

On the Relevance of Linguistics Education to the Communicative Needs of the Sudanese Community

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***ABSTRACT** This paper attempts to draw the attention of the linguistic researchers to the role that applications of linguistics can play in people's lives in Sudan. It particularly concentrates on the relevance of linguistic research to the immediate communication needs of the Sudanese people. It draws on the assumption that the linguistic complexity inherent in the Sudanese Arabic varieties puts a great deal of Sudanese people at disadvantage, particularly in public institutions that relate to people's lives, e.g. educational, medical and legal services. These institutions, the arguments goes, employ SSA which can turn out to be hard to grasp to many speakers some Sudanese Arabic dialects and to the monolingual speakers of indigenous Sudanese languages.*

1. Introduction

Sudan is a multi-ethnic and, therefore, a multilingual country. Linguistic research indicates that over a hundred languages are used across the country alongside certain forms of Arabic as lingua franca – though it is also a fact that Sudanese people with different ethnic, regional and even social backgrounds tend to speak Arabic varieties that can sometimes cause communication problems due to acute linguistic differences inherent in them.

For historical and religious reasons, Arabic has become the country's official language particularly in the northern regions, which are classified as Islamic in religion (for more see Miller and Abu Manga 1992). Thus, since the Islamic religion has been revealed and (mainly) spread through Arabic, Arabic has become the official language of all the independent Islamic states that were founded in this part of the country a long time before their incorporation into the present Sudan. This linguistic fact was true even for the Islamic states that were established by non-Arabian ethnicities, e.g. the Fur and masaleet Sultanates in western Sudan.

Historical documents indicate that official correspondences were carried out in classical (standard) Arabic in these states. However, this carries no implication for the form of the Arabic varieties used in everyday communication. It is possible to argue that these varieties were and still hard to understand for the speakers of other

varieties in different parts of the country. Linguists report that the (regional and social) dialects of a given language form a kind of dialect continuum, whereby a chain of similarity connects all the dialects included in the continuum, with those on the continuum extremes being linguistically dissimilar (Trudgill 1974). The differences among the Sudanese Arabic dialects hardly qualify them to be relevant to this linguistic continuum at least where the dialects at the continuum extremes are concerned. For example, central Sudan is the closest region to Kordofan region, but reports and observations show that some Kordofani beggara dialects are barely intelligible to the users of the same language in the former region. An extreme example to show that this is so can be illustrated by the linguistic situation in the national capital: speakers of different ethnic backgrounds hardly communicate successfully unless a kind of compromise is reached, i.e. it is observable that enquirers should adopt certain forms of the other dialects to have their message communicated.

In most cases, those who do not speak Arabic natively make the compromise. Miller and Abu Manga(1992) maintain that “the variety of Arabic used by the migrants (who are mainly non-native speakers of Arabic) will not only reflect their degree of Arabicization but also their willingness to approximate the standard norms ...”. In the Sudanese context the norms are set by those who speak Arabic natively.

As its name suggests, this paper is an attempt to evaluate the relevance of the Sudanese linguistics education to the immediate communication needs of the Sudanese speech community, so to speak. These communication needs are given rise by the inter-ethnic interface taking place in public official and non-official contexts. Needless to say, it is the official context that calls for urgent efforts on the part of the Sudanese linguists to address the possible communication breakdowns – particularly when communication take place at situations that relate to people’s natural rights, e.g. educational, medical and legal situations.