



**HAL**  
open science

# The construction of linguistic borders and the rise of national identity in South Sudan : some insights into Juba Arabic

Stefano Manfredi

► **To cite this version:**

Stefano Manfredi. The construction of linguistic borders and the rise of national identity in South Sudan : some insights into Juba Arabic. Identity and Dialect Performance. A Study of Communities and Dialects, 2017. halshs-01681175

**HAL Id: halshs-01681175**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01681175>**

Submitted on 11 Jan 2018

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

*The construction of linguistic borders and the rise of national identity in South Sudan: some insights into Juba Arabic (árabi júba)*

Stefano Manfredi (CNRS, SeDyL - UMR8202)

**Abstract:** This paper explores the nexus between the social construction of linguistic borders and the rise of a national identity in post-independence South Sudan. It analyses the indexical functions of Juba Arabic (i.e. *árabi júba*), an Arabic-based pidgincreole extensively exposed to contact with Sudanese Arabic, its lexifier and former dominant language. By combining insights from descriptive linguistics and discourse analysis, I will argue that, although the metalinguistic representations of Juba Arabic are increasingly driven by the ideological hegemony enacted by the State through its discourse on “indigenous languages”, the construction of linguistic borders between the South Sudanese pidgincreole and its lexifier can also be constrained by cognitively prominent grammatical features.

## **1. Introduction**

Until nowadays, two theoretical paradigms have dominated to describe creole-lexifier language contact (Goury & Léglise 2005). The first one is the Fergusonian paradigm of diglossia, which describes creole-lexifier contacts as stable sociolinguistic situations involving two linguistic varieties with specific functional assignments (Ferguson 1959; Carayol & Chaudenson 1978). The second one is decreolization, which postulates an asymmetric contact producing the gradual replacement of creole features by those of its lexifier along the lines of a unidirectional continuum running from two poles, the basilect and the acrolect, through a series of mesolectal varieties (De Camp 1971; Bickerton 1973). Different from diglossia that focuses on functional variation and societal norms, the notion of decreolization refers back to the structural effects of a process of attrition leading to language shift.

Despite its relative success, the decreolization paradigm has been repeatedly criticized during the last decades. Above all, it has been argued that decreolization does not tell anything about variation induced by internal factors (Aceto 1999; Mufwene 2004). Furthermore, being essentially descriptive, decreolization is unable to reflect language attitudes and ideologies lying behind creole-lexifier language contacts (Migge & Léglise 2011). Lastly, the

fact that decreolization is often analyzed in the light of a (post-)creole continuum represents a vexing problem for linguists since it is extremely difficult to draw implicational scales reflecting the gradual shift towards the lexifier language. This is because each speaker tends to have its own way of mixing creole and lexifier features, some converging more on phonological features, others on morphology and/or lexicon (Miller 2007). Irrespective of this epistemological problem, (post-)creole continua are generally assumed to be different from dialect continua in that the basilectal and acrolectal poles are typologically dissimilar to such an extent that they are considered to be distinct languages (Siegel 2010).

In this last regard, a common assumption of post-modern sociolinguistics is that linguistic differentiation always involves ideologically embedded and socially constructed processes (Irvine & Gal 2000). This is the core point of view of globalization studies which postulate that named languages are ideological constructions tied to the emergence of Nation-States and that there are not truly distinct linguistic systems bounded by grammars, as habitually argued by descriptive linguists (Blommaert & Rampton 2011; Jørgensen et al. 2011). In this framework, language borders in contact situations are conceived as means of social categorization, which are only relevant when the speakers deliberately constructs them (García & Li Wei 2014). It is not surprising, then, that most studies relativize the outcomes of the semiotic process of language differentiation by putting emphasis on the lack of coincidence between the linguistic borders constructed by speakers and those drawn by linguists (Bert & Costa 2014; Cornips 2014).

It is against this background that the present study addresses the issue of the social construction of linguistic borders in a creole-lexifier contact situation. It focuses on Juba Arabic, an Arabic-based pidgincreole spoken in South Sudan (Manfredi 2017). Before the South Sudan independence in 2011, Juba Arabic has been extensively exposed to contact with Sudanese Arabic, the dominant language of the former unified Sudan. Thereafter, new contact situations between the pidgincreole and its lexifier emerged due to returnees entering South Sudan from Arabic dominant regions. This prolonged contact eventually led to different degrees of linguistic interference. The first to analyze Juba Arabic in terms of (post-)creole continuum was Mahmoud (1979). Miller (1989; 2007), on her part, insists on the fact that, although affected by its lexifier, the evolution of the South Sudanese pidgincreole is far from being a

linear continuum towards Sudanese Arabic. In the light of the above, the present study faces the question of whether Juba Arabic speakers argue for a differentiation between their language and Sudanese Arabic and, if it is the case, to what extent the construction of this linguistic border depends on local ideological factors or on the identification of relevant linguistic features.

As a matter of fact, due to their atypical conditions of emergence, pidgins and creoles are particularly relevant for the discussion of the ideological link between language and identity (Edwards 2009). Being spoken as vehicular languages, pidgins do not function as identity markers. In contrast, nativized creoles may develop identity functions in relation to ethnic groups (e.g. the Arabic-based Ki-Nubi creole in Kenya and Uganda) or Nation-States (e.g. the French-based Haitian Creole). As far as Juba Arabic is concerned, it is a pidgincreole (Tosco and Manfredi 2013), that is an intermediary category defined by the fact that an earlier pidgin has become the first language only for a part of its speakers (Bakker 2008). This means that, although Juba Arabic is largely used as vehicular language, it shares some sociolinguistic properties with creoles. Miller has already stressed that Juba Arabic functions as marker of a super-ethnic South Sudanese identity since the early 1970s (Miller 1991; 2002). More recently, the South Sudanese independence further straightened the identity functions of Juba Arabic. Accordingly, this study is also concerned with the question of which effects the rise of a South Sudanese national identity have on language categorization and on the construction of language borders.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 draws a background to language policies and language categorization in post-independence South Sudan. Section 3 deals with the definition of Juba Arabic from a descriptive perspective and it presents the main features used by linguists for distinguishing between Juba Arabic and its lexifier. Section 4 then analyses the linguistic borders constructed by speakers in relation to both prominent grammatical features of Juba Arabic and local ideological factors. Section 5, finally, investigates the nexus between speakers' attitudes towards Juba Arabic and the rise of a South Sudanese national identity.

## **2. Background : language policies and language categorization**

South Sudan presents a high degree of linguistic diversity, with about seventy languages belonging to three out of the four language families attested in Africa (i.e. Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic). In this complex

linguistic landscape, the Arabic-based pidgincreole called *árabi juba* (i.e. Juba Arabic) represents the first means of interethnic communication of the country, while being nativized by the largest part of the urban population of Juba, the capital city of South Sudan (Manfredi and Tosco forth.).

Following the Sudan's comprehensive peace agreement in 2005, South Sudan moved from a strict Arabic monolingualism to a policy of multilingualism. In 2011, English has been recognized as official language, whereas all the "indigenous" languages of the country were accorded the status of national languages. What really counts as "indigenous language" is obviously difficult to say, since this category can only be defined in opposition to an "alien language", in most cases represented by a colonial language. The fact remains that Juba Arabic is officially considered to be a variety of Arabic, and therefore it is not recognized as an "indigenous language" of South Sudan (Manfredi and Tosco forth.). Most importantly, being a vehicular language, Juba Arabic does not fit within the ethnic understanding of "indigenous languages" inherited from the colonial language policy and renewed by the South Sudan independence (Abdelhay 2007; Abdelhay et al. 2011). Despite this, I will show that the institutionalization of "indigenous language" as a sociolinguistic category has a significant impact on the social categorization of Juba Arabic.

As a further matter, folk Arabic-centric linguistic ideologies are still at work in post-independence South Sudan and these also affect language categorization. The enduring semiotic opposition between the labels *luġa* and *ruṭāna* is a case in point. The Arabic term *luġa* (*lúga* in Juba Arabic) means "language" and has a normative value in Sudan. It refers back to a high prestige linguistic variety, with an established written tradition and wide community of speakers. *luġa/lúga* is primarily used in relation with Arabic, but it can also label European languages and other languages of wider communication. In contrast, the Sudanese Arabic term *ruṭāna* (*rután* in Juba Arabic) can be broadly translated as "incomprehensible (ethnic) language; patois" and it conveys a marked (depreciative) value. It refers to low-prestige languages, with no written tradition and spoken by small ethnic groups. Sudanese Arabs usually

adopt the term *ruṭāna* for labelling all the non-Arabic linguistic entities present in the region.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of the interviews in sections 4 and 5 shows that Juba Arabic occupies an ambiguous position within the traditional *luḡa / ruṭāna* semiotic dichotomy. However, since discursive phenomena are always hierarchically ranked (Blommaert 2007), I will illustrate the different intertextual meanings of the terms *luḡa / lūḡa*, *ruṭāna / rutān*, and *indigenous language* when used for categorizing Juba Arabic and/or Sudanese Arabic. These considerations will turn out to be useful when analyzing the construction of a linguistic border between the South Sudanese pidgincreole and its lexifier.

### **3. Is Juba Arabic different from Arabic? The linguists' perspective**

This section aims at illustrating the main features used by linguists for establishing a border between Juba Arabic and its lexifier. These will furnish a comparative basis for the analysis of the metalinguistic representations expressed by ordinary speakers of Juba Arabic in section 4.

Creole languages are considered to be different from other spoken languages in that they came into existence as a consequence of the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of the lexifier language from parent to child (Comrie 2011). These uncommon conditions of language emergence entail different processes of language change linked to second language acquisition, substratum interference as well as to internal developments. Having emerged in a situation of second language acquisition with limited access to the target language, Juba Arabic presents typical features of creole languages (Tosco and Manfredi 2013).

First of all, Juba Arabic draws about 80% of its lexicon from its Arabic lexifier (Manfredi 2017). The remaining 20% is composed by an increasing number of loanwords from Nilotic languages whose integration mostly affects the non-basic (i.e. culturally marked) lexicon of the pidgincreole. Most loanwords are from Bari, the main substrate/adstrate language of Juba Arabic; these are either nouns (e.g. *lógoro* “heron”) or verbs (e.g. *kúruju* “cultivate”, Nakao 2012). We also find a number of borrowed nouns from European

---

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in the Arabic-based Ki-Nubi creole of Uganda and Kenya, the term *rutān* simply means “language” (see Luffin 2003).

languages (mainly from English, e.g. *sister* “nun”; *nigas* “street boy”) as well as from other languages of wider communication like Swahili (e.g. *wéwe* “East African migrant”). All things considered, lexicon is certainly not the most relevant domain for establishing a linguistic border between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic.

The phonology of Juba Arabic, on its part, has been forged by a process of second language acquisition in combination with an important substrate interference. On the one side, Juba Arabic is characterized by the loss of Arabic complex realizations which are absent in the Nilotic substrate (i.e. velar fricatives *x* and *g*; pharyngeal fricatives *ħ* and *ʕ*; all the pharyngealized consonants *ṭ*, *ḍ*; *ṣ* etc.). On the other side, it presents non-Arabic complex realizations entered from substrate/adstrate languages via lexical borrowing (e.g. the voiced bilabial implosive in *bʻondó* “village” and the voiced alveolar implosive in *dʻéjele* “bile”). Furthermore, Arabic stress has been reinterpreted as a pitch accent in Juba Arabic. Phonology thus provides a good linguistic evidence for distinguishing between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic. Nevertheless, other vehicular varieties of Arabic spoken by minority groups in the Arabic-dominant regions of Sudan and South Sudan display similar phonological features (Manfredi 2014), and these are not the product of a process of pidginization/creolization as in the case of Juba Arabic.

Turning to morphosyntax, Juba Arabic is characterized by an important reduction of the inflectional and derivational categories of Sudanese Arabic. More generally, an important typological difference between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic resides in the isolating morphology of the pidgincreole as compared to the fusional morphology of its Arabic lexifier. In this regard, Versteegh (1993: 73) affirmed that “*agreement markers in the verbal system of Juba Arabic is of the utmost importance for the comparison between creole and “normal” (Arabic) dialects*”. The following table corroborates this view.

<b>Table 1. Paradigm types</b>	
Baggara Arabic (Kadugli, Sudan) (Manfredi 2010: 129)	<i>bi=na-mš-u</i> IND=1-go-PL “We (will) go”

Vehicular Arabic (Kadugli, Sudan) (Manfredi 2014: 30)	<i>na-mši</i> 1-go “I (will) go, we (will) go”
Juba Arabic (Juba, South Sudan) (Manfredi 2017: 83)	<i>ánna bi=rówa</i> 1PL IRR=go “We (will) go”

As we can see, the Sudanese lexifier, here exemplified by the Baggara dialect of Kordofan, presents a typical Arabic imperfective paradigm with personal affixes indexing aspect, number and gender, and a proclitic marking the indicative mood on the verb. In contrast, in Juba Arabic, the subject is indexed by an independent pronoun preceding an invariable verbal form marked for irrealis. In this respect, Juba Arabic is also different from other vehicular varieties of Arabic that, though affected by some degree of morphological simplification (as showed by the conflation of 1<sup>st</sup> singular and plural persons), do not display the same degree of restructuring of the South Sudanese pidgincreole.

It is important to remind that Versteegh, basing his argument on the variationist study of Mahmoud (1979), has argued that Juba Arabic is increasingly integrating personal affixes from Sudanese Arabic and, consequently, “*we can envisage a future in which the linguistic varieties spoken in Juba become more and more similar to Khartoum Arabic. [...] In the end, this scenario might lead to a situation where Juba Arabic would be nothing more than a regional variety of Sudanese Arabic.*” (Versteegh 1993: 75). Almost twenty years after this prediction of direction-of-change, we can affirm that it did not come true, since the bulk of Juba Arabic speakers still present typical creolized verbal paradigms (Manfredi 2017). This fact may find a reason in the ideological resilience to integration of highly identifiable linguistic items from Sudanese Arabic. The analysis of interviews in section 4 indeed shows that verbal morphosyntax is a cognitively relevant linguistic feature for the construction of a border between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic.

#### **4. Is Juba Arabic different from Arabic? The speakers’ perspective**



In this section, I shall investigate the metalinguistic representations that Juba Arabic speakers express about their language based on the analysis of qualitative interviews recorded in Juba in July – August 2013<sup>2</sup>. The aim of the analysis is to individuate the linguistic features used by speakers for indexing Juba Arabic *vis-à-vis* its lexifier and to compare them with those features that are meaningful to linguists (*cf.* 3).

When asked whether there is any linguistic differences between the South Sudanese pidgincreole and its lexifier, Juba Arabic speakers who do not speak Sudanese Arabic broadly recognize the existence of a linguistic border, without referring to any particular features as we can see in the following excerpt of interview<sup>3</sup>.

**Excerpt 1. Speaker 1**<sup>4</sup>

*fī fērig kebīr // mar-át ána ma gi=fáhim // kan biga / úmon  
bi=dákal fī árabī ta kartúm de / ána ma bi=fáhim kúlu kúlu //  
úmon kamán ma gi=fáhim árabī táí // úmon bi=kélim gal /  
hája de rután //*

“There is a huge difference. Sometimes I do not understand. If they start speaking Khartoum Arabic, I do not understand at

---

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork in Juba (South Sudan) was carried out by Stefano Manfredi and Mauro Tosco (University of Turin) and it 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*).

<sup>3</sup> The interviews used for this study mainly focused on the metalinguistic representations and language attitudes towards Juba Arabic (see also Manfredi and Tosco *forth.*). The interviews were conducted in Juba Arabic, English and Sudanese Arabic. The following excerpts of interviews are coupled with metadata relating to each speaker. These include sociolinguistic information such as gender, age, place of birth, degree of formal education, patterns of bi/multilingualism and, when relevant, migration trajectories. Speech chunks in Juba Arabic, Sudanese Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are phonologically transcribed, whereas English is orthographically transcribed. Juba Arabic is reproduced in *italic*; Sudanese Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are reproduced in **bold**, and English is underlined. All the excerpts display both morphological and prosodic segmentation (= and - respectively mark clitic and affix boundaries, // and / mark major and minor prosodic boundaries, ↑ indicates a rising intonation).

<sup>4</sup> Male, 25 years old, born in Yei, primary education, L1 Juba Arabic, L2 Pojulu, moved to Juba in 1995.

all. They also do not understand my Arabic. They would say:  
this is a *rután*.”

The view articulated by this young speaker is that Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic are distinct languages. His empirical assumption is based exclusively on the low degree of mutual intelligibility experienced by the speakers of the two languages. This factual reality is also acknowledged by linguists (Manfredi 2017). More interestingly, in order to stress the perceived linguistic distance, the interviewee evokes the depreciative term *rután* as used by Sudanese Arabic speakers when referring to Juba Arabic. Thus, in this case, *rután* does not give evidence of the speaker’s semiotic processing of sociolinguistic categories. It rather reproduces the downscaling of Juba Arabic operated in conformity to the Sudanese Arabic-centric layered system, opposing a high prestige variety (i.e. Sudanese Arabic) labelled as *luġa* “language” to a number of low prestige “incomprehensible (ethnic) languages” (cf. 2).

In contrast, Juba Arabic speakers who also speak Sudanese Arabic tend to construct linguistic borders constrained by specific linguistic features as we can see in the following excerpt of interview.

**Excerpt 2.** Speaker 2<sup>5</sup> (Manfredi and Bizri, forth.)

*úo ma árabí // [...] zey hása fí šamáal bí=nadí gal / luġa  
‘arabíyya // árabí júba kamán / ġi=nadí gal luġa // zey ána  
bí=kélim gal / ána kélim le íta // lakín úmon henák / úmon  
bí=kélim gal / b=a-ġúl lē=k //*

“(Juba Arabic) is not (Sudanese) Arabic. Like, for example, in the north it is called *luġa* ‘*arabíyya* (“Arabic language”). Juba Arabic too is called *luġa*. Like, I say: *ána bí=kélim le íta* (“I say to you”). But, over there, they say: *b=a-ġúl lē=k* (“I say to you”).”

---

<sup>5</sup> Male, 38 years old, born in Juba, secondary education, L1 Juba Arabic, L2 Sudanese Arabic, L3 Bari.

This trilingual speaker uses the normative term *luġa / lūga* for referring to both Sudanese Arabic and Juba Arabic.<sup>6</sup> He thus operates an upscaling in the local system of sociolinguistic categories. This means that he accords Juba Arabic the same linguistic prestige as its lexifier language and considers it as a full-fledged “language”. Besides, the speaker constructs a linguistic border between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic by opposing two verbal clauses; these are *ána bi=kélim le ita*, 1SG IRR=say to 2SG, “I say to you” in Juba Arabic and *b=a-gūl lē=k*, IND=1SG-say to=2SG.M, “I say to you” in Sudanese Arabic. Regardless the different lexical verbs conveying the meaning of “(to) say”, we can note that, in the Juba Arabic example, the verb lacks personal affixes and both the subject and the indirect object are encoded by independent pronouns. Conversely, in the Sudanese Arabic example, the subject and the indirect object of the verbal clause are respectively encoded by a person affix on the verb and a clitic pronoun attached to the preposition *lē* “to”. What makes this excerpt particularly interesting is that the factual-descriptive border constructed by the speaker clearly corresponds to the linguists’ representation of Juba Arabic as an isolating language (cf. 3).

The third excerpt of interview also confirms that verbal morphosyntax is a cognitively prominent feature for the identification of Juba Arabic.

**Excerpt 3. Speaker 3**<sup>7</sup>

*másalan / for example // ána kan gi=wónus kílma // másalan / ána gi=rówa // aw ána gi=fítu // de árabí juba // for example / kan zol min kartúm gal // mašē-na // aw / mašē-t // ána tawáli b=ágder áríf kalám de took rise min zol al ja min kartúm // aw kan gi=géni fí kartúm ketír // so on and so forth //*

---

<sup>6</sup> In the first occurrence of the term, we can observe a code-mixed sentence corresponding to a prosodically isolated instance of direct speech including the two adjacent elements *luġa ‘arabiyya* “Arabic language” which are both drawn from Arabic, as testified by the presence of the voiced velar fricative /ġ/ and the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/. In the second occurrence, the realization of the term *lūga* conforms to the phonological rules of Juba Arabic (i.e. absence of the voiced velar fricative /ġ/) and it is not prosodically marked.

<sup>7</sup> Male, 31 years old, born in Juba, secondary education, L1 Juba Arabic, L2 English, L3 Sudanese Arabic.

“For example, if I say, for example: *ána gi-rówa* (“I am going”), or *ánna gi=fútu* (“we are passing”). This is Juba Arabic. For example, if someone from Khartoum says: *mašē-na* (“we went”), or *mašē-t* (“I went”), I can immediately know that this discourse took rise from someone who came from Khartoum, or who spent a long time in Khartoum, so on and so forth.”

This interviewee too gives a factual representation of Juba Arabic based on the opposition between different verbal paradigms. These are *ána gi=rówa* (“I am going”) and *ánna gi=fútu* (“we are passing”), corresponding to the perceived morphological norm of Juba Arabic, and *mašē-na* (“we went”) and *mašē-t* (“I went”), representing the deviated Arabic-like verbal paradigms. In this particular case, the speaker operates a process of iconization (Irvine & Gal 2000) when considering the occurrence of person affixes on the verb as formally congruent with returnees “who spent a long time in Khartoum”. In so doing, the interviewee constructs a community-internal linguistic border between South Sudanese returnees, who have evidently been much exposed to Sudanese Arabic, and South Sudanese long-term residents, who are perceived to be the norm holders.

Juba Arabic speakers may also focus on lexical features for distinguishing between the pidgincreole and Sudanese Arabic, as exemplified by the following excerpt of interview.

**Excerpt 4. Speaker 4**<sup>8</sup>

*úo ma árabí // [...] de rután adíl // de rután baráu // úo / of course / ána árif úo ja min árabí // wo borrowed kalim-át min rutan-át / local // rutan-át / bári / rután šunú šunú / wo biga mulágbat // le déríja / árabí / árabí ma gi=fáhim // you know // árabí ma gi=fáhim //*

“(Juba Arabic) is not (Sudanese) Arabic. This is a *rután*, a *rután* on its own. It, of course, I know that it derived from

---

<sup>8</sup> Male, 31 years old, born in Juba, higher education, L1 Juba Arabic, L2 Kuku, L3 English, moved to Maseru from 1990 until 2005.

Arabic and that it borrowed words from *rutan-át*, local, *rutan-át* such as Bari, whatever *rután*, and it became mixed to such extent that Arabs do not understand. You know, they do not understand.”

The view articulated by this speaker is that, even if Juba Arabic clearly derives from (Sudanese) Arabic, it is a distinct language to such an extent that “Arabs do not understand it”. He then refers to the South Sudanese creole with the term *rután*. Different from excerpt 1, here *rután* does not convey a depreciative value, but it rather points out the centrality of the category “local” in the discourse regarding Juba Arabic. Not surprisingly, the term *rután* is coupled with a metalinguistic representation concentrating on the lexical contribution of “local” languages to Juba Arabic. This view is further strengthened by the following excerpt of interview.

**Excerpt 5. Speaker 5**<sup>9</sup>

*Juba Arabic is different // it has been indigenized in some way // some tribal words of the indigenous languages / in the south / have gone inside // [...] such as Bari / b'ángiri / kúrju // So you can see / be taríga de / árabi júba šílu / yáni / šikil /šikil / afrigi // [...] laánu kalim-át al=maḥalliyya / dákalu fógo ketír //*

“Juba Arabic is different. It has been indigenized somehow. Some tribal words from South Sudanese indigenous languages have been integrated. Such as Bari, *b'ángiri* (“cheek”), *kúruju* (“cultivate”). So you can see, in this way, Arabic took an African shape. Because many *maḥalliyya* (“indigenous”) words have gone inside.”

---

<sup>9</sup> Male, 59 years old, born in Juba, secondary education, L1 Mundari, L2 Juba Arabic, L3, Sudanese Arabic, L4 English, moved to Kampala from 1972 until 1979.

This highly-educated interviewee overtly argues that the linguistic difference between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic resides in the “indigenized” nature of pidgincreole. In his perspective, Juba Arabic is a language with an “African” shape presenting “tribal” words borrowed from South Sudanese “indigenous languages”. This view confirms that, though rare (*cf.* 3), substrate/adstrate loanwords in Juba Arabic have a strong iconic function in relation to the official notion of “indigenusness”. When the speaker portrays Juba Arabic as an “indigenous language” (using also the Arabic term *maḥalliyya* “indigenous”), he operates an upscaling in relation to State’s prescriptions of the sociolinguistic regime. In other words, he attempts to legitimize Juba Arabic within the sociolinguistic space of post-independence South Sudan while accepting without any criticism the notion of “indigenous language”.

### **5. Language attitudes and the rise of a South Sudanese national identity**

While the previous section dealt with metalinguistic representations and the construction of linguistic borders, the last part of the study analyses language attitudes, here defined as beliefs and values that people have about their language (Garret 2010), in relation with the rise of a South Sudanese national identity.

Most Juba Arabic speakers have a positive attitude towards the South Sudanese pidgincreole. This general opinion goes hand in hand with the appreciation of the vehicular function of Juba Arabic in the multilingual landscape of South Sudan.

#### **Excerpt 6. Speaker 6<sup>10</sup>**

*árabi júba lúga / aśán bi=límu jenúb kúlu // for example /  
kan íta rówa fí kénya / lúga tómon wáhid / yawú swahíli //  
swahíli bi=límu kúlu // nína fí jenúb sudán / hája al bi=límu  
nína kúlu / árabi júba // yála rután de biga ta gebíla táki //  
kan íta abukáya / íta bi=wónusu abukáya // lakín árabi júba  
de ma gi=derisú // bes fí bét / árabi júba gi=wonusú / zey  
rután // lakín úo hása biga lúga //*

---

<sup>10</sup> Female, 25 years old, born in Juba, secondary education, L1 Juba Arabic, L2 Arabic, L3 Abukaya.

“Juba Arabic is a *lúga*, because it bonds the whole South (Sudan). For example, if you go to Kenya, they have one language, that is Swahili. Swahili bonds everyone. As far as we are concerned in South Sudan, the thing that bonds us is Juba Arabic. The *rután* is something that belongs to your tribe. If you are Abukaya, you speak Abukaya. But Juba Arabic is not taught. It is spoken only at home, like a *rután*. However, it became a *lúga*.”

In the previous excerpt, a young trilingual girl labels Juba Arabic as *lúga*. This upscaling in the local categorization of languages finds a reason in the emphasis putted on the unifying role of Juba Arabic in South Sudan. This view is reinforced by comparing the vehicular function of Juba Arabic with that of Swahili, and by contrasting it to the category *rután*, which is perceived as inevitably linked to single tribal entities. Furthermore, when the speaker states that, even if Juba Arabic became a *lúga*, it is acquired at home like a *rután*, she gives evidence of the perception of the ongoing nativization process of Juba Arabic.

The following excerpt of interview also confirms that the vehicular function of Juba Arabic is perceived as an important element for the achievement of South Sudanese national unit.

**Excerpt 7. Speaker 5**

*Juba Arabic as a lingua franca / is the language that has a future in this country // it is a uniting bond that can bring South Sudanese together // because no one can claim dominating the other through this language // no Dinka would say / it is ours // [...] so it encompasses the whole South (Sudan) / as an important language that can equally go to primary schools / to / to basic level schools //*

Here, the speaker who previously emphasized the “indigenous” nature of the South Sudanese pidgincreole in excerpt 5, rather stresses that Juba Arabic is the

only unifying *Lingua Franca* of South Sudan and, because of this, it cannot be instrumentalized in the light of the official ethnic-oriented understanding of language diversity. In the speaker's view, a non-ethnic language like Juba Arabic can also be "indigenous" and, as such, it should be recognized as national language and taught in primary schools.

In this context, it should be remarked that the glottonym *árabi júba* still hinders the adoption of Juba Arabic as a marker of the new South Sudanese national identity. First, the term *árabi*, establishes an evident link with the former dominant language. Secondly, the toponym Juba can be interpreted as an exclusive geographic label by outsider groups, and in particular by the Dinka political elite. In the following excerpt, the interviewee brings spontaneously out the question of the glottonym in relation with the non-recognition of Juba Arabic as a official language.

**Excerpt 8. Speaker 7**<sup>11</sup>

*jenub-īn / fī eyy maḥall / gi=wónusu árabi júba // lakín / I think / hukúma / I don't know // dayr-īn i-duss-u árabi / lakín nas lísa gi=wónusu árabi // wa nas ma gi=wónusu bes árabi sákit // law mašē-t fī šári / hum gi=wónusu árabi júba // ána šāyif al=muškila al=kabīr // hum ma ligó ísim le árabi de // šenu hum ma dayr-īn i-nad-ú árabi júba ↑ wa ma éndu ísim le úo // le lúga de // so / úmon bi=jérib ámulu ignore lúga de // lakín you can't ignore al hája ey zol gi=hību de // árabi júba is growing everywhere // de reality lázim hukúma bitána árif // law hum ma dayr-īn i-samm-ú árabi júba / i-fattiš-u ísim táni / árabi jenúbi / wála hája // [...] law šuf-ta kiswahili / éndu a lot of Arabic words // lakín geyrú ísim to / it developed now / it is a new language / [...] so / the same thing / lázim i-fattiš-u ísim / yála árabi júba bi=kún kamán official language //*

“South Sudanese people, in every place, speak Juba Arabic. I think, the government, I don't know, want to hide Arabic, but

---

<sup>11</sup> Male, 27 years old, born in Khartoum, secondary education, L1 Sudanese Arabic, L2 Juba Arabic, L3 English, L4 Swahili, moved to Nairobi from 1995 until 2011.



people still speak Arabic, and they don't speak whatever kind of Arabic. If you go into the streets, they speak Juba Arabic. I think that the main problem is that they did not find a name for this Arabic. Why don't they want to call it Juba Arabic and they don't have a name for it, for this *lúga*? So, they just try to ignore this *lúga*, but you cannot ignore something that is appreciated by everyone. Juba Arabic is growing everywhere. This is a reality that our government should know. If they don't want to call it Juba Arabic, let us look for another name, like *árabi jenúbi* ("Southern Sudanese Arabic") or something else. If you look at Kiswahili, it has many Arabic words, but they changed its name, it has evolved and it became a new language. So, the same thing, let us look for another name so that Juba Arabic can eventually be a national language."

This young returnee is a heritage speaker of Juba. He shows many instances of morphological integration from Sudanese Arabic and he switches frequently towards English. Despite his limited proficiency in Juba Arabic, the interviewee puts emphasis on the linguistic distinctiveness of the pidgincreole and calls for the official recognition of this *lúga*. In his view, the status of national language necessarily passes through the adoption of a new and more inclusive glottonym as, for example, *árabi jenúbi* "Southern Sudanese Arabic". Similar to speaker 6 in excerpt 6, the interviewee further strengthens his position with an explicit reference to Swahili, which is supposed to have evolved as an independent official language because of the adoption of a new glottonym.

An opposite position concerning the glottonym *árabi jûba* is the one expressed in this last excerpt of interview.

**Excerpt 9. Speaker 5**

*Juba / was where the word separation was first pronounced //  
There was no alternative for the future of South Sudan /  
except to go in the independence // Juba here // So you could  
see / this was a starting point / for nationalism / and  
patriotism // and if Juba Arabic is called Juba Arabic / I*

*would wonder it could offend any liberally minded person //*  
*Any person who is not ignorant / actually //*

As we can see, speaker 5, argues for an overt association between the toponym Juba and the rise of national South Sudanese identity. Consequently, he takes position against the adoption of a new glottonym for Juba Arabic. This means that the “indigenous” border constructed by the interviewee in excerpt 5 is not perceived as necessarily in contrast with the appreciation of the vehicular nature of Juba Arabic nor with the recognition of its local glottonym, which is considered symbolically associated with South Sudanese nationalism.

## **6. Conclusions**

In this paper, I have tried to illustrate how the construction of linguistic borders in South Sudan interacts with locally available language ideologies. Evidence shows that the indexicalities of Juba Arabic, when compared to Sudanese Arabic, are interwoven with complex social discourses. First and foremost, in contrast to the State’s decision to consider Juba Arabic as a variety of the former dominant language, speakers of the pidgincreole overtly construct linguistic borders between Juba Arabic and its lexifier.

The most significant border marker for Juba Arabic speakers who do not speak Sudanese Arabic is still represented by the low degree of mutual intelligibility between the two languages (excerpt 1). Juba Arabic-Sudanese Arabic bilingual speakers, on their part, make use of different features for constructing linguistic borders. The question could be then raised why certain linguistic features are only meaningful for some speakers and not for others. A reasonable answer is that metalinguistic representations of Juba Arabic are increasingly driven by the ideological hegemony enacted by the State through its discourse on “indigenous languages”. In truth, metalinguistic representations focusing on linguistically relevant features like verbal morphosyntax (excerpt 2) are gradually giving way to more politically emblematic representations which emphasize symbolic linguistic features such as the presence of “indigenous” loanwords in Juba Arabic (excerpts 4 and 5). The tendency to the “indigenization” of language is also reflected in the politically emblematic use of verbal morphosyntax for the construction of community-internal borders between South Sudanese long-term residents and returnees from north Sudan (excerpt 3). It is also worth noting that speakers do not usually refer to

phonological features for the construction of linguistic border between Juba Arabic and Sudanese Arabic. The erasure (Irvine & Gal 2000) of this relevant linguistic domain may be due to the fact that Juba Arabic shares some of its phonological features with other vehicular varieties of Arabic (*cf.* 3). Thus, speakers tend to eliminate details that are inconsistent with an exclusive linguistic identification of Juba Arabic.

As a further matter, the social construction of linguistic borders in South Sudan is evidently related to the emergence of a national identity. In contrast to the fact that Juba Arabic is not (and probably will never be) recognized as a national language, speakers consider it as the only interethnic means of communication that can guarantee a national unity against the rampant tribalism enacted by the State by means of its language policies (excerpts 6 and 7). This view, which is also reinforced by the gradual upscaling of Juba Arabic in the local system of language classification (excerpts 2, 6, 8), is not antithetical with the representation of the pidgincreole as an “indigenous language”. This shows that the emerging national identity of South Sudan is inexorably linked with the notion of “indigenesness” inherited from colonial policies.

This paper inevitably simplifies a sociolinguistic reality that is much more complex. However, it reveals that linguistic borders constructed by speakers are not ideologically driven *per se*, since they can also be constrained by cognitively prominent features which are meaningful for descriptive linguists. Nevertheless, linguistic borders inevitably interact with local linguistic ideologies which move metalinguistic representations away from a factual linguistic reality. This state of affairs eventually brings to the fore the need for a more nuanced and multifaceted approach to language borders than those founded exclusively on ideological premises.

## **Bibliography**

Abdelhay, A. 2007. *The Politics of Language Planning in the Sudan: the Case of the Navaisha Language Policy*. Ph. D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

- Abdelhay, A., B. Makoni and S. Makoni. 2011. "The Naivasha language policy: The language of politics and the politics of language in the Sudan". *Language Policy* 10: 1-18.
- Aceto Michael, 1999. Looking beyond decreolization as an explanatory model of language change in creole-speaking communities. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 14 (1): 93-119.
- Bickerton, D. 1973. "On the nature of a creole continuum". *Language* 49: 640-669.
- DeCamp, D. 1971. "Toward a generative analysis of a post-creole speech continuum". In D. Hymes (ed.), *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 349-370.
- Bakker, P. 2008. "Pidgins versus creoles and pidgincreoles." In S. Kouwenberg and J. V. Sieglar (Eds.), *The Handbook of Pidgin and Creole Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell. 130-157.
- Bert, M and J. Costa. 2014. "What counts as a linguistic border, for whom and with what implications? Exploring Occitan and Francoprovençal in Rhône-Alpes, France." In D. Watt and C Llamas (eds.), *Language, Borders and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 186-205.
- Blommaert, J. 2007. "Sociolinguistic scales". In *Intercultural Pragmatics* 4 (1): 1-19.
- Blommaert, J. and B. Rampton. 2011. "Language and superdiversity". *Diversities* 13 (2), 1-22.
- Carayol M. and R. Chaudenson. 1978. "Diglossie et continuum linguistique à la Réunion". In N. Gueunier, E. Genouvrier, A. Khomsi (eds) *Les français devant la norme*. Paris: Champion. 175-190.
- Comrie, B. 2011. "Creoles and language typology". In C. Lefebvre (Ed.), *Creoles, their Substrates, and Language Typology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 599 - 611.
- Cornips, L. 2014. "Language contact, linguistic variability and the construction of local identities". In Ajarli, A., and Maehium, B. (eds.), *The Sociolinguistics of Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 67-90.
- Ferguson, C. 1959. "Diglossia". In *Word* 15, 325-340.
- Garret, P. 2010. *Attitudes to Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- García, O. and Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Goury, L. and I. Léglise. 2005. "Contacts de créoles, créoles en contact. Présentation". In L. Goury and I. Léglise (eds.), *Contacts de créoles, créoles en contact. Etudes Créoles, XXVIII*, 9-22.
- Irvine J. T. and S. Gal. 2000. "Language ideology and linguistic differentiation". In P. V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press. 35-84.
- Edwards, J. 2009. *Language and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jørgensen, N., M. S. Karrebæk, L. M. Madsen and J. S. Møller 2011. "Polylinguaging in superdiversity". *Diversities* 13 (2), 23-38.
- Luffin, X. 2003. "L'évolution sémantique du terme "riṭāna" dans les parlers arabes soudano-tchadiens". *Annales Aequatoria* 24, 159-177.
- Mahmoud, U. 1979. *Variation in the Aspectual System of Juba Arabic*. Georgetown University.
- Manfredi, S. 2010. A Grammatical Description of Kordofanian Baggara Arabic. Ph. D. dissertation Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale".
- Manfredi, S. 2014. "Native and non-native varieties of Arabic in an emerging urban centre of Western Sudan. Evidence from Kadugli." In M. Lafkioui (ed.), *African Arabic: Approaches to Dialectology*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 13-51.
- Manfredi, S. 2017. *Arabi Juba: un pidgin-créole du Soudan du Sud*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters.
- Manfredi, S. and M. Tosco. 2014. "Language uses vs. language policy: South Sudan and Juba Arabic in the Post-Independence era". In E. Dansero, F. De Filippi, E. Fantini and I. Marocco (eds.), *Proceedings of the III CUCS Congress, Turin 19-21 September 2013, Journal of Universities and international development Cooperation* 1, 798-802.
- Manfredi, S. and M. Tosco. Forthcoming. "A new state, an old language policy and a pidgincreole: Juba Arabic in South Sudan". *Sociolinguistic Studies*.
- Manfredi, S. and F. Bizri. Forthcoming. "The sociolinguistics of Arabic-based pidgins and creoles". In E. Alwer and U. Horesh (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Sociolinguistics*. New York: Routledge.
- Migge B. and I. Léglise. 2011. "On the emergence of new language varieties: the case of the Eastern Maroon Creole in French Guiana". In Lars Hinrichs

- and Joseph Farquharson (eds.), *Variation in the Caribbean: From Creole continua to individual agency*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 207-229.
- Miller, C. 1989. "Kelem kalam bitak: langues et tribunaux urbains en Equatoria", *Materiaux Arabes et Sudarabiques 2* : 23–58.
- Miller, C. 1991. "Le changement linguistique à Juba et à Khartoum". In H. Bleuchot, C. Delmet, D. Hopwood (eds.), *Sudan-History, Identity, Ideology/Histoire, Identités, Idéologies*. Ithaca: Ithaca Press.153-180.
- Miller, C. 2002. "Juba Arabic as a way for expressing a Southern Sudanese identity in Khartoum". In A. Youssi, F. Benjelloun, M. Dahbi, Z. Iraqui-Sinaceur. *Aspects of the Dialects of Arabic Today. Proceedings of the 4th Conference of the AIDA*. Rabat: Amaaptril. 114-122.
- Miller, C. 2007. "Do they speak the same language? Language use in Juba local courts". In E. Ditters and H. Motzki (eds.), *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics Presented to Kees Versteegh on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*. Leiden: Brill. 607-638.
- Nakao, S. 2012. "Revising the substratal/adstratal influence on Arabic creoles". In H. Osamu (ed.), *Challenges in Nilotic Linguistics and More, Phonology, Morphology and Syntax* (Studies in Nilotic Linguistics). Tokyo: ILCAA. 127-149.
- Mufwene, S. 2004. "On decreolization: the case of Gullah". In M. Marcyliena (ed.), *Language and the Social Construction of Identity in Creole Situations*. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies. 63-99.
- Siegel, Jason, 2010. "Decreolization: a critical review". In J. C. Clements, M. E. Solon, J. F. Siegel, and B. D. Steiner (eds.), *IUWPL9*. Bloomington: IULC Publications. 83–98.
- Tosco, M. and S. Manfredi, 2013. "Pidgins and Creoles". In Jonathan Owens (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 495-519
- Versteegh, K. 1993. "Levelling in the Southern Sudan: from Arabic creole to Arabic dialects". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 99: 65-97.

### **List of abbreviations**

1, 2	first, second person
IND	indicative
IRR	irrealis

PL	plural
M	masculine
SG	singular