

Language and identity construction among the Tagoi of Sudan

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1 Introduction

Tagoi [tag] is a Niger-Congo language belonging to the Rashad language group (Greenberg 1963, Schadeberg 1981; see also Dimmendaal 2018). It is spoken west of Jabal Tagali and Jabal Rashad in the area of Rashad town by 27,000 people (SIL 2017, in Eberhard et al. 2024). It has several dialects: Goy (Tagoi), Umale (Tumale), Moreib and Orig (Turjuk) (Schadeberg 2013). The Tagoi language is not widely used and it lacks intergenerational transmission among Tagoi migrants and refugees who have settled in the Khartoum area. Thus, Tagoi is a severely endangered language that will probably become extinct, if no countervailing measures are taken. This is one of the results of the preliminary linguistic survey conducted by researchers at the Department of Linguistics, University of Khartoum during the period 9/2011-12/2013.

The present study is part of the Tagoi Orthography Development Project, conducted by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Khartoum.¹ This study aims at investigating Tagoi identity construction in relation to language, culture and ethnicity, in addition to exploring how the development of a Tagoi orthography could help in maintaining the Tagoi language, and therewith culture and ethnic identity. Our analysis shows that the Tagoi community is undergoing changes that can be understood within the historical context of the area and that negatively affect the situation of the Tagoi language as one of Sudan's endangered languages. This study highlights the necessity of starting revitalization steps for the Tagoi language and culture, and documenting and recording the oral history and heritage of the Tagoi.

How can Tagoi transmit their heritage and culture through generations? What would be the situation in the case of the loss of the Tagoi accumulation of

¹ The project was granted a Haycock Research Grant by BIEA (British Institute in Eastern Africa) in 2015 to develop a practical orthography for the Tagoi language.

knowledge, experiences, history, epics, songs, heritages, legacy, etc. that are passed from one generation to the next through the language? The fact that language is a central component of individuals' and groups' identity gives rise to the question of how the Tagoi people would be identified in the absence of their language.

Language is a central component of identity and helps determine how people see themselves as part of the national context. What would be the role of the Tagoi language in shaping Tagoi identity, culture and ethnicity? Why is the revitalizing of the Tagoi language extremely important for the Tagoi people? How could the development of the Tagoi orthography be the means of preserving Tagoi culture and identity? To answer these questions, a number of focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with Tagoi people in Khartoum. FGD is a valid tool that helps the researcher in understanding the nature and the underlying factors of the Tagoi language endangerment. It also provides a way of digging deep in order to figure out some generalizations on the present situation of the Tagoi language and appropriate means for its maintenance in the future. The FGD data have been utilized to provide vital feedback and comments, ideas and perceptions of individual participants in the discussion of the issues raised in this study.

1.1 Sociolinguistic profile of the Tagoi

Previous research on this language group dates back to Stevenson (1956/57), and Schadeberg & Elias (1979). There is also a preliminary linguistic survey conducted from September 2011 to December 2013 by a number of researchers at the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum, with the aim of providing facts about the sociolinguistic situation and the degree of language endangerment, the phonology and the noun and verb morphology of the Tagoi language; this constitutes the basis for a more comprehensive data collection and for the building of local competence in language documentation (Alamin 2015). Then, in May 2015, the Department of Linguistics, University of Khartoum, was granted a Haycock Research Grant by BIEA in order to develop a practical orthography for the Tagoi language. This is the second phase, which was supposed to finish in June 2016 but the work continued until April 2018.

The main findings from the sociolinguistic survey in 2012 can be summarized as follows:

- 32% of the 551 respondents use Tagoi on a daily basis, 36% use it a few times a year and 52% never use it at home.
- 61% of the 277 respondents who have children never or rarely use Tagoi with their children at home.

- 65% of grandparents never or rarely use the Tagoi language with their grandchildren at home.
- 65% of children, 68% of youth and 50% of adults never or rarely use the Tagoi language at home.
- 68% of old people use the Tagoi language daily and 50% of adults use it daily or weekly.
- There is no significant different in the use of Tagoi between males and females.
- 81% (445/551) of respondents think that Tagoi will become extinct due to its restricted use, especially among the young generation.
- The Tagoi language is not widely used at home and there is no intergenerational transmission of the language. Besides this, respondents' opinions about its vitality are negative.

Taking these data together, Tagoi is a highly endangered language.

These findings were the basis for further discussions with some of the Tagoi people. Their viewpoints, observations and explanations were recorded and used for more understanding of the present situation of the Tagoi language.

1.2 Methodology

SECTION 1.3 presents a description of the main tool used in collecting the data, i.e., focus group discussions. It is worth mentioning that the other sources of information are the researcher's own observations as a member of the Tagoi Orthography Development Project, as well as the informal interviews and discussions with the Tagoi people throughout the project (May 2015 – April 2018).

1.3 Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion (FGD) is the main data collection tool for this contribution. According to Krueger & Casey (2000: 5):

A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Each group is conducted with six to eight people by a skilled interviewer. The discussions are relaxed, and often participants enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others.

Therefore, four FGDs were composed in two settings: formal (at the University of Khartoum's Department of Linguistics) and informal (in a private house in al-Fiteḥaab in Omdurman). The choice of participants in the FGDs was based on age and level of education. The first two group discussions were conducted

on Friday, 7 October 2016 in al-Fiteḥaab, Omdurman. They started at 9.30 am and took about six hours: three hours for each group. While the first group consisted of six participants, three males and three females, the second group consisted of seven participants, five males and two females. The participants' ages ranged between 27 and 65 years old. All of them were Muslims and bilingual in Tagoi and Arabic, except four males who were monolingual in Arabic. They were illiterate, except one male. They were born in different villages in the Rashad area, except one female, who had an Ethiopian mother and was born in Ethiopia. The five females were housewives, while the seven males had free jobs. They arrived in Khartoum at different times since the 1970s for different reasons: for jobs, education, or to escape the armed conflict in the Nuba Mountains. They all use Arabic with their children at home and with their relatives in their places of origin and in Khartoum. The reason, according to them, is that the Tagoi language is not known by a great number of the Tagoi people, so they have to use Arabic, which is the most widely spread and used language among the Tagoi people. Their viewpoints on the topics discussed will be presented in SECTION 2.

The third and fourth focus group discussions were conducted on Saturdays, 22 and 29 October 2016 at the University of Khartoum's Department of Linguistics. The first one started at 10.30 am and took about 3.30 hours. There were four participants, three females and one male. Their ages ranged between 25 and 35 years old. All had graduated from university and were born in Khartoum, except for the male participant, who was born in the Rashad area. The fourth group consisted of four male participants, members of the committee of the Tagoi Orthography Development Project. They are all Muslims, born in Rashad, and bilingual in Arabic and Tagoi, except one participant who is bilingual in Arabic and English. Their viewpoints on the topics discussed will be presented in SECTION 2.

The researcher and Dr. Helene Fatima Idris were leading the discussions in all groups. Ahmed Sosal, then a teaching assistant, also helped in recording the two groups in al-Fiteḥaab. Recordings were made, with the participants' permission, to make sure that people's ideas did not get lost. In addition, the researchers wrote down certain points. Arrangements for this had been made in advance. Then the recording was transcribed and interpreted in order to have a more complete, accurate and permanent record. The decisions about incentives, places, times, participants and group compositions were also made in advance. The topics to be discussed and the questions to be asked were also prepared. The groups chose the language to be used, which was Arabic. Thus, general questions were asked by the researchers in Arabic.

In conducting focus group discussions, the leader/researcher usually performs a common sequence of events, such as thanking the participants for coming,

reviewing the purpose of the group and the goals of the meeting, setting the stage and going over the flow of the meeting, i.e., how it will proceed and how the members can contribute. The ground rules are presented, encouraging open participation and setting the tone. This preparation is important, because usually the participants have never been in a focus group before, and they also tend to ask opening questions. Some common techniques are used by the researchers, like summarizing what they have heard, asking if the group agrees, phrasing the same question in different ways, asking if anyone else has any comments on that question, asking a follow-up question, and looking around the room and making brief eye contact, especially with those who may not have spoken. After the meeting, the researchers look at the data. If the discussion was recorded, the researchers make a transcript. If not, they make a written summary from their notes. Finally, the researchers share the results with the groups to give them some feedback at a second session, reviewing results, verifying their accuracy and/or exploring further themes.

At the beginning of each session, the researchers introduced themselves and provided a general explanation about the Tagoi Orthography Development Project, within which this study took place, in addition to a general idea of what the study is about, the main issues that will be discussed and how the group discussion will be conducted. Then the members of the groups were asked to introduce themselves: names, places of birth, ages, level of education, jobs, places and languages of education and the time of their arrival in Khartoum. The discussion was guided by four major topics with relevance to the Tagoi language: identity, culture, ethnicity and orthography development.

Since the participants were actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also to respond to other members and to questions posed by the researcher, the focus groups offered a depth, nuance and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys. Additionally, because the focus groups were structured and directed, but also expressive, they yielded a lot of information in a relatively short time. In short, focus group discussions constituted a good way to gather in-depth information about the community's thoughts and opinions on many topics, such as language, culture, ethnicity, religion, migration/displacement, identity, the teaching/learning of the Tagoi language, the effect of the Nuba Mountains conflict on the Tagoi language and language attitudes.

1.4 Data analysis and discussion

This section deals with the findings regarding Tagoi identity construction in relation to language, culture and ethnicity. The participants' views on how the development of Tagoi orthography will help in maintaining the Tagoi culture and ethnicity are also presented.

2 Language and identity construction among Tagoi of Sudan

2.1 The Tagoi language and the participants' identity construction

The term 'identity' is used to refer to an individual's or group's sense of who they are and who they belong to, as defined by them and/or others. Identity can be expressed in several ways, for example, in terms of nationality, geographical location, ethnicity, gender, social class and occupation (Swann et al. 2004: 140-141).

The participants were guided by nine main questions. The starting point was the names and their importance to individuals' personal identity. They argued that having a Tagoi name is not an important indicator of being Tagoi since they all have Arabic names due to Islam. It is important to mention that they changed their old naming system for a "day naming system", where they mostly choose the names of prophets and other important figures from Islam (Ali 2017: 82), as will be discussed later in SECTION 2.2.

The second issue discussed was about what language the participants felt defines them and whether speaking or not speaking Tagoi facilitates or hinders their communication with other members of the Tagoi community. Tagoi is the language that defines all the participants, as they say. As Şafaa expressed: "I'm Tagoi and would like to be identified by Tagoi language although I do not know or use it." For most participants, the knowledge of Tagoi language is not a key factor in communication among the Tagoi people since they are all fluent in Arabic. For those who are fluent speakers of the Tagoi language, they have to use Arabic most of the time, especially with youth, although they love to use Tagoi. Meanwhile, some of the youth expressed their discomfort about when there are some people who are speaking the Tagoi language and they do not understand or are unable to participate. Nusayba confirmed this: "On some occasions, I feel discomfort and exclusion when old people carry out a conversation in Tagoi." When the youth participants were asked about their illiteracy in the Tagoi language, their justification was the lack of communication, i.e., their parents have spoken Arabic with them all the time and have not motivated them to know or use the Tagoi language.

The subsequent questions followed: What other factors define them as Tagoi? Do they define themselves as Tagoi? How do they behave as Tagoi? Do they identify themselves as Sudanese? How? How do they perceive themselves in terms of mixed heritage, i.e., having two languages and cultures?

A lot of discussion topics were introduced to figure out the factors by which Tagoi can be identified. It was found that language is the only factor with which to identify Tagoi people; they tend to behave as Sudanese, as they said.

Therefore, all participants agreed on their identification by nationality as Sudanese and not by ethnicity as Tagoi/Nuba. Sudanese identity, as described by Omer (1998), fits them better. According to Omer (1998: 37-44), there are three concepts closely related to Sudanese identity: Arabism, Islamization and Africanism. Arabism means Arabic identity, which has two dimensions, racial and cultural. Islamization is the trend which aims to determine Sudanese identity based on Islam. For the focus group participants, the cultural dimension of Arabism is what identifies them because racially they are African. Sudanese culture is the dominant one among the Tagoi people; there is no so-called conflict between languages or cultures.

The concepts of identity and belonging are the driving forces of conflicts in southern Kordofan, as assumed by some researchers based on the claim of an autochthonous identity among the Nuba (Ali 2016: 122). Therefore, the claims over communal land on the grounds of autochthony become a source of identity politics and are the basis for the way the Nuba have constructed these policies (Komey 2008, 2009; Manger 2007; Suliman 2002, cited in Ali 2016: 122). The Tagoi also claim their status as ‘first comers’ to the area and are thus autochthonous there (Ali 2016:122). Thus, what are the sources of Tagoi identity politics? Are they the same sources as those of the Nuba? But as will be discussed later in SECTION 2.3, Tagoi participants emphasized their belonging to Sudan rather than to the Nuba. The participants talked about how other Nuba groups consider them as *not* being Nuba. Ahmed asserted this: “To the other groups in the Nuba Mountains, we are not Nuba.” There was no answer when they were asked about who are they in the eyes of the other Nuba groups.

2.2 Tagoi culture in relation to the Tagoi language

Before proceeding, the role of culture must be explained as related to language. Culture explains how people make sense of daily experiences. People take in experiences through the lens of culture. Both language and culture have the same goal of meaning making (Kövecses 2010). Culture expresses meaning in a variety of ways, such as through art, dance, music, ceremonies, names and narratives. Language expresses meaning through the words that give verbalization to the experiences that humans share. The importance of both aspects is undeniable; each component of the relationship is important and should be examined. Language is closely tied to culture; language is an instrument to express the culture and environment of the speaker (Yağiz & Izadpanah 2013). Without culture, language has fewer channels through which it can express meaning. While language needs culture, culture is also dependent upon language. According to Hans J. Vermeer, language is an intrinsic part of culture (Liu 2012). Language not only preserves and transmits culture, but it is also a vessel of cultural change (Liu et al. 2014). Language can communicate

political, social and cultural ideas within a community and provide a method for explaining the reasoning behind the ideas, leading to potential change. Without the use of language to convey meaning and transmit ideas, cultural changes would be limited to non-linguistic ideas. Because a culture without language is not true reality, cultural studies should be closely tied to language studies.

According to Ali (2016), there are a variety of cultures over the small area where the Tagoi live. This is due to the fact that many ethnic groups (“tribes”) have found refuge in the Nuba Mountains (Elles 1935: 4, cited in Ali 2016: 115). There are a number of historical circumstances that have led to the distinctiveness of the Tagoi culture, as assumed by Stevenson (1962: 122-125, cited in Ali 2016: 119). Therefore, we will try to gain insights into the different elements of the Tagoi distinctive culture, emphasizing the role of the Tagoi language in the cultural practices of this group. The historical circumstances related to the Nuba area that should be considered are the arrival of the Muslim *Juhayna* in the sixteenth century, followed by the Muslim *Ja'aliyyin* and *Ghudiyyat* and *Baggara* during the eighteenth century, and the marriage of Mohammed Al-Ja'ali to King Tagali's daughter and the role of his son Abu Juaridah and his descendants in expanding the kingdom and spreading Islam.² The arrival of a small Arabic-speaking group from the Muslim *Funj* Kingdom in the eighteenth century was the main turning point in the Tagoi history. This group “was exiled from Sinnar, the capital of the Funj Kingdom, to the north-eastern Nuba Mountains following a dispute over political authority” (Ali 2016: 119). According to Stevenson (1962: 122-125, cited in Ali 2016: 119), “intermarriages between the expatriate and host groups in the north-eastern Nuba Mountains resulted in socio-cultural cross-fertilization, giving the Tagoi their distinctive culture”, while their language was greatly affected by the Arabic language.

Between the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium period (1899-1956) and the present day, the Tagoi in the Nuba Mountains have undergone significant socioeconomic and political transformations during the Condominium due to the establishment of a strong administrative system in the Nuba Mountains, inter-tribal wars were brought under control, cultivation was extended outwards from around the foothills, and Nuba farmers began to rebuild their homesteads on the lower slopes and pediments fringing the massifs in areas exposed to government and commercial influences. (Ali 2016: 120).

The dispute over land (*garadid*) and political authority between the Tagoi and later arrivals (*Hawazma* and their allies) escalated to violence in the Tagoi area

² For more information on Tagoi history, see Ali (2016: 115-122).

(Ali 2016: 125, 129-130). Therefore, the Tagoi have fled their home to more secure areas. What is mentioned could explain many of the study's findings.

The participants were introduced to the concept of culture, which is used in this context to refer to experiences, heritage, customs, festivals, lifestyle, ways of thinking, values, ideas, traditions and knowledge. Then they were asked about their views on the assumed relationship between language and culture, the necessity of preserving Tagoi culture by preserving the Tagoi language, and their cultural activities, practices and organizations in Khartoum and in their place of origin.

Wardhaugh (2002: 219-220) reported that there appear to be three claims regarding the relationship between language and culture: The structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world or, as a weaker view, the structure does not determine the worldview but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language toward adopting a particular worldview. The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do. Based on the above viewpoints on the relationship between language and culture, the discussions were directed. The aim was to know what Tagoi people do in their everyday life that culturally distinguishes them from others. Apart from the harvesting ceremonies, all the participants confirmed that there is nothing relating to lifestyle, traditions, customs, values or anything else that distinguishes Tagoi from others, except Dawuud, who emphasized the existence of certain social practices only for Tagoi: "We have a special dance using copper, a kind of music performance that cannot be found among others. In addition, there are certain traditions used by Tagoi on certain social occasions although they are restricted in use now." Hussein talked about certain ways of carrying religious rituals among Tagoi *Suufiyya* (an Islamic group), but this cannot be considered a distinguishing element since it is practiced by only a few and cannot be generalized to all Tagoi people.

Tagoi have been exposed to influences which have led to a loss of their social and cultural heritage. They also underwent a serious conversion to Islam, which led to other changes in their language and culture during the reign of Mek Jabouri (1828-1851). They had many cultural practices that were abandoned due to the influence of Islam (Ali 2017: 72). *Kujur* was important. It "may mean any of the following types of priest: shaman, medicine man or woman, grain priest, rainmaker or any other minor magic expert. In the Nuba languages, the same word is used for *kujur* and for the ancestral spirit" (Ali 2017: 72). *Kajara* (plural of *kujur*) were regarded as highly sacred having their own privacy. Besides this, the residents of the Mount of Jarad performed *asbar* rituals (rituals of sowing, harvests, weddings and circumcision), through which *kajara* were believed to

control the locusts and used them as weapons when there was a need to defend the self and property (Ali 2017: 73).

The number of Qur'anic schools, mosques and scholars of *fiqh* and *shari'a* grew rapidly and worked hard to change the people's perceptions in a coup against the traditional *asbar* beliefs and rituals, which in the past had been practiced in parallel with Islamic rituals. (Ali 2017: 77).

According to the participants, there are no organizations that currently exist for Tagoi, although there are some associations for the Tagoi university students in Khartoum. Their main activities are social. Şafaa explained: "I was a member of one of these associations. We used to help the students who were not able to pay the fees for their studies, prepare the reception parties for the new students and so on." Furthermore, the existence of such organizations helps in maintaining Tagoi heritage, culture and language, specifically in the urban areas.

"Islamisation of the Tagoi was accompanied by the Arabisation of the names of people and villages, and even the language itself" (Ali 2017: 81). The Tagoi had their own old naming system before the coming of Arabic names. The Arabization of names started in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was 'day name' based. The Tagoi now mostly choose the names of "[...] prophets and other important figures in Islam and were linked to the days of the week on which these prophets and figures were born" (Ali 2017: 82).

Generally speaking, one can emphasize the role of Islam in shaping Tagoi culture and identity. They abandoned their beliefs, customs, traditions and other practices when they adopted Islam a long time ago. In Ali's (2017: 77) words, "[t]his resurgence of Islam accelerated the disappearance of many *asbar* rituals and the emergence of a new understanding of religion". Besides this, their existence in an ethnically heterogeneous area had a great effect on the Tagoi culture. The long and close contact with these various groups resulted in shared cultural elements between these groups and could justify the absence of a distinctive culture of the Tagoi that was assumed by Stevenson (1962). This may also be due to the long time (more than fifty years) between Stevenson's study and the present one.

2.3 Language and ethnicity among the Tagoi

The term 'ethnicity' was explained to the participants by the researchers as defined by Swann et al. (2004: 100-101), Enninger (1991: 23) and Isajiw (1979: 24). Ethnicity is described by Swann et al. (2004: 100-101) as an aspect of an individual's social identity, which is closely associated with language and usually based on descent. In addition, the subjective experience of belonging to a culturally and historically distinct social group is often included in the

definition of ethnicity. Language forms a central aspect and symbol of ethnic identity. It is seen by Enninger (1991: 23) as “an open set of traits such as shared and distinctive values, common ancestry, a collective consciousness and self-perception as being different from others”. To Isajiw (1979: 24), “ethnicity refers to an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary group”. It can thus be understood as an awareness of membership in, and affiliation with an ethnos, the awareness of which is based on a sense of sharing those traits in and through which a given ethnos constructs its identity and its history (Isajiw 1979: 24).

The discussions with participants were then guided by a number of points: their understanding of ethnicity, ethnic belongingness, and the categories and criteria to be considered when accounting for their Tagoi ethnicity, their Tagoi, Nuba and Sudanese ethnic affiliations. The aim was to gain knowledge on the extent to which the Tagoi language forms a central aspect and symbol of the Tagoi ethnic identity, since ethnicity and linguistic affinity strengthens a group and consolidates their walls against invasion by outsiders, as explained by Obeng & Purvis (2010: 376). According to Obeng & Purvis, speakers of the same language who belong to the same ethnic group have a feeling of solidarity or “weness” (i.e., belonging) and therefore stick together in times of strife and happiness.

Many families were displaced during Adam Aljabouri’s period of rule (1910-1933). Adam Aljabouri was the brother and successor of Mek Gedayl (Ali 2017: 88). “In addition, the British government deported a large number of Tagoi cavalymen and their families to Darfur to weaken the military strength of the Tagoi tribe” (Ali 2017: 88). They started to resettle in the plains of Tagoi and on the Mount of Jarad between 1933 and the 1950s, and their settlement was completed by the 1960s. The majority of Tagoi people were forcibly displaced after the outbreak of the civil war.³ They settled in many of the Sudanese cities, including Khartoum, Kosti and Al-Rahad, among others. Generally speaking, internal migration has an enormous impact on ethnicity, as sketched in the country study of Sudan (1991, edited by Helen Chapin Metz). “Although migrants tended to cluster with their kinsfolk in their new environments, the daily interaction with Sudanese from many other ethnic groups rapidly eroded traditional values learned in the villages. In the best of circumstances, this erosion might lead to a new sense of national identity as Sudanese [...]”⁴ This may be a justification for the participants’ preference for being identified by nationality as Sudanese rather than by ethnicity. And this may be among the

³ After the secession of southern Sudan in 2011; for more information see Ali (2016).

⁴ Source: <http://countrystudies.us/sudan/40.htm>

reasons for Tagoi attitudes towards their native language and Arabic, i.e., it must be considered as a social indicator of changing beliefs, as assumed by Baker (1992: 9). It is clear that Arabic is highly valued as the language of Islam. Based on Holt's (1996: 11) argument that "[g]iven that language is probably the most powerful symbol of ethnicity, it therefore forms a basis of identity for millions who are politically separated", one can reinforce the importance of language for the Tagoi.

When they were asked to ethnically identify themselves within the general frame of Nuba, the participants expressed their preference *not* to be identified as 'Nuba'; instead they want to be identified as *Tagali*, which was lately ruled by Arab Muslims, as previously mentioned. They expressed their desire to be related to Islam, which Tagali represents. For them, their identification as Nuba is related to Christianity. In addition, they talked about the western hills of the Nuba Mountains, where people identify themselves as Nuba, in contrast to the people of the eastern hills, who used to belong to the Islamic Tagali kingdom. This supports the importance of religion in the formulation of Tagoi ethnic identity. This idea is confirmed by James (1979: 286): "In the Nuba hills, Taqali turned to an Islamic identity while other parts of the hills revitalized their beliefs in spirit mediumship."

Like many of the Sudanese groups who assume that they have an Arabic origin, based on the story of 'the stranger', people of the Tagali Islamic Kingdom also showed their Arabic lineage, as explained by James (1979: 287):

All of these frontier peoples had available a wealth of ideas and images from their own cultures as well as those to the north and south for interpreting their experiences. Taqali people and the elites of the upper Blue Nile shaykhdoms worked out similar accounts of their origins, not only because of similar conditions but also because of cross-fertilization during the Mahdiyya. Both groups adopted motifs, especially that of the Wise Stranger and pseudo-ethnic categories, from the Arabic-speaking Sudan.

Ethnicity is related to loyalty. As stated by Stevenson (1989: 196-207), there exists a conflict of loyalties: local and regional loyalties versus loyalty to the state as a unified whole. In the Nuba Mountains, there are mixed ingredients of loyalties: localness, Arabness and Nubanness. The degree to which each is felt may depend on the level of social cohesion involved and all these seem to be part of the ingredients of ethnicity. Strength of localness may vary with the degree of social cohesion in a particular group and with other factors. It is a localness of feelings, knit together by language, by certain cultural features marking that particular group, and by a feeling attached to loyalty; in other words, a particular kind of ethnicity. It is found among most local groups: Nyimang, Katla, Moro, Otoro and many others. Arabness is a wider circle of

belonging, which comprises a certain attitude to life, religion (Islam), language (Arabic) and pride of race. Arabness can be applied to many Nuba, who are of Nuba origin, but whose original culture (language and religion) has been diluted or influenced in varying degrees either by Arabization or by Arabicization, i.e., by actual Arab admixture and/or by the adoption of Arabic as their language. Groups and individuals of this kind can be found in many of the Nuba Mountains towns. Loyalty to Arabness could be a suitable loyalty for Tagoi, who situate themselves within the context of nationality, i.e., being Sudanese. Nubanness is bigger than Localness. For the Nuba groups, it is a regional feeling, an awareness of a common or similar environment, a similar economy and a broadly similar way of life, which many of the Tagoi participants prefer not to be attached to. Africanness is another factor in Nuba seeing themselves as having something in common with African nations and against the Arab World (see Nashid 2014: 204-205).

2.4 Orthography development in the Tagoi language

The participants' viewpoints on the development of Tagoi orthography were the focus of the last part of the FGDs. The following issues were discussed:

- The importance of learning/teaching the Tagoi language.
- How will the Tagoi people benefit from orthography?
- How will orthography help in maintaining Tagoi identity and culture?
- Will Tagoi be used in writing letters, e-mails, SMS, articles, books, newspapers and songs?
- Would they like to read in Tagoi?
- How will the Tagoi alphabet be taught and spread among the community?
- How will Tagoi be used in writing?

All the participants agreed on the importance of learning/teaching Tagoi language for different reasons: maintaining culture, heritage and identity. The Nuba Mountain armed conflict that started in 2011 was a turning point for the Tagoi people. It helped in raising Tagoi awareness of the necessity of learning their language for security reasons. They talked about the grievous experiences they had come across during the Nuba Mountain armed conflict. Knowing the Tagoi language was a matter of safety then. They told many stories about girls who were kidnapped and raped by the militias because they did not understand the warning to hide before the arrival of the militias when it was said to them in the Tagoi language. They emphasized the role of this war in drawing Tagoi attention to the importance of knowing their language.

Education in Arabic was the main reason for language shift to Arabic among Tagoi, as assumed by the participants. As previously mentioned, language is a central component of identity and helps determine how people see themselves

as a part of the national context. The language of instruction in schools is one of the vehicles through which these identities are established. Is the situation not only a language shift, but instead an indicator of an identity change or shift?

Speaking Tagoi was a stigma and not stylish, as was explained by the participants, but now the majority of them show their pride in being Tagoi and have expressed their need to know and speak the Tagoi language. This view indicates a change in belief for the sake of the promotion of the Tagoi language and culture.

The Tagoi language will be used for writing Tagoi oral history, oral traditions, songs, folktales, etc. when it is learned, and the language will be used in day-to-day communication among Tagoi, collecting traditional songs and stories, spreading information among the Tagoi community and creating literature and a website. Therefore, it could become their way of reconstructing their ethnic identity and collecting their fragmented cultural elements.

The Tagoi alphabet could be the first step in a long journey, as stated by Mohammed Ahmed Eisa in the presentation he made on 29 October 2016 at the University of Khartoum's Department of Linguistics. The Tagoi alphabet might be used and spread among Tagoi people through different channels: establishing schools for Tagoi to teach the language, summer courses, evening lessons, etc. He expressed Tagoi people's need for two further projects: one for syllabus development guided by certain plans and another for learning and teaching of the Tagoi language. The main objective of these projects is to develop an integrated syllabus for the teaching and learning of the Tagoi language, in an easy way that can be managed by the target groups (Tagoi people, researchers and other interested groups). The expected outcomes of this project, as stated by Mohammed Ahmed Eisa, are: a complete package of Tagoi language documentation, teaching and learning of the Tagoi language, facilitating communications (in Tagoi) between the community members, using the Tagoi language to express Tagoi culture, preserving the Tagoi identity, maintaining the community's privacy and preparing Tagoi people for managing their cultural diversity. Then a detailed description of the integrated Tagoi syllabus was given; its components, main guidelines, design, logic, means of teaching, resources, and the learning committee and its roles. This presentation is a reflection of Tagoi perspectives and gives a summary of their future expectations. It shows their readiness for starting to take serious steps towards language and culture revitalization. The question posed here is: Will the formal learning of the Tagoi language help in reviving the Tagoi ethnic identity, which could lead to the retrieval of spoken language?

2.5 Summary of the main findings

This section presents a summary of the findings reached and their implications, as well as some recommendations.

- The Tagoi community is undergoing serious changes that can be understood within the historical context of the area and that negatively affect the situation of the Tagoi language as one of the Sudanese endangered languages.
- Among the factors affecting the situation of the Tagoi language are: migration, religion, education and the attitudes that accompany them, the Nuba Mountains armed conflict, and the impact of living in an ethnically heterogeneous area.
- The Tagoi language is the basic marker of the Tagoi ethnicity and identity. Its being the basic means of preserving Tagoi culture, heritage and identity increases the importance of revitalizing of the Tagoi language.
- The participants' preference to be identified as Tagali or Sudanese rather than Nuba supports the importance of Islam to the Tagoi people. Religion in the form of Islam is one of the most important factors in the transformation of the Tagoi community and their adoption of Islamic traditions and practices.
- The distinctive Tagoi culture does not appear clearly; instead, Tagoi people emphasized their adoption of the 'national' Sudanese culture, which is influenced by the economically, politically and socially dominant riverain Arabic-speaking ethnic groups. The reasons behind this may be the historical circumstances of the area, which have led to socioeconomic and political transformations among the Tagoi. Their close contact with other groups has created shared cultural elements among them all; besides this, their migration to more secure areas, due to the armed conflict, has led to their integration within the national Sudanese frame.
- The Nuba Mountains armed conflict (which started after the independence of South Sudan in July 2011) has helped in creating new awareness of the importance of the Tagoi language for the Tagoi people and their safety.
- Developing an orthography for the Tagoi language could be the first step in preserving Tagoi heritage, culture and identity. In addition, they show their readiness to begin taking serious steps towards language and culture revitalization.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

The information on the project considering the learning and teaching of Tagoi has been updated by asking Mohammed Ahmed Eisa, a member of the Tagoi

community, what has happened since the time of the focus group discussions (4 years ago). Did they teach the Tagoi language? How?

He said:

Following the publication of the alphabet book, we developed an application in relation to this book. The application depicted the contents of the book in a sort of an attractive (click and get a response) format, so that when a letter is clicked, you can hear its sound and when you click the picture, the application pronounces the name of that picture or the action represented by it. Along with that, we also developed an electronic dictionary showing the meaning of Tagoi words in both English and Arabic languages.

We subscribed for one year to Google store (GS) and uploaded the application in (GS) so that it can be available for the Tagoi community. Unfortunately, the year time of subscription lapsed 3 years ago and as we cannot renew it (because payment in the hard currency), then the access to the application was denied by Google store (blocked).

This study recommends the necessity of:

- Activating and developing the application of the alphabet book.
- Encouraging the two-phase project proposed by the Tagoi community.
- Starting revitalization steps for the Tagoi language and culture, which could begin with the alphabet book.
- Raising Tagoi awareness of the importance of knowing and using the Tagoi language and culturally behaving as a distinctive group.
- Documenting and recording of the oral history and heritage of the Tagoi.
- Establishing associations and organizations that will help in maintaining the Tagoi language and culture.

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At the Omdurman market (photos: Gertrud Schneider-Blum, February 2019)