Sudanese Languages in Melbourne:
Linguistic Demography and Language Maintenance

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Abstract. The Sudanese community in Australia is quite small, but has grown very rapidly over the past decade. The major language groups of this community – Arabic, English, Dinka – are recognised in the Australian community and middle-sized languages such as Nuer and Acholi have also achieved some recognition. The focus of our research, however, is Sudanese languages with small speaker populations in the homeland and correspondingly very small populations in Melbourne. Discovery techniques based on census data or other government records almost inevitably miss such groups and include them in "other" categories. The first phase of our interview-based research involves a more detailed mapping of the linguistic demography of the Sudanese community in Melbourne and has initially targeted speakers from two linguistically diverse regions: the Equatoria region, where speakers identify at least 20 languages with a population in Melbourne, and the Nuba mountains, with at least 10 languages represented in Melbourne. We discuss here issues related to the invisibility of such speaker groups, whether it is possible to separate languages and dialects of languages (especially in the case of varieties of Bari found in the Equatorian community), and what possibilities exist for documentation and language maintenance in this diasporic community.

Keywords: Sudan, African languages, language endangerment, language maintenance, demography, Melbourne

1.   General remarks

In this paper, we present some preliminary data from a project which is investigating the linguistic demography of the Sudanese community in Melbourne. This project is based on a number of assumptions: that there are endangered languages in Sudan, that linguistic fieldwork in that country is likely to be problematic for the foreseeable future, and that the linguistic diversity of Sudan is reflected, at least in part, in the emigrant community in Melbourne. Following from these assumptions, the aims of the project are to improve our knowledge of the linguistic diversity present in the Sudanese community in Melbourne, to find in Melbourne speakers of endangered (minority) languages from Sudan, and to carry out research on such languages with speakers in Melbourne.

Sudan has been the site of armed conflicts for most of the period since 1955 (Johnson 2003). As a result, millions of Sudanese, particularly in the south (and more recently in the west) have been displaced with large numbers forced to flee to refugee camps outside of Sudan's national borders. Since the late 1990s Australia has begun to accept relatively large numbers of such Sudanese refugees through a government sponsored program, and Sudanese communities have become increasingly visible in different locations in Australia.

History shows that minority ethnolinguistic groups are very often badly affected by violent civil conflict where it occurs within nations. As a result, we can predict, given the duration and severity of conflict in Sudan, that many more languages in this country are endangered than might otherwise be the case. Some linguistic consequences of the conflict are discussed by Kevlihan (2007), who reports data which suggest that the introduction of English as an official language in South Sudan (See section 2 for further discussion) is having an unfortunate impact on local languages there. It is also likely that speakers of some endangered languages from Sudan are now living in Melbourne and we believe that documentation work can usefully be undertaken in this diasporic setting. Data collected in such circumstances cannot be as rich as data collected where a language is fully embedded in its ecological and cultural setting, but we suggest that the data is nevertheless valuable, especially when the alternative is for languages to become silent in the absence of good documentation or any effort toward language maintenance. We hope that any such

work would be supported by *in situ* field research in the near future. Aside from Darfur, Sudan has been relatively peaceful in recent years and language documentation projects are currently underway in that country. We note, however, that in several cases, these projects are (at least initially) working with migrant populations in Khartoum and other large cities – in a diasporic setting (see Mugaddam 2006 for the linguistic diversity of the refugee population in Khartoum).[1]

In the remainder of the paper we first give some basic demographic information on Sudanese immigration to Melbourne and background information on the linguistic situation in Sudan. We then discuss the earliest work looking at the presence of African languages in Victoria (Borland & Mphande 2006), noting the methodological issues which lead that work to underestimate the diversity which is present. Then we present our preliminary results, which suggest that the Sudanese community in Melbourne is very linguistically diverse. We conclude with some remarks on the possibilities which we see for language documentation and for language maintenance, and on some of the factors which may affect the success of such work.

2.   Sudanese migrants in Melbourne

According to the Australian Census of 2006, there were 19,049 people living in Australia who were born in Sudan, and 17,848 people reported their ancestry as Sudanese (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). The Department of Immigration and Citizenship estimates that Victoria is the state with the largest proportion of this population (36%) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007), and this suggests a population in Victoria of just under 6900 Sudanese. Borland & Mphande (2006) report 6139 immigrants from Sudan arriving in Victoria before the end of 2005. These people are overwhelmingly settled in the greater Melbourne region. Of

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[1]   While the political situation may have improved significantly in Sudan, in situ research remains difficult for Australian researchers who require permission from their own cautious universities. The Australian Government's travel advisory for Sudan remains at the level "Do not travel" (http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Sudan, accessed 18 December 2009).

the 2005 people from the Sudan who arrived in Victoria in the 2004-5 financial year, all but 84, that is 96%, settled in Melbourne (Borland & Mphande 2006:11).

3. The language situation in Sudan

Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) lists 134 languages as being spoken in Sudan. Arabic became the official language of the state after independence in 1956 (Idris 2004), although English was widely used and known, especially in Southern Sudan (see below). While Arabic has been the major language of the education system since the 1960s (Abdel Rahman 2001), in the 1980s and 1990s the Arabic-speaking elite in north Sudan reinforced efforts in favour of national Arabization, at the expense of English, and the many local languages – a policy leading to significant resentment in the south. As a result of the 2005 peace agreement between the Arab-dominated national government located in the north and the southern resistance, Sudan no longer has an official language, although Arabic is recognized as a national language and given equal status with English. The newly autonomous southern Sudan recognizes English as its official language, but allows for equal use of English and Arabic (Kevlihan 2007). Local varieties of Arabic are commonly used in Sudan: Khartoum Arabic is recognised as a distinct variety (Dickins 2007), and the strongly creolised variety known as Juba Arabic (Watson 1989) is important as a lingua franca in the south of the country, especially in Equatoria province. It is important to note that region, religion, and language use are closely interrelated in Sudan. Further discussion of these relationships can be found in section 5.

Several other languages can be considered major languages with large speaker populations in Sudan. For example, Dinka has approximately 1.4 million speakers, taking the five generally recognised varieties together, and Nuer has around three quarters of a million speakers (Lewis 2009). English must also be considered as an important language in Sudan, and has since 2005 returned very much to the fore (see above). British colonial rule in the south, together with British missionary efforts in that part of the country, made English a prestige language up to and indeed after independence. This influence persisted even further when the recognition of English and its use in education in the south was included as a condition of the Peace Accord

of 1972 which ended the first civil war (Abdel Rahman 2001) and it again has renewed status throughout the country since the new peace agreement of 2005.

As mentioned previously, there are more than 130 languages spoken in Sudan. Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) gives the figure 175,317 as the mean number of speakers per language, and 16,000 as the median number of speakers per language. However, these figures are almost certainly too low as they are based on a total number of speakers at just over 22 million, while recent estimates put the population of Sudan at more than 41 million (CIA 2009). But even allowing that the figure given as a median is too low, it is nevertheless clear that many languages in Sudan have small speaker populations and can be considered to be endangered. This is reflected in further data from Ethnologue, which lists 13 languages in Sudan as having fewer than 1,000 speakers and another 33 as having fewer than 10,000 speakers. Not surprisingly, given the large number of languages, especially in southern Sudan, multilingualism is common – with our respondents often claiming to speak more than one local language, in addition to major lingua francas such as Juba Arabic, Dinka or English.

4. African languages in Melbourne

Borland & Mphande (2006) is an important source that investigates the growing presence of African languages in the state of Victoria and the extent to which adequate services are available to meet the new needs. Fifteen languages from Sudan are reported as being present in Melbourne, in addition to Arabic varieties. These languages are: Acholi, Anuak, Bari, Dinka, Fur, Kakwa, Lopit, Luwo, Ma'di, Moro, Murle, Nuer. These authors base their findings on data from publicly available sources, the national census and the records of service providers, and such sources provide an incomplete picture of the true situation.

Minority languages can be hard to uncover in official data, and such languages may remain hidden. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, official record-keeping often works with a restricted range of choices. This means that minority languages will not be named and that speaker numbers cannot be retrieved from a default category such as "Other" or "Unspecified African language". The second reason that minority languages can be concealed is that people may choose to identify as

speakers of a more widely-used language in order to access services (e.g. interpreters). Records kept by the service provider will not show the presence of the minority language unless requests are made for services in that language.

The data available from the 2006 national census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007) provide a limited view of languages spoken by people of Sudanese origin. Arabic is treated in these data as a monolithic language, and it is not possible to tell anything about the different varieties or the place of origin of the speakers. In addition to Arabic, the Census individually lists six or seven languages which are spoken in Sudan. The six which are straightforward are Acholi, Dinka, Hausa, Nuer, Shiluk, and Tigre. Hausa and Tigre are primarily spoken in countries other than Sudan, but both languages have speaker populations in the north of the country. The seventh language listed in the census tables is given as Luo. Ethnologue lists as separate languages Luo of Kenya and Luwo of Sudan, and it is not clear which of these might be the language named in the census, but we suspect it is the same as Borland & Mphande's Luwo.

The census has two additional categories which provide relevant data, although they give little helpful information. These categories are "African languages, nec" (nec = not elsewhere classified) and "African languages, nfd" (nfd = not further defined). A total of 1062 people are listed under these two categories for Melbourne (Major Statistical Region), and many of these are undoubtedly speakers of Sudanese languages not specifically identified in the census.

Borland & Mphande also used data from interpreter requests to government agencies in producing their list of 15 Sudanese languages. We have access only to information on available interpreter services, taken from the websites of NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, www.naati.com.au, accessed 20/08/09) and VITS Language Link (www.vits.com.au, accessed 20/08/09). NAATI offer services in nine languages from Sudan besides Arabic, and VITS offer services in seven besides Arabic and Sudanese (sic). Both organisations can provide services in Acholi, Dinka, Fur, Nuer and Tigre, while NAATI additionally offers Bari, Ma'di, Shilluk and Zande. VITS also offers services in Luo and Murle. The difference between actual service provision and Borland & Mphande's results therefore suggest that there is potential demand for services which is not or cannot be met.

5.   Preliminary results

The results which we report here are the result of interviews with members of the Sudanese community in Melbourne. To date, we have completed interviews with approximately 20 people, but our research is continuing. Two types of question have produced these data. Firstly, most of the people interviewed are themselves speakers of minority languages, and can provide direct evidence of the presence of their language in Melbourne. Secondly, we asked all subjects what other languages they knew of with speakers in Melbourne. For most of the languages listed in this section, we have information of the second type only. We have no reason to doubt the information which has been provided to us, but the nature of the data should be kept in mind. At the same time we note that our Sudanese respondents show high sensitivity to the precise ethnolinguistic affiliation of members of their community in Australia – a characteristic which appears to reflect normal social practice in Sudan. As such, that they are able to identify each individual speaker of some very small languages currently resident in Melbourne or elsewhere in Australia.[2]

A second limitation of the results presented here is that we have only had contact with people originating from two sub-regions in Sudan. These are Equatoria, the southernmost province of Sudan and a linguistically highly diverse area, and the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan province in central Sudan.[3]   These two regions and their location in Sudan are shown in Map 1. We have not as yet surveyed Sudanese refugees from the large area between Equatoria and Nuba. More recently, Australia has received a very small number of refugees from Darfur (western Sudan) – the most recent site of devastating conflict and displacement. The precise linguistic af-

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[2]   In our interviews, we also collect information about the respondents' first language, other languages learned prior to leaving Sudan, migration history and additional languages acquired during that journey, and language use in daily life in Melbourne.

[3]   As part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, a referendum will be held in the Nuba area to decide whether it should definitively join Southern Sudan. For the moment it is administered separately.

filiation of this currently small part of the Sudanese community in Australia also remains to be investigated.

Map 1. Sudan, showing the Nuba Mountains and Equatoria regions

In the sections which follow, we give the following information about the languages which have been reported to us:

• the name which was reported to us in interviews

• the name and identifying code used by Ethnologue to refer to that language

• the number of speakers reported by Ethnologue for that language in Sudan.

The first two items do not necessarily correspond, and there are two reasons for this. Firstly, most of our interviews have been relatively brief and the researcher has not always had time to familiarise themself with the speech sounds of the interviewee. Our transcriptions are therefore not as reliable as we would wish. Secondly, in some cases the language name given in an interview is listed in Ethnologue as an alternative name.

5.1. Languages from Equatoria

5.1.1. Equatoria: Niger-Congo languages

Most of the languages from Equatoria which have been reported to us are Nilo-Saharan languages, but a small number of Niger-Congo languages have also been mentioned. In two cases, Ethnologue suggests that the languages are only spoken in other countries.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Zandi	Zande	zne	350,000
Buya	Buya	byy	Numbers for Democratic Republic of Congo only
Mundu	Mündü	muh	23,000
Boeka	Banda-Mbrès	bqk	Numbers for Central African Republic only

Table 1. Equatoria: Niger-Congo languages

5.1.2. Equatoria: Nilo-Saharan, Central Sudanic

Seven languages from the Central Sudanic branch of Nilo-Saharan have been mentioned. As with the Niger-Congo languages, one of these is only spoken outside Sudan according to Ethnologue. The speaker numbers listed here suggest that several of these languages may be endangered (Keliko, Olu'bo, Ma'di).

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Afukaya	Avokaya	avu	40,000
Baka	Baka	bdh	25,000
Kaliko	Keliko	kbo	10,000
Lugbara	Lugbara	lug	(Uganda)
Lulubo	Olu'bo	lul	15,000
Madi	Ma'di	mhi	18,000
Muru	Moru	mgd	70,000

Table 2. Equatoria: Central Sudanic languages

5.1.3. Equatoria: Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, Eastern, Bari and dialects

Bari is a major language of southern Sudan. Ethnologue mentions five dialects in addition to Bari proper, suggesting that lexical similarity between Bari and individual dialects is around 80-85%. In our data so far, three of the dialects have been mentioned by Bari speakers. It is surprising, given the information on the degree of lexical similarity, that these speakers discuss the difference between the varieties as being mainly differences in identity and culture; they claim that they all speak Bari, with some slight differences. This is an area in which further research would be valuable.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Bari	Bari	bfa	420,000
Pajulu	Bari (Pöjulu)	bfa	25,000
Kuku	Bari (Kuku)	bfa	26,400
Yangwara	Bari (Nyangbara)	bfa	18,000

Table 3. Bari and dialects

5.1.4. Equatoria: Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, Eastern

In addition to Bari, eight other languages from the Eastern branch of Nilotic have been mentioned. One of these, Nyangatom, is spoken in Ethiopia according to Ethnologue, although the entry there mentions that this ethnolinguistic group are cattle herders who follow their cattle into Sudan. This is also the language from this group which would seem most likely to be endangered.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Kakuwa	Kakwa	keo	40,000
Lango	Lango	lno	38,000
Latuka	Otuho	lot	135,000
Lopit	Lopit	lpx	50,000
Lokoya	Lokoya	lky	40,138
Mundari	Mandari	mqu	115,997
Nyangatom	Nyangatom	mmj	(Ethiopia 14,200)
Topuasa	Toposa	toq	100,000

Table 4. Eastern Nilotic languages

5.1.5. Equatoria: Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic, Western

Four languages from the Western branch of Nilotic have been mentioned. None of these seem likely to be immediately endangered.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Acholi	Acholi	ach	45,1000
Didinga	Didinga	did	100,000
Lokoro	Päri	lkr	28,000
Morle	Murle	mur	60,000

Table 5. Western Nilotic languages

5.1.6. Equatoria: Not yet identified

Interviewees from Equatoria have mentioned two languages which we have not yet been able to identify with certainty. The names given are Gia and Shirruk. It is very likely that the second of these is Shilluk, a language which we know independently is

present in Melbourne. The other language may well be a member of the Teso-Turkana dialect cluster which Dimmendaal (2007) refers to as Ğie.[4]

5.2. Languages from the Nuba Mountains

As in Equatoria, languages from both of the major families, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, are mentioned for this region. Ethnologue mentions four dialects of Ngile (Masakin), but only two of those have been reported to us so far in Melbourne.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Heban	Heiban	hbn	4,410
Masakin Tiwal	Ngile	jle	38,000
Masakin Qusar	Ngile	jle	38,000
Moro	Moro	mor	30,000
Otoro	Otoro	otr	10,000
Koalib	Koalib	kib	44,258

Table 6. Nuba Mountains: Niger-Congo languages

We noted previously that some languages from Equatoria are not listed as being spoken in Sudan according to Ethnologue. This is not surprising, given that Equatoria province is at the edge of the country and has borders with four other nations. It is, however, rather surprising that we have apparently a similar report for the Nuba Mountains region which is not close to any border. The language mentioned to us as Kurunga seems only to match with the language Ethnologue calls Karanga and reports as being spoken in Chad. It is possible that we have misidentified this language and further research is certainly needed.

Name given	Ethnologue	Code	Speakers
Nyimang	Ama	nyi	70,000
Kurunga	Karanga	kth	(Chad 10,000)
Kādja	Sinyar	sys	12,321

Table 7. Nuba Mountains: Nilo-Saharan languages

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[4]   We are grateful to Yvonne Treis for suggesting this possibility.

Two languages have been mentioned as being spoken by people from the Nuba mountains which we have not yet been able to identify:

Bashim – Salih (1991) citing Stevenson (1972) divides the Moro people of the Nuba region into two linguistic groups, one of which includes Abu Hashim and Toucho (see below).[5]

Taidjo – this may possibly be Tocho (ISO639-3: taz).

6.   Future Work

Borland & Mphande (2006) discuss 15 languages (in addition to Arabic) spoken by members of the Sudanese community in Melbourne. Our research to date – while still preliminary – has produced evidence for more than forty languages being present in the community, with only eight overlapping with the previous study (Acholi, Bari, Kakwa, Lopit, Ma'di, Nurle, Otuho, and Shilluk). Our results come from contact with Sudanese people from only two regions of that country and we therefore expect that the list of languages represented in Melbourne will be longer than the current list when the research is more comprehensive. The preliminary findings already justify our assumption that there are speakers of a wide range of minority languages from Sudan living in Melbourne, and that there are opportunities to carry out language documentation work.

One unexpected outcome of our survey was the identification of a number of languages not previously reported as present in Sudan by sources such as Ethnologue. These include Buya and Boeka. We expect that with further research the number of such languages will increase.

Various factors will have to be taken into account in any more intensive language work carried out in the Australian Sudanese community. Religion is an important point of division in the Sudanese community, and, as previously mentioned, it interacts with other factors, including language. The northern part of Sudan is very much

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[5]   Again, our thanks are due to Yvonne Treis for pointing out this reference.

Islamicized, but the southern part of the country is more diverse in religion and most Christian migrants originate there. Thus, although Arabic is widely known, at least in some form, it is less likely to have cultural significance for people from south Sudan. Such people are also more likely to have knowledge of English before they leave Sudan, for reasons discussed in section 2. This existing pattern may be reinforced by patterns of migration. People from south Sudan are more likely to exit via Kenya, while those from the north are more likely to exit via an Arabic-speaking country such as Egypt. The Sudanese Christian community is further divided into Catholic and Protestant groups; it is not yet clear to us whether this has any linguistic consequences.

Identity is also an important factor in the linguistic choices of Sudanese people in Australia. All of the people we have interviewed are multilingual, but the relationship between language and identity varies from one group to another. For example, many of the Equatorians to whom we have spoken see being Equatorian as an important identity, with identification as a member of a specific language group being secondary. This Equatorian identity is not tied to use of a particular language; in their community activities, Equatorians use different varieties of Arabic and English. It also seems likely that people from the Nuba Mountains see themselves as participating in a regional identity, but our data is not yet as clear on this point. More generally, we would suggest that the people we are targeting in this research are negotiating complex identities in their new home. They may now view themselves as Australian, but still have loyalties to their origins. As members of minority groups in Sudan, however, that loyalty may not be to the country or community as a whole, but may instead involve a regional identity (as for the Equatorians) or identity as a member of an ethnolinguistic group.

Attitudes to language are closely linked to identity issues also. Some research has now been carried out on the attitudes of Sudanese people in Australia to their heritage language (Hatoss & Sheely 2009, Izon 2005). To date, such work has been limited to Dinka speakers, but it has shown positive attitudes to the heritage language at least for that group. Our contacts so far suggest similarly positive attitudes amongst other language groups, but there are complicating factors. One is the complex choices facing migrant speakers of minority languages, discussed in the pre-

vious paragraph; another is the small size of the groups of speakers of these languages in Melbourne. For the smaller languages which they investigated, Borland & Mphande (2006, Table 7.12) give estimates of less than fifty speakers in Victoria, and in some cases less than twenty, while our respondents have mentioned languages which are restricted to single families. It is obvious that language maintenance is very difficult for such small groups. Nevertheless, we intend to incorporate language maintenance activities into any future research.

It is expected that any language documentation of Sudanese languages undertaken in Melbourne, as a result of our survey, will most likely focus on languages such as Heban from the Nuba Mountains region, with a speaker population of 4,410 reported in *Ethnologue* on the basis of data from 1984, and some of the smaller languages from Equatoria such as Kaliko (10,000 speakers in Sudan but a total speaker population of 22,500). In addition to documentation of endangered languages, we also see interesting possibilities for research in other areas, including the geographical spread of some languages, dialectology of larger groupings such as Bari, and the varieties of Arabic used by different groups from Sudan. We hope also that our linguistic mapping of the Sudanese community in Melbourne will be useful to other researchers, linguists and others, and provide encouragement for them to carry out research that might benefit the Sudanese here and in Sudan.

Acknowledgements

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