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## Chapter 14

# Language Policy and Planning in Sudan

## From Local Vernaculars to National Languages

*Ashraf Abdelhay, Al-Amin Abu-Manga and Catherine Miller*

The language situation in Sudan is complex, with more than 120 named languages. This diversity raises many challenges for the promotion and codification of Sudanese languages, including ideological and scientific issues. What are the criteria for defining a specific and autonomous language? Which languages should be selected for codification and for which purposes? The first institutional attempts to codify a number of Sudanese languages occurred during the colonial period and were guided by strong ideological aims: counteracting the spread of Arabic/Islam in the southern part of the country (including South Kordofan). After independence in 1956, a pro-Arabization policy was launched throughout the country as a result of pan-Arabic nationalism among dominant northern political circles. The peace agreements that ended the two long wars in the south (1955–72 and 1983–2005) provided a legal framework for a language policy encouraging cultural and linguistic plurality. This was done first exclusively for the south from 1972 to 1982 (Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972) and then for the whole country since 2005 (the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, also known as the Naivasha Comprehensive Peace Agreement, of 2005).

From 1930 up to the mid-1990s, the promotion and codification of non-Arabic Sudanese languages concerned almost exclusively the southern Sudanese languages and were mainly (but not exclusively) performed by Christian associations. Since the late 1990s, the promotion of Sudanese vernacular languages became the concern of many non-Arabic-speaking

groups, irrespective of their religious beliefs and their degree of contact with Arabic. This raises new challenges concerning codification choices such as choice of alphabet and choice of standardization. The language situation in Sudan has been mostly conceived in dichotomist terms opposing Arabic (both classical and vernacular, including Juba Arabic spoken in South Sudan) on the one hand to all other non-Arabic languages and English on the other. This conception is still largely dominant. The issue of identity remains the key factor within this struggle, due to the fact that language and ethnicity have been so closely linked to each other, beginning at least since the first attempts to classify Sudanese languages.<sup>1</sup>

Policy towards the promotion of Sudanese vernaculars fits with the present global trend of considering language rights as a key human right.<sup>2</sup> Language rights are therefore officially and theoretically supported by most Sudanese political parties, international institutions and NGOs. This politically correct discourse praising equality of status and rights for all languages does not really take into account the feasibility of such idealistic claims.

The present chapter will analyse some aspects of the various attempts to promote Sudanese languages. It will start by summarizing briefly the historical steps of language codification in Sudan. It will recall the main Sudanese official texts that provided the institutional frame for language planning and will also describe the profiles of the main actors. The bulk of this chapter was written in 2010 and early 2011 and does not cover the changes that occurred following the proclamation of the Republic of South Sudan in July 2011. This important issue needs further research and input from South Sudanese scholars. With this chapter we hope to provide a historical, contextualized analysis of the main formal attempts to promote Sudanese languages (Arabic vernaculars and Juba Arabic excluded) and a framework for further research to assess the ongoing changes in both practice and ideology. By ideology, we mean here the dominant *doxa* that tends to consider language one of the key vectors of identity at the state or national level or the regional/ethnic level.

### **Linguistic Diversity and Language Boundaries**

More than one hundred languages are spoken within Sudan.<sup>3</sup> This linguistic diversity is characterized by two salient features. One is the uneven demographic and geographical distribution of these languages. About 70 per cent of Sudanese languages are found in the western and southern parts of the country (as original home regions), with striking diversity in southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. While Sudanese Arabic is supposed to be spoken as a mother tongue by at least fifteen million Suda-

nese, it is estimated that Dinka, the second main Sudanese language (or macrolanguage), is spoken by less than two million people.<sup>4</sup>

The second salient feature is the instability of the language situation in Sudan due mainly to population movements and urbanization. In the last thirty years, population movements have occurred from all Sudanese regions to the main regional and national urban centres, as well as from one area to another. This has led to greater multilingualism in urban centres as well as the acceleration of a linguistic shift towards Arabic. In addition, more than two million Sudanese are believed to have settled abroad. The result is that the one-to-one correlation between language and ethnicity is no longer valid (Miller 2006). This complex translocality challenges the reductive ideology of ethnolinguistic enumeration, favouring a 'sociolinguistics of mobility' (Blommaert 2010). Yet, the linguistic and ethnic classifications established at the beginning of the twentieth century continue to be considered unquestionable scientific *doxa* by both academic circles and social activists struggling to preserve Sudanese linguistic diversity.

## Colonial Policy towards Vernacular Speech

### *The Rejaf Language Conference and Its Consequences*

Identification and classification of Sudanese languages were undertaken systematically beginning in the colonial period (i.e., late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries). This process was framed by the dominant European linguistic and racial ideology of that period (Makoni and Pennycook 2005). The focus on non-Arab languages and cultures was mainly inspired by the wish to separate Arab and non-Arab groups and to stop the spread of Arabic and Islam in southern Sudan and the southern Nuba Mountains (Abdelhay 2008, 2010b; Albino 1970; Beshir 1969; Sanderson and Sanderson 1981; Wai 1973). Correlation between language and ethnic groups was considered essential to establish strong ethnic boundaries and avoid acculturation (Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni 2010).

A key moment in this process of classification and categorization was the Rejaf Language Conference of 1928 (*Report of the Rejaf Language Conference 1928*, henceforth the RLC), which was organized within the general frame of the famous South Policy and Closed District Policy (Closed District Ordinance). The conference was sponsored by the colonial government and attended by missionary representatives from the Congo and Uganda as well as experts from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures such as Professor Diedrich-Westermann. The aims of the RLC involved (1) discussing the feasibility of adopting a system of group languages for educational purposes, (2) studying the possibility of

adopting a unified orthographic system, (3) examining the production of educational textbooks, and (4) designating a classified list of languages and dialects in the south.

The final resolution identified eight group languages (Dinka, Bari, Nuer, Lotuko, Shilluk, Zande, Acholi and Madi) for preparation of textbooks in Roman script in the vernacular elementary schools (RLC 1928: 30). For the other language communities, teaching was to be done either in one of eight selected languages or in colloquial Arabic transcribed in Roman script (RLC 1928: 31). The classification of Sudanese languages, started by Westermann (1911), was pursued by A.N. Tucker and M.A. Bryan (Bryan 1948; Tucker 1934; Tucker and Bryan 1956). The implementation stage of the RLC resolutions faced several difficulties, including lack of consensus over orthographic choices for a single language, and it did not succeed in preventing the spread of Arabic as the main lingua franca of the south.

The RLC, however, did have an important impact for the future. It encouraged missionaries and linguistic experts to research local languages and to write and publish textbooks, grammars and dictionaries contributing to the linguistic knowledge of these languages. Many teaching materials continued to be used up to the 1970s. Most of these readers were based on biblical texts. Translation of the Gospel into Sudanese languages started at this period and continues up to now.

Moreover, the RLC contributed in spreading the idea – if not within the whole southern population, at least among the educated part of it – that vernacular languages could and should become literary languages in order to protect southern ethnic and cultural specificities. This had a strong impact on further positions on the promotion of vernacular languages. After independence and up to the 1980s, the southern political parties were more concerned with the issue of promoting local vernaculars than were other regional parties from northern Sudan.

#### *Colonial Policy towards Vernaculars in Northern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains*

The situation was radically different in the north, where a few linguists and civil servants began describing the main northern Sudanese languages, such as Nile Nubian or Beja. There were, however, no plans to teach vernacular languages in Muslim-dominated areas or to produce textbooks for primary education, and no attempt was made to spread the idea of a standardization or codification of local language practices. The result was that, apart from the Nuba Mountains movements discussed next, there were, at independence, no regional northern movements acting to promote vernacular languages.

The Nuba Mountains were regarded as a separate province in 1914 and first assigned to the Sudan United Mission (SUM), an evangelical Protestant mission from New Zealand and Australia (Abdelhay 2010b). The government advised the SUM to provide missionary education on the pattern of southern Sudan and formulated a 'Nuba policy' in order to encourage a Nuba identity. As in southern Sudan, there was an attempt to form 'language groupings' in order to federate isolated communities and to promote the Roman script for writing Arabic. The adopted educational policy for the Nuba Mountains was embedded in the 1930 Memorandum on Educational Policy in the Nuba Pagan Area. But this 'Nuba policy' faced numerous problems, the major one being the fluidity of ethnic boundaries in this region. It was abandoned in 1934, with Arabic written in Arabic script becoming the main language of education.

Interest in Nuba languages led to a number of linguistic descriptions (R. Stevenson 1956–57) and to the publication of readers in different Nuba languages (like Nuba-Moro) as well as biblical translations such as the translation of the New Testament in Moro in 1956 by the American Bible Society. Therefore, the languages of non-Muslim Nuba groups were better described than the languages of Muslim Nuba groups (Quint 2006). But it was only around the 1980s that Nuba regional movements started to put linguistic issues on their political agenda.

## **Postcolonial Policies from 1956 to 1985**

### *Arabization: 1956–1972*

In 1946, the Closed District Policy was abandoned in order to enable national unification and, in 1949, Arabic became the official language of the entire country. Following independence, the linguistic policy of the Sudanese government was characterized by strong Arabization, and the teaching of vernacular languages was altogether stopped in 1964 (Albino 1970; Nyombe 1997; Oduho and Deng 1963; Yokwe 1984).

In 1956, an Egyptian expert, Dr Khalil Mohamed Asakir from Cairo University, was hired by the Sudanese government to supervise the introduction of Arabic in southern Sudanese schools. With the assistance of Yusif Al-Khalifa Abu-Bakr, Dr Asakir began by devising systems for transcribing southern languages using Arabic script, hoping that 'a unification of the alphabet would tend to reduce linguistic diversity and consequently bring South and North socially close together' (Abu-Bakr 1978: 206). The basic idea was that native literacy in Arabic script would facilitate further acquisition of Arabic. Readers in Dinka, Zande, Bari, Moro and Lotuko written in Roman scripts were transliterated into Arabic scripts. This ex-

perience did not last long and was quickly abandoned (but reintroduced in 1993, as will be discussed later).

In the north and in western parts of the country, regional movements such as the Beja Congress (1957) or the Nuba Front (1964) were acting for a better distribution of the national wealth, but cultural and linguistic claims remained rather marginal. The only exception was in the Nubian community, where the flooding of the area (following the building of the Aswan Dam in 1969), the displacement of the population and archaeological salvation projects raised Nubian awareness of their cultural heritage, including the writing of the Old Nubian language. Nubian archaeologists and intellectuals started to promote the writing of the modern Nubian languages first in Roman or Arabic script (Badr 1955, n.d.) and then in Nubian scripts following Dr Khalil Mukhtar's initiative in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Many Nubian cultural associations were active in Khartoum in the 1960s to the 1980s (Hale 1979).

#### *The Addis Ababa Agreement and the Coming of the SIL in Southern Sudan*

In 1972, the Addis Ababa Agreement put an end to the first civil war and recognized the autonomy of southern Sudan. Chapter III, Article 6 of the Regional Self-Government Act stated that 'Arabic shall be the official language for the Sudan and English the principal language for the Southern Sudan, without prejudice to the use of any language or languages which may serve the practical necessity for the efficient and expeditious discharge of executive and administrative functions of the region' (Beshir 1975: 158–177).

An educational conference was organized in Juba in 1974, reendorsing the Rejaf Language Conference recommendations but extending Arabic-language instruction in the south. Henceforth, schools in the south could present their curricula in either Arabic or English. Local languages were classified and grouped into two categories: category A (Bari, Dinka, Kresh, Lotuko, Moru, Ndogo and Nuer) and category B (Acholi, Anuak, Baka, Banda, Didinga, Feroqe, Jur-beli, Jur-Luo, Kakwa, Kaliko, Madi, Mundari, Murle, Shilluk, Toposa and Zande). Languages of category A were to be used as means of instruction in rural elementary schools (grades 1–3), whereas those in the second category were targeted for literacy training (Abdelhay 2008: 200).

In 1977, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education of the Southern Region to set up a programme for implementing the official policy of reintroducing the teaching of local languages (in category A) in rural primary schools. The SIL is an

international evangelical institution based in Dallas (Texas, USA) supporting Bible translations into local languages. According to Janet Persson, a long-standing SIL expert on Sudan: 'The Southern Ministry encouraged SIL to assign linguists to other Southern languages where they had a mandate to do linguistic analysis, produce literacy materials and assist the local churches in translating the Bible and any other books they considered important for their communities. 15 languages were added.'<sup>6</sup> In 1978, the Institute of Regional Languages (IRL, supervised by the SIL) was created in Meridi for the training of teachers and the production of readers (in Roman script), starting with the nine selected languages that had already been used in education previously and that therefore had some written materials. From 1977, the SIL started to publish teaching materials in Roman script for the selected languages, including orthographic books, primers, readers and scientific books or papers published in the series Occasional Papers in the Study of Sudanese Languages.<sup>7</sup> The SIL linguists have proved efficient in the description of southern languages, particularly at the phonological level. They participated in the training of a few Sudanese linguists like E. Yokwe, who worked with the SIL on his own mother tongue, Bari, and later published his Ph.D. dissertation in the United States.

The breakout of the second civil war in 1983 interrupted the foundational work for the establishment of language development in southern Sudan. In 1988, the SIL left southern Sudan and moved its main office to Nairobi, Kenya. In 1991, under the Islamic Inqādh government, the SIL's agreement was no longer valid and the SIL had to resort to a new approach (see 3.3.4), continuing its descriptive linguistic work in eastern Africa and Khartoum among southern refugee communities.

In spite of the SIL involvement, the promotion and teaching of southern languages remained limited on the ground in the period 1977–88. In urban areas, ethnic and linguistic diversity seriously constrained the teaching of southern languages. In rural areas, the key targeted areas for the teaching of southern vernaculars, there was a lack of trained teachers and educational infrastructures. Local vernaculars were mainly used as oral languages (together with Juba Arabic) either in churches or in some broadcasting of the Sudan Council of Churches Radio.

#### *Development of Sudanese Linguistics in the North*

From 1972 to 1984, institutional interest in Sudanese languages was also growing in Khartoum. In 1972, the Institute of African and Asian Studies (IAAS) was founded and included a linguistic department specializing in the study of African languages. The IAAS started to publish phonological



and morphological descriptions of some Sudanese languages, including master's theses, some of them undertaken by SIL linguists like J. Persson (on Jur-Möddö) and E. Kipaltrick (on Bongo). The IAAS also published a series on oral literature (like the one written by Adrob on Beja). Publications were either in English (with Latin transcription for the southern languages) or in Arabic (with Arabic transliteration). Many foreign linguists came to work on Darfuri and Kordofani languages as well as on Nilotic languages, resulting in the publication in Europe and North America of several important volumes on Sudanese African linguistics (either grammars of a single language or historical classifications of language groups). The Nilo-Saharan Association was founded during this period, contributing to the improvement and overall quality of exchanges among researchers.

The period between 1972 and 1988 was characterized by important advances in the knowledge and study of Sudanese languages, both in northern and southern Sudan. In the north, however, the expectations raised by the foundation of the IAAS very quickly became a source of disappointment. Lack of human and material resources as well as a hostile political environment beginning in 1982 hindered active IAAS participation in the promotion of Sudanese languages. In the south, the involvement of political forces appeared to be rather limited, and the region was facing too many economic challenges. As a result, in the mid-1980s, promotion of Sudanese languages remained more virtual than effective. Over the same period, the defence of Sudanese linguistic and cultural diversity became a major point of political debate, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's (SPLM) cultural vision started to spread more and more among the non-Arab groups of Sudan (Miller 2003).

### **Years of War and Resilience: 1984–2005**

The years between 1984 and 2005 are characterized by three dynamics at the linguistic and educational levels: (1) the enactment of educational reforms in 1990 by the Islamist regime, which reinforced Arabization and Islamization throughout the country (Berair 2007; Jahallah 2008); (2) an increasing mobilization for the defence of linguistic and cultural diversity among not only southern groups but also northern non-Arab groups, a trend ideologically supported by the SPLM's 'New Sudan' discourse; and (3) the use of Ugandan or Kenyan curricula in southern schools controlled by the SPLM both in southern Sudan and refugee camps in eastern Africa. English was the medium of instruction and vernaculars were not used (Bredlid 2006; Yongo-Bure 2006). Teaching took place under extremely

difficult conditions, as southern educational buildings were almost completely destroyed by the war (except in main cities like Juba, Wao and Malakal).

### *Governmental Policy*

Governmental policy was characterized by serious gaps between official resolutions and real social and political practices. A few months after coming to power in September 1989, the Islamic regime organized the National Dialogue Conference for the Problems of Peace. This conference produced a resolution on language and education that recognizes the special position of English in the southern regions and states that 'the government should not take scarcity of financial means as a pretext for barring any indigenous language from being used as a medium of instruction and should adopt the initiatives of ethnic groups wishing to promote their respective tribal languages and use them as media of instruction for their children'.

That was the situation 'on paper' regarding indigenous language rights in 1989. On the ground and in practice, the situation was characterized by the Arabization of higher education (implemented in all Sudanese universities, including those of southern Sudan, as well as for all faculties, including in the applied sciences) and of former private schools, as well as direct and indirect support of the Arabic language and Arab-Islamic culture in all public domains, with a reportedly drastic drop in the previously high standards of English among university graduates (Abu-Manga 2010).

Concerning promotion of the vernacular languages, only two institutional initiatives can be noted: first, in the period from 1991 to 2005 some Sudanese and African languages were used in broadcasting by the National Unity Radio (Radio Omdurman), namely, Hausa, Juba Arabic, Nuer, Dinka and Shilluk. This was essentially to carry the messages and ideology of the regime inside and outside the country (Abu-Manga 1995). Second, in 1993, Yusif Al-Khalifa Abu-Bakr resumed his old 1956 project of writing African languages in Arabic script. Funded by the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the project was hosted by the International University of Africa in Khartoum and continued up to the early 2010). Both initiatives have clear ideological goals: (1) counteracting the SPLM's discourse and attracting non-Arab groups to the regime; (2) trying to disconnect the writing of Sudanese languages from the Roman script (associated with Christianity) in order to maintain a link between Arabic and the other Sudanese languages.

A theoretical acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic diversity was again promulgated in 1997. A constitutional decree came out on 22 No-

vember 1997 and created a National Council for Language Planning. In this decree, Arabic was recognized as the 'national language', and the other languages simply as 'local languages'. The cultural diversity and linguistic plurality of Sudan was to be protected and was recognized as part of the cultural personality of Sudan. The right to diversity (although a structured diversity) was also recognized in Article 27 of the 1998 constitution, which stipulated that 'there shall be guaranteed for every community or group of citizens the right to preserve their particular culture, language or religion, and rear children freely within the framework of their particularity, and the same shall not by coercion be effaced'.<sup>8</sup> This Article set up the basis of what would become the 2008 Act of the Council for Promotion and Development of the National Languages.

#### *SIL Activities in Khartoum*

Whereas SIL activities were officially stopped in southern Sudan, the organization managed to pursue literacy activities among the southern refugee communities of Khartoum. The Khartoum Diocese of the Episcopal Church of Sudan decided to enlist foreign individuals participating in SIL programmes to work in Khartoum and help the church with Bible translations and literacy classes. The SIL could not work in Khartoum as it had in southern Sudan, however, and adopted a low profile. Instead of bringing several experts it opted for a policy of linguistic development at the grass-roots level (Gilley 2006).

A strategy of 'language groups' was initiated in 1993. A language group was formed by a few people of the same ethnic or linguistic group, eager to be trained in order to work on their own language, produce readers and set up literacy classes. Under the Sudan Workshop Program (SWP) the SIL organized training workshops for each community in order to establish orthography and literacy programmes, Bible translation and the transcription of oral traditions. Native speakers and members of the language groups were to decide which dialect of their language they wished to describe, and which orthography they would apply. In 2005, about thirty language groups were working and producing literacy materials (Gilley 2006). The refugees' financial situation, however, was so dramatic that it often restrained the process. Language group members who worked on a voluntary basis often could not find the financial means to publish their readers (the SIL produced the first thirty issues, but the language groups then had to find their own funding in the community among members who, more often than not, could not help). Most groups were unable to produce anything more than a handbook of orthography in their chosen

language. Many had difficulty selecting orthographic rules capable of standardization, a problem that eventually led to conflict among subgroups, each one wanting its own dialect/language to become the language group standard (see Manfredi, this volume, for a case description). The overall impression was that, in spite of the SIL's long experience in Sudan, the language groups were unable to build on a shared knowledge base.

However, the impact of SIL activities went deeper than might appear at first glance. If the literacy activity had been conducted under the umbrella of the Sudanese Episcopal Church and was supposedly restricted to Christian refugee groups from the south, the process quickly influenced numerous non-Christian groups, either mixed groups (Muslims and Christians, like several groups from the Nuba Mountains or Northern Bahr Al-Ghazal) or Muslim groups, like the Beja, the Fur, the Ingessana and the Zaghawa. In this way the SIL linguistic ideology spread throughout Sudan irrespective of religious affiliation, the key being that in order to exist, an ethnic group was required to codify and write its own language, a process that might conceivably lead to endless fragmentation.

In spite of a general political climate hostile to Christianity and Christian missionaries in the north at that time, it should be mentioned that the SIL did not work in complete isolation (and in fact was closely watched by the Sudanese security services). Leoma Gilley, the initiator of the SIL workshop programme, succeeded in establishing official links with Sudanese institutions like the University of Khartoum, where she taught African linguistics for a number of years. Some SIL workshop members registered for course work in the IAAS to obtain a diploma in African linguistics. The few Western linguists, who had nothing to do with the church, often worked with Sudanese informants participating in the SIL workshop programme.

Between 1994 and 2005, Khartoum became the meeting point for various individuals (Sudanese church staff, Western or Sudanese linguists, Sudanese intellectuals, social activists, individual members of communities, etc.) who, regardless of religious beliefs or political inclinations, shared a desire to codify and promote Sudanese languages. A concretization of such a process was the holding of the Ninth International Nilo-Saharan Conference organized by the IAAS in Khartoum in 2004, which was attended by several Western and Sudanese linguists.

### *Internal Resilience*

This specific political and social context contributed to another important process, in that work on linguistic codification and transcription was no

longer the preserve of experts and academics, but became accessible to a larger circle of activists and lay people whose legitimacy lay with their own native skills and their concern for their linguistic communities. Literacy in vernacular languages, a prior church initiative, became widespread among Muslim groups whose literary language is Arabic.

At this stage, the matter of which script to apply in transcription became increasingly a matter of ideological choice. In the south, Christian and related associations universally opted for Roman scripts. In the Muslim north, non-Arab groups educated in Arabic for centuries (either in Koranic schools or, since the twentieth century, in governmental schools) would logically have preferred to transcribe their languages and produce literary texts using Arabic scripts (like Persian, for example). But the political cleavages between so-called Arabs and non-Arabs became so profound in the last decade of the twentieth century (Sharkey 2008) that most of the regional and ethnic movements, as well as their main activists, opted to mark their cultural and linguistic differences away from Arabic. This neonationalist trend among non-Arab groups is typical of any process of emerging nationalism (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Joseph 2004). In this respect, non-Arab Sudanese groups replicated the trend observed all around the world. In the precise case of Sudan, it should also be noted that most linguistic descriptions of Sudanese languages have been written in European languages and transcribed using the Roman or International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Very few linguistic descriptions of Sudanese languages (excluding Arabic, of course) have been recorded in Arabic, and African linguistics is rarely associated with Arabic scripts (except for Abu-Bakr's ISESCO experience). While proponents of both scripts present linguistic arguments to defend their choices, it must be recalled that the choice of alphabet for any language of the world is a matter of convention and ultimately a political choice.

During this period of internal resilience, one may note the political and linguistic mobilization of the Sudanese diaspora all around the world (including East Africa, Europe, North America, Australia and even Arab countries), which certainly played an important role in spreading cultural and linguistic awareness both outside and inside Sudan. Through forums, conferences, meetings, publications and now websites, the members of the Sudanese diaspora became particularly active in the strategic defence of Sudanese languages and culture. For example, the first Conference on Beja Linguistics was held in Cairo in September 1999. In 2000, the Dinka Language Institute, Agamlong, was created in Australia.<sup>9</sup> Even though a transnational orientation is evident, the involvement of the Sudanese diaspora has led to numerous uncoordinated actions, which sometimes lack any recognizably regimented linguistic expertise.

## **The Resolution on Language in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement**

### *A Major Political Step*

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) marked the end of the second civil war and included very important linguistic recommendations that, unlike the previous Addis Ababa peace agreement, were not restricted to southern Sudan but were supposed to concern the entire country. The resolution on language included in the CPA and endorsed in the interim constitution of 2005 was organized around five key points:

#### 2.8. Language:

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

2.8.2. Arabic language 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. (CPA 2005: 26–27)

It was further agreed that a council would be established under the presidency to oversee the implementation of the new language policy. The two major facts of the CPA language resolution are: first, the recognition of English as the co-official language (though in practice it remains a second official language); and second, the recognition of all Sudanese languages as national languages that can be eventually used as working languages at the regional level.

These points represented a landmark advance over previous Sudanese linguistic policy, even if practical considerations raise a number of concerns (Abu-Manga 2007; Abdelhay 2010a; Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni 2010). According to some observers, it appears that nonlinguist decision makers in the northern part of the country adopted a limited view of language policy and were not seriously prepared to discuss these issues, whereas among southern political elites the issues had far greater political currency. This was confirmed by the makeup of the respective delegations for the Nairobi language policy discussions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement some months before the signature of the CPA: the SPLM was represented by a group of experts that included four trained linguists (Ph.D. holders), whereas the central government was represented by a group of

secondary school teachers headed, ironically, by a teacher of mathematics. Similarly, no linguist of any calibre participated on the government's side in the final discussions in Naivasha, while the SPLM's side on this matter was headed by a professor of African languages and linguistics, George Nyombe Bureny, who was then on the faculty of the University of Nairobi in the Department of Linguistics. This disposition was a clear indication that the difficulties inherent in language and culture were well understood by the intellectual and political elites from southern Sudan long before the signing of the CPA. On the other hand, the northern political elites seem to have realized the importance of these issues only later.

### *The Impact of the CPA in the Pre-2011 South*

The first implication of the CPA was the reinforcement of English in all SPLM-held territories, including the Nuba Mountains in the south. English is the working and communication language of the south, and the principal language used in education. The choice of English for educational purposes had been followed by the SPLM for more than twenty years, enabling southern students to pursue higher studies in East Africa. In 2005 the educational system was in a catastrophic state, with southern Sudan having the lowest access to primary education in the world according to the UN. Rehabilitation projects estimated it would be necessary to construct twenty-five hundred schools per year in the period between 2005 and 2011 (Yongo-Bure 2006).<sup>10</sup> In 2010, and according to southern Sudanese sources, the number of students increased very quickly (Garang 2010a), and numerous institutes have been established with support from the UN and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, among others (Wright 2006). The use of English at all educational levels raised problems of communication in that there is a general lack of trained teachers, as pointed out by the southern minister of education in July 2010 (Garang 2010b) when he stated that, in many schools, instruction was provided in a local language and that English was taught as a subject. Nevertheless, the implementation of a concrete policy to help the promotion of the 'indigenous national languages' is rather slow in both the north and south.

In 2008–9 the SIL signed a new agreement with the southern Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). Two SIL members were assigned to work with the MOEST on reintroducing the teaching of local languages into the primary school system. The minister of education plans to set up an Institute of National Languages (INL), which will presumably be somewhat like the old IRL. Former SIL assistants are expected to participate in this new institute<sup>11</sup>. In 2014, the Department of National Languages within MOEST organized a number of workshops

with the SIL advisors in order to develop the guidelines for the further teaching of south Sudanese languages under the supervision of the future INL (Spronk 2014), of 2011, had yet to materialize. The proposal may yet be reworked given the political realities following the outcome of the January 2011 referendum for independence.

Efforts to promote southern languages are more effective via radio media, which have been a regular feature of southern Sudanese information services since 2005. The Sudan Catholic Radio Network (SCRN) began broadcasting in Juba in 2006 and by 2010 had opened stations in Torit, Tonj, Rumbeck, Yei, Malakal and Gidel (southern Nuba Mountains). Other than English and Arabic, SCRNs presents broadcasts in the following languages:<sup>12</sup> Bari, Madi, Acholi, Dinka, Lotuko, Didinga, Lango, Madi, Toposa Bongo, Jur, Tira and Otoro. Another radio, Sudan Radio Service (SRS), established in Kenya in 2003 with support from USAID/OTI, relocated to Juba in 2010 and broadcasts many programmes in Sudanese languages. According to its website, 'programming reflects the vibrant communities and cultures in southern Sudan. Regular, weekly programming targets speakers of Dinka, Nuer, Juba-Arabic, Bari, Shilluk, Zande, Moro, Arabic, and English.'<sup>13</sup> Veteran SRS reporter and writer Victor Lugala is reported to have said that 'broadcasting in the mother tongues of South Sudan as well as in the lingua-franca – Juba-Arabic – is the best way to reach his people, since news and stories resonate more when they are heard in the everyday languages of his people. The fact that we are focusing in languages that are well understood by the people makes radio a very good device' (Fick 2011). The status of Juba Arabic, the lingua franca of South Sudan, remains unclear. Although it is not officially categorized as a southern vernacular, it is the mother tongue of many urban dwellers. It has not been granted a national or official status within the 2011 transitional constitution of the Republic of South Sudan.

There are several indications that civil society in South Sudan, and particularly the people and associations coming back from East Africa, are very much concerned by the development of their native languages and cultures. It remains to be seen whether this development will concern mainly oral practices (music, theatre, radio, TV, etc.) or whether the movement will extend to written communications (education, literature, newspaper, Internet, etc.). For the time being, most of the websites for such associations are published in English.

### *The Impact of the CPA in the North*

In the north, several developments took place. At the official level, a presidential decree in February 2009 announced the creation of a Council for



Development and Promotion of the National Languages and appointed a chairman (Professor Al-Amin Abu-Manga) and eight members with balanced regional and ethnolinguistic representation, including three southerners, one from Darfur, one from eastern Sudan, one professor of English and one professor of Arabic linguistics, the latter being Yusif Al-Khalifa Abu-Bakr. The council announced several ambitious goals for the protection and promotion of national languages and cultural heritage.

For the time being, however, the council lacks the financial means to undertake an ambitious programme and its future faces serious uncertainties. The establishment of the council was based on the interim constitution, whose mandate ended in 2011. It is not certain that the council will continue its work with the same vigour and the same support from the northern government now that the country has been partitioned into two independent states.

Most initiatives seem to remain in the civil or religious sectors. Whereas the SIL has stopped its workshop programmes in Khartoum, the Sudanese Episcopal Church in Khartoum maintains its department of literacy and translation for the southern population. Since 2006 the American Bible Society has operated a Moro Literacy Project, offering literacy classes in both Khartoum and the Nuba Mountains (American Bible Society 2009). At the university level, linguistic researchers have experienced new hope with the announcement of new sources of international funding for programmes on Sudanese endangered languages. Most of these programmes have established cooperative relations between Sudanese and SIL linguists and Western universities (such as Edinburgh or Cologne Universities for the Dinka, Shilluk and Nuba languages). These programmes have relied in part on informal networks that were developed during the last decade of the twentieth century, including SIL and IAAS linguists like Leoma Gilley, Eilen Browne and Professor A. Mugadim.

As in the last decade of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, a number of language activities have actually been pursued abroad. In Chad, members of the Zaghawa community working with the SIL have proposed a specific writing system for the Beria language, based on a sampling of the markings on camels.<sup>14</sup> This writing system was invented in 1972 by a Sudanese schoolteacher, Adam Tagir (see Norein 2006), adapted by Siddik Adam Issa in 2004 and then designed by SIL volunteers in 2007 (Seonil Yun and Lorna Priest).

Examples of individual, associative or institutional initiatives are numerous and could give the impression of intense activity. However, many initiatives may face a durability problem. As of mid-2010, a number of websites accessed in June 2009 were no longer accessible either outside Sudan (like the site of the Dinka Language Institute in Australia, or the site

of the Association for the Promotion of the Beria Language<sup>15</sup>, or within Sudan itself. This very issue is the reason why no serious language planning is possible for Sudanese languages without a strong institutional body coordinating the various initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The description, codification and planning of the preservation of Sudanese languages has a rather long history characterized by few periods of improvement and long periods of decline. Planning for Sudanese language instruction and codification implies two different but interconnected processes.

The first process impacts on human representations of languages. Codifying a language implies per se a process of differentiation. In Sudan this process of linguistic differentiation was intimately connected with the construction of ethnic boundaries in the case of non-Arab languages (but not in the case of Arabic). This means that each ethnic group needs to have its own autonomous language in order to be recognized within the symbolic social order. A striking contradiction is the fact that processes of codification are increasing at a time when actual practices are characterized by language mixing or code switching.

The second process is more ideological and political and reflects the power relationships within Sudan. Relationships between the various languages are more often conceived in terms of competition than coexistence and polarized around Arabic versus non-Arabic languages. This conception has led to well-known authoritarian Arabization policies, which proved to be political and social failures. The idealization of language diversity and language equality without seriously considering functional uses and social practices could just as easily lead to another failure.

The years between 1989 and 2010 witnessed a radical shift in language planning. After a rather fanatic pro-Arabization policy applied to the entire country, the Sudanese government accepted the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which implied the promotion of all Sudanese languages as national languages. One may wonder to what extent the 2005 CPA-based language policy will impact the maintenance of languages in post-CPA Sudan, particularly on the (conceivably) endangered languages in both the north and the newly independent south. Will the northern government pursue the 2005 CPA-based language policy after the secession of the south?

Compared to previous periods, an important development during the last two decades has been the emergence of a 'civil society' that is involved

in the defence of cultural and linguistic plurality. This led to two important steps. First, promotion of vernacular languages is no longer restricted to Christian associations and southern groups but has also spread to most 'non-Arab groups', contributing in this way to the construction of national ethnic boundaries. Second, it means the development of new forms of community-oriented nationalism to challenge state-organized nationalism. At this stage the crucial issue for the Sudanese intellectual elite is to rethink the issue of language demarcation and the very bases of linguistic nationalism.

## Notes

1. For a critical approach to the relationship between language and ethnicity continuously advanced by various types of nationalism in Sudan, see, among others, Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni 2010; Miller 2006; Sharkey 2008.
2. See Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (2006), which states that 'Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning'. See <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/index-gb.htm> (accessed 19 October 2010).
3. For details on language classification and numbers, see Hurreiz and Bell (1975), Thelwall (1978), Abu-Manga and Abu-Bakr (2006).
4. Data provided by Ethnologue, [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=SD](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=SD) (accessed 25 November 2010).
5. Badr's book (n.d.) transcribes Nubian in both Roman and Arabic script. Khalid Mukhtar, an archaeologist at Cairo University, opted for the use of Old Nubian script to transcribe modern Nubian vernaculars. In 1997–98, he wrote a book that was to be published in Cairo. After his death in 1998, his work was pursued by the Nubian Studies Association in Cairo.
6. Janet Persson, personal email communication, June 2009. The fifteen added languages belong mainly to category B plus Juba Arabic).
7. See [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country\\_bibl.asp?name=SD](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country_bibl.asp?name=SD) (accessed 1 November 2007).
8. See <http://www.unesco.org/most/Insudan.htm> (accessed 18 January 2011).
9. See <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~agamlong/dlia/index.en.html> (the website was first accessed in June 2009; in December 2010, it no longer worked).
10. The 2005 UN report reads: 'Only 2 percent of the population completes primary education and the adult literacy rate is 24 percent. Of the few schools that do exist (there is one school per 1,000 children), only 10 percent are in permanent buildings' (Yongo-Bure 2006).
11. Janet Persson, personal email communication, June 2009.
12. See <http://sudancatholicradio.net/> (accessed 29 December 2010).
13. See <http://www.evrel.ewf.uni-erlangen.de/pesc/peaceradio-SDN.html> (accessed 29 December 2010).
14. See <http://scripts.sil.org/ZaghawaBeria/Home> (accessed 13 September 2009).
15. <http://www.zaghawa.org/> (accessed 7 July 2009).