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A NEW STATE, AN OLD LANGUAGE POLICY, AND A PIDGINCREOLE: JUBA ARABIC IN SOUTH SUDAN

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*To the memory of Lowani Duku Dimas,
friend and colleague*

Abstract

The paper discusses the language policy of South Sudan against the backdrop of a sociolinguistic survey and various interviews with government officials in Juba, South Sudan, carried on in July-August 2013. After a presentation of the language situation of the country, the article focuses on Juba Arabic, its role and its unrecognized status as the most widely used *lingua franca* of South Sudan. The Constitution of the newly independent country nominally recognizes and enshrines the language diversity of the country, but does not come to grips with the very existence of Juba Arabic, an Arabic-based pidgincreole which is the only real unifying language of a vast portion of the country and the first language of the capital, Juba. Juba Arabic presents the usual problems of many creoles: it shows a high degree of individual variation, it lacks an established written code and norm, draws its lexicon – but not its grammar – from its lexifier and it does not bear an autonomous glottonym. As a special problem, its lexifier is Arabic, and it is therefore connected with a long-time “enemy:” Sudan. Building on those insights, the paper explores the official discourse behind the regimentation of the linguistic situation of South Sudan and assesses its impact on local linguistic practices.

1. Introduction¹

This article the report of a work in progress for two different reasons: the first and usual one is the preliminary state of our data, collected in Juba, South Sudan, in July-August 2013. The second, and most important, is the unstable political situation in the country.

South Sudan acquired independence on July 2, 2011 and is the youngest nation-state having gained general recognition and membership in the UN. The post-independence political situation in South Sudan took a rapid downfall in December 2013, when open war erupted between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir Mayardit and those siding with his former Vice-President, Mr. Riek Machar. Fighting and ethnic cleansing have caused tens of thousands killed, and almost 2,000,000 IDPs and refugees in neighbouring countries. In August 2015 the Government and the rebels finally signed a peace deal under the threat of UN sanctions.

Against this precarious background, the present article depicts a language policy in the making which has not been implemented (and possibly will never be). The problems it addresses

¹ Fieldwork in South Sudan was made possible by a grant from the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) within the project “Areas of Linguistic and Cultural Transition in Africa” (*ATrA*). Our partner in South Sudan was the Department of Arabic at the University of Juba. We thank its Director, Prof. Siham Osman, for her assistance in acquiring the entry visa to South Sudan and in making our research possible. We express our gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, which allowed us to carry on a number of interviews with key officials. We also thank Claudius Waran Patrick and Sara Bojo Lokudu for their precious help in the sociolinguistic survey, as well as the Embassy of France and the Ambassador, M. Christian Bader, for their logistic and practical help. We are especially thankful to our language consultants, and in particular to Lowani Duku Dimas, who passed away on April 12, 2014. All errors and omissions remain our exclusive intellectual property.

(and maybe contributes to create) are instead real and continue to beleaguer the country.

2. Language in the South Sudan and the special place of (Juba) Arabic

The linguistic landscape of South Sudan is fairly complex; *Ethnologue*² lists 68 spoken languages. While no single language is shared by even a majority of the population, some form of Arabic is since at least the late 19th century the most widespread medium of interethnic communication. Which Arabic is more difficult to say.

First, we have an Arabic-based contact variety generally referred to as *árabi júba* (i.e., Juba Arabic; henceforth: JA), and whose historical origin can be traced back to the Egyptian colonial expansion in the 19th century (Miller 2006; Owens 1996; Tosco and Manfredi 2013). Most plausibly, JA originated out of an extreme contact situation in which enslaved Nilotic populations were forced to communicate with Arabic-speaking traders coming from northern Sudan and Egypt. This provided the sociolinguistic context for the rise of a pidginized form of Arabic and in due time of modern JA. Even if JA is traditionally considered a pidgin, a better label is pidgincreole, i.e., an intermediary category between pidgins and creoles which is defined by the fact that an earlier pidgin has become the first (and possibly the only) language for a part (but definitely not all) of its speakers (Bakker 2008, cf. 5.2.). JA shows a drastic restructuring of its lexifier language (Sudanese Arabic) and is not mutually intelligible with any Arabic variety. Structurally, JA displays typical features of creoles, such as the almost complete shunning of morphology, the absence of gender as a morphological category, the lexification of uninflected verbal forms, the expression of TMA distinctions through invariable preverbal markers, and basic SVO word order (Tosco and Manfredi 2013). Therefore, even if the lexicon of JA is by and large Arabic-derived³ and JA does not bear an autonomous glottonym (cf. Miller 2009), it cannot be considered a variety of Arabic.⁴ JA speakers have a very clear metalinguistic consciousness of the distinctiveness of their language and show a positive attitude toward it. In most cases, this does not contrast with a general appreciation of the “indigenous” languages and of English.⁵ Furthermore, and in contrast to the state’s language ideology (cf. 6.), a majority of speakers view positively the use of JA, which they consider their first and foremost language, in education. Finally, they pragmatically argue that JA is the only linguistic means that can facilitate interethnic communication and may overcome “tribalism” in South Sudan.⁶

Second, one finds Sudanese Arabic, which is widely spoken by people of northern Sudanese descent and many South Sudanese educated in Arabic and/or who spent the civil war period in northern Sudan.

Third, different non-native varieties of Arabic (generally referred to as *árabi al besít* “simple Arabic”) are used as an interethnic medium in the north (around Malakal) and west (around Wau) of

² Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2016. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Nineteenth edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

³ Loanwords from neighbouring Nilotic languages are quite rare in JA and limited to non-basic (i.e. cultural) lexicon.

⁴ Interestingly, Leonardi (2013) speaks of a process of creolization of Arabic insisting on the structural distinctiveness of JA as compared to its lexifier language. However, her assumption is not reflected in the choice of the glottonym ‘South Sudanese Arabic,’ which does not highlight the linguistic specificity of JA but, on the contrary, posits a connection between the South Sudanese pidgincreole and common Arabic national koines such as ‘Egyptian Arabic,’ ‘Sudanese Arabic,’ etc.

⁵ This and the following results stem from a second part of our fieldwork which was concerned with metalinguistic representations and attitudes towards JA vis-à-vis Sudanese Arabic, English and the ethnic South Sudanese languages; other questions touched upon the relationship between language and ethnic identity, and the possible use of JA as a written medium and in education. The data were elicited through a number of interviews in JA and English. Due to space limitations we cannot present these data in details here, and we will limit ourselves to an outline of language attitudes.

⁶ According to Miller (2000), JA started to be adopted as a marker of a super-tribal southern identity after the signing of the Addis Ababa peace agreements (1972), which granted a large autonomy to the southern regions of Sudan.

South Sudan, as well as in peripheral regions of Sudan. Data on these vehicular varieties are scarce, mainly as a consequence of their high degree of individual variation. Manfredi (2013) shows that non-native varieties of Arabic are grammatically less restructured than JA and claims they cannot be described as pidgins. Interestingly, even if both Sudanese Arabic and non-native varieties of Arabic have some linguistic interference on JA (Versteegh 1993), monolingual speakers tend to keep all three apart. In contrast to this, and as an ideological reaction to the policy of Arabicization enacted by the former unified Sudan, the official discourse claims that JA is a variety of Arabic and that it cannot therefore be considered an “indigenous language” of South Sudan (cf. 6, 7).

3. Language in the constitution(s)

The present-day South Sudan language policy finds its immediate origins in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (hereafter CPA), signed in 2005 between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and the Government of Sudan; also referred to as the “Naivasha Agreement” it brought to a substantial stop the Second Sudanese civil war, and paved the way to the independence of the South in 2011.

The language side of the CPA has been discussed and analysed in detail by Abdelhay (2006, 2007), Abdelhay et al. (2011) and Makoni et al. (2013), as well as, in the larger picture of the Sudanese colonial and postcolonial language policy, by Abdelhay et al. (2011). Following the CPA, Sudan formally moved from a strict Arabic monolingualism to a policy of multilingualism where both Arabic and English were recognized as official languages, whereas other “indigenous” languages were accorded the status of national languages. According to the CPA, Sudanese language might be used in education and at any level of the federal administration.⁷ Writing well before the referendum on independence and the current intra-South civil war, Abdelhay (2007: 17) closed his article with the hope that ‘a faithful implementation of this decentralised language policy within the suggested multi-ethnic federalist system will not only contain (i.e., prevent) the southern potential secessionism but also the divisive monolingualism.’ What happened is of course very different.

The CPA propositions on language policy – which Abdelhay et al. (2011: 487) define ‘a language policy statement with a carefully reworked ideological syntax and vocabulary’ – are the following:

2.8.1. All indigenous languages are national languages which shall be respected, developed and promoted.

2.8.2. Arabic is the widely spoken national language in the Sudan.

2.8.3. Arabic, as a major language at the national level, and English shall be the official working languages of the national government business and languages of instruction for higher education.

2.8.4. In addition to Arabic and English, the legislature of any sub-national level of government may adopt any other national language(s) as additional official working language(s) at its level.

2.8.5. The use of either language at any level of government or education shall not be discriminated against.

⁷ The CPA policy of multilingualism reinforced a direct association between linguistic, tribal and ethnic boundaries that was already affirmed by the Rejaf Language Policy held in 1928 (Abdelhay 2010; Abdelhay et al. 2011; Abdelhay et al. 2016). As a consequence, the CPA encouraged the belief that language is a key marker of ethnicity, and that group negotiations over political status would be enhanced by an overt insistence on the use of an “indigenous” language (see Manfredi 2015 for a discussion of the ethno-linguistic consequences of the CPA language policy in the Nuba Mountains area).

At the constitutional level, the results of the Agreement found a first implementation in the Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan (which entered into force on 9 July 2005) and the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan (5 December 2005, and following a Draft Constitution proposed by the Southern Sudan Civil Society in Nairobi, February 2005). Both the Constitution of Sudan and of Southern Sudan follow almost verbatim the wording of the Agreement. For South Sudan the provisions on language read as follows⁸:

- (1) All the indigenous languages of Southern Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.*
- (2) English and Arabic shall be the official working languages at the level of the governments of Southern Sudan and the States as well as languages of instruction for higher education.*
- (3) There shall be no discrimination against the use of either English or Arabic at any level of government or stage of education.*
- (4) English, as a major language in Southern Sudan, and Arabic, shall be the official working languages at the level of the governments of Southern Sudan, and the states and the languages of instruction for higher education.*
- (5) In addition to Arabic and English, the legislature of any sub-level of government in Southern Sudan may adopt any other national language as an additional official working language or medium of instruction in schools at its level.*

Summing up, the salient points on language policy of the NPA and of the 2005 Constitutions are:

- the Arabic-English official national bilingualism;
- the official status of one of the two languages (Arabic in the North, English in the South) is based upon the language being a ‘*widely spoken*’ medium; while this is certainly true for Arabic in the Sudan, English is hardly a spoken language at all in the South; in both cases, the official status of the other language is not explained;
- the possibility of multilingualism at lower levels of government (in this connection, the possibility of local multilingualism, as implied by the bracketed plural of ‘*language*’ in the Naivasha Agreement) is lost in both Constitutions;
- the absence of
 - any reference to majority and minority languages at the national or sub-national level;
 - any list of languages and/or ethnic group;
 - any provision on language at lower levels of education.

As its predecessors, the current Transitional Constitution of South Sudan (which came into force with independence in 2011) does not list languages nor ethnic groups, but still refers to the “indigenous languages of South Sudan.” Its references to languages (Chapter 1, Article 6) are also much shorter:

- (1) All indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.*
- (2) English shall be the official working language in the Republic of South Sudan, as well as the*

⁸ In the Constitution of (northern) Sudan, Arabic replaces English as a “major language.”

language of instruction at all levels of education.

(3) *The State shall promote the development of a sign language for the benefit of people with special needs.*

Arabic has disappeared, together with any reference to official multilingualism at the local level. English remains the sole official language and is promoted ‘*at all levels of education.*’ Apart from a generic respect, development and promotion of all ‘indigenous languages,’ the Constitution represents a clear regression in terms of provisions for multilingualism. While, as remarked by Abdelhay (2007: 9), the Sudanese constitution of 1988 offered to all “indigenous peoples” the right to preserve their languages, cultures and religions, the “indigenous languages” are nowadays enshrined as national languages; but, as noted again by Abdelhay (2007: 9), such a generic statement is a ‘non-instrumental language right’ (following Rubio-Martín’s 2003 terminology): it attaches a symbolic value to all the local languages – while paying, we add, lip-service to language diversity.

The constitution of the single states of South Sudan may flatly contradict the central government’s one; e.g., the 2005 Interim Constitution of Central Equatoria (where the national capital, Juba, is located) states *inter alia* that both ‘*English and Arabic shall be the official working languages at all levels of the government of the State as well as languages of Instruction for higher education*’ and that ‘*Bari shall be an additional official working language or medium of instruction in Schools at the State level*’. This State Constitution therefore predates the 2011 Transitional Constitution and at the same time reflects the fact that Arabic (especially but not only JA) is widely used in Central Equatoria and that Bari is the first ethnic language.

4. Education and the “indigenous languages”

How do the Constitutional provisions reflect in everyday educational practices? Not much, and not well. What little education exists in South Sudan is by and large in English, and locally either Arabic or an “indigenous” language is used (the latter in the first years of primary school; s. also below). The Government’s educational policy remains unclear, nor did interviews conducted at the Ministry of Higher Education shed much light: primary education in “indigenous” languages is planned, but neither the exact number of the languages nor a timetable were made available to us. Most importantly, it is not clear *which* language will be taught *where* and *to who*. Education in the “indigenous” language is planned for the first three years of the primary school, with English being introduced in the fourth class. It is equally unclear if education in the “indigenous” language will then be dropped altogether, or the language will be taught as a subject. It seems that language uses rather than ethnic membership will be taken into account in choosing the “indigenous” language; on the other hand, ethnic membership is also evoked as a criterion for selecting the “indigenous” language in primary education (cf. 6).⁹ The risks involved in such an approach are evident, especially in the absence of a true federal system where decisions about language policy are placed in the hands of local authorities.

Various interviews with chief executives at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology made it clear that public education in the “indigenous languages” will for the time being be provided in:

⁹ In our interviews with government officials (v. 6), reference to the Ugandan laws on local language teaching has often cropped up.

- Dinka
- Nuer
- Shilluk
- Bari
- Zande

These are the languages with the highest number of speakers but are also strictly ethnic languages and play no role as interethnic media; a longer list includes:

- Lotuko
- Moru

As a bequest of the British colonial period, these are the same languages which had already been selected at the 1928 Rejaf Language Conference as “*suitable for development.*” The Rejaf Conference, which also prescribed the use of the Roman script, even for writing down “*colloquial Arabic,*” has had enduring effects on language in South Sudan.

The “Rejaf ideology” has been tacitly assumed by the new independent government of the country, starting from the very use of the adjective “indigenous.” “Indigenous” is a technical term in the Sudan that finds its origin in the British political and educational discourse from the 1930s onwards, and it is part and parcel of an “indirect rule” system embodied in a set of measures aiming at the creation of “self-sufficient” cultural identities. As a result, ‘[T]o solidify communal identification, the British rule discouraged the searching out of commonalities that transcend differences such as common language and culture by accentuating differences even when none existed’ (Abdelhay et al. 2011: 468-469). The authors’ claim goes hand in hand with the idea that colonial linguists’ work reduced multilingual practices to grouped artefacts – “real languages” (Abdelhay et al. 2011: 471). Such a creation ex-nihilo of differences is not exemplified, but actually occurred in colonial Sudan (a case in point is the creation of a Laggorí identity to the detriment of other groups in the Nuba Mountains; cf. Manfredi 2015). Ditto for the linguists’ work: the quest for the “native speaker” and “mother tongues” has been, and partially still is, a scientific posture of much descriptive linguistics — as such, not an invention of the British administration. Obviously, it is at odds with multilingualism, diglossia, all the messiness of contact situations, multiple and shifting ethnic and language allegiances, and so on. What is more important, language description and even more so language standardization favour the crystallization of ethnic boundaries, and in the former unified Sudan they were instrumental to the local empowerment of ethnic groups.

The fact that much of what is known on the Southern Sudanese languages is due to the painstaking work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (hereafter SIL) did not help: descriptive scientific work is coupled in this case with a special emphasis on a speaker’s first, “native language” as a focal part of his/her identity and a source of personal and community self-esteem. As noted by Handman (2009: 637), ‘[A] speaker’s first, native language holds a special place in Christian translation literature, as the language in which the Scriptures and other material can best be understood by receptor communities.’ Handman (2009) draws the attention to the potential disruptive effects of the imposition of non-native language ideologies on local communities, and what is valid for the “native speaker” applies of course also to the whole “mother tongue” ideology,

whose historical origins in the European modern times have been described by Bonfiglio (2010).¹⁰

Finally, “indigenous” languages exclude “foreign” languages: Arabic is the first casualty, notwithstanding the presence of many Arabic monolinguals (cf. 5). Arabic is also ignored at the official level – although it is much better known than English and very much in use.

JA is likewise excluded, mainly because of the direct association with its lexifier language, although it is the everyday language in the capital, Juba, and in much of the country. Things for JA are actually even worse, because JA is itself an exclusively oral and non-standardized language (although it has by now quite a long, if sporadic, written history; cf. Miller 2014).

What do South Sudanese think about this language? How do they rate its degree of independence vis-à-vis Arabic? How do they use it, when and with who?

The result of our research clearly show (cf. 5) that JA has by now a substantial body of first-language speakers; they still belong ethnically to different ethnic groups and do not see themselves as a new “entity.” The possibility of belonging to an ethnic group without speaking its language was specifically addressed in the interviews and generally answered in the positive by our respondents, who often admitted a low or no competence at all in their “indigenous” languages. The idea that JA is “the” language of South Sudan crops up from time to time in our interviews, and is often voiced in popular music and the net. Connected to this is the problem of the very name of the language, an issue which a few respondents were well aware of: being “Arabic” points to a foreign (and in principle enemy) entity, while being “Juba” restricts it to a specific location (although the capital town of the country). Before addressing the official discourse related to these issues in section 6, section 5. will provide an idea and some figures on the extent and spread of JA in present-day Juba.

5. Juba: which language(s), where?

5.1. The sample

The first part of our fieldwork was spent on a qualitative evaluation of the degree of multilingualism and the linguistic uses by means of a sociolinguistic survey. In order to assess the status of JA in Juba, two districts were chosen: Malikiya (alternative spelling: Malakiya), the heart of “old Juba,” traditionally inhabited by mainly Muslim ethnic Bari; and Gudele, one of the new residential areas, extending to the West of Juba town.

The data were gathered through anonymous interviews carried on by students from Juba University living in these neighbourhoods. They proceeded from relatives and friends to other families who volunteered being interviewed. The answers were written down and later tabulated by us. The sample is therefore not random, and this explains why important ethnic groups and languages are barely represented in our sample.

Within each district 50 households were investigated, for a total number of 314 interviewees (190 in Malikiya and 124 in Gudele; 12 additional interviews in Gudele were disregarded for the purposes of the present study). The higher number of interviews in Malikiya stems from a higher ratio of individuals per household (3.79 vs. 2.48). The low rate of individuals per family is partially explained by the very high rate of infants and by the fact that answers were provided on an individual basis.

The data bring to the fore the very recent (and still ongoing) inflow of migrants: Juba is a

¹⁰ In this regard it is interesting to note that Tanya Spronk (2014), a SIL member collaborating with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in the definition of the guidelines of multilingual education of South Sudan, overtly uses the disputed term of “mother-tongue.” Not surprisingly, the same also crops up in the discourse of government officials who worked with SIL when referring back to the constitutional “indigenous” languages (cf. 6).

young town, where the average age is 31.5, but as low as 28.6 in Gudele. Even more importantly, Juba is a relatively “new town:” less than a half of the interviewees were born in town (36.6% of the total), while even in the historical district of Malikiya the percentage reaches 49% only. A grand total of 46% of interviewees settled after 2005. In Gudele the newcomers are 74.1% – three out of four inhabitants.

	Gudele	Malikiya	Total
Households	50 (+12 not considered)	50	100
Individuals = Ratio	124/50 = 2.48	190/50 = 3.79	314/100 = 3.14
Age (average)	28.6	34.4	31.5
Gender	M 67 (54%) F 57 (46%)	M 74 (39%) F 116 (61%)	M 141 (45%) F 173 (55%)
Length of stay in Juba			
- Born in Juba	22 (17.7%)	93 (49%)	115 (36.6%)
- Arrived after 2005	92 (74.1%)	54 (28.4%)	146 (46,4%)
- Arrived before 2005	10 (9.2%)	43 (22.6%)	53 (17%)
Education			
- university	21 (17%)	62 (32.6%)	83 (26.4%)
- secondary	43 (34.6%)	68 (35.8%)	111 (35.3%)
- primary	34 (27.4%)	42 (22.2%)	76 (24.3%)
- none	26 (21%)	18 (9.4%)	44 (14%)

5.2. Multilingualism and Juba Arabic

Juba is also, of course, highly multilingual (and more so in the new area of Gudelle than in Malikiya), as shown in Table 2 below.

Half of the population of Gudele claims to speak three languages; Malikiya – home to an older couch of the population – has a slightly but significantly lower multilingualism rate, with 45.2% of the interviewees claiming to speak two languages. In both neighbourhoods, at least three fourths of the respondents claim to speak either 2 or 3 languages, and monolingualism is much less common than knowing more three languages.

	Gudele	Malikiya	Total
<i>More than 4</i>	8 (6.5%)	6 (2.1%)	14 (4.5%)
<i>4 languages</i>	31 (25%)	16 (9.5%)	47 (15 %)
<i>3 languages</i>	63 (50.8%)	69 (36.4%)	132 (42%)
<i>2 languages</i>	21 (16.9%)	86 (45.2%)	107 (34%)
<i>1 language</i>	1 (0.8%)	13 (6.8%)	14 (4.5%)

Within such a multilingual scene, JA is by large the first language (here intended as the first acquired language) for almost half of the respondents (47% in total, but as many as 60% in Malikiya). Flying in the face of an official policy of utter disregard (if not overt hostility) for Arabic

and its speakers, (Sudanese) Arabic ranks second, with almost 10% of the interviewees (most of them in Malikiya) declaring Arabic their first language. This figure is of particular interest because it shows that, in contrast again to the official discourse (cf. 6), people are generally aware of the difference between JA and Arabic, and they view them as separate languages even in the absence of a direct input question from the interviewers.

Multilingualism is better reflected in Gudele than in Malikiya, where less ethnic groups are represented and almost all of them from Central Equatoria. Most importantly, JA is the only shared medium, with 6.37% only claiming *not* to speak it. The fact that more people do *not* speak JA in Malikiya than in Gudele is *prima facie* odd, but is probably due to the higher impact of (Sudanese) Arabic, the second language in the neighbourhood: Arabic speakers may have a lower interest in JA and may get along with Sudanese Arabic as an interethnic medium.

	Gudele	Malikiya	Total
JA	33 (26.6%)	114 (60%)	147 (47%)
Arabic	5	26	31 (9.8%)
Bari	6	22	28 (9%)
Moru	11	8	19 (6%)
Zande	13	0	13 (4.1%)
Pojulu	6	6	12 (3.8%)
Dinka	5	4	9 (2.9%)
Madi	6	0	6 (2.0%)
Mundari	6	0	6 (2.0%)
Baka	5	0	5 (1.6%)
Kakwa	3	2	5 (1.6%)
Acholi	3	1	4 (1.3%)
Kuku	4	0	4 (1.3%)
Nyangbara	4	0	4 (1.3%)
Nuer	3	0	3 (1.0%)
Balanda	3	0	3 (1.0%)
other	2	0	2 (0.7%)
JA unknown	7 (5.65%)	13 (6.84%)	20 (6.37%)

5.3. Which language, where?

This part of the survey was intended to assess language uses in four social domains, namely 1) at home, 2) within the neighbourhoods, 3) at the market place, and 4) at the public offices. The use of the different languages is revealing: JA is present in all of the four investigated domains (even, partially, “in the public offices,” where English and Arabic – both of them also of course written media – clearly predominate). On the other hand, JA is the first medium at home, within the family, although in competition with other languages. It is still the first home language in Malikiya – a sign of a longer history in town. The differences with Gudele, although telling, must not be exaggerated: also in Gudele JA is the only home language for a fourth of the interviewees, while another third uses it alongside an ethnic language. In both neighbourhoods almost the same percentage claims to use an “indigenous” language only at home. Which “indigenous” language is of course a matter of

the different history and composition of the two neighbourhoods. JA is the preferred medium to talk with neighbours and, to a lower extent, in the market. JA is therefore, first and foremost, the language of socialization.

Table 4. Language uses			
	Gudele	Malikiya	Total
a. at home			
JA only	34 (27.5%)	85 (44.7%)	119 (37.8%)
x + JA	40 (32.3%)	54 (28.5%)	94 (30%)
x only	21 (16.9%)	30 (15.8%)	51 (16.3%)
JA + x	24 (19.3%)	14 (7.4%)	38 (12.1%)
x + y + JA	5 (4%)	7 (3.6%)	12 (3.8%)
b. with the neighbours			
JA only	83 (66.9%)	155 (81.6%)	238 (75.8%)
x only	8 (6.5%)	25 (13.2%)	33 (10.5%)
JA + x	20 (16.1%)	8 (4.2%)	28 (8.9%)
x + JA	8 (6.5%)	0	8 (2.5%)
JA + x + y	3 (2.4%)	1 (0.5%)	4 (1.4%)
x + y	1 (0.8%)	0	1 (0.3%)
x + y + JA	1 (0.8%)	0	1 (0.3%)
x + y + z	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)
c. at the marketplace			
JA only	79 (63.7%)	115 (60.6%)	194 (61.7%)
JA + x	31 (25%)	21 (11.1%)	52 (16.6%)
x only	8 (6.5%)	25 (13.2%)	33 (10.6%)
x + JA	2 (1.6%)	18 (9.4%)	20 (6.3%)
x + y + JA	0	7 (3.6%)	7 (2.2%)
JA + x + y	2 (1.6%)	4 (2.1%)	6 (1.9%)
x + y	2 (1.6%)	0	2 (0.6%)
d. at the public offices			
English	39 (31.5%)	34 (18%)	73 (23.3%)
Arabic	5 (4%)	54 (28.7%)	59 (18.8%)
JA	21 (17%)	23 (12.2%)	44 (14%)
English + Arabic	6 (4.9%)	14 (7.5%)	20 (6.4%)
English + JA	10 (8%)	4 (2.1%)	14 (4.5%)
Arabic + English	3 (2.4%)	7 (3.8%)	10 (3.2%)
JA + English	8 (6.4%)	2 (1%)	10 (3.2%)
English + Arabic + JA	0	6 (3.1%)	6 (1.8%)
Arabic + JA	0	4 (2.1%)	4 (1.3%)
Arabic + English + JA	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)
English + Arabic + JA	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)

English + JA + Arabic	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)
Kakwa	0	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)
English + JA + Bari	1 (0.8%)	0	1 (0.3%)
not applicable	31 (25%)	38 (20%)	69 (22%)

6. The Official Discourse vis-à-vis Juba Arabic

This section investigates the official discourse about language as expressed by government representatives. The analysis is based on formal interviews with two government officials of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology recorded in August 2013 in Juba.¹¹ They are Moses Mading (henceforth MM), a Director of the Department of National Languages at the time of our fieldwork, and Edward Kokole Juma (henceforth EK), Director of the Department of Teacher and Education Training. The aim of this section is basically to explore the ideologies lying behind the regimentation of the linguistic situation of South Sudan as well as to assess their possible impact on the language attitudes and language uses seen in the previous sections (cf. 2, 5). We will concentrate our attention on the following issues:

- the definition of “indigenous language;”
- the definition of JA vis-à-vis Arabic;
- the status of monolingual JA speakers.

We first asked the interviewees to elaborate on the meaning of “indigenous language;” MM provided the following answer:

*“Indigenous means that, that particular people, **grouping**, of the languages are **indigenous**, like Murle, like Bari, like Dinka. These are the **indigenous communities**. But they have different languages. These languages were said to be **dialects** or they were said to be **local languages**. But they are not **local**, because **God created languages all the same**, what made other language not spread all over the world is that they don't have power. Like the British they invaded all. Like French. So these are languages with power, but they are the same.”*

Even if MM gives a mere tautological definition of “indigenous language” (“*indigenous means that they are indigenous*”), the above excerpt is of particular interest for several reasons. First, the interviewee argues that there is a direct link between “indigenous languages” and a “*grouping*” of people or “*indigenous communities*.” This reveals an ideological understanding of “indigenous languages” as invariable entities. As anticipated in 4, this notion can be traced back to the Rejaf Language Conference, and has been more recently implemented by the CPA and the South Sudanese language policy (cf. 3).¹² Second, when MM affirms that “indigenous languages” cannot

¹¹ The interviews were conducted in English. The excerpts presented in this paragraph are transcribed orthographically. We did not to correct morphosyntactic and/or lexical incongruences.

¹² One of the main aims of the Rejaf Language Conference was to “to make recommendations as to whether a system of group languages should be adopted for educational purposes, and if so, what languages would be selected as the group languages for the various areas (of the Southern Sudan)”. In this regard, Abdelhay et al. (2011: 470-471) observe that “The lasting effect of the Rejaf Language Conference as a language-planning device was the production of a linguistic cartography of ‘immobile languages’ anchored to a specific space: the South. By selecting some languages and omitting others, the Rejaf Language Conference invented a linguistic hierarchy that was fundamentally ideological.”

be considered “*dialects*” nor “*local languages*” because “*God created languages all the same,*” he provides a strong evidence of the pervasiveness of the SIL faith-based approach to language diversity. However, the asserted linguistic ecumenism is evidently incoherent with the position expressed vis-à-vis JA, which, as not indigenous, is evidently “less equal” than others (see below). Third, the reference made to European languages “with power” can be explained by the assumption that “indigenous languages” have been historically subordinated to former colonial languages. This however reveals that “indigenous languages” as a category cannot be defined without an explicit reference to an alien counterpart.

EK’s answer to the question of how to define an “indigenous language” is more articulated, but also much more controversial:

“Long time ago, when we were under the Arabs, all our national languages were called indigenous languages. They made them very inferior. Indigenous languages, very local languages. Inferior. So our late leader John Garang in 2004 declared that all indigenous languages in South Sudan are now national languages, before the CPA. [...] That means to raise a culture, to raise an ethnic grouping to national status. Just the languages are promoted from being indigenous to be national, because they are a modern system of languages. Now you don’t talk of any mother tongue as indigenous, they are all national languages. [...] When you learn about the background, about the struggle, it can tell you that the war was about domination, was about oppression of all ethnic languages, to be extinguished, so that people are dominated only to speak Arabic. Now we have just liberated ourselves, and we find ourselves that Arabic is widely spoken everywhere. Right now in fact is the uniting language, the language that unity all the different ethnic groups of South Sudan. We are aware about that.”

Here “indigenous language” bears the strong negative connotation of “*very local,*” or “*very inferior*” language. However, the fact that the South Sudanese constitution overtly cites “indigenous languages” and assigns them the status of national languages does not seem to bother the interviewee as incoherent. EK further assumes that the adoption of the label “indigenous language” is a consequence of the Arabs’ domination in the former unified Sudan, rather than of the colonial language policy and of the later revival of “indigenous languages” in the CPA language policy (cf. 3). Second, just as MM, EK argues that there is a direct link between “indigenous languages” and “*ethnic groupings.*” Furthermore, using a very common biological metaphor, MM explains that the present day regimentation of “indigenous languages” as “national languages” is a reaction to the former domination of Arabic, which was basically intended to “*extinguish ethnic languages.*” Notwithstanding this ideological position, EK also affirms to be aware that “*Arabic*” is the only language that can pull “*the different ethnic groups*” of South Sudan together.

This leads us to the second issue of our analysis: the definition of JA vis-à-vis Sudanese Arabic and other languages. Given the confusion surrounding the glottonym “Arabic” in his previous statement, we asked EK to address the distinction between JA and (Sudanese) Arabic:

Q: Are you speaking of Arabic, or Juba Arabic?

“Arabic in general. Juba Arabic has been there before the independence of South Sudan itself. People from different parts of South Sudan came to the capital city, and that is

*where Juba Arabic emerged. **But in the mind of politicians, this idea is not in their mind. It has not been caught (sic!) in the policy.** But the policy says in broad terms that all indigenous languages are promoted, from indigenous to national languages.*”

As a reaction to our question, EK affirms that he is referring to Arabic “*in general.*” Therefore, the interviewee does not acknowledge any particular distinction between JA and (Sudanese) Arabic. At variance with this affirmation, he also highlights the longstanding presence of JA in South Sudan and, distancing himself from the decisional sphere, deplores the fact that this situation has not been formalized by the national language policy.

Different from EK, MM expresses an unambiguous position concerning the definition of JA in comparison to (Sudanese) Arabic, as we can see in the following excerpt:

*“In this forum we discussed something about **Juba Arabic.** It was brought up that **they are no longer using Juba Arabic, they are using classical Arabic.** Because Arabization here came in and all schools were in Arabic, and they were speaking Arabic, everything was done in Arabic. And they were writing in Arabic. **Even children who are Bari speakers when you, when you, when you hear them, they speak Arabic in the streets and all this. You will have Juba Arabic outside.** In Lanya, in all these areas, Rokon, and all these. So we discussed this thing. The churches, the two churches, Catholic and Protestant. **They tried to write what is called Shukuru Yesu with Roman alphabet. When we come, when we come as linguist, come and test it exactly, it will not come exactly.** [...] When we discussed about Juba Arabic in the forum, **they said why to write with Roman script, Juba Arabic with roman script, if we have rules already for Arabic.** Arabic will be used of course; even in the churches we have Arabic bibles. **So it can be like that Arabic, while we use the “mother tongue”.** [...] So Juba Arabic will not written in the Roman script. Because we have rules already. Arabic will be though in P5.”*

Q: But it will be Arabic...

“Yes, it will be Arabic. Not Juba Arabic, it will be Arabic.”

Q: Is Juba Arabic different from Arabic?

*“**It is not different from Arabic. It’s a dialectical thing.** [...] Arabic came during the time of the Turkish rule, they were using some of the people and recruited them in the army. So they have been ordered in Arabic like that. So they used what is called colloquial Arabic. But now after Arabization came here. **Now when they speak orally, they speak very clear Arabic.**”*

At the beginning of the excerpt the interviewee makes reference to a “*forum*” in which the status of JA was discussed. That is the *Practice and Planning of Multilingual Education Workshop* organized by SIL and the government of South Sudan in 2006, and which was primarily intended to make proposals on the choice of the “indigenous languages” to be used in primary education as well as on the production of textbooks (Ferdinand et al. 2008; Spronk 2014). According to MM, during the workshop it was argued that, because of the institutional Arabicization of the former unified Sudan,

JA is no longer spoken, except in rural areas such as “*Lanya*” or “*Rokon*.” This is evidently in contrast with the fact that JA is mainly spoken in Juba where it underwent a massive process of nativization, while being spoken as a vehicular language alongside other languages in the rural areas. Accordingly, it seems that the interviewee identifies JA with its non-native (i.e. pidginized) version characteristic of rural and recently urbanized speakers rather than with its native (i.e. creolized) form widely used in the capital city. However, it should also be stressed that the influence played by Sudanese Arabic on JA in terms of decreolization (cf. 2) is particularly evident in the South Sudanese capital as a result of the recent arrival of returnees from Khartoum; this may have had an influence on the interviewee’s assumption that JA has been replaced by “*classical Arabic*,” where this latter term obviously refers to Sudanese Arabic (perceived as the high linguistic variety in terms of prestige). Finally, MM affirms that there have been some attempts to standardize a JA orthography in Roman alphabet,¹³ but these failed because there are already orthographic rules for Arabic (i.e., for the Arabic script). Accordingly, MM states that Arabic should be taught as a foreigner language starting from P5 and not as an “indigenous language” starting from P1. This statement led us to ask the question whether JA is different from (Sudanese) Arabic. In this connection, the interviewee makes clear that in his understanding JA “*is not different from Arabic*” since it is “*a dialectical thing*” and that at the present time people speak “*very clear Arabic*.” This means that, in contrast with the metalinguistic representations expressed by the majority of JA speakers, MM overtly considers JA as a variety of the former dominant language, by which it has been profoundly affected.

As a last point, during the interview with MM we draw his attention to the presence of JA monolinguals in South Sudan:

Q: In urban centres like Juba you find children who only speak Arabic or, let say, some form of Arabic, like Juba Arabic.

Some of them came from East Africa. They came from east Africa.

Q: Some of them. But, as you observed, there are also people who say: we are Bari, but we only speak Juba Arabic. So, will these people learn Bari at the primary school or will they study directly in English?

What we are putting is a policy. They are Bari, of course. And if they are Bari, they must know their mother tongue. [...] It is the system; they must know their mother tongue. Because their fathers and their mothers, they speak Bari.

As a reaction to our statement that in Juba there are many JA monolinguals, MM maintains that they are returnees from East Africa; as a consequence, he denies these “outsiders” any linguistic right. But this does not correspond to the sociolinguistic profile of the majority of JA monolinguals, who are basically South Sudanese individuals born and grown up in the capital. We therefore urged MM to comment on the presence of JA monolinguals that preserve their ethnic identity (as in the case of many Bari located in Malikiya, cf. 5) as well as on the language to be adopted for their

¹³ In particular, he makes reference to a popular prayer book in JA : *Shukuru Yesu: a collection of Juba Arabic and English songs that are popularly used in students' and youth conferences in the Southern Sudan*, published by the Scripture Union in 1998.

primary education. The answer given by MM does not leave any doubt: by affirming “*if they are Bari, they must know their mother tongue,*” he overtly states that the first and foremost criterion for choosing an “indigenous language” for primary education is neither location nor language use, but ethnic affiliation. In such an ideological context, it is evident that a non-ethnic language such as JA has no room.

We can sum up the main points of the official discourse towards JA as follows:

- As an ideological reaction to the process of Arabicization enacted by the former unified Sudan, JA is considered as a variety of Arabic. It is therefore not recognized as a “national language;”
- being an inter-ethnic means of communication, JA cannot fit with the ethnic understanding of “indigenous languages” inherited from the colonial language policy and renewed by the CPA;
- despite the fact that linguistic rights are formally recognized on the basis of language uses, ethnic membership remains the foremost factor underlying the choice of “indigenous languages” in education. As a consequence, JA monolinguals do not have a statutory right to education in their own language, and they will be forced to learn an “ethnic” language;
- it seems that the official discourse does not affect the metalinguistic awareness of JA speakers, as they tend to make a clear distinction between the pidgincreole and its lexifier (cf. 2). Likewise, the fact that JA is not recognized as a national language does not limit its use as a vehicular language and its ongoing nativization (cf. 3).

7. Conclusions

It is evident that, here as elsewhere, political bodies and people cope with language diversity on the basis of different assumptions and interests. This is mainly because the vertical organization of languages as regimented by language policies rarely – if ever – matches the complex horizontal distribution of languages (Blommaert 2007: 11). In the case of South Sudan, the government overtly chose to exclude from its language policy the most widespread means of interethnic communication, which is the Arabic-based pidgincreole commonly called Juba Arabic. The analysis of the official discourse vis-à-vis JA revealed that this choice could be explained by different ideological factors. In the first instance, as a reaction to the policy of Arabicization enacted by the former unified Sudan, so that, despite its linguistic and socio-historical peculiarities (cf. 2), JA is considered a variety of Arabic. As a consequence, JA is not constitutionally recognized as an “indigenous language” on a par with other South Sudanese languages, and it will not be standardized and/or taught in primary schools. Secondly, being an interethnic means of communication, JA cannot be linked to any specific ethnic group. As a consequence, the sociolinguistic status of JA does not fit with the ethnic understanding of “indigenous languages” promulgated, at first, by the British colonial rule and boosted, at a later time, by the CPA. Even if “indigenous” languages are formally recognized on the basis of location and language uses, the analysis of the official discourse clearly shows that the individuation of an ethnically defined linguistic community remains the main criterion underlying the recognition of linguistic rights in South Sudan.

In this overall situation, ideology is not absent in the speakers’ attitudes toward language(s), and it is apparent for example in a frequently heard nationalist statement about JA being “the language which unites South Sudanese people.” Despite this, pragmatic considerations play a much

bigger role than ideology: the speakers stress the usefulness of an already existing local *lingua franca* in order to surmount the problems inherent in everyday communication. The relative weight of ideology and practical considerations is reversed in the case of the government's perception of the language problem. The choice of English as the language of education may be supported by economic and practical considerations, whereas the recognition of the indigenous languages may be seen as a tactic move to prevent possible criticisms of a scarce attention to the diversity of the country; but ideological considerations had the upper hand in the choice of English as the sole official language of the country, in spite of the fact that it is barely if at all known by the vast majority of the South Sudanese. "Indigenous languages", on their part, are mentioned in the Constitution, but JA, which is considered a "non-indigenous" language, is not. This state of affairs is potentially harmful when considering the fast process of nativization of JA in post-independence South Sudan (cf. 5).

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