, the massive population movement of the last two decades has led to an increasing ethnic and language diversity, as can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Language distribution in Central Sudan according to the 1956 and 1993 National Censuses

STATE	LANGUAGE	1956 (Thelwell)	1993
KHARTOUM ST.	Arabic	96,9%	85,4 %
	Nuba		3,97%
	South S.		4,46%
	Darfur		2%
CENTRAL SUDAN	Arabic	84 %	74,9%
= Sennar, Gezira, BN,	West African	8%	12 %
& W.N	Berta-Burun		7,3%

Therefore the linear picture of a language shift towards Arabization, which emerges from most language survey has to be qualified. If it is certainly true that youngsters speak more and more Arabic compared to the older generation, it is also true that many Sudanese urban centers are now characterized by the coexistence of various languages. These languages are not only spoken within the households but can be spoken in public space (particularly market place) and start to be more and more present in the cultural arena (cf. the numerous musical tapes in various Sudanese languages which start to be widely circulated including songs in Dinka). To take again the example of Gedaref town, one can hear the common use of Hausa in the crop market and can buy commercial tapes of local urban songs in Tigre, Tigrinya, Hausa, etc.

II Language shift, language contact and ethnic affiliation
The data collected through questionnaire (censuses or language surveys) are important because they provide quantitative data which help to assess the degree of language change. But they also have to be taken with a lot of caution for many reasons. One concerns the reliability of the data collection, particularly concerning the 1993's census, where it is not sure that the questions pertaining to language have been always asked in a proper manner. The second is that there is always a discrepancy between what people pretend to speak and what they really speak. The third one is that questionnaires handle each language as a distinct

category and tend to emphasize language boundaries without taking into account the fluidity of languages uses, which precisely characterizes language changes.

An emblematic case of such a categorization is the use of the term Arabic as opposed to all other Sudanese Vernacular languages. By using a single label which encompasses a high degree of varieties going from Classical Arabic, Modern standard Arabic, Khartoum Arabic, the various regional Arabic, Juba Arabic, etc. the questionnaire method implicitly postulates the unity and uniqueness of Arabic vis à vis other languages. And this is a serious methodological bias.

Most studies on language uses in the Sudan tell us little about what type of Arabic is spoken by the people who claim to speak it as a first language: how far do non-Arab groups in the Nuba Mountains or in Darfur speak (or not) a specific Arabic variety compared to the neighbored Arab groups or to Khartoum Arabic ? What is the influence of their own language? How far do they wish to reproduce or not the norms of Khartoum Arabic? How far do they code switched, etc. etc. These are some of the many unanswered questions for the time being. The term "Arabic Mother Tongue" can refers to such distinct Arabic varieties that it would be misleading to think that it necessarily provides the people with a sense of a shared common language and moreover with a sense of a shared common culture. The case of Juba Arabic is the most typical counter example of such a false unity. It shows that an Arabic-based language can develop as a specific regional language, and has little to do structurally and culturally with MSA or Khartoum Arabic. Juba Arabic is now recognized as one of the linguistic expression of a Southern identity and it is sometimes used in theatrical stages or radio broadcast to express a Southern identity shared by people of various ethnic groups (Miller 2002). It would be completely misleading to assume that the use of Juba Arabic as a mother tongue by a growing numbers of Southerners urban dwellers can be compared with the use of standard Sudanese Arabic.

Therefore the process of language shift to Arabic (i.e. Arabization) can refer to very distinct linguistic dynamics and there is now an urgent need for developing a new trend of sociolinguist studies in Sudan, which will include more qualitative data and illustrate better the real language uses of the people and the degree of language mixing, complementing the information provided by the surveys.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Sudanese situation is the fact that language shift does not lead to the weakening of ethnic affiliation. On the opposite, the spread of Arabic have occurred at the same time than an increasing ethnic consciousness (Miller 2003) and might have help the formation of supra-ethnic group solidarity like in the case of the Nuba (Abu Manga and Miller 1995). The few studies which have included questions on both languages uses and languages attitudes have indicated a strong maintenance of ethnic affiliation in spite of language change (Miller & Abu Manga 1992, Mugaddim 2002). Many people continue to have a positive attitude towards their language even if they speak it less and less. This point is certainly at the heart of a new trend toward a new linguistic consciousness. While Arab nationalism has based its moto on "Being an Arab is to speak Arabic", this does not apply to Sudan, where many people do speak Arabic as a fist language without considering themselves as Arabs. Many people reject Arabism when it is used to convey a sense of political supremacy based on racial heredity (see the numerous discourse of the SPLM about the status of Arabic). The Sudanese case illustrates how the linguistic nationalism have been a fiction. Language itself is not a sufficient tool of assimilation. Speaking Arabic does not make you an Arab if you belong to an ethnic group consider as non –Arab (the same process occurs in a country like France, where the fact of speaking French is not enough to make the migrants of the second-generation).

The time is now ready to drop out a number of ideological postulates which have been dominating not only the Sudanese political life but also a large part of the international research on language and identity. One is that the use of a supposed common language help to unify people. The second is the underlying presuppose that members of a common ethnic group necessarily share the same ethnic languages.

III. Language change and Linguistic nationalism

For decades, many Sudanese politicians and ideologists, influenced by an Arab linguistic nationalism have thought that imposing one common language (Arabic) to the whole Sudanese population will foster national integration and assimilation to a common core Arab culture. The political failure of such a language ideology is now obvious (Mahmud 1984, Miller 2003, Yokwe 1997), although this policy succeeded in the public marginalization of all other Sudanese languages and the weakening of English. There has been a large debate to decide whether or not such a policy was due to the influence of political Islamism in the Sudanese political life (Abdul Salam 1989, Yokwe 1997). Although the association of Islamization and Arabization have play an important role in the Sudanese political life, particularly regarding Southern Sudan, it must be remembered that linguistic nationalism have been the creed of most modern states including the more secular one such as Turkey (Miller 2003). The pro-Arabization policy that dominated most of the Sudanese politics since Independence has to be understood as a reaction to the former colonial policy of divide and rules. A similar counter -reaction might dominated the analyses and the decisions of a number of new political forces in the Sudan. After five decades of Arabism, it is normal that a number of people and political associations wish to reverse the trend and break away with Arabic, which is associated with a particular political, cultural, racial and social domination

One of the danger of such a counter reaction is the fact that these parties might fail in the same linguistic nationalist trap than their opponents by associating too closely a language with a specific culture or ethnic group, by denying the historical contact between Arabic and the local languages, by insisting that all members of their ethnic group share the same cultural values, etc. If the real linguistic and cultural diversity of the Sudan is to be recognized, this implies that a number of categories are abolished or at least not taken for granted. It means that instead of considering languages as separate and often conflictual entities, it must be understood that identity and cultural affiliation can be expressed in a diversity of voices, that the former "colonial languages" can be self appropriated. It means also that pragmatism prevails on purely ideological stands and that although all languages are equal "in nature", they are not "equal" on a socio-economic market and not all can play the same role.
I am conscious that this is easy to say and extremely difficult to do, particularly after such a long conflict and such a long despise of vernacular cultures. A real new language planning will need difficult choices.

Conclusion

The language changes of the last decades must not be either over estimated nor under estimated. One of the main impact of such language shift is the clear discrepancy between claimed ethnic affiliation and claimed mother tongue. This means that the traditional ethno-linguistic categories, which have been established in the late 19th-early 20th centuries by the Colonial Anthropology and Administration have to be seriously questioned and cannot be taken as fix and immutable categories.

This language shift raises also serious dilemma for the associations acting for a defense and revalorization of their vernacular languages (see Eida Eissa in this panel). Can some endangered languages become something else than a folkloric heritage? How can the ordinary people be motivated by the defense of their vernaculars if they themselves already speak another one? Which are the languages which can play an educational role? How make a choice without creating new competition?

I would like to conclude by saying that for the time being, it seems that most political parties do not seriously take into consideration the language issue. They limit themselves to "politically correct" declarations that will assure the respect of plurality without devoting any time, any expertise and any means on how such linguistic plurality can be institutionalized. The real competition is seen between English and Arabic, and this was also the case after the implementation of the Addis Abeba Agreement in 1972. The teaching of a selected numbers of Southern Languages remained largely theoretical for both financial and man-power reasons. Today it seems to me that the "defense" of the vernacular languages is largely let to a few and often penniless associations or individual will, while the task is enormous.

In a way, (and I know that I am here rather provocative), this is maybe a rather good thing that the fate of the Sudanese languages is not too seriously dealt with by the politicians. It will maybe leave the space for more pragmatism and also maybe for a more creative approach.

Ce qu'il faudra que j'ajoute pendant la conférence c'est
a) parler des décisions prises par le SPLA pour enseignement de l'anglais dans les Nuba Mountains depuis 2001
b) parler des radios-télévisions développé par UN
c) dire que les chiffres du recensements sont beaucoup plus bas que ceux des languages surveys

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