TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface/Foreword ............................................................................................................. i
Marilyn Martin-Jones

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

1. African literacy ideologies, scripts and education .............................................. 1
   Ashraf Abdelhay Yonas Mesfun Asfaha and Kasper Juffermans

2. Lessons in textspeak from Sexy Chick: Supern vernacular literacy
   in South African instant and text messaging ......................................................... 59
   Fie Velghe

3. Beneath the surface? Contemporary ajami writing in West Africa,
   exemplified through Wolofal ................................................................................. 85
   Friederike Lüpke and Sokhna Bao-Diop

4. Performance of multilayered literacy: Tarjumo of the Kanuri
   Muslim scholars ........................................................................................................ 115
   Dmitry Bondarev and Abba Tijani

5. Script choice and power struggle in Morocco .................................................... 143
   Abderrahman El Aissati
6. The politics of literacy in the Sudan:
   Vernacular literacy movements in the Nuba Mountains. Abdel Rahim Mugadam and Ashraf Abdelhay
   ................................................................. 173

7. Englishing, imaging and local languaging in the Gambian
   linguistic landscape ............................................ 201
   Kasper Juffermans

8. Rural livelihoods literacies and numeracies and their
   implications for adult literacy pedagogy: the case of Bweyale in
   Uganda ................................................................. 231
   George Ladaah Openjuru

9. Ideologies of language and bilingual education in Mozambique .... 265
   Sarita Monjane Henriksen

10. Building early reading on syllables and cultural practices in
    literacy instructions in Eritrea .................................. 299
    Yonas Mesfin Asfaha, Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers

11. Neither helpless nor hopeless: portable multiliteracies, discourses
    and agency in a ‘township of migrants’ in Cape Town .......................... 325
    Charlyn Dyers and Fatima Slemming

12. Plural formations of literacy and Occam’s razor principle: A
    commentary .......................................................... 347
    Sinfree Makoni

Notes on contributors .................................................. 359

Index ........................................................................... 365
6

THE POLITICS OF LITERACY IN THE SUDAN: VERNACULAR LITERACY MOVEMENTS IN THE NUBA MOUNTAINS

Abdel Rahim Mugadam | Ashraf Abdelhay

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show that in dynamic situations riddled with unequal distribution of material and cultural resources as in Sudan, political battles are fought through the proxy of literacy and language. Indeed, the embedding of political statements on language and literacy in peace accords in Sudan (e.g. Naivasha Peace Agreement 2005–2011) indicates that “whenever language is drawn into nationalist struggles, it becomes more than ‘just language’” (Blommaert 1999: 429). Since independence from Britain in 1956, nationalist regimes have been preoccupied with constructing a hegemonic national order on the ideological premise of what Bamgbosé (1994: 36) called “oneness”. This chapter is intended as a contribution to the literature on the politics of literacy. Discourses on language and literacy by subjugated groups in Sudan should be understood relationally to the hegemonic discourses of Arabicisation and Islamisation. The latter should be read as nationalist projects intended to redo the colonial social order on new homogenous terms. Significantly, these discourses about language and literacy in Sudan are rooted in a colonial form of linguistics manipulated in the construction of social differentiation. Although understanding the full complexity of the language situation in Sudan is a matter of empirical enquiry, the distribution of linguistic resources in some regions is a reflection of the economic history of those regions.
The main objective here is to interrogate the value-neutralness of literacy claims and, in particular, the vernacular literacy development in the context of Sudan. Literacy research conducted by academics and/or locals is always shaped by the socio-political circumstances which gave rise to them. To achieve this aim, we will examine the phenomenon of local language committees in the Sudan, with a focus on the Tima Language Committee of the Nuba Mountains, a region in the State of Southern Kordofan. However, in order to historicise these less-recognised and under-resourced local language planning bodies, we will review the (British) colonial and postcolonial historiographies of literacy in the Nuba Mountains. In the postcolonial period, we will analyse the agreement on “the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Niles States”, which is one of the six protocols and agreements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed by Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the government of Sudan represented by the Islamist regime of the National Congress Party (NCP). This agreement provides some of the socio-political parameters within which local language and literacy committees operate. It is not our aim to critique the language ideologies or views of “language” and “culture” guiding literacy development activities of marginalised local language committees. Nor is it our goal to assess claims of cultural “authenticity” or “falsity” held by members of these committees. Rather, our objective is to reveal the socio-historical conditions in which strategically mobilised statements about language, literacy and identity are articulated. We are interested in understanding the operation of power through the inspection of linguistically constituted social phenomena including vernacular literacy movements.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In the next section, we review key conceptual and methodological models of the study of literacy. The third section reviews British colonial policy in the Nuba Mountains, with a focus on the political motivations and effects of colonial educational literacy practices. The fourth section provides a broad review of the postcolonial period, paying particular attention to recent political statements on language education embedded in the CPA and relating to the Nuba Mountains. The fifth section briefly reviews the Tima literacy project developed by the Tima Language Committee. The final section concludes the chapter. The data for this chapter is constructed from various sources including on-site observation, unstructured interviews and photographic documentation.

A conceptual framework of social literacies
In this section, we provide a broad review of some significant approaches and key concepts for the study of literacies. We start with Street’s (1984) ground-breaking work that led, with other scholars, to the construction of the socio-cultural field of “New Literacy Studies” (NLS). NLS, which is an ethnographically informed critique of the assumptions and tenets of the traditional conception of literacy, argues for a situated understanding of the actual social practices in various cultural contexts (Gee 2008; Street 1984, 1993a, 1994, 1998, 2003, 2011). Other concepts with similar theoretical commitment include “pluriliteracies” (Garcia, Bartlett and Kleifgen 2007); “multiliteracies” (Cope and Kalantzis 2000); “literacy ecologies” (Barton 1994); “literacy practices” (Street 1984); “multimodal literacies” (Jewitt 2008; Kress 2003). These models use the word “literacy” in the plural because it is “a socially contested term” in the sense that “we can choose to use this word in several different ways and such choices, in the end, have social and moral consequences” (Gee 2008: 31). Street (2011: 581) states that “literacy is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition”. These conceptual frameworks interrogate the disciplinary orthodoxy of looking at literacy in cognitive and developmental terms. The critical research tradition goes beyond definition of literacy as the ability to read and write to show that literacy practices articulate with and are shaped by social, political and cultural factors (Gee 2008; Street 1984).

The organisation of linguistic resources into bounded languages is a product of the 19th century ideology of nation-state (Heller 2007; Hobsbawm 1992). Literacy (in the singularly monolithic sense) is implicated in the nationalist project of transforming speech communities into imagined homogenous language communities. A “language community” characterises a group of individuals on the ideological basis of the existence of a functionally differentiated standard language (Silverstein 1996, 2003). The 19th century totalising ideologies of nation-state singularised the concept of “literacies” as one monolithic “literacy” defined in terms of individuality. And this decontextualised understanding of literacy has become a form of discursive governmentality with material effects (Rockhill 1987). Colonial ideological processes resulted in the “invention” of structured pluralised versions of “language”, and “bilingualism” as discrete forms of social categorisation and stratification (see Errington 2001; Makoni 2011; Makoni and Pennycook 2007). In some colonial and postcolonial African contexts, various orthographic literacy practices have received different socio-economic valuations (Blommaert 2004; Juffermans 2011). Some researchers have examined the local agency in the processes of literacy planning and education in Africa (e.g., Trudell and Klaas 2010).
Adopting a social constructionist orientation which recognises the dynamism and hybridism of linguistic resources has significant implications for the ways multilingualism and literacy are approached. Sociolinguistic studies of globalisation have demonstrated that the mobility of people and cultural resources led people to engage with literacies in multiple languages and scripts (Blommaert 2010; Garcia, Bartlett, and Kleifgen 2007). The socio-economic hegemony of English and other regional languages particularly in Africa has resulted in the emergence of complex forms of verbal repertoires. Depending on the context in which it is used, the employment of languages of mobility and accessibility such as English in Africa can constitute a threat to the multilingual choices. However, the use of English in some contexts can open up multilingual spaces for local languages to become visible and to resist the hegemony of national languages (Garcia, Bartlett and Kleifgen 2007; Blackledge and Creese 2010). The emergence of new technologies of literacy has also increased the presence of previously peripheralised literacy practices and hybrid forms of language. This postmodern state of affairs had led researchers such as Garcia, Bartlett and Kleifgen (2007) to argue the case for abandoning the reifying discourses of “bi-literacy” and “bi-lingualism” in favour of “plurilingualism” and “pluriliteracies”. Drawing on the insights provided by work in the area of the NLS, they contend that the concept of pluriliteracies captures the social values of speakers and their complex language practices viewed as integrated, flexible, hybrid and variable. The point here is that monolingual approaches to literacy and bilingualism are based on an essentialist premise that linguistic resources are separable and countable. The alternative is intended to shift the focus on language and literacy from “whole bounded units of code and community, and towards a more processual and materialist approach which privileges language as social practice, speakers as social actors and boundaries as products of social action” (Heller 2007: 1).

The focus of this critical conceptual apparatus is not so much on the mechanical acquisition of skills as on the political and ideological nature of literacy practices (Street 1993a, 2003). In other words, this critical perspective grounds the study of literacy and language in the domain of ideological studies; social organisation and social practice (see Heller 2007: 2). Researchers in this tradition look at literacy as inherently multiple social practices embedded in ideological and economic conditions. Street (1993b) argues that ethnographic models of literacy should engage with questions of power and authority by revealing the significance of the acquisition and uses of specific literacies for the distribution of power and authority in society. That is, literacy practices are inextricably associated with cultural and power structures. This
ideological model is centrally concerned with contextual variability in everyday literacy practices. Rockhill (1987: 165) argues that “the construction of literacy is embedded in the discursive practices and power relationships of everyday life – it is socially constructed, materially produced, morally regulated, and carries a symbolic significance which cannot be captured by its reduction to any one of these”.

The pragmatic and ideological perspectives to literacy are set in stark contrast with what Street (1984, 1993b: 5) terms the “autonomous model of literacy” which treats literacy as a neutral technology detached from its cultural contexts. What is called the “great divide” between “orality” and “literacy”, and by implication between “primitive” and “modern” cultures, is rejected outright by ideological and sociocultural approaches to literacy (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Goody 1986; Ong 1982). For scholars in the field of NLS, modes of communication are “mixed” or hybrid in every society as literate conventions are often applied for oral forms and vice versa (Street 1984: 4). However, “challenging the great divide in favour of an oral/literate “mix” does not necessarily entail naive universalism” (Street 1993b: 9).

Furthermore, studies of literacy which are informed by the ideology of monolingualism have imposed Eurocentric conception of literacy onto other cultures (Street 2003: 77). The autonomous model conceptualises literacy as a decontextualised set of skills deemed necessary for effective functioning of the state and its bureaucratic institutions (Street 1993b). This position draws a deterministic relationship between the technology of writing and the emergence of scientific and logical thought and the growth of political democratic structures (Street 1984: 5). These characteristics turn out to be of the social order rather than of literacy per se (Street 1984: 6). Thus, this (autonomous-literacy) understanding ignores the ideological character of this conception of literacy (Street 1993b: 11).

We use the above critical perspective and concepts to understand how literacy was used by colonial and postcolonial regimes in the Sudan to construct social differences. In the next two sections, we discuss colonial and postcolonial literacy ideologies and practices as a way of historicising and contextualising the emergence of language committees in the Nuba Mountains.

A colonial linguistics of literacy in the Nuba Mountains

The Nuba Mountains covers an area of around 30,000 square miles (Baumann 1987; see Map 1). Administratively, they are part of the State of Southern Kordofan. They are regarded as part of the periphery of the Arab-Sudanese heartlands (Baumann 1987). In this section we show that
the British colonial regime manipulated language and literacy to construct social differences in the Nuba Mountains. The historical review we present here is based on Abdelhay (2010b). We look at the colonial language and "literacy regime" (Blommaert 2008) with a focus on the stratified distribution and valuation of resources involved in the production of the Nuba as a self-contained identity. Another significant point which relates to the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies is that it is mainly during the colonial period that vernaculars received serious attention by outsiders with religious or scientific motivation. The dominant discourse in the post-independent Sudan pejoratively dismissed non-Arabic local vernaculars as "rutanat".

Map 1: The Nuba Mountains (Salih 1990: 419; reproduced with permission of Oxford University Press. Note: Southern Sudan is now a separate nation-state).

The British-dominated Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1898–1956) administered the Nuba Mountains as a separate province in 1914 and the introduction and management of education was left to Christian missionaries, namely
the evangelical protestant Sudan United Mission (henceforth SUM) from New Zealand and Australia. The principal aim of both the colonial government and the Christian mission was articulated by an official as “building up an indigenous Nuba culture under Christian influence” (cited in Willis 2003: 42).

The SUM started its operation in 1920 and Heiban in eastern Hills was used as the main station. The policy of the colonial regime as laid down in 1923 was to isolate “negroid” pagan areas from Arab and Islamic influences (Salih 1990: 418). Separate systems of (local) education were employed in manufacturing subjectivities and group identities of Arab and Nuba. For example, in the socially constructed Arab/Arabised areas this was implemented through the set up of “khalwas” (Qur’anic pre-schools), and Arabic literacy and language were used. The “pagan part” of the Nuba Mountains was managed through Christian education and vernacular and later English particularly in the village schools (Sanderson 1963: 236). The official text which embodied this colonial policy was developed in 1931 by James Angus Gillan, the Governor of Kordofan (1928–1932), and was entitled “Some Aspects of Nuba Administration”. Gillan believed that the social creation of the Nuba as a single “tribe/race” through social and linguistic reductionism is a necessary diversity management strategy:

> How many reasonably well informed outsiders are there who realise that there is no “Nuba” tribe or race, but an as yet unknown number of entirely different stocks, of different cultures, religions and stages of civilisation, speaking perhaps as many as ten entirely different languages and some fifty dialects more or less mutually unintelligible? It is these factors that in broad outline constitute half the “Nuba Problem” in as far as it concerns native administration and indigenous culture, the other half being their contiguity with the Arab. If we were dealing with one solid and separate pagan race there might still be a problem, but its solution would be comparatively simple and would not be urgent. We should only have to isolate it within a metaphorical wall and deal with it at our convenience (Gillan 1931: 6).

It is evident that the colonial practices of governance stemmed from a Eurocentric language ideology which conceptualised language (and literacy) as separable and autonomously enumerable (e.g. “ten different languages”, “fifty dialects”). Multiculturalism and multilingualism were associated with specific forms of thought which were consequently interpreted as indexical of the Nuba identity: “To the average white man Nuba processes of thought are more difficult to follow than those of the Arab” (Gillan 1931: 12).

Arabic language and identity were constituted as the mobile “Other” in relation to “authentic” Nuba ethnicity. Thus, the aim of the colonial
regime was to “preserve or evolve an authentic Nubacivilisation and culture as against a bastard type of arabicisation” (Gillian 1931: 20). The aim of the colonial policy was to assist the Nuba to “stand on its own feet as a self contained unit” (Gillian 1931: 20). To produce a hierarchically structured society, the colonial regime opted for a creation of administratively federated system in which language featured as a prominent productive strategy of divide-and-rule. For Gillian (1931: 20), the creation of a Nuba unity based on language and race against the Arabicisation involved “the creation of federations strong enough to stand on their own feet, and (provided certain lines of policy are consistently followed) sufficiently imbued with Nuba tradition to present a firm barrier to Arabicisation”. In other words, the ideological and structural basis for the creation of unequal social relations was a “mutual federation in view of difference of race and language” (Gillian 1931: 23).

Colonial linguistics and a reductive form of scriptural literacy played a productive role in the creation of social and ethnic boundaries. Gillian (1931: i) drew on the linguistic work of D.N. MacDiarmid (an SUM missionary), and produced “Nuba Language Groups” and a “sketch map of Nuba language groups”. Literacy was employed as a form of colonial governmentality to materialise the production of categorical forms of identities. Literacy in this socio-political sense transcends “the ability to read and write”. In particular Alphabetic literacy was part and parcel of (re)constituting ethnic or tribal identities. For example, although the colonial regime recognised the communicative instrumentality of Arabic, they looked at Arabic literacy as a dangerous force since it provided access to forms of knowledge constructed in Arabic, and could potentially lead to social disintegration of the Nuba. This is evident in the 1930 “Memorandum On Educational Policy in the Nuba Pagan Area” by the Secretary for Education and Health, J.G. Matthew (cited in Gillan 1931: vi, emphasis in original):

The wish of the Government is that Nubas should develop on their own lines and be assisted to build up self contained racial or tribal units; but at the same time it is recognised that for their material advancement there must be easy communication between them and their neighbours and also between the various groups of Nubas themselves who speak different dialects. It is considered that Arabic is the only possible language of intercommunication and it is recommended that for this purpose Arabic in Roman script should be taught as a subject in the elementary schools. Obviously other subjects must be taught in the pupils’ own language. The use of Roman instead Arabic script is desirable on two grounds [sic]. In the first place the children will have learned Roman script when being taught to read and write their own language and the difficulty of teaching two scripts will therefore not arise. In the second place the use of Arabic script
would enable pupils to read Arabic literature of all kinds which would thereby introduce influences tending to disintegrate their tribal life.

The effect of this literacy planning (colloquial Arabic in Roman script) is “dysfunctional literacy” that is alienating because it detaches the student from the material reality of everyday life. Sharkey (2002) has made the following significant remark on the linguistic activities of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the Northern Sudan including the Nuba Mountains:

Although CMS missionaries used Arabic rather than English in their schools, they insisted on teaching an idiosyncratic “romanized” colloquial Arabic of their own devising – a system of reading and writing in Latin print that had no practical local applications. Graduates of CMS schools were therefore restricted not only by social expectations based upon their gender, ethnicity or social status, but also by their possession of a dysfunctional literacy. (Sharkey 2002: 52)

Sharkey (2002: 70) adds that CMS missionaries “hailed the Latin alphabet as a cultural barrier to Muslim influence”. Matthew, who later became a CMS secretary in Jerusalem, admitted retrospectively that he and others supported the use of “Arabic in Roman script and not in Arabic script in order to cut them [the Nuba] off from the Koran” (cited in Sharkey 2002: 70). Thus, educational literacy was a site of tension associated with ideological and political interests. What can be noted here is that public discourses draw a link between language, script and (religious) identity. Keun (1930: 38), a French traveller who went to study the Sudan during the colonial period, noted that one of the major problems facing the Nuba is “how to keep them from learning the Arabic language, a medium which will undoubtedly imbue – and contaminate – them with the Arabic mentality and customs”. Keun (1930: 38) added: “I should like to see the extremely conscientious Commissioners here become the Protectors of the pagans against Trousers and Islam, the Dispensers of English and Biology, and perhaps in two generations they will have in this district an astonishingly enterprising race!”.

Moreover, the groups whose forms of speech deviated from the colonial social order in the Nuba Mountains were represented by Gillan (1931: 28) as “foreign enclaves”. This ideological objective is intertextual and articulates with the colonial Southern Policy (1920–1946) which intended to construct the “north” and the “south” of the Sudan as separate social entities. Similarly, this had begun with the invention of “a series of self-contained racial or tribal units” in the southern Sudan. In essence, the Southern Policy was a social project of inventing ideological differences between the “south” and the “north” (for a discussion of this policy, see
Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni 2011). Language and literacy played a productive role in the creation of the social inequalities between the south and the north. In the context of the Southern Policy, Miller (2010: 388) points out that “the use of Latin script to write Arabic can be interpreted as a means to dissociate Southern Sudanese Arabic from Islam and an attempt to include Southern Sudanese Arabic within the larger Christian community”. The ideological processes of “erasure” (Irvine and Gal 2000) intended to suppress internal variability within the socially constructed groups of “pagan Nuba” and “Muslim Arabs”.

It should be noted that the implementation of the colonial Nuba policy, which was rooted in essentialising ideological discourses, was not without challenges. The dynamic multicultural identities made it difficult to materialise any necessary correlations between a single “racial origin” and “culture”. Gillan (1931: 26) admitted that the most difficult aspect of the Nuba Policy was “the problem of the contiguity of two cultures of somewhat similar racial origin”. For instance, in Talodi sub-district, there was a community called the “Talodi Arab” defined by Gillan as a group of “Nuba origin but of Arab speech and custom” (Gillan 1931: 26). Due to these problems, Douglas Newbold (1932–1938), who later became the Civil Secretary (1939–1945), decided to reverse the Nuba Policy in 1934. Newbold decided that Standard Arabic in Arabic script should be used. He believed that “Roman characters limited the Nuba and this was an unsatisfactory medium of instruction” (Sanderson 1963: 240). Another decision taken by Newbold was that Arabic should replace English as a medium of instruction after vernacular education (Sanderson 1963: 240). Newbold suggested that Islamic teachings should be incorporated into the education and justice system (Henderson 1953: 69). Most importantly, anthropologist Siegfried Frederick Nadel (1947: 178), who was hired by Newbold to assess the implementation of the colonial policy, noted that some of the social groups in the Nuba Mountains had no collective “tribal name” for themselves. For example, Nadel (1947: 178) found that “the modern tribal name of the Moro people was given them by their Arab neighbours, to whom the Moro became known by the name of their ancient home, the hill of Elmoron (or Lebu)”. The point here is that the colonial regime was involved in the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), including the construction of artificial tribal boundaries between already interacting social groups in the Nuba Mountains. Postcolonial regimes exercised a similar interventionist practice in the Nuba Mountains.

Postcolonial vernacular literacy planning within a liberatory framework in the Nuba Mountains
In the previous section, we have shown that the colonial Nuba policy mobilised language and literacy to construct “self-contained racial or tribal units” by demarcating social differences through the semiotic standardisation processes of creating, following Halliday (1976), “anti-orthographies” and “anti-societies”. After independence from Britain in 1956, nationalist governments opted for a centralised form of governance with the aim of building a culturally unified nation. Language and religion were used as the unifying tools to carry out this aim. The educational system was and is still used as a disciplinary institution (Foucault 1977) to implement nationalist projects. The state-supported policies of Arabisation which constituted the core of a nation building project were imposed across the whole country (for a detailed review of the postcolonial history see Sharkey 2003; Mamdani 2009). Arabisation in this sense is a top-down nation-building project rooted in the nationalist ideology of “oneness” (Baragbose 1994: 36) to build a homogenous cultural (and linguistic) community in the Sudan. Thus, the postcolonial institutional regime is centrally informed with a nationalist conformist agenda. Arabic literacy, and not any other vernacular literacy, is framed as unvarying across local contexts. Clezio (1975: 42) points out that the Arabic alphabet is “a factor of national integration” in Sudan. The key religious institutions for Arabic education and literacy are the Masjed (mosque) and Khalwa (a pre-school Qur’anic institution, now largely replaced by nurseries in urban areas).

The postcolonial social order supported by linguistic scholarship tried to reverse the literacy policies of the Christian missionaries particularly in the southern region of Sudan. For example, Khalil Asakir and Yusuf al-Khalifa Abu Bakr created orthographies in Arabic script and pedagogical materials for southern Sudanese languages (see Hurreiz and Bell 1975: 31). In the postcolonial official and scholarly discourses Arabic orthography is represented as the “the national script” (Hurreiz and Bell 1975: 31). Here, we are not just dealing with a mere “script” or “language”. Sharkey (2002, 72) rightly notes that “whereas Christian missionaries had once supported romanized Arabic to blunt Islamic influence, northern politicians now promoted Arabized vernaculars in primary schools as an acculturative step towards the study of standard Arabic and, perhaps, towards Islam”. The important point is that both colonial and postcolonial discourses in the Sudan strategically mobilised the traditional sociolinguistic framing of “language” as a proxy for resisting or imposing nationalist ideologies. The implementation of functional literacy or work-oriented literacy was the key concern particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.
However, the national identity of the Sudan was hotly contested following the civil conflict in the southern Sudan in 1955, resulting in one of the longest civil wars on the African continent. The Nuba Mountains were later dragged into the armed conflict and endorsed the side of the SPLM. The south-north civil war was concluded by two key peace agreements: the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972-1983 and the Naivasha or Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005-2011 which led to the secession of the southern Sudan in July 2011 through a referendum held in January of that year (see Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni 2011). The following five main statements constitute the governing framework of the CPA with respect to language:

2.8.1 All the indigenous languages are national languages which shall be respected, developed and promoted.
2.8.2 Arabic is the widely spoken national language in the Sudan.
2.8.3 Arabic, as a major language at the national level, and English shall be the official working languages of the National Government business and languages of instruction for higher education.
2.8.4 In addition to Arabic and English, the legislature of any sub-national level of government may adopt any other national language(s) as additional official working language(s) at its level.
2.8.5 The use of either language at any level of government or education shall not be discriminated against (CPA 2005: 26–27).

Before the signing of the CPA, the Nuba Mountains engaged in armed struggle with central governments including the current regime of the NCP (the NCP seized power in 1989 through a military coup). Since part of the Nuba Mountains was dominated by the SPLM, the CPA consisted of a separate agreement to deal with the conflict in the State of Southern Kordofan (which includes the Nuba Mountains) and Blue Niles. The protocol is entitled “The Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Niles States”, signed on 24th May 2004 (see CPA 2005). The area of the Nuba Mountains is geographically identified as a “northern” part. Space limitation permits us to highlight only a few key points which legitimise local language and literacy development activities. The agreement states in the preamble that it recognises that “the conclusion of the comprehensive peace settlement that the Sudanese people are longing for requires solving the problems in Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile States as a model for solving problems throughout the country” (CPA 2005: 73). And it reaffirms that “citizenship shall be the basis for equal rights and duties for all Sudanese citizens regardless of their ethnicity or religion” (CPA 2005: 73). Most importantly, the socio-political resolution of the conflicts in the area involves the development and protection of languages and heritage. The agreement formulates this
principle, among significant others, in the following marked way: “The
diverse cultural heritage and local languages of the population of the State
shall be developed and protected” (CPA 2005: 73).

We should note that the agreement grants the States (Southern
Kordofan and Blue Nile) executive and legislative power over the
administration of primary and secondary education (see CPA 2005: 81).
As we previously mentioned, Naivasha language policy has legislated
university education to be bilingual in Arabic and English across the
whole country. Three remarks can be made about the above political
statements. First, the insertion of a linguistic provision in this political
document can be interpreted in various ways. Secondly, the assertion of
“citizenship” as an overriding context-free political identity and the
simultaneous recognition of the significance of context-bound linguistic
cultural affiliations as part of a political solution to the conflict in the area
might appear contradictory but not irreconcilable.

Thirdly, the two political forces (the SPLM and the NCP) signal that
the socio-political marginalisation in the region is partly sociolinguistically
constituted (note that in the quoted statement “language” and “heritage”
are collocated). The top-down ideological policies of Arabisation by
various central governments may be used as an interpretive framework for
these political statements on language. The area has and still continues to
witness high tensions between the Messeria and the Nuba. The Baggara
groups (cattle-herders) are perceived by the Nuba as government-
supported Arab (for a recent account on Nuba-Baggara relationship see
Komey 2010). However, this is an ideologically interested conflict
because at the level of actual practice interactional forms of Arabic and a
version of Islam feature visibly in the multicultural repertoires of the
majority of the Nubas. In this context, the feature of “race/ethnicity”
figures more prominently than religion and language. The late Nuba leader
Yusuf KuwaMekki was reported to have said: “despite all the talk about
my Arabism, my religion, my culture, I am a Nuba, I am black, I am an
African” (Copnell 2011). Recently, the head of the Nuba Relief,
Rehabilitation and Development Organisation was reported to have
warned: “If they will continue to impose the Sharia law, the Islamic
religion and the Arabic language on the people, you will see a new Darfur”
(Copnell 2011). Shortly before the separation of the southern Sudan,
President Beshir stated: “If south Sudan secceeds, we will change the
constitution and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of
culture and ethnicity...Sharia (Islamic law) and Islam will be the main
source for the constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the
official language” (Abdel Aziz 2010). This stance has provoked the anger
of various speech communities including the Nuba. For example, the Nuba
Survival Foundation has cautioned that “should this happen the Nuba will
become fourth class citizens, officially discriminated against in terms of race, language and religion” (Rahhal 2011). The analytic constructs of the “speech community” and “language community” can explain this seeming contradiction. The Nuba who are constituted of various speech communities refuse to be politically co-opted into the ideological linguistic community which defines the nation as Arab-Islamist. More significantly, in the dominant public discourse the standard language ideologies represent (and construct) Arabic as the only legitimate language for national integration and education because it already has a well-developed writing system. This may explain the preoccupation by local communities in the Nuba Mountains and other parts of the Sudan with vernacular literacy development in order to prove that their linguistic varieties are “languages” in the standardized sense of Arabic and English. In other words, locals who received their basic education in Arabic and English are aware of the dominant language ideologies and attempt to manipulate whatever resources available including linguistic scholarship to register their voices. Yet, the notion of the “speech community” should be understood here more loosely and should not imply that the Tima community is strictly parochial or has clear-cut linguistic boundaries.

Further, the agreement assigns priority to the building of infrastructure and human resources in the States. This point is pivotal because we believe that the social value of a linguistic resource is shaped and, in turn, shapes the political economic conditions in which it is embedded. However, the local administration of the institutional production of knowledge in an area riddled with racial and cultural tensions as the Nuba Mountains opens up much-needed possibilities and spaces for subjugated voices to challenge the status quo. These sociocultural spaces are often revealed through a strategic manipulation of the hegemonic discourses of Arabic and English. Vernacular literacy events, whether in the Nuba Mountains or in Khartoum, have effectively succeeded in forging a sense of social solidarity between members of the groups at the local level and in attracting the attention of academics at national and international institutions. However, to understand the genealogy of social inequality in the Nuba Mountains, a socially integrated and politically accountable interdisciplinary scholarship is urgently needed. Blommaert and Verschueren (1991: 12) noted:

The linguist’s involvement in matters social has been notoriously small throughout the 20th century history of the discipline. The ideological dichotomy between “language” and other spheres of human life has shaped a type of linguistics which has accurately described dozens of North American Indian languages, while the Indians themselves – as an
identifiable group – have virtually disappeared from the face of the earth. The “language” was preserved, while we let the community die.

In its evaluation report of July 2008 on the implementation process of the CPA, the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) noted that “for wider stabilisation the historical marginalisation of the Nuba needs to be addressed” (AEC 2008: 33). Situated within this sociohistorical context, in the next section, we broadly focus on a local literacy planning body: the Tima Language Committee.

The construction of translocal literacy projects: the case of the Tima Language Committee

In this section, we broadly examine the emergence of local literacy planning bodies in the Nuba Mountains with a focus on the Tima Language Committee (henceforth TLC). Before proceeding, we should make the following disclaimer: although we are talking about vernacular literacy development projects this should not imply that we are dealing with a peripheral “oral” culture in the evolutionary process of becoming “literate” in contrast to other groups with established Arabic and English literacy traditions in other parts of the Sudan (this is against the “great divide” thesis, see above). Many of the young people (particularly of the male population) are multi-literate in the dominant writing practices of Arabic and English. And they draw on their histories with these literacy practices, in some cases in collaboration with academics, to develop writing systems for a locally spoken form of communication (note that the distinction between “speaking” and “written modes of communication” can be drawn even within so-called “literate cultures”, see Blommaert 2008). Suffice it to say that the textual sample in Figure 1, which is an instance of an educational genre, is designed by two Nuba youth in cooperation with a linguist. The point is that writing, or any graphic practice is not contrasted with speech as such, but both are viewed as modes of action in relation to the communicative repertoires of the people.

The people under discussion are identified by their neighbouring communities with various group-defining labels including “Tima”, Tamanik or Yibwa. However, the same group self-identifies as “Umurik” (singular “Kumurik”), and it refers to its area and language as “Lumurik” and “Dumurik” respectively. Tima tribe is one of the social groups in the Nuba Mountains of north-central Sudan. Tima consists of four villages each with a leader called “sheikh algarya” (village leader). The Tima people have expressed their desire for Tima to become a means of instruction in basic education in order to maintain the language as a
symbol of their identity. Some of them including the leaders have formed
the TLC. The scholarly attention to Tima stemmed from the community
itself when they approached the African and Asian Institute at the
University of Khartoum. The fact that it was the Tima members who
contacted the Institute, and then jointly started the construction of the
project may point to their different positionalities and circumstances of
inequality in which their “voice” can only relatively be recognised through
the proxy of Academic scholarship. The TLC is basically dedicated to the
task of developing a writing system for the Tima language. In other words,
it is focused on vernacular literacy which deals with the development of a
written version of a language that acquires its social value in specific
interactional domains of everyday life. Although the phrase “vernacular
literacy” may sound deceptively non-political, the reverse holds true.
Trudell and Klaas have reminded us,

Vernacular literacy is not simply literacy in the community’s own
language; it is distinctive in its lack of official recognition, institutional use
and political prestige. Vernacular literacy here also carries a hint of the
countercultural, an expression of defiance against the institutions which
have marginalized it; given that it has no utility in the outside world, its
local value is a statement that the community is making about itself.
(Trudell and Klaas 2010: 124).

The TLC has produced two books in the Tima language using the Roman
script. Membership of the TLC includes persons of both sex, some of
whom live in Khartoum but still maintain ties with the Tima community
while others reside in the Tima area. Some researchers at the international
level are also involved in the development of linguistic and educational
materials in Tima. Thus, the sources of this literacy project and the
developing interpersonal relationships, which are complex and
translocal/transnational (Nuba, Khartoum, Europe), defy being reduced to
any parochial level or specific locality. For example, a recent project
entitled “a multimedia documentation of verbal communication among the
Tima” was sponsored by Volkswagen Foundation, Germany, as part of the
programme of Documentation of Endangered Languages (see DOBES
2006). The project is intended, among other things, to develop a
multimodal literacy syllabus shaped by the socio-cultural order of the
Nuba Mountains (see Figure 1). The project has set an example for a form
of “cooperative language planning” (Ruiz 1984: 29; cf. Hymes’ 1996 “the
principle of cooperative ethnographic research”) in which local people and
academic researchers engage in joint literacy projects. The question of
whether this material will “count” as a literacy syllabus within the wider
normative system in Sudan is a political question par excellence. However,
this project may have transformative effect on the way linguists conceptualise local communities they work with. Members of the TLC no longer act as mere sources of data due to their ethnic membership, but as equal literacy and language developers and analysts with authorial inscribing voice. For example, the multimedia literacy syllabus in Figure 1 is created jointly by two members of the TLC (NasraldeenAbdallaKorsha and Hamid Kafi Amin) and a German professional linguist (Gertrud Schneider-Blum).

Figure 1. A page from a DoBeS literacy syllabus in Tima

The Tima community has two primary schools, one of which consisted of 557 students of both sexes, with seven teachers, five of whom were men and two women (on-site observation 2006). The TLC is motivated by grassroots social causes articulated in the significance of educating their children in the Tima. The term “grassroots” should not be interpreted to imply a localised homogeneity or even “non-schooled” forms of literacy. On the contrary, the Tima tribe is itself hierarchically structured on the basis of education, age, professions, etc. The dominant medium of instruction in the schools was English, and the curriculum was based on Kenyan materials. Borrowing materials from neighbouring countries
points to the translocal value and use of these literacy materials and complex type of social networks people are engaged with.

Further, we noticed that the actual institutional practice of “using English curriculum” is at variance with the intention of the teachers (who mostly want a Tima curriculum). The books produced by the TLC have demonstrably problematised the dominant language ideology in which only Arabic is designated as a “language” and the “Other” as a “local dialect” on the basis of whether a language has a writing system. Therefore, the issue of “literacy” (in the traditional sense) is centrally implicated here. It should also be remarked that Arabic is a constituent element in the sociolinguistic repertoire (the set of communicative resources) of the people of the Southern Kordofan. A repertoire may be defined as an ordered collection of communicative resources deployable according to contextual needs. More importantly, the linguistic work by the TLC provides an avenue for understanding why and how literacy movements get involved in language planning activities. The TLC has succeeded in mobilising the sectors of the Tima community around the first sociolinguistic project on social attitudes towards specific forms of speech. The process of data generation for the project, which took the form of organising a series of “literacy events” (Heath 1982: 50), involved research assistants from different sections of the society. Young girls have actively participated in the process of information gathering by administering survey questionnaires in the four Tima villages. The point here is that different sectors of the Tima community were actively interested in collaborating with linguists and fieldwork researchers working in the area of language documentation. For them the development of literacy was not just the responsibility of school but of the society, and that was why elderly people were centrally involved.

The Tima community has proved to be a genuine agent in the development of (a form of) its speech, and has shown practically how bottom-up inclusive language planning can work effectively. Here we argue that this cooperative labour was possible because the two parties operated with similar language ideologies. The tribal intervention in the working of languages is in essence no different from the linguistic professional one. The fact that the TLC has developed literacy materials in Roman script for Tima indicates its awareness of the dominant standard language ideologies in the country. The choice-making of a medium of instruction and the educational curriculum in the Nuba Mountains are relatively determined by a history of conflict and oppression by central governments. As we write, the State of Southern Kordofan including the Nuba Mountains has become a battlefield between the NCP and SPLM.

The Tima community parted company with Arabic educational curricula a long time ago. For this reason, linguistic options including the
issue of writing script are not neutral but rather ideological. Commenting on the choice of orthographic script by the Christian missionaries in the context of the colonial period, Miller states:

The choice of the script is not a neutral one and in many countries there have been acute controversies concerning the choice of the official script, each script being more or less associated with a specific religious trend (Arabic with Islam, Latin with Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Cyrillic with Orthodox Christianity). Many non-Arab Muslim communities around the world have and still use the Arabic script to write their own vernacular language. By doing so, they share a common cultural writing with the other members of the Arab-Muslim world (Miller 2010: 388).

Miller’s argument still has significant relevance to the present-day context of the Nuba Mountains where the ideological functions of literacy are in some cases reformulated explicitly by committees or planning bodies. For instance, the Moro Literacy Project organised by the American Bible Society which has significantly contributed in the educational development (particularly for girls) in the area has the following objectives (American Bible Society 2009):

The objectives of the project are ambitious: it aims to publish learning resources and encourage the Moro community to learn to read, to encourage the Moro to write about their history and culture and, by doing so, to preserve it, and to promote the reading of the Bible in Moro so as to preserve Christianity among the people “the urban young, in particular” in the face of the growing influence of Islam.

Another significant reason mentioned by Schneider-Blum as to why the TLC selected the Roman script is that the children are first taught how to read and to write in English with the Roman script, and they are exposed to the Arabic script and writing system only very late during their school education. The TLC has also provided a translocal account of how a community in practice can resist top-down centralised state policies by being guided by a collective effort to create spaces using the existing resources. It could be said that members of the TLC are strategically operating with ideologies of standard language and literacy, though the people should have their own folk forms of metapragmatic awareness. In other words, the TLC is appropriating the dominant ideological frame of reference which regards the existence of a writing system as a condition of legitimating a given communicative resource as “language”. It could be the case that the TLC believes that their linguistic resources would not be equally recognised with Arabic or English unless they are artefactualised (see Mugaddam and Abdelhay: forthcoming). What is of significance is
that some members of the Tima community have access to metalinguistic
categories which could enable them to get involved in mutual engagement
with professional linguists. They can even go as far as to interrogate the
constructs developed by expert knowledge. This is evident in the
following Arabic interactional transcript between a professional linguist
and a member of the community:

1 Tima Member  takhasus?  Specialisation?
2 Linguist  takhasus lughawiyyat  Specialisation is linguistics.
3 Tima Member  lugha nubiyya walla  A Nubian language or, there
lugha ma katir?  are many languages?
4 Linguist  lughawiyyat sudaniyya  Sudanese linguistics.
5 Tima Member  uhm  Uhm.
6 Linguist  takhasus fi lughati  Specialisation is in
sudaniyya  Sudanese languages.
7 Tima Member  Wainta ina bitit kalam  And you do you speak the
lugha bita tuloshi?  Tuloshi language?
8 Linguist  la la  No no.
9 Tima Member  wakayfintatakundictur?  And how then are you a
doctor?

The above chunk of linguistic interaction seems unmarked with locally
managed turns largely determined by the occurrence of adjacency pairs in
a form of questions and answers. What is of special interest for our
purpose is the folk linguistic categorisation of the linguist as a person who
“speaks many languages”, a definition which is immediately repaired or
rejected by the linguist. The interjection “Uhm” by the Tima member (line
5) can be seen as a further demand for clarification or quantification, a
move which the linguist responded to by the restatement in Line 6. This
element displays the point that some of the members who attend the
TLC’s meetings operated with a standard language ideology; hence the
socio-political significance of writing. The point that Tuloshi (or Tulushi)
was conceptualised as a monolithic whole is a case in point. This
interaction is embedded in a wider socio-historical context riddled with
(armed) conflict with the central government. And here the issue of power
relations becomes visible. The situation in the Tima area was/has been also
characterised with contradictions and tensions with respect to the
educational policy (e.g., an imported English curriculum) and the
linguistic forms used outside school in the community (Arabic, Tima,
English, other forms). Although Arabic, English, Tima and other verbal
resources are used outside the school domain, they are not in free variation
but rather layered. The use of English in the education system in Tima
schools should not imply that the teachers are a victim of false
consciousness. English in the Nuba Mountains is regarded as one of the
counter-hegemonic strategies to the homogenising educational discourse of the NCP. We should note that the TLC members (as all members of the community) have a set of fragmented socio-political identities which they perform in various contexts (e.g., in the Mountains, Khartoum, etc.). The examination of the repercussions of globalisation as a particular socioeconomic discourse in the Nuba Mountains in general and in the Tima area in particular should point to the fact that the Nuba are not “self contained racial or tribal units” as the colonial regime intended them to be a century ago. A significant part of the population, in particular the youth, in the Nuba Mountains, engages with global products in a strategic and creative manner. For example, we observed that in Dilling some of the people engage with the English Premier League through, among other things, announcements written in Arabic (see Figure 2).

Translation:

English Premier League,
Sunday 26.11.2006,
Portsmouth x Newcastle, at 4 o’clock;
Man United x Chelsea, at 7 O’clock.
Will Chelsea do it in the Stadium of Dreams?
Support and enjoy with Jalal Video. Jalal Video
Figure 2. A public announcement on the closed door of a shop in the Market of the Dilling City, Sudan (photo taken in December 2006).

The above advert displays traces of its audience. The readership of this material would be persons living in the city or its surrounding neighbourhoods and have some reasonable communicative competence in this (trans)local genre of Arabic. The circulation of discourses about corporatised events such as the English Premier League may have a shaping influence on the local economies of linguistic forms in these areas. More intensive empirical research is needed to understand how the social groups and individuals in the Nuba Mountains reconstitute their cultural practices and discourses in response to new globalised products.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed the socio-political conditions of literacy in Sudan with a focus on vernacular literacy movements. We have broadly analysed the colonial and postcolonial history of literacy in the Nuba Mountains as a way of situating community language and vernacular literacy committees. We have reviewed the Tima Language Committee as a case study. We have argued that the British colonial policy in the Nuba Mountains used educational literacy as a modality of social differentiation and control. The postcolonial policies towards the Nuba Mountains attempted to undo the effects of the colonial literacy policy by inducting the masses into “the official” script of Arabic language and literacy. Literacy in the Nuba Mountains of the Sudan has become infused with complex ideological meanings. Further ethnographic research is required for understanding the full complexity of literacy practices (including unofficial or non-school practices) in the Tima community in particular and the Nuba Mountains more generally. Empirical enquiry is also needed to explore the socio-political circumstances in which a particular literacy option in the community becomes a “marked” choice in a sociolinguistic regime characterised by a hierarchy of resources in which Arabic and (gradually) English are the hegemonic forces.

References


