Language and Identity in the Context of Conflict: The Case of Ethnolinguistic Communities in South Darfur State

By:
Dhahawi Salih Ali Garri, University of Nyala
& Abdelrahim Hamid Mugaddam, University of Khartoum

Abstract
This study investigates the patterns of taking pride in Arabic and other native languages among the ethnic groups characterised by ethnolinguistic vitality in Nyala and the satellite internally displaced persons’ camps. The study also looks into how these communities perceived the role their native languages could play in the construction of their ethnic identities. In addition, factors influencing the construction of ethnic identities were investigated. Data pertaining to language perceptions on identity, and the role of conflict in the process of identity construction were collected. To this end, four tools were employed to collect the data: a thirteen-item questionnaire administered to 711 respondents, 12 focus group discussions held with 112 participants, in-depth interviews with 20 persons and participant observations. The study came to a number of findings, the most important of which were: (a) the communities investigated were found to have revitalised their native languages by taking pride in them in different domains; (b) there was a perceived aversion towards Arabic across the groups studied; (c) there was a conscious revitalisation of ethnolinguistic identities; and (d) the current conflict has played a great role in the emergence of revitalised ethnolinguistic identities.

1. Introduction
Located in the westernmost part of Sudan, the Greater Darfur (constituting five federal states) occupies an area of 549 thousands square kilometres. South Darfur (SDS) – the area of the present study – is one of these states, with its capital Nyala and a population of 4,074,369 people. Occupying vast savannah lands, SDS is a paradise for sedentary farmers or roaming pastoralists. Although they are usually transhumant, the majority of farmers are Negroid Africans while the majority of nomads are Arabs. Since the 1970s, the region has been devastated by frequent droughts, making tense the competition between the nomads and farmers over the shrinking land and water resources. When conflicts arose on such grounds, they were often contained amicably through time-honoured, traditional conventions. Since the early 1980s, however, the Darfurians have been simmering with being marginalised; and with it, rhetoric of imbalances in power and wealth sharing was overtly voiced. Nevertheless, there has never been a collective animosity towards the State until mid-2003, the year the current conflict underwent a complete metamorphosis into a collective political thinking. Afterwards, two armed movements: Sudan Liberation Army/Movement of Justice and Equality, both are now falling under several breakaway groups, manifested themselves as movements fighting the government for political grounds.
In fact, as Harir (1993: 4) notes, since long ago the Sudanese at wide have been experiencing an unstated, but a noticed ethnic-based conflict masked in a pejorative semantics such as *awlād al-balad* vs. *gharrāba*, (sons of Arabs vs. westerners, or the non-Arabs and Arabs alike). This can be put as Centre vs. Periphery conflict, regardless of who the people in the periphery are. Ironically, there exists an unseen conflict, Harir (*ibid.*) argues, which can be described as “what is not said which divides” the worthy sons of Arabs and ‘gharraba’ – a long conflict narrative traceable since the time of Mahdi, the famous religious propagandist,

because the riverain Arabs
did not accept the authority of Khalifa Abdullahi, the appointed successor of Mahdi even though Khalifa Abdullahi was an Arab himself. His undoing, as far as the riverain Ashraf were concerned, was that he was a Baggara Arab of the Taisha tribe of western Sudan, i.e. Dar Fur (p. 6-7).

It seems that, we argue, enmity between the Centre and the Periphery subdued, at least tactically, when the current conflict broke out. Instead, by the virtue that the vanguards of the current conflict who first kindled it are mostly non-Arabs, and by the very same token that the majority of ethnic groups mobilised by the government to counterattack the Liberation Army/Movement were Darfur Arabs, antipathy between these two groups inevitably ensued. As a result, the two groups flagrantly vented their animosities towards each other, resulting in the devastation of the whole region.

Except for intermittent eras eliminated from official circles by the British colony whereby English was imposed as an official language, Arabic has been the dominant language since the 1950s for many apparent reasons. It is the only lingua franca that gained its dominance from power vested in it by the ruling intelligentsias in Sudan right after independence in 1956. Arabic was further supported by the adoption of Arabiciation policy (Hurreiz and Abdel-Salam (1989). Alongside with Arabic about a hundred languages belonging to three families, Afro-Asiatic, Kordofanian, and Nilo-Saharan are spoken in the Sudan (Greenberg 1966). In Darfur, Afro-Asiatic language group is represented by Arabic and Nilo-Saharan languages are represented by Zaghawa Fur, Massalit, and Midoub. Some languages such as Hausa, Fulani, Daju and Iringa have a noticeable representation among in the region. Yet, children and youths of the communities speaking Darfurian languages are shifting constantly to Arabic, the dominant language in the Darfur and Sudan at large (Idries 2005, Mugaddam 2006).

In this study, we tend to use the term ‘Arabicised’, instead of ‘Arabised, to refer to linguistic, social or cultural processes noted by Hurreiz and Abdel-Salam (1989) above. With this in mind, we categorise ethnic groups in Darfur into three groups: Arabs, semi-arabicised groups, and groups characterised by ethnolinguistic vitality (EV). The latter groups are so defined because they still vigorously speak their native languages in a wide range of domains. Arabic is spoken as a lingua franca by almost all the indigenous groups in Darfur. Aside Arabs who speak Arabic exclusively and some small groups of Arabs who speak Darfurian languages due to mutual communal interaction and intermarriage with non-Arabic speakers, there are the arabicised native
communities. Among these are the Tunjur and Berti who had undergone a complete shift to Arabic (Miller and Abu-Manga, 1992). Birgid, Qimir, Borno (the earlier waves of immigrants only), Simayat and Mima are also regarded as Arabized.

For the purpose of the present study, we refer to groups which use their native languages as ethnolinguistic communities (ECs). Although it is hard to single out an indigenous group as completely or slightly arabicised, these groups are exemplified by ECs whose languages are currently undergoing a pacing shift to Arabic, such as the Daju. The latter group includes the Fulani, Hausa, Masalit, Fur and Zaghawa. While the Fur, the largest group entirely live in Sudan, the Zaghawa and Masalit live in Sudan and Chad, and Fulani in a wide belt stretching from the Sub-Saharan belt to central Sudan. These four ethnic groups are chracterised by ethnolinguistic vitality groups because they (a) still use their native languages vigorously in wide domains; and (b) have developed a strong and distinct ethnic identity.

1.3. Ethnic identity construction in Darfur

Joseph (2004) argues that identity is not an easy concept to capture as long as the answer to the question “Who are you deep down there?” is sought. However, he proposes three definitions for the term: (1) ethnic identity which focuses more on a shared common descent, cultural heritage and political aspirations for autonomy; (2) national identity which focuses on political borders; and (3) racial identity – now a concept virtually taboo in American discourse. Contextualised in the setting of the present study, ethnic identity in Darfur can be seen as an epitome of ethnic racism. Bearing this in mind, it cannot be unfathomable why, within the simmering processes of ethnolinguistic identity construction, ethnic integration quickly attenuated and racial identity accentuated as soon as the conflict erupted. When unequal ethnic identities are let to compete in hostile linguistic, political, social and economic environments, say of Darfur, the marginalised ethnic identities are likely to come into the conflict.

However, identity is not a static trait of a person or a group. It is constantly constructed or reconstructed according to the changing dynamics and modes of interaction with others. One of the means people use to reconstruct their identities is through the language they use (Thornborrow, 1999:136). In the present Darfur, language has become the most workable tool to construct ethnic identities becoming a community disintegrating factor. In other words, the emerging rhetoric of Arab/non-Arab literature take ‘who speaks what’ as a measure for labelling the parties involved in the conflict. Again, the term identity in the area of the present study speaks to a quasi-primordial concept of identity which is, as noted by Mar-Molinero (2000), primitive structure of a group of people sharing common cultural, social and linguistic features. Furthermore, identity in Darfur is very close to a concept defined by Eriksen (1992: 314) as the “systematic reproduction of basic classificatory differences between groups” which bears cultural distinctiveness constructed by continuity of contrasts.
2. Factors influencing language attitude in the Sudanese context

2.1. The linguistic factor

In 1970, the Institute of African and Asian Studies in the University of Khartoum initiated a series of field studies known as Language Survey Studies (LSSs) to carry out a comprehensive survey for the Sudanese Languages. To support LSSs in conducting statewide language surveys, an Advisory Committee for Language Survey was established in 1972 by a presidential decree to: identify, document, develop and implement operational procedures for better studying of the Sudanese languages. That committee was considered to be a language planning body through which many language policies were brought into action. The most pertinent language policy was marked when the Third Language Conference in Sudan was held in 1991 to, among other objectives, abolish the negative attitudes held by indigenous language speakers towards Arabic. However, the way prolonged linguistic, cultural and social arabicisation processes imposed on ethnic language speakers show that the objectives set forth in the conference were nothing more than lip service. In terms of the overall objectives, the whole business was made on political and religion motifs: to bring Sudan closer to the Arab and Muslim world than to the African affinity. Accordingly, we argue, languages policies passed by the committee have been harmful to indigenous language speakers. As a result, sensitivity to native languages ensued. As noted by Furgeson (1971), when linguistic minorities realise that their languages are disempowered, they might develop negative attitudes towards the imposed language, Arabic in the case of Sudan.

In Sudan, it has been a tradition in studies on language attitude to use terms such as language preference or language choice to refer to vernacular-speakers’ language use or attitudes towards Arabic or their own languages (Mugaddam, 2006a, Mugaddam 2006b, Idris, 2007). Although such terms are meant to describe language attitudes developed by the studied communities, their attitudes were objectively investigated, putting these studies under the criticism that adopting quantitative tools for obtaining attitudinal trends is likely to result in unreal findings. In the present study, however, we used both qualitative and quantitative tools to reflect on how negative or positive attitudes were held towards the languages under our study.

As a national language in Sudan, attitudes to Arabic are believed, both by governmental bodies and individuals to be positive. It is true that symbolic and ideological powers vested in Arabic are so influential that minority language speakers are coerced to succumb, in their uphill fight, to use their languages in almost all domains. Worsened by the eruption of the ethnicised conflict in Darfur, speech communities in Darfur experienced a propensity towards revitalising their ethnic languages. Along with a mounting pressure imposed by socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors to desert their languages, minority language speakers are facing a dilemma. They have to stay loyal to their traditions, heritages, including languages, and withstand social and economic disadvantages. On the other hand, they have to struggle against the unfavourable language situations they are destined for. While they cannot deny the instrumentality of Arabic for achieving economic mobility, the ECs are equally
becoming resistant to the processes of disempowering their native languages. Such a situation can better be interpreted by linguistic habitus theory, to which we will return in data analysis and discussion section.

2.2. The conflict factor

Amid the escalating waves of interethnic conflict which erupted in 2003, the Darfurians are falling apart. As noted by O’Fahey (1980:13), the catastrophic history of the Turko-Egyptian occupation of Darfur (1874-1882) repeats itself in now: there descended a devastating apathy onto the Darfurians, a “melancholy in Dar Fur, still known as “the years of banditry”/umm kwakiyya, (kwak remaining unidentified), of burnings and misery” [italics and brackets original]. Driven by lampoons chanted by women locally known as Hakamat – delirious lyric chanting women whose jingles would immediately send warlike tribesmen frenzy and blood-thirsty – a paramilitary formations known as Janjaweed devastated whole communities. Many UN-based reports claim that the conflict claimed about 200,000 – 500,000 lives, i.e. one in twelve persons was killed, about 2000 villages were completely decimated and more than two million persons became homeless, either internally displaced or took refuge in Chad or Central African Republic. As a result, ethnic hatred has reached unprecedented magnitude. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms which were used to restore social integration, when conflicts arise, were no longer held sacrosanct. Conspicuously, ethnic schisms emerged, and with it there ensued ethnic-ridden clichés such as us and them classification of people; both terms being used by Arabs and non-Arab groups alike.

Keeping in mind this background, we maintain that conflict is a factor in the emergence of negative attitude among other speech communities in the case of our study. The IDPs currently settled in the study area are exclusively ECs who were not at ease with the Arabs in the history of ethnic conflicts in Darfur (Takana 1998). To qualify this, we argue that Dessler’s (1994) conflict categories which are reflected through channels (social, political economic or national splinter groups), targets and triggers and catalysts among a group can be workable evidence to explain our position that the current conflict is a major factor in the emergence of aversion towards Arabic on the part of ECs. Through such channels, armed movements emerged, and through targets and triggers, ethnolinguistic-based antipathy towards Arabic ensued.

3. Research methodology

The population of this research consisted of residents settled in Nyala and in five internally IDPs camps around it. The sample of the study consisted of 717 respondents belonging to tribes such as Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, Daju, Fulani, Borgo, Borno, Jebel, Arab NL-speakers and Hausa. Added to 112 focus group discussants divided into 12 focus groups (8 – 10 discussants each) and 20 individuals personally interviewed, the final size of the sample is 829. Age groups, level of education and sex were nearly proportionately represented in the sample. It is noteworthy that the Hausa were the only
group that we could not hold a focus group discussion with, for reasons out of our control.

3.1. Data collection

A 13-item questionnaire (written in Arabic) was used in the study. It was redeveloped after those used by Bourhis et al. (1981), White and Curtis, (1990), Goldschmidt (2003) and Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2011). We also capitalised on, with some modifications, questionnaires used by Miller and Abu-Manga (1992), Mugaddam (2002) and Dada (2007). The questionnaire items were divided into three parts. Respondents’ personal data (sex, age, ethnicity, job and level of education) were presented in part one. In part two, respondents’ attitudes towards their native language and Arabic were tested, whereas in part three, the items were designed to elucidate dynamics of ethnolinguistic identity construction processes. The same items were presented to the focus group discussants and to those who were individually interviewed.

Data collection procedures differed according to the type of sample targeted or tools used. We administered the questionnaires to and recovered them from students in running classes immediately at the end of each class. Because the Humanitarian Aid Commission in Nyala informed us that the IDPs were sensitive to deal with people who they did not trust, and so was the situation amid the conflict, we had to administer the questionnaires by research assistants. These were senior students majoring in English studying in the University of Nyala who were trained by the present researchers to administer the questionnaires. Apart from the focus group discussants studying at the university, other discussants were also recruited. Because tape-recording was an issue of concern to the vast majority of participants in the focus group discussants, we minuted the discussions with the help of trained assistants. As cultural insiders and well-aware of the dynamics of ethnic, social and linguistic mechanisms in the research area, we have also observed almost all the phenomena pertinent to this research. Using Wolcott’s (1994) qualitative data treatment technique, i.e., employing descriptive, analytic and interpretative processes simultaneously, the final categories produced from qualitative data were analysed along with the quantitative data.

3.2. Data analysis and results

We hypothesised that the ECs under study began taking pride in speaking in their mother tongues and also developed a perceived aversion towards Arabic caused primarily by the current conflict. Data obtained from the questionnaire are analysed and interpreted according to language(s) each ethnic group perceived as the most suitable means for taking pride in. The analysis also covers issues such as showing self-assertion when using a language in public places (Table 1), the language(s) they perceived most as having a role in their identity construction (Table 2), and finally, the perceived power of native language in identity construction (Table 3). In order to give a complementary picture, such perceptions were further ascertained by analysing the qualitative data.
gleaned from the focus group discussions (FGDs), personal interviews and on-the-field observation.

4.1. Patterns of language attitudes

The concept that language functions as a source of personal pride among minority speech communities is associated with the linguistic habitus theory (LHT) of Bourdieu (1986, 1991). This theory stipulates that a person’s position is not only defined in terms of his or her social class but also in terms of her or his cultural, social and symbolic capitals. Nested within the social capital is language. More pertinent to the premise of this theory in regard to the above hypothesis is the argument that language plays a significant role in moulding the perceived status of one’s language as a source of personal pride until, finally, the linguistic habitus is experienced. In the context of the present study, where linguistic, cultural and social arabicisation processes have long been operated by the government and directly been experienced by the indigenous ECs, it is assumed by the government that taking pride in Arabic should outweigh taking pride in any of the native languages. However, the argument presented in the present thesis goes against such an assumption.

In the light of the above literature, we will analyse and discuss the our findings to test the aforementioned hypothesis (section 3.2). In this study, the terms taking pride in language and language use for showing self-assertion are interchangeably used instead of language preferences or language attitudes which are used in almost all the research done in language maintenance and shift in Sudan. We are doing this because the former terms are employed to examine the observable linguistic behaviours which may determine a minority language user’s preferences of his/her language or of the dominant language. Conversely, the terms used in this study are meant to measure how strong an indigenous language speaker takes pride in his or her language even if the preference of the dominant language is imposed by social, economic or demographic realities. Thus, taking pride in one’s language is used to mean the positive attitudes which indigenous language speakers had towards their own languages arising from psychological ties, social tendencies or economic ends determined by their communities. Again, and throughout this paper, terms showing “self-pride” and “self-assertion” are used in their respective contexts to stand for the situations where the subjects under study reported they had felt proud speaking in a certain language in public places.

Table 1 shows frequency of answers given to a question about what language(s) the respondents used the most in public places to show self-pride. To deal with answers given, we will first analyse the quantitative data obtained from each table, then the qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions, interviews or observation. The table shows that languages chosen as a media of communication in public places for showing self-pride differed greatly across the groups investigated. 47% of the Fur preferred Arabic only as a language of self-pride, followed by the Masalit and Borgo, the Fulani, Hausa, Borno and the Arab NL-speakers, respectively.
Table (1): Ethnic groups and patterns of taking pride in a language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic linguistic community</th>
<th>Arabic only</th>
<th>Both Arabic and native language</th>
<th>Native language only</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Row N %</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Row N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fur</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masalit</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaghawa</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daju</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borgo</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borno</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jebel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab NL-speakers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, by virtue of being a minority in Al-Salam Camp, the Jebel were found to be severely pressed by the irresistible instrumentality of Arabic on the one hand, and the need to strengthen their ethnic existence by maintaining their language in the camps on the other. For example, a Jebel discussant argued that “We cannot expel Arabic out of our life because it is a part of it. We all have to speak Arabic at schools and at markets. Our children have to learn in Arabic.” Similar arguments were expressed by many other focus group discussants, mainly the Masalit and Fulani. This suggests that while many of the studied groups were showing pride in their NLs, they still recognised the indispensability of Arabic.

The data gleaned from the university focus group discussions showed that taking pride in Arabic, feeling proud of speaking in Arabic, in public places was determined, most of them said, by the media of communication, place, and purpose of communication. While the Masalit, Fur, Fulani and Daju said they were not careful of feeling self-assertive as such by speaking their native languages, Zaghawa, Hausa and Jebel were found more sensitive using their own languages. A Jebel discussant, for example, maintained that the Jebel people insist on speaking their language wherever they went. “Our language makes us exuberant while chatting, when we feel something might go wrong, we immediately switch to English [they called their language English],” he said. Findings reached here suggest that the tendency to take pride in one’s native language has a relationship with the degree of preference for Arabic; For example, Mugaddam (2002) and Idris (2007) found that the Fur and Masalit were the groups most inclined to shift to Arabic, whereas the Zaghawa were the opposite.

Taking pride in English was insignificant across all the respondents, but was more evident among the university FGDs. In the IDPs camps, however, English was gaining a solid ground. In the IDPs, English was symbolised as food and security provider. For example, a Daju discussant asserted that “The IDPs blindly trust the foreign relief workers…. If given by a foreign relief worker, a heap of this [pointing to a heap of dung] is much more appreciated than anything of value given by any Sudanese
fellowman…” Taking pride in a foreign language was replicated by other studies. Dada (2001), for example, found that Yoruba-speakers in Nigeria tended to appreciate English for its instrumentality although almost all the studied parents wanted their children to learn Yoruba in order to maintain cultural continuity.

Of interest are the Daju university discussants who reported that they felt self-assertive by using their language in public places, though they all had only passive knowledge of Daju (except one who was originally from South Kordofan State where Daju is still vigorously spoken). Such a tendency was also observed when we traced a 15-year-old Daju respondent studying at Owaisha Secondary School for Girls in Bilail who reported that she had spoken Daju fluently at home. When asked in the classroom about the one who claimed proficient in Daju, two Daju girls promptly replied. Opposite to this example was the case of a Shwai respondent studying in Al-Salam Camp Primary School. When traced, the respondent not only denied speaking his native language, but also denied that any of his family members spoke Shwai. However, his peers argued that his elder family members spoke their native language. The Shwai case was exemplified in studies carried out by Rejito (1987) on the Oromo in Ethiopia and by Papapavlou and Sophocleous (2009) on the Greek Cypriot university students who spoke a Greek-Cypriot dialect. Both groups were stigmatised language-based reasons.

Among the young children and youth in the IDPs camps, feeling self-assertive by using one’s native language was taken as a fashion. A Daju interviewee, an owner of two private basic schools in Bilail Locality, reported that he banned speaking in native languages at his schools because the pupils were always complaining that they provoked one another in local languages. He further admitted that his pupils were developing a sense of revitalised native language use which was primarily associated with the current conflict, adding that even the children, including the Daju children believed to have little knowledge of Daju, were learning how to equivocate more precisely than the older people in particular instances so that infiltrators could easily be identified.

Generally, it was observed that speech communities in the IDPs camps prefer using their native languages in wide domains. Although different ethnic groups were living in all the camps, they usually live on ethnic-clusters known by Centres – each having its own name – and used as assembly points where food rations were periodically distributed by relief organisation. This helped these communities to maintain their languages and develop distinct ethnic identities. Among the university students, the use of native languages was not observed so overtly except in some annual celebrations held by the Fur and Zaghawa students. Generally, however, claims about taking pride in preference of native languages were the strongest among the university students.

For their peculiarity at the IDPs, some data about the Borno should be reviewed. There were two groups of Borno in the study area: the early Borno who lost their language since long time ago and those who had recently settled in Nyala or displaced from the southern peripheries of South Darfur State to Al-Salam IDPs camp. So, what is found in this research only pertains to the latter group. Among this group
and Hausa, preferences of using native languages in public places were found to be the lowest. Thus, it is concluded that, if such a preference is taken as a gauge how soon a language would die, the Borno, Masalit and Hausa were the communities most likely to lose their languages in the near future.

Generally, across almost all the ECs under study, the prevalent tendency to feel self-assertive by speaking a language swayed between Arabic only or both Arabic and mother tongue. Native language only was positioned the next in this tendency. Relatively, and bearing in mind that Arabic is the official language and a lingua franca for all the ECs, loads given to it were, we argue, not as great as one would expect when we put into consideration the overall government policies to arabicise the native communities.

Seen from a religious perspective, Arabic and Islam are inseparable, though in reality there are many Muslims in the world who do not speak Arabic except when reciting the Qur’an, the Muslims’ Holy Book, which was revealed in Arabic. The fact that all the ECs in Darfur are Muslims, then, in the Islamic rhetoric, it is taken for granted that Arabic is an indispensable tool that should mould the Muslim culture and identity. However, among the vast majority of the discussants, instrumentality of Arabic was reduced to mere religious domains. Satirically quoting a cliché-ridden statement which goes in Sudan: “Darfur is the home of luh1 and the Qur’anic celebrities,” a Fur discussant contended why the rich cultural diversity of the Darfurians was only expressed in terms of religion. In response to this argument, another Fur discussant stated that “By this [Darfur being described a home of luh] it is meant that we are not smart enough.” However, The Jebel, Arab native language-speakers and Fulani strongly realised the connection of Arabic to Islam as well as the role it played in constructing their identities. The thinly held attitude towards Arabic as the language of Qur’an among many Fur discussants was again replicated by the Zaghawa discussants. For example, one of them, while we were posing a question, heckled that the Darfurians should not allow others [Arabs] to link Arabic to Islam because Islam is a religion for all Muslims not Arabs.

The argument that Arabic and Islam should be kept apart were not in line with Zumrawi’s (1980) who found that the positive attitude to Arabic and its pacing spread among the native language-speakers in the Nuba Mountains and New Halfa was related to the religious status Arabic gained among the groups she studied. Again, aversion towards Arabic arising from the denial of its relation to culture and religion as shown in this vein, however, does not confirm Abu-Manga’s (1987) study in Miurno, in central Sudan, where the shift to Arabic was strongly associated with the religious and nationalistic asset it possesses.

1. Luh is a wooden board on which Qur’anic verses are written in chunks for young children to learn by rote and memorise in khalwa, a traditional Qur’anic school.
4.2. Processes of ethnolinguistic identity construction

To find out how the ECs under study were engaged in the processes of constructing their ethnolinguistic identities, we will elucidate quantitative data at two levels. Firstly, the language(s) perceived by the ECs as having roles in the construction of their identities is analysed (table 2). Secondly, we will also find out how strong perceptions these communities had of their native languages as having a role in the identity construction (table 3).

Table 2 shows frequency of answers given to a question about what language(s) the respondents perceived as having a role in the construction of their identity. The figures indicate that both Arabic and native languages were perceived as languages having the strongest role in identity construction (42.3%), followed by Arabic only (38.1%), native language only (15.2%) and finally came English (4.5%). It is evident that the majority of the subjects perceived Arabic, the national language, and their native languages as the media for constructing ethnic identities. To depict a complementary picture of the perceptions of a particular language as playing a role in culture construction, we will look into how this perception was connected to the ECs perceptions of the role their native languages played in the construction of ethnolinguistic identity, a point that now is in order as seen in Table 3.

Table (2): Language most perceived as having a role in identity construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Arabic &amp; native language</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows frequency of answers given to a question about how strong the respondents perceived the role of native languages in shaping ethnolinguistic identities. The figures indicate that the ECs were far from being unconscious of the strong roles their native languages played in the construction of their ethnic identities. The vast majority of them were either very strongly conscious of that role (36.1%), strongly conscious (20.6%) or somehow (15.1%). The fact that they seldom perceived native languages as having roles in ethnic identity construction substantiates that they were very sensitive to their native languages.

Table (3): Perceived role of native language in ethnolinguistic identity construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong role</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong role</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somehow</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little role</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above two tables give only a superficial idea of the preferences of languages or perceptions on ethnic identity construction processes. Some telling data are elicited from ethnographic observation as shown below. Data collected from the observed linguistic, cultural, and folkloric traditions practised by the ECs crystallise how language is employed to establish ethnic identities. To see the way that was operated, qualitative data were drawn from discussions with ECs settled at the IDPs and in Nyala town, with a special emphasis on the data drawn focus groups discussions with students at the University of Nyala, the sole state-run university in South Darfur State, with over 11,000 students coming from different ethnic groups. A few students also come from other Greater Darfur states and other parts of Sudan. Since 2005, the government banned students’ political activities at the university. As a result, academic and cultural associations reintroduced and practised the banned activities on exclusively ethnic basis. In fact, the political activities at the university represent disguised platforms for bigger active political parties working outside the university.

We observed that the most active associations at the university were run by the Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit, Daju and Fulani students. Because their, political, social and cultural activities were so stereotypical, we will only describe, as an example, one activity carried out by the Fur Students’ Association. It was one of the most active associations at the university, with a General Assembly consisting of exclusively Fur students. Except for this particular activity, ethnographic data were also collected from other students coming from other ECs, including data reflected by the Fur and Tunjur students’ associations on “Welcome” board banners hung on several parts of the university walls. The Tunjur students were not counted as an ethnolinguistic community, but the content of their banner was compared with the Fur Students’ for a particular reason as we will see it in the coming paragraph.

Figure 1 shows two apparent dynamics employed by the Fur students to strengthen ethnic identity. Firstly, there is transliterated phrase in Fur (line 4), whose translation is: “Jebel Marra looks green when approached, but loomed black from distance. O! The Fur sons let’s join together.” The phrase encourages the Fur sons, all the sons, to unite. It is a call for the unity of the Fur. However, the text did not make such clear boundaries as to what kind of unity was required from the Fur to maintain. Was it a call for unity within a wider Sudanese context or a Fur unity alone? Anyway, calling for ethnic unity in the context of the current conflict is a pressing and a telling need among all groups. Transliterating the text from Fur to Arabic carried much deeper linguistic and ethnic implications. It was intended to give the Fur language an elevated status – a bearer of the Fur identity. Again, the Jebel Marra, hemmed in by the territories historically ruled by Fur sultans, must have also been explicitly highlighted to stand for another symbol – the Fur Sultanate, a fact which is inferred from writing the name of Sultan Shaw Dorshid. Secondly, we discern the tantalising political comeback
among the Fur students. Naming their session after Sultan Shaw Dorshid, though his ethnic origin was disputed by the Tunjur university students as we shall see in Figure 2. Shaw Dorshid was there to stand for political symbolism – a sceptre – brought about from remote history. In terms of the Fur status, the Fur were clearly working to sharpen their political, social, and power symbols. A similar result was reached by Bornman and Appylgryn (1997) in South Africa. They found that ethnolinguistic identity maintenance among the Black informants was strongly correlated with their expectations of power access and protection of their cultural heritage.

Figure (1): A board banner welcoming the freshmen (posted by the Fur students)

Translations:
Line 3: “The session of Sultan Shaw Dorshid (2011-2012).”
Line 4: Transliterated from Fur to Arabic, meaning: “Jebel Marra looks green when approached but loomed black from distance. O! The Fur sons lets join together.”

Two days after the appearance of the Fur banner, the Tunjur students hung their own (Figure 2). The following day, on December 6th, 2011, the Tunjur students again publicised a strong-worded handbill condemning the Fur students statement about Sultan Shaw Dorshid was a Fur sultan. Amid the conflict, interethnic gap was widened by the resurrection of the fading ethnic identities, even among the non-ethnolinguistic communities such as the Tunjur. In both Figure 2 and the handbill, the Tunjur students were also reminding the others that they were once the masters of ancient Darfur by referring to Sultan Shaw Dorshid as a symbolic comeback (see the translated line 3 in Figure 2). The handbill stated that Dorshid was the first Tunjur sultan who established and ruled an Islamic sultanate in Sudan as a whole. Furthermore, the handbill stated that Dorshid was the founder of the oldest plot endowed to the Madina Mosque in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which was issued on 14 Shahwal 983 AH, corresponding to 1575. But most importantly, the handbill, in some of its statements, stated that “The Jebel Marra Students should only seek glory in the history of their ancestors, concluding: “This [stating that sultan Shaw Dorshid was of Fur origin] behaviour is considered an identity-theft, a distortion to our history and erasure to our identity.”
The Tunjur students’ prompt reaction exemplifies how the ethnic groups of Darfur were sensitive to their specific identities, even if they are to do with some six centuries ago, the time Sultan Shaw Dorshid is believed to have ruled Darfur. The events narrated in the two banners and the handbill did not come out of the blue, for they clearly bring forth the question “Who are you deep down there?” Thus, strengthening ethnic identity was not only brought alive by recalling events from the contemporary history, but also from immemorial past. It is the emergence of this kind of political and ethnic fragmentation that revived the Fur aspiration to re-establish their bygone sultanates. As Shohamy (2006, cited in Taylor-Leech, 2011) asserts, the presence or absence of languages in public spaces communicates ‘symbolic messages about the importance, power, significance and relevance of certain languages or irrelevance of others.”

The Masalit and Daju students’ associations at the university were not exceptions. Taj-Eldin, the Masalit sultan who fell martyr while fighting the French invaders during the colonial times, and Kassifuroge, the legendary Daju sultan, were impressively posed in ways similar to those done by the Fur and Tunjur students. For the Daju students – Um Kardoos, another symbolic hilly area and the capital of the ancient Daju Sultanate – was not only shown in their banner to stand for a geographical niche, nor for a historical monarchy. The Daju discussants argued that Um Kardoos was used to remind the other people that it symbolised fecundity of man and land, vitality of language, and sublimity of the Daju people, and above all, superiority and dominion through history. Many of such tendencies were also substantiated from other discussants’ opinions, all reminding us that they were also glorifiable by their bygone kingdoms, sheikhdoms, and ancient histories. Conscious involvements in such processes were ubiquitous in the study area.

We stated earlier in this section that we will describe one particular event celebrated by the Fur students to exemplify how naive languages were employed by the university students to strengthen ethnic identity. It was a procession held by the Fur students, among other activities celebrated annually, to observe “send-off” or “welcome” festivals. Now this description is in order. On January 2nd, 2012, a small group of Fur boys and girls passed along the university main road, clapping their hands,
singing and dancing. Some minutes later, the road was thronged with an expectedly mushrooming audience, mostly invited from outside the university by their student fellowmen. Some moments later, percussions clattered and a drum boomed sonorously and rhythmically from within the participants, with a singer first chanting in Fur and then repeatedly chorused by the group. With the unceasingly thundering trumpet and trills piercing into every corner in the campus, the procession gained momentum. Dressed in every Fur traditional cloths and style, the group danced the farangabia (meaning a startled gazelle in Fur), streaming up and down the main road several times and greeting the audience in Fur. Carrying tasselled staffs (brateel, singular bartal, used for covering food dishes) and all artefacts reminiscence of the Fur folklore, culture and heritage, the girls advanced in the procession, swaying and gyrating to the percussionists’ rhythms. They sometimes skipped nimbly and tossed heads in the air as if they were really being startled. They filled the campus with unbroken trills. Following the girls from the back, the boys roared in husky voices and ululated. With agility, they often suddenly hurled their bodies towards the girls as if they were really startling the gazelle.

By the time the procession was over, we observed that the air in the University of Nyala was unmistakably ‘coloured’ Fur. The audience was (we also discerned) overwhelmed by a surge of ethnicity, for they closely streamed up and down the main road with the procession until it was over, cheering and dancing.

Among the university students, it was not only the revitalisation of native languages that was apparent, but also aversion towards Arabic. The Fur, Zaghawa Daju discussants openly contended that their native languages were suppressed and they were up to revitalise them because their languages were disempowered by the government. We believe such tendency was strengthened by the fact that the political activities in the university were banned since long time ago. As a result, the students resorted to cultural and ethnic activities to fill in the vacuum caused by the prohibition of political practicing.

It was observed that the Daju tended to be the keenest group in revitalising their language. The wholesale revitalisation of native languages amid the current conflict is the major motive for revitalising their language. This seems true because the Daju language is, as reported by the discussants, only vigorously spoken by the elderly people. The finding that the Daju were earnestly revitalising their language was again confirmed by the Daju IDPs discussants. For example, a Daju female discussant had this to say:

We used to never care of the Daju language. To many of us, the Daju language was …a forgotten past. But nowadays, we have to tell the other tribes that we too have our own language. In the past, when our children hear someone speaking in Daju, they used to stand looking at him aghast….One day, my little daughter returned home from school crying, and complaining that her Fur classmate called her bad names…and shouted at her with the Fur language. Ever since I wished if she could do the same in Daju.”
Our hypothesis that the conflict rendered the ECs under study sensitive to their linguistic identities was substantiated by observable linguistic behaviours as well as by the discussants’ statements. Before the conflict, we are certain that hardly could one hear a native language speaker admitting that her or his own language was a source of self-pride, nor was a language claimed to be playing a role in the construction of a distinct ethnic identity. Such sensitivity to native languages sprang from the fact that, in the current conflict, each ethnolinguistic community is strengthening its intra-ethnic solidarity to stand against potential perpetrators. The words ‘perpetrators’, or ‘Janjaweed’, which were very frequently used by the discussants to refer to the people who assaulted them, are new in the conflict semantics in Darfur. We discerned that many of the discussants were deliberately using such words to raise a leading-point. That is, they would have to strengthen their ethnic solidarity to feel secured by forming counterinsurgency ethnic structures, notably the mushrooming ethnic-based armed movements. The best mechanism employed for maintaining this solidarity, security and social integrity is sought through strengthening intra-ethnic coherence. This, in turn, is anchored by revitalising dynamics of identification with language, the handiest dynamic.

Again, we posit that emergence of sensitive attitudes towards native languages coincided with the eruption of the conflict because the previous studies carried out on the situation of languages in Sudan had a common finding: there was a pacing shift towards Arabic spurred by positive attitudes towards it (for example see Miller & Abu-Manga, 1992; Jahalla, 2001; and Mugaddam, 2002 and Khalifa, 2008). The first ever study found a reversed positive attitude towards a native language was Corbett’s (2012) among respondents in Al-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur State, and in Nyala. She found that the care for Fur was much greater in the conflict than before. For example, she interviewed a Fur scholar who had this to say:

> Before the war of Darfur, the Fur [language], just like other African languages, was about to vanish because the young generations speak Arabic. But today, the Fur language becomes [sic] very strong. If you visit one of the camps of Darfur, you will find Fur people and their children speak[ing] Fur and sometimes … Arabic, and sometimes … English words. So the situation of Fur is going to be very, very strong … after the war. But before the war, it was very weak. Fur cling to their language now [more] than before [because of] political and cultural reasons. They are looking for self-assertion. This is the hope of all the tribes … because Sudan is a multi-tribal country (p. 107).

In our study, a battery of arguments posed during the focus group discussions also show that emergence of sensitivity to native languages was linked to the conflict. For example, the Jebel were found so dissatisfied with the disempowered status of their language to the extent that they called Arabic a “foreign language”. This statement was grounded on other argument posed by another Jebel discussant who retorted that we [the present researchers] should understand why there was no single light coloured IDP like us in Al-Salam camp, where the majority of the Jebel IDPs lived. Colour matters much
in the camps, for, as we discerned from the Jebel discussants’ argument that our light colours rendered us Arabs. In this vein, a Fur discussant also contended, saying that “We always hear on the media that all the Sudanese bear an Arab culture. I am not an Arab… so, how can I bear an Arab culture?” Similarly, another Zaghawa discussant argued that he did not find any difference in his enmity to Arabic and to the Arabs themselves. He further argued that if a traveller disliked travelling by a car, he would simply have to see another means of travelling, “And so is the case with Arabic and the Arabs for us. We have to resort to our language to maintain our culture.”

However, the Masalit IDPs were found to be the group least perceiving Arabic as a source of identity and culture construction. Such a stand went against the position usually held of Arabic among the Masalit university discussants and respondents who perceived Masalit as a language suitable for showing self-pride and as having high instrumental capacities. In this regard, a Masalit university discussant argued that “My own worthless possession [his native language] is more invaluable than others’ worthy things. I would rather maintain my culture in my language even if it is a primitive one.”

The finding that the students at the University of Nyala were revitalising ethnic cultures is a very interesting story. It suggests that the politicised atmosphere of festival processions held at the university were operated as centripetal culture dynamics (i.e. brought from outside the university) for the remaking of ethnolinguistic cultures. These ethnolinguistic cultures and identities were reproduced, revitalised, given centrifugal power and exported outside the university to the public as models of ethnolinguistic identities.

By and large, and apart from the inclination shown by the Fulani, Hausa and Borgo who adhered more to the core identity, other ECs were rather inclined to develop a micro-ethnic regional identities peculiar to their languages and communities. Again, it is clear that the prolonged linguistic arabisation processes operated in Sudan have not mitigated language-based sensitivities among the ethnolinguistic communities under study. Arabisation processes imposed by the government rendered ECs indifferent to the maintenance of their languages in the pre-conflict Darfur. However, the long-hoped ethnic assimilation and the expectation of maintaining the melting pot in Sudan, here exemplified by the case of Darfur, is at odds with cultural and linguistic differences observed. This situation has come into existence due to the fact that ethnic groups’ cultural traits and identities, as noted by Nagel (1994) and Billig (1995) may be changed, constructed, reconstructed or discarded, depending on the factors having impact on the group’s status, situation and their need to maintain boundaries among them. Fluidity of such traits and identities has rendered ECs susceptible to easy ethnic fragmentation in Darfur.

4.3. The role of conflict in shaping language attitude

Our point that the conflict has had a driving force in making ECs sensitive to and proud of their languages is further supported by obtaining data with another question: What the respondents’ preferences, regardless of their ethnic origins, of using
a certain language were to feel self-assertive according to their place of residence. In terms of place of residence, we identified five groups of ECs in our study: (a) those who were settled in the country and we classified them as little affected by the conflict; (b) those who returned to their homeland after being displaced, classified as affected by the conflict at the beginning, but not now as such; (c) those who settled in Nyala after being displaced, classified as not directly affected; and (d) the currently IDPs, classified as greatly affected by the conflict.

Table 4 shows that taking pride in Arabic only in public places was registered as high as 48.2% among the respondents who were not affected by the conflict as such (ECs settled in the country). Both Arabic and native languages were moderately used for showing self-assertion in public, registering 35.3% and 19.3%, respectively. The ECs, who returned home after being displaced, were found to be nearly similar in the patterns of taking pride in each language. When the loads given by those who lived elsewhere were excluded from the tested scales, the one given to Arabic only ranged from the lowest to the highest, 31.6% – 36.8%, on both native language and Arabic ranged from 28.9% to 35.6% and on Native language only moderately ranged from 23.2% to 27.2%. Taking pride in English was insignificantly the lowest across all the tested scales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Preferred language of self-assertion in public</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentual distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settled in the country</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned home after displacement</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settled in city after displacement</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settled in city before displacement</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now displaced in IDP camp</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives elsewhere</td>
<td>Arabic only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Residence</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
linguistic habitus theory can best offer us a better understanding of the seemingly paradoxical figures in this table. Had Arabic only been internalised as a tool without which the ECs’ economic, social and linguistic gains were not achievable, it must have incomparably been rated the highest. The ubiquitous finding that there is a pacing shift to Arabic statewide (Miller & Abu-Manga, 1992; Jahalla, 2001; and Mugaddam, 2002; Idris, 2007 and Khalifa, 2008) among the ECs is not substantiated in this study. The sole factor which, we argue, could have reversed our finding is the conflict factor.

The finding obtained from Table 4 is further supported by the data gleaned from the FGDs, personal interviews and observations. We observed that, in everyday life communications among speech communities in the present Darfur, no spontaneous interaction between two persons or groups occurred without the interactants’ ethnic identities are first made known to each other, in particular at the IDPs camps. One question negotiates this situation: “Where are you from?” This is the kind of stereotypical placing of people in predefined social or ethnic strata. In pre-conflict era, this was never the case. Joseph (2004) argues that, determining a person’s identity is not possible without asking him or her “Who are you deep down there?” Language is the handiest determinant of unveiling others identities among the groups under study. And with it whether or not the “others” are Arabs or non-Arabs are made known on the one side, and whether or not the non-Arabs belong to a particular ethnic group on the other side. Accordingly, the magnitude of enmity towards the “others” is scaled.

Showing pride in native languages across almost all the focus group discussants was one of the most reliable findings of this study. It was observed that showing self-assertion by using one’s native language and hatred of Arabic was reasoned by, though the threads of this link was not straightforward, an existing collective antipathy towards the Arabs. The link was, however, sometimes succinctly expressed by some of the Daju and Zaghawa – Arabs are killing us, they said. Such an antipathy was also expressed by the majority of Jebel discussants. When they were asked how differently they felt by using the Jebel language at schools or at market places, one of them stated that “A Jebel person does not change [his linguistic identity] whether he is at home, school or university. We speak our language anywhere so that we are not colonised again.” When asked if he could identify those who might “colonise” them again, he heckled: “You should ask yourself this question”. In a similar vein, a Zaghawa discussant also frankly contended: “As you see, all the IDPs are purely rattana [vernacular-speakers] except those like the Abu-Darag who don’t have a native language, but are also displaced like us.”

We believe that such extreme stands speak to the tacitly perceived trend among the ECs that the current conflict is not devoid of apparent Arab/non-Arab (zurga) epithets. The fact that all the IDPs in Darfur are now solely settled by non-Arabs must have deepened this ethnic-based antipathy, which in turn fed into the revitalisation of native languages. In essence, this too, is ascribed to the prevailing wholesale community ethnicisation processes underway in Darfur.

It seemed that the level of education greatly determined the type of perceived attitude towards a language. Among the university focus group discussants, the
frontlines between taking pride in a native language and developing aversion towards Arabic was very clear. For example, the Masalit university discussants, unlike their fellowmen who reported in the questionnaire as the group which took pride in Arabic the most in public places, were found to be the least in using Arabic for the same purpose. One Masalit discussant reported that: “To be a Masalit proper, one must master the Masalit language and regularly speak it….Without keeping our language alive, we cannot protect ourselves.” Other university discussants were found to be inclined to downplay the instrumentality of Arabic for reasons other than its communicative capacity. For example, a Daju discussant maintained that Arabic should be respected and taken pride in because it is a national language, but he also added that the State should also nurture the native languages so that their speakers would feel respected. In response to a question on whether they felt their languages was disrespected by Arabs, this discussant further noted that he had felt so, adding: “The person who disrespects your language, also disrespects you.”

While ethnic zoning is a preferred mechanism for the maintenance of ethnic and linguistic identity in Darfur, Goldschmidt (2003) found that ethnic zoning in South Africa, to the contrary, was collectively rejected by the Black South Africans during the apartheid dispensation. We ascribe this to the fact that in South Africa, ethnic zoning was imposed by the Whites to easily contain the rioting Blacks when they took to the streets whereas in Darfur the camps were established when the war-affected people had to take refuge in the present IDPs camps. The IDPs are now becoming places where atrocities committed in the conflict are symbolised, making it plausible to conclude that positive attitudes towards native languages and negative attitudes towards Arabic are intensified when they are linked to those who are affected by the conflict.

5. Conclusion

When the findings are brought under close scrutiny, in particular by connecting them to the prevailing ethnic-based conflict in Darfur, some telling conclusions are reached. Deep within the interacting factors working to revitalise ethnicity, pride in indigenous languages speaks to the emergence of parallel native language revitalisation undercurrents. What was missing among these groups, and recently has come to the surface, was just the trigger. That is, the opportunity is now made available by the emergence of ethnolinguistic revitalisation. Now with this dormant lingostalgia being triggered by the eruption of the conflict, community ethnicisation and fragmentation ensued, and with it the most workable ethnic identity marker and source of ethnic pride, the language, has become functional as an ethnic defence mechanism. Given this, together with the new power vested in the native languages, ethnolinguistic revitalisation has come into being combined with a growing wholesale sentimentality to constructing distinct regional native identities. As such, a strong comeback of taking pride in indigenous languages in the study area is not devoid of causes related to the current conflict. Taking pride in a language entails making strong the ethnicity speaking that language which, in turn, means “We, the Fur, Zaghawa, Fulani, etc., are here to resist for revival of our power source – our language.” These tendencies are expressed
by developing linguistic affinities reflected by using native languages for showing self-assertion as well as developing a mild aversion towards Arabic. This supports May’s (2008) argument that the prolonged and forced acculturation of minority speech communities would not mitigate sentiments to their languages.

References


