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Sudan

1. ARABIC WITHIN THE LINGUISTIC MAP OF THE SUDAN

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, with an area of almost 1 million square miles inhabited by about 33 million people. Like many of the tropical African countries, it is characterized by linguistic density and diversity, with more than one hundred languages (113, according to the 1956 census). These languages belong to three out of the four language families into which all the languages of Africa are classified (Greenberg 1966). The 1956 census showed that 51.4 percent of the people spoke Arabic as their mother tongue and the remaining 112 languages were spoken as native language by 48.6 percent of the total population. All recent language surveys agree that Arabic is spoken by about 80 percent as a first, second, or third language. As such, it serves as a lingua franca and facilitates communication among groups speaking more than one hundred mutually unintelligible languages spreading all over the country, including the southern region. Mother-tongue Arabic speakers make up the most economically affluent, socially prestigious, and culturally dominant ethnic group in the country, and Arabic derives its prestige from their status. It is the official language of the State according to the Constitution, and the dominant language in all other official and semi-official domains, including, for example, mass media, politics, administration, and the army. After the Arabization of higher education in 1991, Arabic became the official medium of instruction at all educational levels. Other languages with a large number of speakers include Dinka, Nuer, Zande, and Bari in southern Sudan; Beja in eastern Sudan; Fur and Masalit in Darfur in western Sudan; Koalib and Nyimang in the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan and Fellata or Fulani in different areas in western, central, and eastern Sudan. Although the → Nubian languages of northern Sudan, i.e. Nobin and Dongolese, do not belong to the most widely spoken languages, their demographic minority position is counterbalanced by their historical importance and their considerable contribution to the development of Sudanese Colloquial Arabic (see below, Sec. 3).

2. SUDANESE ARABIC DIALECTS AND VARIETIES

Arabic in the Sudan exists in the form of one main central dialect and a number of other regional dialects, each with distinctive linguistic features. There are three other distinctive Arabic varieties spoken by people whose mother tongue is a language other than Arabic. Qâsim (1989) attributes the multiplicity of regional dialects in the Sudan to environmental and linguistic factors. Regarding the first factor, the early immigrant Arab tribesmen of the 7th–16th centuries, in their search for pasture, settled far apart from one another, and eventually adapted themselves
to the indigenous languages and environmental conditions of their new habitat. Linguistically, these immigrants originated from a number of well-known tribes that existed in Arabia at that time. Each group, due to isolation, maintained its dialectal features; the following features are only a few examples of the variants that are found (Qāsim 1989):

i. Realization of /h/ as /h/ in the Hamar dialect of Kordofan, e.g. bārr > hār ‘hot’; this is a feature of the Bani Sa’ād Ibn Zayd Manāt dialect in Arabia.

ii. Deletion of the final consonants of a word (known as tarxim), e.g. alkam > alkla ‘speech’; this characteristic of the Rubhat dialect of southern Sudan was also a feature of the Tayyī dialect.

iii. Realization of the word ‘a’tā as an’ta ‘to give’ by some tribes of Kordofan was recorded in the dialects of Sa’ād Ibn Bakr, Ḥudayl, ‘Azd, and Qays.

iv. Rendering of the definite article al- as am- in some words all over the Sudan, e.g. albārīh > umbārīh ‘yesterday’, which is a feature of the Yemeni dialects.

The inhabitants of western Sudan, in particular Darfur, belong to two major distinct linguistic stocks: speakers of Nilo-Saharan languages (Fur, Masalit, Maba, Zaghawa, etc.), and the Arabic speakers who immigrated to this region mainly from across the Sahara through Fezzan (Libya). The latter speak the Ḥassāniyya Arabic dialect, similar to the one spoken by the Shuwa Arabs in Chad and Nigeria. It is this dialect which constitutes the substrate for the West Sudanic Arabic variety developed and used by the non-Arabic communities of the region. It is the same variety that is spoken in Chad. Its main outstanding feature is the inability of its speakers – being nonnative speakers of Arabic – to properly pronounce the Arabic emphatic sounds /t/, /d/, /s/, and /l/ (pronounced in Sudan as /l/), the velar fricative /g/, and the pharyngeal sounds /h/ and /l/. The emphatic sounds are replaced by their simple correspondents: tīb > tīb ‘medicine’, dāḥīt > dāḥīt ‘officer’, etc. The sound /g/ is realized as /ʃː/; gābā > xābā ‘forest’. The sounds /h/ and /l/ are replaced by /h/ and /l/, respectively, and they may disappear in final position: bārīb > bārīb ‘war’, saḥīb > saḥī ‘correct’; ‘ali > ‘ali [proper name], nāwī > nō ‘variety’.

The Eastern Sudanese Arabic variety is the one spoken by the Beja in the area between Kassala northward through Port Sudan, along the Red Sea up to the Egyptian border. In addition to the phonological features described for the West Sudanic dialect, the Eastern Sudanese dialect is also distinguished by its deviating word order, having SOV as a basic pattern of word order (instead of the SVO of the other dialects): alwalad jāb almoṣya ‘the boy brought the water’ > alwalad almọṣya jāb ‘the boy the water brought’. For a descriptive grammar of the dialect of the Shukriyya tribe, see Reichmuth (1983).

The Southern Sudanese variety of Arabic is, in fact, a kind of creole Arabic that developed during the Turkish-Egyptian rule (1821–1882). It is also known as Juba Arabic, although it is spoken with a number of variations in different parts of the southern region. It has assimilated and adapted a large number of vocabulary items and concepts from the surrounding local languages. However, its most salient feature is the drastic reduction of its grammar: no gender distinction, minimal and peculiar application of number (e.g. ṭaṭ ‘you [sg. masc. and sg. fem.],’ itakum ‘you [pl. masc. and pl. fem.],’), and reduction in tenses (e.g. ṭaṭ akal ‘you ate’, ṭaṭ ge akal ‘you are eating’).

3. Sudanese Colloquial Arabic (Sudan Colloquial Arabic)

The standard version of spoken Arabic from which these regional dialects vary is known in the literature as ‘Sudanese Colloquial Arabic’, also known as ‘Khartoum Arabic’ or ‘Omdurman Arabic’. It acts as the central or model dialect by which the other varieties are measured and which speakers of the other dialects and varieties strive to approximate when trying to speak more elegantly. It is spoken over a vast area extending from northern Sudan (below Nubia), along the Nile, through Greater Khartoum, and then down between the White and Blue Niles into the Gezira and further down to the edges of the Southern Blue Nile regions. Its center of gravity in central Sudan is the most developed part of the country, both socially and economically. However, it is also the form of Arabic spoken in all the large towns in the Sudan where the riverine Arabs are present in significant numbers.
Qāsim (1975) compares the conditions which led to the supremacy of this dialect with those which led to the supremacy of the Qurayş dial-
ect of Mecca over the other dialects of Arabia. The Nile, which earlier provided a suitable settlement for the sedentary Arabs, had the same function as the Ka'ba for the Bedouin, thus rendering the area from Barbar south to the remote areas of the Gezira a melting pot of Sudanese cultural, linguistic, and economic her-
tage. Qāsim concludes: “The language which sprang up (in this area) is to some extent repre-
sentative of all Arab tribes in the Sudan and reflects their continuous interaction with the
indigenous groups” (1975:100).

Sudanese Colloquial Arabic is indebted to two local linguistic sources, Nile → Nubian and Beja, for the greater part of its non-Arabic vocabulary. Nile Nubian provided it with a large number of words pertaining to various semantic fields, including farming, fauna, and handicrafts. Most of the Nile Nubian words found in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic can be morphologically identified by the Nubian accusa-
tive/dative case marker, -(v)g/-l(v)k. Examples of these are: mārīg ‘sorghum’, kōrēg ‘shovel’, safrāg ‘curved stick used for throwing’, kādis ‘cat’, tagārōgā → tabārōgā ‘round mat of palm fronds’, kabdiło ‘granary-shaped deep and broad basket made of palm fronds [used for keeping dry food stuff]’, etc. Beja influence, on the other hand, is encountered in many words relating to marriage customs and traditions, such as jiriktīk ‘piece of red silk worn on the wrist of bride and groom at their wedding’, suksuk ‘small beads [for decorating the bride]’, sabbāl ‘the act whereby a woman who is danc-
ing allows her hair to touch the face of a man who approaches her to express his admiration for her dance’, etc. Other fields include names of some animals and birds, such as ba’dāšūm ‘fox’ and ba’anēb ‘a kind of eagle’. Moreover, all words morphologically marked by the sūf-
fix -(v)b originate from Beja, such as angarēb ‘wooden bed’, ankōlīb ‘a kind of sugarcane’, wekāb ‘an ingredient of sauce’. This suffix is also used for designating ethnic affiliation, as in ʻAbdallāb ‘members of Abdalla’s clan or his descendants’, ʻUmarāb, ʻAlyāb, etc.

In the course of its development, Sudanese Colloquial Arabic also acquired lexical items from other (foreign) languages, the most impor-
tant of these being:

From Turkish: Mostly words in the semantic fields of professions, administration, and the military, often morphologically identified through the affixes -i denoting profession, -xana ‘place’, and bās- ‘senior’. Examples: bustāi ‘postman’, tamarā‘[male] nurse’, adabxana ‘WC’, ʻiijāxana ‘pharmacy’, bāskātib ‘senior clerk’, tābiyya ‘military headquarters’, gislāg ‘military residential compound’, ʻašūs ‘sergeant, corporal’. Many of these words are gradually being replaced by their Standard Arabic forms.

From Persian: Mostly names of flowers (often used as proper names for females), food, carpets, work and musical instruments, and other miscellaneous items. Examples: yāsmin ‘jasmine’, xusāf ‘dessert of mixed fruits and juice’, ʻiklīm ‘a kind of precious Persian carpet’, ʻakās ‘hammer’, tāmbūr ‘tambourine’, yāfta ‘signboard’, nišān ‘decoration [for honoring a person]’.


From French: Only a few words, through Egyptian Arabic. Examples: tilīfizjōn ‘television’, jarāsōn ‘waiter’, (al-)madām ‘wife’.

For the last thirty years, socioeconomic and sociocultural booms have had a great impact on many aspects of life in central Sudan, includ-
ing language. These are the booms of ʻıgtrāb, i.e. emigration to the oil countries in the Gulf for work, and the ‘mania’ of the Egyptian television film series. The mūgtariš ‘immigrants’ brought back Arabic words and concepts such as sāyyāra (instead of ʻarabiyya) ‘car’, dawām ‘working hours of the day’, jamāb ‘to put aside, park [a car]’ and ammū ‘uncle [in the sense of boss]’. Moreover, through these emigrants, Sudanese Colloquial Arabic words relating to travel abroad, which were hitherto very infre-
cently used, have now been promoted to the status of active vocabulary. Examples: ta’šīra or fīza ‘visa’, okke ‘OK [in flights booking]’, șek siyābi ‘traveler’s check’.

The influence of Egyptian television serials, on the other hand, is reflected by the newly spreading trend of using the 3rd person possessive pronoun with kinship terms as terms of address for the 1st person, e.g. ʻammu ‘his paternal uncle’ and xālu ‘his maternal uncle’, when addressing one’s own uncles. Another new fashion is the naming of children, especially females, after Egyptian film stars (Shirin, Nasrin, etc.).

At present, Sudanese Colloquial Arabic is in the process of borrowing and integrating new words from computer language. These
are mostly verbs adapted from English, such as *farmat* ‘to format’, *sakkan* ‘to scan’ (particularly when referring to scanning of pictures and photographs by journalists), and *sayyaf* ‘to save’. Of course, such words still have a very restricted degree of frequency, but with the progress in computer literacy they are expected to increase in number and become more widely circulated.

3.1 Phonology

Four out of the 28 Old Arabic consonants do not exist in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic: /q/; /h/; /l/; and /l/. They are replaced by the following phonemes:

- /q/ > /k/ or /k/ and (in a few cases) /g/; /q/: *gāla* > *gāl* ‘to say’, *baqar* > *baqar* ‘cattle’, *qatala* > *katal* ‘to kill’, *waqat* > *wakit* ‘time’, *qāmin* > *gāmin* ‘law’, *laqag* > *laqāb* ‘nickname’
- /t/ > /d/ or /s/; *talāta* > *talāta* ‘three’, *jutta* > *jutta* ‘corps’, *tábabbata* > *sabbat* ‘to fix’, *waṭṭiq* > *wāṣiğ* ‘sure, confident’
- /d/ > /l/; /a/; or /l/; *jabada* > *jabad* ‘to pull’, *dawwab* > *dawwab* ‘to melt [trans.]’, *danab* > *danab* ‘tail’, *udn* > *adān* ‘ear’, *dakara* > *dakar* ‘to mention’, *laḍḍ* > *lażīz* ‘delicious’
- /d/ > /l/; /a/; or /l/; (emphasis alveolar voiced fricative): *dāhr* > *dāḥar* ‘back’, *nadif* > *nadīf* ‘clean’, *dābir* > *zāhir* ‘clear’, *wāḍīfa* > *wāziifa* ‘job’

Apart from the above changes, the following are represented by at least one example:

- /i/ > /i/; *‘ayna* > *wān* ‘where?’, *b > ‘im*; *bargūt* > *margūt* ‘flea’, /j/ > /l/; *jāyj* > *dājī ‘army’, *h > /l/; *ḥattā* > *xatī* ‘to put’, *d > /l/; *zagrad* > *zagrat* ‘to ululate’, /r > /l/; *darba* > *dafa* ‘movable part of the door, window, or cupboard’, /s > /l/; *sura* > *sura* ‘nail’, /s > /l/; *sa’af* > *sa’af* ‘palms arens’, /l > /l/; *jibrī* > *jibrīn* [male proper name], /m > /l/; *fa‘ima* > *fa‘ina* [female proper name], /y > /l/; *zarbī* > *zarbi* ‘mean person’ (cf. also Qasim 1989).

The Sudanese Colloquial Arabic consonant inventory includes three consonants that do not exist in Old Arabic:

/ʃ/; realization of Modern Standard Arabic /ʃ/ (see the examples *zāhir*, *wāziifa*, above)
/ʃ/ [ʃ] (alveo-palatal voiceless affricate), as in *qat* ‘all’ (only one example)
/ʃ/ [ʃ] (nasal palatal): *nyamak* ‘sauce of rice mixed with lentil’ (only one example)

The Sudanese Colloquial Arabic vowel system includes two vowels that do not exist in Old Arabic: /e/ and /o/ (short and long).

/lo/ may be related to Old Arabic /l/, as in *be-lōl* < *bi-lāl* ‘in the night’. Its long form /l/ always corresponds to the diphthong /aw/; *bet < bay* ‘house’, *yāret < yā laytā* ‘hopefully’.

/lo/ may be related to Old Arabic /l/: *gālo < qālā* ‘they said’. Its long form /l/ always corresponds to the diphthong /aw/; *tōr < tawr* ‘bull, ox’, *mōt < maawt* ‘death’.

The syllabic system of Old Arabic is based on six types of syllables: Cv, Cv, Cvc, Cvc, Cvc, and Cvc (usually a gemination and only in pausa). Sudanese Colloquial Arabic uses the first four types only, illustrated by the sentence ‘*ad .dē. tu tu ’ā. sir* ‘I gave him juice’. When Modern Standard Arabic words are pronounced colloquially, the geminated consonant of the syllable Cvc is realized as a simple (nongeminated) consonant, e.g. *ḥādd > ḥād* ‘sharp’. The Cvc (nongeminated) syllable type is also avoided in colloquial pronunciation through the insertion of epenthetic vowels /a/, /a/, and /u/ between C and C, leading eventually to the split of the syllable into two: Cvc > Cv, Cvc. Insertion of a specific vowel is roughly conditioned by the grammatical category of the word in question and the type of Cc consonant: /a/, when the word is a noun and Cc is a back fricative consonant, e.g. *nasal > naxal* ‘palm trees’, *labm > labam* ‘meat’; /u/, when (i) the word is a noun and Cc is not a back fricative consonant, as in *waqat > wakit* ‘time’, *sann > samin* ‘ghee, butter’; and (ii) the word is a verbal noun, as in *jalūd > xalīd* ‘shaving with a whip’, *axād > axīd* ‘taking’; /l/, when the word is a noun, Cc is not a back consonant, and Cc is /l/, /l/, or /l/, as in *xazm > xazīm* ‘mouth’, *faqr > fazir* ‘poverty’, and *ratāl > ratul* ‘pound’ (cf. also Badawi 1962).

Stress plays a more important role in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic than in Modern Standard Arabic. Here, two types of stress can be distinguished: lexical and grammatical. The position of lexical stress in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic words is as follows:

i. Monosyllabic words are usually stressed when pronounced in isolation, but in strings of utterances, the presence of stress depends on the syntactic environments in which they occur.

ii. In disyllabic words, the stress falls on the ultimate syllable, if it is of the type Cc or Ccv going back to Cvc-gemination.
Otherwise, it falls on the other (first) syllable: *mu.dır* ‘director’; *mu.him* ‘important’, but *gá.bi* ‘idiot’; *ár.fak* ‘I know you’. iii. In multisyllabic words, the stress falls on:

(a) the ultimate syllable, if it is of the type CVC or CVC going back to CvCC-germination, as in *ma.sá rif* ‘pocket money’; *mus.ta.bid* ‘tyrannical’;
(b) the penultimate, if (a) does not apply and the penultimate is of the type Cv or CVC, as in *dag.gó.na* ‘they beat us [past]’; *šá.kál.tak* ‘I quarreled with you’; or
(c) the preceding syllable, if (a) and (b) do not apply, as in *muz.dá.li.fa* [one of the places Muslim pilgrims stop at during the pilgrimage to Mecca].

Further preceding syllables never carry stress.

Grammatical stress, on the other hand, operates in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic as follows. When the 1st person object and possessive pronouns are suffixed to nouns, they carry the stress irrespective of the syllabic structure of the noun, as in *wa.ta.ni* ‘my nation’ (contrasting with *wa.ta.ní* ‘national’), *ma.xad.dá.ti* ‘my pillows’, *ad.dá.ní* ‘he gave me’, *is.tag.fal.ní* ‘he fooled me’. When the object pronoun of the 3rd person singular masculine *-hu* is attached to a 3rd person plural masculine verb, the pronoun is usually deleted, the plural morpheme *-u* is shortened and lowered to *-o*, and the stress is shifted to the final syllable irrespective of the syllabic structure of the verb, as in *a.ká.ló* (< *aká.lo-hu* < *aká.tí-hu* ‘they are it’) (contrasting with *á.ka.lo* ‘they are it’), *it. ál.a.mó* ‘they learned it’. This stress applies to all tenses and moods: *bíyákló* ‘they will eat it’, *úkló* ‘eat [pl.] it!’. In Old Arabic, the feminine marker *-á* of adjectives whose masculine form is of the pattern *aCCaC* is shortened to *-a*, with the stress still maintained on the final syllable (against the lexical stress rules), as in *bédá* ‘white’, *ó.rá* ‘one-eyed woman’ (cf. also Badri 1974).

Metathesis occurs in *nijid* < *nadija* ‘to ripen, become cooked’, *na.al* < *la.an* ‘to curse’, *malága* < *mil’a qa‘a* ‘spoon’, *ság’a* < *sá’a qua‘a* ‘thunder’. A consonant is added in *nagrá* < *nagás* ‘to decorate’, *angara* < *unq* ‘[thick] neck’, *laxbat* < *xalata* ‘mix’. Consonants are deleted in *wad* < *walad* ‘boy, son’, *nus* < *nis* ‘half’, *áb* < *ab* ‘slave’. Assimilation occurs in *itta* < *antá* ‘you [sg. masc.]’, *gutta* < *qulta* ‘you said’.

New words are coined out of whole phrases or sentences, as in *ma.léš* < *má* ‘alayhi say’ [an expression for excuse], *habábák* < *marhabán bika* ‘you are welcome’, *minu* < *man huwa* ‘who [sg. masc.?]’, *míni* < *man hiya* ‘who [sg. fem.?]’, *sinu* < *’ayyu say’in huwa* ‘what?’ (+ interrogative pronoun), *hassá* < *ha-sáš’a* (< *hádhibi s-sáš’a* ‘now’).

Blending takes place, mostly with the Beja prefix morpheme of relation *-áb*, as in *gurbáb* < Arabic *gurb* ‘loom’ + Beja *-áb* ‘sheet of women’s clothing tied around the loin’.

3.2 Grammatical features

The basic word order in a simple sentence is SVO, with complete disappearance of case marking: *alwálad katab al-imtihäuser* ‘the boy wrote the examination’. In verbs conjugated in the past tense, no distinction is made between the 1st person and the 2nd person singular masculine subject pronoun, which both end in *-a*, e.g., *’akalta* ‘I/you [sg. masc.] ate’; weak verbs are conjugated without the *-a*; *sádét* ‘I/you [sg. masc.] prayed’. In general, there is no specific marker for the future tense; both the future and the present tense are expressed through the morpheme *bir*, and the targeted tense is understood either from the accompanying adverb or merely from the context, e.g., *bištágíl fi ljamí’a* ‘I work in the university’, *bükra bištágíl fi ljamí’a* ‘tomorrow I will work in the university’. However, a few groups of speakers use the morphemes *ha*– and *ráh* for expression of the future: *ha-– ráh yíštágíl fi ljamí’a* ‘he will work in the university’. The habitual and progressive aspects are built through the grammaticalized participle *gá’id* ‘sitting’: *gá’id yimší bmadrasa* ‘he goes to school [regularly]’, *gá’id yákul* ‘he is eating’, *gá’id yíjíri* ‘he is running’. With the remaining tenses and moods, Sudanese Colloquial Arabic does not differ much from Modern Standard Arabic.

Gender is generally marked for both nouns and verbs: *almalík mát* ‘the king died’, *almalíka mátat* ‘the queen died’. However, the dual is restricted to nouns; it is marked with the ending *-en*: *dél waladén* ‘these are two boys’. Nouns in dual number concord with plural verbs: *alwaladén akalú* ‘the two boys have eaten’. The sound plural is formed with *ín*: *sítta lmadarrisín* ‘I saw the teachers’ and *almudarrisín jo* ‘the teachers have come’.
3.3 Semantic features

A considerable number of Classical Arabic words still survive in the Bedouin dialects of the Butana region of central Sudan and Kordofan (western Sudan), especially words pertaining to the realm of camel rearing and natural phenomena (e.g. weather changes, different kinds of clouds, etc.). Sudanese Colloquial Arabic, on the other hand, maintains only a small number of such archaic words, some of which may even be derived from lexical sources that had become obsolete. Examples of these are <i>sagat</i> ‘cold’, derived from <i>sajit</i> ‘ice, snow’, and the verb <i>itanjaš</i> ‘to become furious and ready to fight’, derived from the noun <i>hinfiš</i> ‘a kind of snake, whose veins swell when it is enraged’.

There is another group of Classical Arabic words whose original meaning has undergone various degrees of change in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic. They may have undergone semantic extension, as in the word <i>aštart</i>, which originally meant ‘a person with one eye lower than the other’ and ‘a person who does not sing or clap in harmony with the group’. The former meaning is maintained as it is in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic, whereas the latter has been extended to mean ‘someone lacking in harmony’ in general. Another example is <i>jada</i> ‘to stop feeding a beast [i.e. by throwing it away]’; this has received the general meaning ‘to throw’. A final example is <i>fanjari</i> ‘an expert in camel riding’, which has taken the meaning of ‘an elegant person’. Semantic restriction is found in the word <i>sallag</i>, originally ‘to cut or pierce vertically’, but in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic specifically ‘to carry out eye surgery’ (hence <i>sallag</i> ‘eye surgeon’). Another example is <i>dabib <i>dābb</i> ‘creeping animal’, which is restricted to snakes in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic.

Additionally, Sudanese Colloquial Arabic includes a substantial number of idiomatic expressions whose origin can hardly ever be traced to Classical or Modern Standard Arabic. Examples of these are <i>atturaba fi xašmak</i> lit. ‘ground is in your mouth’ and <i>xum we sur</i> ‘gather and make a bundle’, which both mean ‘you are just wasting your time’, said in anticipation of disappointment. There also exists an entire group of idioms constructed with the names of bodily parts for the description of positive or negative qualities. Examples of these are <i>batnu gariga</i> lit. ‘his stomach is deep’, i.e. ‘he hardly ever reveals information on his personal affairs to others’; <i>galbun abyad</i> lit. ‘his heart is white’, i.e. ‘he is kindhearted’; <i>galbun aswad</i> lit. ‘his heart is black’, i.e. ‘he is cruel’; <i>lisunu zifir</i> lit. ‘his tongue is rancid’, said of someone who speaks obscenities; <i>ěnunu harr</i> lit. ‘his eye is hot’, i.e. ‘he may cast an evil eye’; <i>idu xafila</i> lit. ‘his hand is light’, i.e. ‘he is a thief’, but <i>idu lāhga</i> i.e. ‘his hand is long enough [to attain the target]’, which means that he is influential.

4. Gender language and social jargons

Aside from the regional Arabic dialects, Arabic varieties, and the Sudanese colloquial dialect, there are a number of linguistic styles related to gender, as well as social and occupational jargons. The best examples among these are women’s language and the university students’ jargon.

Arabic in the Sudan includes a sizable corpus of vocabulary used by women (→ language and gender). There is also a distinguished speech art or style marked as exclusively ‘women’s language’, which falls outside the realm of the speech or usage of men. Examples of such vocabulary are <i>sajami</i> ‘my ashes’, said in reaction to bad luck; <i>ądir allah</i> ‘God is omnipotent’, said as an expression of wonder; <i>wób aley</i> ‘lamentation on me’, said to express sorrow; <i>bőri</i> (<i>bari</i> ‘innocent’), said to express denial or negation when something is unpleasant; etc.

Women’s language in Sudan is also characterized by the frequent use of stylistic embellishments such as alliteration, simile, and proverbs, e.g. <i>albidman arrijal yidmán möifa</i> fi lgarbāl ‘having confidence in men is like trusting a sieve to hold water’. Other remarkable features of this language relate to the special use of colors, such as <i>lėmíni</i> (the color of the lemon) ‘dark green’ and <i>lön zeynab</i> ‘Zeynab’s color’, i.e. ‘light green’. In addition to these is the women’s peculiar use of the adjective <i>hilū</i> ‘sweet’ (in the sense of ‘beautiful’), which may be used in describing, for example, a dress: <i>fustān hilū</i> ‘a sweet [i.e. beautiful] dress’, <i>landırma balat</i> ‘igid what a sweet necklace she has’.

The university students’ jargon predominates mostly in the well-established universities in
Superlative → Elative

Swahili

1. SWAHILI AND ARABIC

Swahili is a Bantu language, more specifically a member of the Sabaki subgroup of North East Coast Bantu. It has been suggested that the ancestor of the modern dialects was spoken in an area along the East African coast, somewhere between the Webi Shebelle River in what is now Somalia and the Tana River in Kenya (Nurse and Spear 1983:46; Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993:490–496). Between 1100 and 1500 C.E., the Swahili dominated trade between the African interior and the Indian Ocean, a hegemony that was interrupted in the 16th century by invasions from the south by the Portuguese and from the north by Orma and Somali raids. In the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, under the rule of Omani Arab sultans who ousted the Portuguese and established a court in Zanzibar, the Swahili regained their position as mediators of trade between the mainland and the Indian Ocean, establishing caravan routes and trading outposts between Zanzibar and places as far west as Uganda, Burundi, and Zaire (Contini-Morava 1997:841).

Swahili was first written in Arabic script, in which there are manuscripts dating back to the early 18th century. The earliest extant Swahili manuscript poem known to scholars is Utendi Wa Tambuka, an epic or heroic poem written in Pate for Fumo (Sultan) Laiti Nabhan and dated 1728 C.E. (in the Library of the Seminar für afrikanische Sprachen, Hamburg, no. 3554 H. 119). A Roman alphabet which is now standard was introduced during the colonial period, although some Swahili-speaking Muslims continue to use Arabic script, especially in private correspondence. The cultural importance of Islam is reflected in the large number of loanwords from Arabic. Indeed, this misled some early scholars to describe Swahili as a 'mixed language', a view that persists today among many East Africans (Contini-Morava 1997:842), probably also because its name is derived from an Arabic word sawābil, plural of sābil 'coast' with the suffix -i, i.e. 'the coastal language'. In the middle of the 20th century, Tucker (1946–1947:854, n. 3)