The Significance of Sudan for Forensic Linguistics
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1. Introduction

2. The linguistic map of the Sudan

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, with an area of ca. 1 million square miles inhabited by ca. 40 million people. Like many of the tropical African countries, it is characterized by linguistic density and diversity. But it is also distinguished from the other countries by a number of additional characteristics, most prominent among these being the instability of its language situation, multiplicity of border languages and existence within its territories of a number of West African immigrant languages. In what follows we try to give more details about these characteristics.

a. Linguistic density and diversity:

More than a hundred languages are spoken within the Sudanese national territories (113 languages according to the 1956 census, 106 languages according to Tucker & Bryan (1956) and 177 languages and dialects according to Abu-Bakr & Hurreiz (1984). These languages belong to three out of the four language families (Phyla) of Africa according to Greenberg’s (1963) classification. Adding the immigrant languages, we find that 16 out of the 18 branches comprised in these three families are represented in the Sudan.

b. Instability of Language Situation:

About 25 years ago Bjorn Jernudd (undated) described the language situation in the Sudan as being “not well defined and constantly changing and will not be stable for some time”. One of the salient features to underline in this regard is the uneven geographical distribution of the Sudanese languages. About 70% of these languages concentrate in the Southern half of the country (as traditional home-regions), with a striking density in the southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. This is while in some regions in the northern half of the country (e.g. Northern or Eastern Sudan) one may hardly count more than 5 languages. However, the actual factor behind the instability of the language situation in the Sudan is the constant population movement, especially during the last 30 years, as a result of the civil wars, on the one hand, and drought and famine, on the other hand. As the direction of the movement has always been from the peripheries to the centre, Khartoum agglomeration today has become a new home for all the Sudanese language2. One of the ultimate outcomes of this phenomenon is the acceleration of language shift to Arabic.

c. Border Language:

Sudan shares borders with up to 9 neighbouring countries, which makes it the country with the most numerous neighbours in Africa. Since political boundaries in Africa do not consider ethnic or linguistic boundaries, Sudan shares at least one language with each of its neighbouring countries, as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbouring Country</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>(Nile) Nubian, Beja, Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Zaghawa, Arabic,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Zaghawa, Arabic Maba, Daju, Kanuri, Massalit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Banda and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC (Congo)</td>
<td>Zande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Acholi, Madi and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Toposa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Murle, Nuer, Shilluk, Koma (Gumuz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Tigre, Arabic</td>
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**d. West African immigrant languages:**

Establishment of West African communities can be dated in terms of centuries. Since the advent of Islam in West Africa until recently West African Muslims from as far as West as Senegal and Mauretania used to cross the Sudan on their way to or back from Mecca in Arabia for pilgrimage. A number of these pilgrims, for one reason or another, settled permanently in Sudan. However, such old migrations of individuals or small groups of people had a very limited linguistic impact, because these immigrants have already been completely integrated linguistically and culturally in the Sudanese linguistic map was associated with the wave of West African migrations to Sudan as a result of colonialism during the first decades of the last century. As a result of this historical event the linguistic map of the Sudan added a number of West African languages, the largest of which are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Shared with</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfulde</td>
<td>Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger Republic, Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cameroon and Chad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>Nigeria, Niger Republic, Ghana, Togo, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songhai</td>
<td>Mali, Niger Republic, Benin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanuri</td>
<td>Nigeria, Niger Republic, Chad</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The Arabic spoken in the Sudan can be classified into series of forms listed in term of quality (i.e. Whether high or low) in the following order.

a. Modern standard Arabic (MSA. For others the classical Arabic):

b. This is the standard form shared among all the Arab countries taught in school and used in writings. In Sudan it is usually used in highly formal situations (mostly in Friday mosques, political rallies, university lecturers specialized in Arabic).

c. Middle or intellectuals’ Arabic: It approximates the MSA. It is the form spoken by well educated people through which high intellectual concepts are expressed. It also serves interviews in radio and television.

d. Sudanese Colloquial Arabic (SCA), known also as Khartoum Arabic. It is regarded as the Sudanese central dialect used originally by ordinary people
belonging to Khartoum and its vicinities and extents to all big urbanized towns in
different parts of the Sudan (except Southern Sudan and the Western parts of
Darfur). For its importance to our present study will come back again to it.

e. The Arabic regional dialects: spoken by distinct Arab sedentary communities in
Northern Sudan and nomadic Arab communities in Northern area of central
Sudan and the Baggara groups in Kordofan (including the Nuba Mountains) and
Farfur.

f. Arabic varieties: spoken as a second language by non-Arab ethnic groups, most
distinguished among these are the Juba pidgin Arabic in Southern Sudan, the
variety spoken the Nubians in far Northern Sudan, the variety spoken by the Beja
in Eastern Sudan and Darfur variety of Arabic spoken in Darfur extending well
into Chad. Each of these varieties has its distinctive linguistic characteristics
resulting from the influence of the respective local languages.

Population movements and asylum seeking:
The present striking phenomenon of asylum seeking by the Sudanese in Europe and
America is to a large extent linked with the population movements, the Sudan has been
witnessing for the last 30 years. Some of these movements have been caused by disasters,
both natural and man-made, where some others have been for search of better conditions
of living. Accordingly, we can distinguish here three types of population movements in
term of the direction of the movement:

a. Movement within the country:
It is usually from the peripheries to the centre (mainly Khartoum agglomeration). In
addition to the normal rural migration characterizing most of the African countries, a
large number of the Sudanese inhabitants also moved from Southern Sudan, Western
Sudan and the Nuba Mountains because of the civil wars, on the one hand, and drought
and feminine, on the other hand (the displaced).

b. Movement from outside to inside the country:
In the period from the mid 1970s up to the early 1990s (the first Gulf war) thousand of
Sudanese made their to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in search for better
conditions of life, and later on to escape hardship in Sudan. Involved were people in all
professional sectors: university lecturers, secondary school teachers, medical doctor,
skilled and unskilled labourers down to shepherds.

From the beginning of the 1990s new circumstances emerged in both Sudan and the
Gulf countries that brought about change in the direction and reasons of migrations the
first Gulf war engendered a drastic drop the economic conditions of Saudia Arabia and all
the other Gulf countries, which made them no more attractive to Sudanese. At the same
time the realistic of the Islamic regime’s policies in the form of political persecution of
opponents, escalation of the civil war and hostile relations with the neighbouring
countries. Economic sanctions coupled with the high costs of the war hampered any
development. Many qualified adherent. Then expansion in higher education and scarcity
of jobs engendered thousands of unemployed graduates. They are all the elements
included in this categories of migrants who sought refugee in Egypt, Europe, USA,
Canada and Australia, constituting potential corpus of asylum seekers. These include also
some of the people, who are formerly working in the Gulf countries (or their children).
How? Being used to a lucrative style of life, they found it difficult to go back to Sudan
where they neither have jobs nor investment. This is especially if they have financial commitments to their extended families or their children are studying abroad. They become obliged to move to over seas under whatever pretext.

Asylum seeking and asylum right granting: The case of ‘Sudanese’ asylum seekers in the Netherlands,

Since the establishment of the Islamic regime in 1989 Sudan became the focus of the European media of all kinds, for the reasons I mentioned earlier. These reasons made the Sudanese asylum seekers gain a special sympathy from the European community in general, and the Netherlands in particular.

According to my experience with the eight cases I examined over 13 months (April 2004-May 2005) for linguistic contra-expertise applicants for asylum claiming to be Sudanese can be classified into three categories as follows:

a- Genuine asylum seekers: These are either politicians or people from war affected areas (Southern Sudan, and the Nuba Mountains).

b- False Sudanese applicants, claiming to belong to war affected areas while they are not.

c- Non-Sudanese applicants, claiming to belong to war affected areas in the Sudan, while they are not even Sudanese

With regard to the first category of applicants, the Netherlands government authorities seem to have effective means of identifying them. It seems that politicians are recommended by certain references recognized by the government authorities, whereas non-activists from Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains are recommended through the SPLM coordination offices in the Netherlands. This may be reason why I have so far not assigned to examine any case in this category of applicants.

With the other two categories, it seems that the rule on the part of the government authorities concerned is: “every case is genuine until the opposite is proved”. This “assumed” rule is definitely in favour of the false applicants, and many of such applicant succeeded in getting the right of asylum, which they did not deserve. So to say, only extremely suspicious cases are subjected to examination. This is because over the last 13 months I was assigned to examine only 7 cases, and the applicants in all of them occurred to be not genuine. Three of these cases belong to category (b) (false Sudanese applicants), whereas the other four cases belong to category (c) (non-Sudanese false applicants).

With regard to the (falsely) claimed home, all the false Sudanese applicants claimed the Nuba Mountains, though the Southern Sudan is larger in size and has been a war affected area for a longer time. This is simply because Southern Sudan is quite clearly marked in terms of the physical features of its inhabitant and the variety of Arabic they speak. False applicants also hardly display reasonable geographical and cultural knowledge of any region in Southern, unless they happened to live there for some time. On the other hand, the Nuba Mountains region can be described as a “grey” area that includes both Nua proper and nomadic Arab groups, in addition a significant number of riverain Arabs settled in all the big and small towns of the area as traders, government employee, large scale farmers, etc. Here different Arabic dialects and varieties are spoken. Moreover, as the Nuba Mountains area (especially its northern half) is considered to belong more to the North than to the South, false applicants find less difficulty in collecting some data on the area, from both oral and written sources.
All the four non-Sudanese were found to be originating from area to the west of the Sudanese western borders, between Chad and Ghana. One of them claimed Darfur as home-region; and one claimed the Nuba Mountains in Southern Sudan and kept speaking of an area in Southern Sudan bordering the Nuba Mountains.

The difficulties of ‘Language analysis’ for identification of ‘Sudanese’ asylum seekers

From above description of the Sudanese linguistic reality, it now appears clearly that application of ‘language analysis’ method for identification of asylum seekers is not an easy task.

The first question is: To what extent is a certain linguist qualified to undertake ‘language analysis’ for a Sudanese asylum seeker? In other words, what are the minimum professional qualities that required in him to enable him undertake such a task?

a. He needs to be a linguist.
b. He needs to be specialized in African languages
c. He has to have enough knowledge of the language setting ad linguistic map of the Sudan
d. He must have enough idea about the border languages
e. He is required to know some major West African language that exist also in the Sudan.
f. He is required to be well acquainted with the salient feature of aspects in the Sudan.
g. He must have good knowledge in Sudanese Arabic dialectology.

Unfortunately, in all the cases I so far re-examined for ‘contra-expertise’, none of the first language analyst seem to meet even half of these requirements. Some analysts disqualified applicants claming the Nuba Mountains as home region merely because they speak perfect Khartoum Arabic. This is while Khartoum Arabic per se is nowadays a ‘no-man’s language’ which cuts across ethnic and regional boundaries, as explained. Moreover, Khartoum Arabic itself does not exist in one form, but it includes some tiny linguistic features that help a competent specialized linguist to determine whether its speaker is a typical Khartoum citizen or not.

Likewise, the Hausa speaking applicants were disqualified by the analysts because Hausa is not a Sudanese Language. In fact, Hausa is one of the 11 largest languages in the Sudan. Here, the question should be: Do these applicants speak Sudanese Hausa. But then how can the analyst determine this, if he neither knows Hausa nor does he know the difference between Sudanese Hausa and the variety of Hausa spoken in different regions of West Africa?

More of such problems are expected to emerge when the European governments authorities start examining cases of applicants from Darfur. As mentioned earlier, the Darfur Arabic dialects or variety, whether spoken by the nomadic Arabs or non-Arabic ethnic groups extend well into Chad. Almost all the Darfurian tribes and ethnic groups are also found in Chad, with almost the same cultural traits. In some cases, members of the same family may be distributed in Chad and the Sudan.

What are the linguistic and extra-linguistic clues in ‘language analysis’?
Before listing the linguistic and extra-linguistic that help in identification of an asylum seeker through ‘language analysis’ method, language analyst should bear the following principles in mind:

**a**- Speaking Khartoum Arabic alone is not enough for establishment of an applicant’s home region.

**b**- Not speaking a tribal language alone does not mean that the applicant does not belong to that tribe (there is a rapid shift to Arabic).

**c**- With the exception of Sudanese with Egyptian, North African or Middle Eastern Background, every (adult) Sudanese knows his tribe.

**d**- Speaking a West African language does not mean that the applicant is not Sudanese.

Moving deeper into the data under analysis, my experience with the cases I so far re-examined showed that careful false applicants may be, still they are betrayed in the following areas:

**a**- Pronunciation of vowels in local place and tribal names: linguist agree that vowels are more difficult than consonants in both realization and perception. But this is of course for non-native speakers of the language concerned, with regard to the Arabic native speakers claiming (falsely) a Nuba tribe of Nuba Mountains, their difficulty in pronouncing the vowel in tribal place names is attributed to two reasons: Arabic has only three vowels (I,a,u) whereas the minimum number of vowels included in any Nubian language is five (I,e,a,o,u,). The other reason is that: some of the applicants get their information from written sources, and Arabic orthography does not mark vowels, so, if an applicant is not able to pronounce the name of his claimed tribe or home-village correctly is this a strong evidence that his claim is false.

**b**- Realization of tones in place and tribal names. This case of vowels; most of the false applicants are betrayed by tonal patterns of local place and tribal names. This applies to both Arabic and non-Arabic native speakers.

**c**- Position of stress on words: This applies to non-Sudanese false applicants with some knowledge of Arabic. These were mostly found to belong to some Nomadic Arab tribes living around lake Chad. Their way of stressing syllables of some words may not be attested in any Sudanese Arabic dialect.

**d**- Mention of some cultural items such as foods and vegetables which do not exist in the claimed home (birkiib, fagguus).

**e**- Selection of (Arabic) words, which are not common in any Sudanese dialect (rajjaal, fuluus).

What has been listed above are just some basic clues that help the language analyst to draw reasonably convincing conclusions about the relation of applicants to their claimed home-regions. However, another criteria of a pivotal importance in language analysis is the correlation between the different pieces of data included in the interview. In other words, individual pieces of information may only be valuable when linked to and checked against the general life history of the applicant or geographical, social or cultural setting of his claimed home. In the case I re-examined I can across many cases, where certain pieces of information occur by logic to be incompatible with others. Examples of these are:
a. A secondary school leaver who spent all his life in the Nuba Mountains, yet speaking the form marked as ‘Educated Arabic’ with deeply thought and well formulated concepts and idiomatic expression that are characteristic of typical native citizens of Khartoum agglomeration.

b. A person born in Khartoum and he lived there up to the age of 10 years (language acquisition at childhood), and yet could neither realize the particular Arabic sound nor express himself in full correct sentences.

c. A person who was able to pronounce all the particular Arabic consonants perfectly, yet unable to express himself in full correct sentences.

d. An applicant claiming the existence of a ‘teaching hospital’ in his home-town in the Nuba Mountains, while there is no faculty of medicin in the entire region. This means a) he belongs to a town where there is a teaching hospital and b) he does not know the function of the teaching hospital.

e. An applicant claiming to belong to a town in the Nuba Mountains, yet unable to pronounce correctly the name of the form of rooms used as shops in his town’s market. He pronounced [krunk] instead of [kurnuk]. We assume that the word was communicated to by another person and he wrote it down in Arabic without marking the vowels.

Advice to the immigration officers

As mentioned earlier, from the cases I re-examined, I notice that immigration officers conducting interviews in the Netherlands tend to be more sympathetic with applicants than the opposite. The following remarks, and eventually advices, all based on my experience with the cases constitutly the data for this paper, may help the immigration officers to be more just for their government as well as for the applicant. These remarks and advices are made with assumption that only suspicious cases are subjected to ‘language analysis’.

a- Immigration officers are to bear in mind that false applicant do a through home-work for the interview and they probably try to know the kinds of questions asked to previous interviewees.

b- Interpreters being from a different nationality from that of the applicant may affect negatively the interview. Because the applicant in his effort to communicate information to the interpreter may find himself obliged to deviate from his own dialect in order to approximate that of the interpreter.

c- Time should not be wasted in questions on national flags, currencies or national anthems. First, answers to such questions may be prepared by the applicant before. Second, incorrect answers may not necessarily mean that the applicant is not a national of the country in questions. Since not all nationals of the country can remember such items at once; they may even not know some of them ( I, personally cannot recite any time the national anthem of my country).

d- Immigration officers should find a way of making the applicant pronounce as many local place and tribal names as possible, as well as names of cultural items such as foods, musical instruments and other items of material culture.
Footnotes

1 - Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan. Only the Khoisan family (phylum) which is not represented in the Sudan.

2 - E.g. in 1988 a total number of 51 languages were found to be spoken in an area of ca. 8 square kilometers in the vicinity of Khartoum. See Miller & Abu-Manga (1992).

3 - One of them was found to be a typical Darfurian citizen, but he seems to have submitted his application before the break out of the civil war in Darfur-misfortune.

4 - He seems to be a recent applicant, who submitted his application after the break out of the civil war in Darfur.

5 - However, the applicants in question were actually found to be not from the Nuba Mountains not only because they speak Khartoum, but on the basis of other evidences not referred to by the nalysts.

6 - Sudanese Hausa borrows heavily from Arabic, both words and concepts, whereas West African Hausa borrow, besides Arabic, also from English and French. Moreover, some Hausa words used in West Africa are not known among the Sudanese Hausa speakers.

7 - In most cases, families enquire about your tribe if you approach their daughters for marriage.