



## Sociolinguistic Study of Fulbe Marriage Rituals

Halima Abdullahi Aminu<sup>1\*</sup>, Sakina Adamu Ahmad<sup>2</sup>, Shehu Aliyu Waziri<sup>3</sup>, Nasara Bello Dogon-Daji<sup>4</sup> & Sirajo Muhammad Sokoto<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>Department of English Language and Linguistics, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria

**Corresponding Author:** Halima Abdullahi Aminu, E-mail: [haleemahabdullahi5@gmail.com](mailto:haleemahabdullahi5@gmail.com)

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: July 24, 2019

Accepted: August 27, 2019

Published: September 30, 2019

Volume: 2

Issue: 5

DOI: [10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.5.20](https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.5.20)

### KEYWORDS

*Sociolinguistics;  
Fulbe; marriage;  
Rituals*

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates both language and material rites involved in the entire process of Fulbe marriage in the study area. The problem is the gradual adaptation of the culture of the dominant environment leading to substitutions of both internal and external culture of the endangered marriage traditions in favour of the dominant culture. Two sampling techniques were used in this study - Stratified and Snowball Purposive sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to sample six local government out of the twenty-three local governments in the state. While Snowball purposive sampling was employed to sample the participants from each of the selected local governments. The study has 120 participants as a sample size. Ethnographic research method was employed for the study. Two research questions were asked based on the objectives of the study. An open-ended Structured Questionnaire tagged Fulbe Marriage Rituals Inventory was used to interview each of the 120 respondents individually. Descriptive data analysis was employed to answer the research questions both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study finds out that Imen gidí bi wane hokke wance dùm hautabe Kougal (we're here to seek the hand of your daughter in marriage) emerged as the most favoured linguistic rituals in contracting Kougal Fulbe and Chede kougal, (money for marriage) and Kolte (cloth) emerged the favoured material rites of Fulbe marriage in the study area. In view of these findings, the study recommends that there is need for proper and much broader study to document the sociolinguistic rites involved in both endogamous and arranged marriage in Fulbe tradition; and that money and cloth should not be restricted as the only material marriage rites in the study area considering the plight of less privileged.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a worldwide practice, generally known to be a union between a man and a woman. In Fulbe tradition, marriage is one important aspect of life, which was celebrated with the expectation to be a lasting union between the husband and the wife. Fulbe consider marriage as a divine institution that ensures stronger, socio-economic, and political alliances of the couples. Consequently, in Fulbe marriage tradition, linguistic and material rituals are highly hold very important before, during and after the marriage contract. The thrust of this study, therefore, is to document both sociolinguistic and material rites of Fulbe marriage in Sokoto State. Linguistic rituals here refer to words evoked or used to seek for and used to accept a girl's hand for

marriage in Fulbe tradition. While material rites refer to any sort of gift offered in connection with the marriage contract. The term "Fulbe" is a designation describing speakers of Fulfulde in Africa and particularly in Nigeria where they have settlement in both towns and rural regions of Hausa land and other parts of Northern Nigeria. Also, Mukoshy, (2014) describes the Fulbe as a group of people that for a long period of time put strain into operation upon their culture and philosophy of life. This ability made them to develop a highly refined culture based on equity and respect to their social norms.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The basic problem of this study is the gradual assimilation of the culture of the dominant environment into Fulbe traditional marriage. This gradual process leads to substitutions of both internal and external culture of the endangered language in favour of the dominant language. In view of this, Fulbe in the study area are seen to be increasingly

becoming assimilated by the dominant environment. Based on this problem the study decides to document both linguistic and non-linguistic rituals of Fulbe marriage in the study area.

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to document both the linguistics and material rituals involved in Fulbe marriage in the study area. The specific objectives of the study are to find out both linguistic and non-linguistic rituals involved in *Kougal Fulbe* in the study area. The scope of the study is geographically limited to Sokoto state of Nigeria.

### 1.3 Research Questions

Two research questions were asked based on the objectives of the study as follows:

1. What are some of the linguistic rituals of Kougal Fulbe in the study area?
2. What are the material rituals of Kougal Fulbe in the study area?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage represents the launching of the most universal institution—the family which contributes immensely to holding societies together and giving them stability (Oke, 2006). This understanding makes it very challenging to offer an adequate definition of marriage due to sociocultural differences around the globe. However, according to Royal Anthropological Institute (1951) marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate.

Generally, marriage is conceptually seen as a transition from one social category to another. This involves a change of family, clan, village, tribe or to some certain extent, even ethnic group. It connotes a complex socio-political and economic contract. The contract that covers diverse aspects of social integration limited not only to childbearing, but, extend to the creation of a new set of family, with certain stringent obligations of maintenance upon each member of the union accordingly. However, in Fulbe tradition according to Birkland (2007); Hampshire (2004) marriage represents a break from the girl's household (*suudu*) to set up their own household with her husband who stays in his father's compound and who gradually takes over the headship of the household. Although in some cases and in the principles of Close-Cousin Kin marriage, the girl may not move very far away from her parents' household in order to maintained regular contact with each other in times of crisis. Thought, Stenning (1962) reports that in Fulbe culture, marriage is more significant to girl suitor who will have access to milk either from her own cattle or from the cattle of her

husband, and later from the cattle of her children. While, the significance of marriage for the boy is to herd his father's cattle, or his own cattle in case of inheritance when the herd is shared.

The most common marriage rituals among Fulbe are linguistic and material rituals in form of dowry and bride-wealth. The linguistic rites involves for instance in preferential marriage decided by parents of the suitors is for the girl's father to simply saying; "I give so-and-so (the girl) to so-and-so (the boy) until she reaches puberty", and the boy's father shows his appreciation and acceptance by handing over a bull (*ngari kougal*) to the girl's father as a token of espousal, the bull being slaughtered and eaten by the relatives. In another style, the father of the boy says, in effect; "Give me your daughter; I am going to 'marry' them", — to which the father of the daughter complies (de St. Croix, 1945)

After either of these linguistic rites, it is the custom for the boy's parents to send presents yearly at the time of festivals to the girl's family. These include a present of money for making the girl's hairdo, a special present given to the girl at festivals, and kola-nuts in amounts which increase at each presentation. Also, on market-days the lad will give the girl small presents of two or three kola-nuts and some amount of money. The time of their marriage may be some six or seven years after betrothal depending on the family arrangements.

Fulbe being mostly pastoralists, cattle feature prominently in most of their festivals (Hampshire, 2004), consequently in the case of a grown man with cattle of his own, proposing a girl, cattle are named by the father or the guardian of the girl who may suggest certain heads of cattle. The bridegroom-to-be, or his representative rather, bargain the number of cattle to offer after some talk, a compromise of, say, three is made. One large bull may take the place of, and be counted equal to, two small ones. In whichever way, the marriage is sealed in the presence of the 'ardo' or 'maudo wuro' to whom the bridegroom owes allegiance and who may not live at that camp and some call a 'modibbo' from a nearby town if there is none in the tribe to bless the occasion (de St. Croix, 1945).

The best-known economic customs relating to marriage in Fulbe traditions are dowry and bride wealth. Dowry is given to the woman from her parents as an advance on her inheritance, and it is hers, although often administered by her husband (Cohen, 1970). Dowry reflects the status of the woman at marriage, and a good dowry can gain a desirable wife. Bride-wealth, on the other hand, is

paid to the bride's family. Dowry and bride-wealth, however, need not be mutually exclusive; a combination is often used. The ritualistic part of these arrangements involves visits and negotiations between the two sets of kin and sometimes special displays of the items (Goody, 1973).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic research method was employed for the study as a research design because the study was intended to explore the sociolinguistic and material culture of Fulbe marriage in the study area. The design facilitates Ethnographic researcher and the participants of the study to engage and interact closely in their normal and natural context for data collection purposes (Lodica et al, 2006).

#### 3.1 Population

All the Fulbe in the 23 Local Governments of Sokoto state form the population of the study. According to Hampshire (2004) It is very difficult to ascertain the estimate of Fulani due to their life pattern. However, according to Nigeria Population and Development Sokoto Fact Sheet (2017), the population of Sokoto state was estimated to be close to 5.4 million heads which include all the ethnic groups in the state.

#### 3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Two sampling techniques were used in this study - Stratified and Snowball purposive sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to sample six local governments out of the twenty-three local governments in the state. While Snowball purposive sampling was employed to sample the participants from each of the selected local governments. The study has 120 participants as a sample size. This was in accordance with Cohen et al (2007) that a sample size of thirty participants is considered by many researchers as ideal sample size. The selected areas for the study include Tureta and Yabo Local Governments from Sokoto South Senatorial Zone; Binji, and Tangaza Local Governments from Sokoto Central Senatorial Zone and; Rabah and Wurno Local Government areas from Sokoto East Senatorial Zone of the state.

The respondents were selected and interviewed based on age limits. The study assigned age criteria as a procedure for the participants of the study. The age limit assigned was 50 years and above. This became necessary in order to have elderly individuals with in-depth knowledge of both sociolinguistic and material rituals involved in constructing Fulbe marriage in the study area.

### 3.3 Instrument for Data Collection

Open-ended Structured Questionnaire tagged *Fulbe Marriage Rituals Inventory* was used to interview each of the 120 respondents individually. Open-ended structure was employed in order to solicit adequate information from the respondents as against close-ended, which may not give desired information.

## 4. RESULTS

### Research Question One

What are some of the linguistic rituals of Kougul Fulbe in the study area? Answer to this question is contained in Table one.

**Table 1 Some Linguistic Rituals of Kougul Fulbe**

| Local Government | Men ngari rartanngo suka amen Kougul | suka amen iyidi suka modom Kougul | imen bi wane hokke wance dun hautabe Kougul | Total     |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Yabo             | 9                                    | 7                                 | 0   | 16        |
| Wamakko          | 9                                    | 2                                 | 0   | 11        |
| Tangaza          | 4                                    | 4                                 | 12  | 20        |
| Tureta           | 1                                    | 6                                 | 8   | 15        |
| Rabah            | 3                                    | 6                                 | 8   | 17        |
| Wurno            | 3                                    | 4                                 | 10  | 17        |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>29</b>                            | <b>29</b>                         | <b>38</b>                                   | <b>96</b> |

Table 1 reveals that *imen gidi bi wane hokke wance dun hautabe kougul* (we're here to seek the hand of your daughter in marriage) emerged as the most favoured set of linguistic rituals in contracting kougul Fulbe in the study area with the highest frequency of 38 entries across the six local governments. Thus, *imen gidi bi wane hokke wance dun hautabe Kougul* (we want to ask for your daughters' hand in marriage) emerged as the most favoured linguistic rituals in contracting Kougul Fulbe in the study, and that answers the research question.

### Research Question Two

Research question two asked: What are the material rituals of Fulbe marriage in the study area? Table 2 presents the data to answer the research question.

**Table 2 Material Rites of Fulbe Marriage**

| Local Government | Chede Kougul | Chede kougul ,Kolte | Chede kougul ,Goro | Chede kougul , Gauri | Total |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Yabo             | 16           | 0                   | 3                  | 1                    | 20    |
| Wamakko          | 0            | 5                   | 4                  | 11                   | 20    |
| Tangaza          | 3            | 8                   | 6                  | 3                    | 20    |

|              |           |           |           |           |            |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Tureta       | 8         | 4         | 2         | 4         | 18         |
| Rabah        | 0         | 12        | 3         | 3         | 18         |
| Wurno        | 0         | 8         | 6         | 4         | 18         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>26</b> | <b>114</b> |

Table 2 presents the data to answer the research question. According to the Table, *Chede kougol*, (money for marriage) and *Kolte* (Cloth) has the highest frequency of 37 entries, with Rabah Local Government having 12 number of entries. Tangaza and Wurno scored eight entries each, while Wamakko Local Government has five. Table 2 also informs that six responses were missing as only 114 out of 120 participants responded to the questionnaire items number two. Out of these six missing respondents, Tureta, Rabah and Wurno Local governments have two missing participants each. In conclusion, based on number of frequencies, *chede kougol*, (money for marriage) and *Kolte* (cloth) emerged to be the favoured material rites of Fulbe marriage in the study area, which answers research question two.

#### 4.1 Discussion

In this section the findings of the study are discussed in the light of literature reviewed. The first finding is *Imen gidi bi wane hokke wance dum hautabe Kougol* (we're here to seek the hand of your daughter in marriage) emerged as the most favoured linguistic rituals in contracting Kougol Fulbe in the study with the highest score of 38. Other linguistic approaches according to the study with respect to Table 1 include *suka amen iyidi suka modon Kougol* (our son wants to marry your daughter), and *men ngari rantango suka amen kougol* (we have come to seek the hand of your daughter for marriage), both scored 29 respectively. This finding therefore breaks new ground informing new linguistic options that were not reported in the literature.

For example, there is a difference in approach between kin marriage proposed by the parents of the suitors at their early age of say between seven to ten years and that of an adult seeking a girl for marriage in his own capacity. In the former, it was reported that the father of the girl will simply say "I give so and so (his daughter) to so and so (the boy) for marriage. Where the father of the boy will give a bull to the family of the girl and that seals the agreement. Similarly, the father of the boy may request the father of the girl thus: "Give me your daughter, I am going to marry them (his son) to which the father of the girl will comply in most cases. In the case of the later, de St. Croix, (1945) mentioned that the father of the bride will name the number of cattle to be given as

bride wealth, nothing was reported as a proper linguistic rite of seeking for marriage.

The second finding of the study reveals that *Chede kougol*, (money for marriage) and *Kolte* (cloth) emerged as the favoured material rites of Fulbe marriage in the study area. This agrees with de St. Croix (1945) that its customary for parents of the groom to send presents yearly at the time of festival. These presents include money for hair do and clothes (de St Croix (1945) mentioned kola nuts as a special present given to the girl's parent during festivals. However, in this study, kola-nuts being part of material rites has the least score of 24 entries representing only 20% of the total sample size., where *chede kougol* and *gauri* scored 27 and 26 respectively, out of the total sample size of 120 from the study area. These divergent opinion from the study area informs that *chede Kougol* and *kolte* is not the only means of material culture but emerged as the most favoured option among many options.

#### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, the study concludes that *Imen gidi bi wane hokke wance dum hautabe Kougol* (we're here to seek the hand of your daughter in marriage) emerged as the most favoured linguistic rituals in contracting Kougol Fulbe in the study. And *chede kougol*, (money for marriage) and *Kolte* (cloth) emerged the favoured material rites of Fulbe marriage in the study area.

#### Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that there is need for proper and much broader study to document the sociolinguistic rites involved in both endogamous and arranged marriage in Fulbe tradition; and money and cloth should not be restricted as the only material marriage rites in the study area considering the plight of less privileged individuals in the communities.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Birkeland, A. (2007). Managing Fulbe identity: Exchange Relations and Ethnic Discusses in a Village in central Mali. Unpublished Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the cand. Polit. Degree in the department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo.
- [2] Cohen, L., Manian, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Routledge, New York.
- [3] Cohen, R. (1970). *Brittle marriage as a stable system: The Kanuri case*. In P. Bohannan (Ed.), *Divorce and after*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

- 
- [4] de St. Croix, F. W. *The Fulani of Northern Nigeria: Some General Notes*. Government Printer, Lagos.
- [5] Goody, J. (1973). *Bridewealth and dowry in Africa and Eurasia*. In J. Goody & S. J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and dowry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Hampshire, K. (2004). Fulani: A chapter in Encyclopaedia of Medical Anthropology. DOI: 10.10.1007/0-387-39905-X\_67. Pp 656-664
- [7] Kurfi. M. H. (2012), Changing Patterns of Marriage Courtship among the Hausas: Brokerage in Contemporary Kano Metropolis. *Journal of Sociological Research*. Vol.3 No.1
- [8] Lodico, M., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in Educational Research from theory to Practice*. Jossey-Bass Publication, San Francisco.
- [9] Mukoshy, I. (2014) *A Fulfulde - English Dictionary*. Ibadan: Polygraphics Ventures Limited.
- [10] Oke, E. A. (2006) *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. Ibadan: Agbo Areo Publishers. PP. 100- 116.
- [11] Stenning, D. J. (1962): "Household Viability Among the Pastoral Fulani." In the Development Cycle in Domestic Groups, pp. 92-119.