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Sociolinguistic  
Studies

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ISSN: 1750-8649 (print)

ISSN: 1750-8657 (online)

Article

## Juba Arabic (ÁRABI JÚBA): A 'less indigenous' language of South Sudan

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### Abstract

This article explores the official discourse behind the regimentation of the linguistic situation of South Sudan and assesses its impact on local linguistic practices against the backdrop of a sociolinguistic survey and interviews with government officials. After a presentation of the language situation of the country, the article focuses on Juba Arabic and its unrecognized status as the only *lingua franca* of South Sudan. The Constitution of the country nominally recognizes and enshrines the language diversity of the country, but does not come to grips with the existence of Juba Arabic, an Arabic-based pidgincreole which is the only unifying language of a vast portion of the country and the first language of the capital.

KEYWORDS: JUBA ARABIC, SOUTH SUDAN, LANGUAGE PLANNING AND POLICY,  
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

South Sudan acquired independence on 2 July 2011 and is the youngest nation-state to have gained general recognition and membership in the UN. The post-independence political situation in South Sudan took a rapid downturn in December 2013, when open war erupted between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir Mayardit and those siding with his former Vice-President, Mr. Riek Machar. Against this precarious background, the present article depicts a language policy in the making, which has not been implemented (and possibly will never be). The problems it addresses (and maybe contributes to create) are instead real and continue to beleaguer the country. In South Sudan, as elsewhere, political bodies and people cope with language diversity on the basis of different assumptions and interests. This is because the vertical organization of languages as regimented by language policies rarely (if ever) matches the complex horizontal distribution of languages (Ricento, 2005; Blommaert, 2007; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). In the case of South Sudan, while all the ‘indigenous languages’ have been granted the status of national languages, the government overtly chose to exclude from its language policy the most widespread means of interethnic communication of the country, which is the Arabic-based pidgincreole (see 2 below) commonly called Juba Arabic.

Juba Arabic presents the usual problems of many creoles (Léglise and Migge, 2007): it shows a high degree of individual variation, it lacks an established written norm and draws its lexicon – but not its grammar – from its lexifier and former dominant language **represented by** Sudanese Arabic. Descriptive and comparative research on creole languages has showed that creoles are socially and linguistically systems on their own and they are clearly distinct from their lexifiers (Winford, 1997). In contrast, we will show that Juba Arabic is officially equated to Sudanese Arabic. In this regard, it should be remarked that linguistic differentiation always involves ideologically embedded and socially constructed processes (Irvine and Gal, 2000). This is the core point of view of globalization studies, which postulate that named languages are ideological constructions tied to the emergence of nation-states and that there are not truly distinct linguistic systems bounded by grammars and communities (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen and Møller, 2011). Contrary to these assumptions, linguistics stresses that structural differences do indeed exist, and they characterize at least that subset of the world’s languages, which Kloss (1967) defined as ‘Abstand languages’ (cf. Tosco, 2017). In a globalization perspective, language borders are instead conceived as means of social categorization, which are only relevant when the speakers deliberately construct them (García and Wei,

2014). Interestingly enough, the independence of South Sudan corresponded, on the one side, to the creation of state internal language borders by means of the imposition of the ‘indigenous language’ category and, on the other side, to the erasure of the external linguistic border between Juba Arabic and its lexifier. In the light of the above, the aim of this article is to identify the ideological guidelines of the South Sudanese language policy and to evaluate their impact on local language uses and practices.

The present study is based on a multi-methodological fieldwork carried out in Juba, in July-August 2013.<sup>2</sup> The quantitative part of the fieldwork was intended to draw an overview of the sociolinguistic situation of Juba based on a statistical survey on multilingualism and language uses. The survey, which was conducted with oral questionnaires, included information on age, gender, ethnic affiliation, residence, literacy, patterns of multilingualism and language uses for each respondent. The survey is primarily meant to assess the degree of nativization (i.e. first language acquisition) of Juba Arabic. Furthermore, speakers’ interpretation of their language uses allows for insights into the impact of language policies on language practices. As far as the qualitative fieldwork is concerned, it consists of two parts. The first part was concerned with metalinguistic representations and attitudes towards Juba Arabic vis-à-vis Sudanese Arabic and other South Sudanese languages. The data were elicited through formal interviews in Juba Arabic and English. Due to space limitations, we will not present these data in detail here, and we will limit ourselves to an outline of local language attitudes (see Manfredi, 2017b). The second part investigated the official discourse about Juba Arabic and the category of ‘indigenous languages’. This part of the research, which represents the bulk of this paper, is based on interviews with government officials and it is meant to decrypt the State ideology lying behind the promulgation of its language policies and eventually to assess its influence on language uses and attitudes.

The paper is organized as follows; section 2 briefly draws the linguistic situation of South Sudan. Sections 3 and 4 respectively analyse the general lines of the South Sudanese language policy and the institutionalization of the ‘indigenous language’ category in the light of the colonial and postcolonial language policies. Section 5 presents the results of the sociolinguistic survey conducted in Juba and serves as a prelude to section 6 which deals with the official discourse about Juba Arabic and ‘indigenous languages’. Finally, section 7 summarizes the ideological load of the South Sudanese language policy by highlighting its lag with respect to the position of Juba Arabic.

## 2 Language in the South Sudan and the special place of (Juba) Arabic

The linguistic landscape of South Sudan is fairly complex; *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2016) lists 68 spoken languages. While no single language is shared by even a majority of the population, since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century some form of Arabic has been the most widespread medium of interethnic communication. *Which* Arabic is more difficult to say.

First, we have an Arabic-based contact variety generally referred to as *árabi júba* (i.e. Juba Arabic) and whose historical origin can be traced back to Egyptian colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Manfredi, 2017a; Tosco and Manfredi, 2013). Juba Arabic originated out of an extreme contact situation in which enslaved Nilotic populations were forced to communicate with Arabic-speaking traders coming from northern Sudan and Egypt. This provided the sociolinguistic context for the rise of a pidginized form of Arabic and in due time of modern Juba Arabic. Even if Juba Arabic is traditionally considered a pidgin, a better label is pidgincreole, i.e. an intermediary category between pidgins and creoles which is defined by the fact that an earlier pidgin has become the first (and possibly the only) language only for a part of its speakers (cf. section 5.2). Juba Arabic shows a drastic restructuring of its lexifier language (Sudanese Arabic) and is not mutually intelligible with any Arabic variety. Structurally, Juba Arabic displays typical features of creoles, such as the almost complete shunning of morphology, the lexification of uninflected verbal forms and the expression of TMA distinctions through invariable preverbal markers (Tosco and Manfredi, 2013). Therefore, even if most of the Juba Arabic lexicon is Arabic-derived and Juba Arabic does not bear an autonomous glossonym (Miller, 2009), it cannot be considered a variety of Arabic.<sup>3</sup> Juba Arabic speakers have a very clear metalinguistic consciousness of the distinctiveness of their language and show a positive attitude toward it (Manfredi, 2017b). In most cases, this does not contrast with a general appreciation of the ‘indigenous’ languages and of English. Furthermore, and in contrast to the state’s language ideology (cf. section 6), a majority of speakers view the use of Juba Arabic positively, and they consider it their first language. Finally, they pragmatically argue that Juba Arabic is the only linguistic means that can facilitate interethnic communication and may overcome ‘tribalism’ in South Sudan.

Second, one finds Sudanese Arabic, which is widely spoken by people of northern Sudanese descent and many South Sudanese educated in Arabic and/or who spent the civil war period in northern Sudan.

Third, different non-native varieties of Arabic (generally referred to as *árabi al besít*, ‘simple Arabic’) are used as an interethnic medium in the north (around the

city of Malakal) and west (around the city of Wau) of South Sudan, as well as in peripheral regions of Sudan. Data on these vehicular varieties are scarce, mainly as a consequence of their high degree of individual variation. Even if both Sudanese Arabic and non-native varieties of Arabic have some linguistic impact on Juba Arabic (Versteegh, 1993), creole speakers tend to keep all three apart (Manfredi, 2017b). In contrast to this, the official discourse claims that Juba Arabic is a variety of Arabic and that it cannot therefore be considered an ‘indigenous language’ of South Sudan (cf. section 6 and 7).

### 3 Language in the Constitution(s)

The present-day South Sudan language policy finds its immediate origins in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (hereafter CPA), signed in 2005 between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and the Government of Sudan. Also referred to as the ‘Naivasha Agreement’, it brought to a substantial stop the second Sudanese civil war, and paved the way to the independence of the South in 2011.

The language side of the CPA has been discussed and analysed in detail by Abdelhay (2006, 2007), Abdelhay, Makoni and Makoni (2011) and Makoni, Abdelhay and Makoni (2013). Following the CPA, Sudan formally moved from a strict Arabic monolingualism to a policy of multilingualism, where both Arabic and English were recognized as official languages, whereas other ‘indigenous’ languages were accorded the status of national languages. Writing well before the referendum on independence and the current intra-South civil war, Abdelhay (2007:17) closed his article with the hope that ‘a faithful implementation of this decentralised language policy within the suggested multi-ethnic federalist system will not only contain (i.e. prevent) the southern potential secessionism but also the divisive monolingualism’. What actually happened is very different.

At the constitutional level, the results of the CPA found a first implementation in the Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan (which came into force on 9 July 2005) and the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan (5 December 2005, and following a draft constitution proposed by the Southern Sudan Civil Society in Nairobi, February 2005). For South Sudan the provisions on language read as follows:

- 1) All the indigenous languages of Southern Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.
- 2) English and Arabic shall be the official working languages at the level of the governments of Southern Sudan and the States as well as languages of instruction for higher education.

- 3) There shall be no discrimination against the use of either English or Arabic at any level of government or stage of education.
- 4) English, as a major language in Southern Sudan, and Arabic, shall be the official working languages at the level of the governments of Southern Sudan, and the states and the languages of instruction for higher education.
- 5) In addition to Arabic and English, the legislature of any sub-level of government in Southern Sudan may adopt any other national language as an additional official working language or medium of instruction in schools at its level.

Summing up, the salient points on language policy of the 2005 Constitutions are:

- Arabic-English official national bilingualism.
- The official status of Arabic and English is based upon the language being a ‘widely spoken’ medium; while this is partially true for Arabic, English is hardly a spoken language at all in South Sudan.
- The possibility of multilingualism at lower levels of government promulgated by the CPA is lost.

Like its predecessors, the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan, which came into force with independence in 2011, does not list languages to be implemented, but still refers to the ‘indigenous languages of South Sudan’. Its references to languages (Chapter 1, Article 6) are also much shorter:

- 1) All indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted.
- 2) English shall be the official working language in the Republic of South Sudan, as well as the language of instruction at all levels of education.
- 3) The State shall promote the development of a sign language for the benefit of people with special needs.

Arabic has disappeared, together with any reference to official multilingualism at the local level. English remains the sole official language and is promoted ‘at all levels of education’. Apart from a generic respect for, development of and promotion of ‘indigenous languages’, the Constitution represents a clear regression in terms of provisions for multilingualism. While, as remarked by Abdelhay (2007:9), the Sudanese Constitution of 1988 offered to all ‘indigenous peoples’ the right to preserve their languages, cultures and religions, ‘indigenous languages’ are nowadays enshrined as national languages; but, as noted again by Abdelhay (2007:9), such a generic statement is a ‘non-instrumental language right’ (following Rubio-Martín’s 2003 terminology): it attaches a symbolic value to all local languages – while paying, we add, lip-service to language diversity.

The Constitution of the single states may flatly contradict that of the central government; the 2005 Interim Constitution of Central Equatoria stated *inter alia* that ‘English and Arabic shall be the official working languages at all levels of the government of the State as well as languages of Instruction for higher education’. This State Constitution therefore predates the 2011 Transitional Constitution and reflects the fact that Arabic is widely used in Central Equatoria and that Bari is the first ethnic language of the region.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4 Education and the ‘indigenous languages’

How do the constitutional provisions reflect on everyday educational practices? Not much, and not well. What little education exists in South Sudan is by and large in English, and locally either Arabic or an ‘indigenous’ language is used. The Government’s educational policy remains unclear, and interviews conducted at the Ministry of Education did not reveal much, only that primary education in ‘indigenous’ languages is planned; however, neither the exact number of the languages nor a timetable were made available to us. Most importantly, it is not clear *which* language will be taught *where* and *to whom*. Education in the ‘indigenous’ language is planned for the first three years of primary school, with English being introduced in the fourth year. In this context, it seems that language uses rather than ethnic membership will be taken into account in choosing the ‘indigenous’ language; on the other hand, ethnic membership is also evoked as a criterion for selecting the ‘indigenous’ language in primary education (cf. section 6). The risks involved in such an approach are evident, especially in the absence of a true federal system where decisions about language policy are placed in the hands of local authorities.

Various interviews with chief executives at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology made it clear that public education in the ‘indigenous languages’ will for the time being be provided in Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari, Zande, Lotuko and Moru. These are the languages with the highest number of speakers but are also strictly ethnic languages and play no role in interethnic communication. As a bequest of the British colonial policy, these are the same languages that had already been selected at the 1928 Rejaf Language Conference as ‘suitable for development’. The Rejaf Conference, which also prescribed the use of the Roman script, even for writing down ‘colloquial Arabic’, has had enduring effects on language ideologies in South Sudan: the ‘Rejaf ideology’ has been tacitly assumed by the new independent government of the country, starting from the very use of the adjective ‘indigenous’. ‘Indigenous’ is a technical term in the Sudan that finds its origin in the British political and educational discourse from

the 1930s onwards, and it is part and parcel of an ‘indirect rule’ system embodied in a set of measures aiming at the creation of ‘self-sufficient’ cultural identities. As a result, ‘[T]o solidify communal identification, the British rule discouraged the searching out of commonalities that transcend differences such as common language and culture by accentuating differences even when none existed’ (Abdelhay, Makoni, Makoni and Mugaddam, 2011:468–469). The authors’ claim goes hand in hand with the idea that colonial linguists’ work reduced multilingual practices to grouped artefacts – ‘real languages’ (Abdelhay, Makoni, Makoni and Mugaddam, 2011:471). Such a creation *ex-nihilo* of differences is **not exemplified**, but actually occurred in colonial Sudan (a case in point is the creation of a Laggori identity in the Nuba Mountains; Manfredi, 2015). Ditto for the linguists’ work: the quest for the ‘native speaker’ and ‘mother tongues’ has been, and partially still is, a scientific posture of much descriptive linguistics – and as such, not an invention of the British administration. Obviously, it is at odds with multilingualism, diglossia, all the messiness of contact situations, multiple and shifting ethnic and language allegiances, and so on. What is more important is that language description and even more so language standardization favour the crystallization of ethnic boundaries, and in the former unified Sudan they were instrumental to the empowerment of ethnic groups.

The fact that much of what is known on the Southern Sudanese languages is due to the painstaking work of the worldwide no-profit Summer Institute of Linguistics (hereafter SIL) did not help: descriptive work is coupled in this case with a special emphasis on a speaker’s first, ‘native language’ as a focal part of his/her identity and a source of personal and community self-esteem. As noted by Handman (2009:637), ‘[A] speaker’s first, native language holds a special place in Christian translation literature, as the language in which the Scriptures and other material can best be understood by receptor communities’. Handman draws attention to the potential disruptive effects of the imposition of non-native language ideologies on local communities, and what is valid for the ‘native speaker’ applies of course also to the whole ‘mother tongue’ ideology, whose historical origins in European modern times have been described by Bonfiglio (2010).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, ‘indigenous’ languages exclude ‘foreign’ languages: Arabic is the first casualty, notwithstanding the presence of many Arabic monolinguals (cf. section 5). Arabic is also ignored at the official level – although it is much better known than English and very much in use.

Juba Arabic is likewise excluded, mainly because of the direct association with its lexifier language, although it is the everyday language in the capital, Juba, and in much of the country. Things for Juba Arabic are actually even worse, because



Juba Arabic is itself an exclusively oral and non-standardized language (although it has by now quite a long written history; Miller, 2014).

What do South Sudanese think about this language? How do they rate its degree of independence vis-à-vis Arabic? How do they use it, when and with whom?

The results of our research clearly show (cf. section 5) that Juba Arabic has a substantial body of first-language speakers; they still belong ethnically to different ethnic groups and do not see themselves as a new 'entity'. The possibility of belonging to an ethnic group without speaking its language was specifically addressed in the interviews and generally answered in the positive by our respondents, who often admitted a low or no competence at all in their 'indigenous' languages. The idea that Juba Arabic is 'the' language of South Sudan crops up from time to time in our interviews, and is often voiced in popular music and on the Internet. Connected to this is the problem of the very name of the language, an issue which a few respondents were well aware of: being 'Arabic' points to a foreign entity, while being 'Juba' restricts it to a specific location. Before addressing the official discourse related to these issues in section 6, section 5 will provide some figures on the extent and spread of Juba Arabic in present-day Juba.

## **5 Juba: Which language(s), where?**

### **5.1 The sample**

The first part of our fieldwork was spent on a qualitative evaluation of the degree of multilingualism and the linguistic uses by means of a sociolinguistic survey. In order to assess the status of Juba Arabic in Juba, two districts were chosen: Malikiya, the heart of 'old Juba', traditionally inhabited by mainly Muslim ethnic Bari; and Gudele, one of the new residential areas, extending to the West of Juba town (see Table 1).<sup>6</sup>

Within each district 50 households were investigated, for a total number of 314 interviewees. The higher number of interviews in Malikiya stems from a higher ratio of individuals per household (3.79 vs. 2.48). The low rate of individuals per family is partially explained by the very high rate of infants and by the fact that answers were provided on an individual basis.

The sample brings to the fore the very recent inflow of migrants: Juba is a young town, where the average age is 31.5, but as low as 28.6 in Gudele. Even more importantly, Juba is a relatively 'new town': less than a half of the interviewees were born in the town, while even in the historical district of Malikiya the percentage born there is only 49%. A total of 46% of interviewees settled after 2005. In Gudele, newcomers account for almost three out of four inhabitants.

**Table 1.** The survey sample.

	<b>Gudele</b>	<b>Malikiya</b>	<b>Total</b>
Households	50	50	100
Individuals = Ratio	124/50 = 2.48	190/50 = 3.79	314/100 = 3.14
Age (average)	28.6	34.4	31.5
Gender	M 67 (54%) F 57 (46%)	M 74 (39%) F 116 (61%)	M 141 (45%) F 173 (55%)
Length of stay in Juba:			
Born in Juba	22 (17.7%)	93 ( <b>49%</b> )	115 (36.6%)
Arrived after 2005	92 ( <b>74.1%</b> )	54 (28.4%)	146 ( <b>46.4%</b> )
Arrived before 2005	10 (9.2%)	43 (22.6%)	53 (17%)
Education:			
University	21 (17%)	62 (32.6%)	83 (26.4%)
Secondary	43 (34.6%)	68 (35.8%)	111 (35.3%)
Primary	34 (27.4%)	42 (22.2%)	76 (24.3%)
None	26 (21%)	18 (9.4%)	44 (14%)

**5.2 Multilingualism and Juba Arabic**

Statistical data drawn from questionnaires cannot realistically reflect the socio-linguistic situation of a given community, as they depend on the subjective views of the respondent in constructing linguistic borders. Nonetheless, some important trends can be observed. As a general remark, Juba is, of course, highly multilingual (and more so in the new area of Gudele than in Malikiya), as shown in Table 2.

Half of the population of Gudele claims to speak three languages; Malikiya has a slightly but significantly lower multilingualism rate, with 45.2% of the interviewees claiming to speak two languages. In both neighbourhoods, at least three fourths of the respondents claim to speak either two or three languages.

**Table 2.** Degree of multilingualism: answers to the question ‘How many languages do you speak?’.

	<b>Gudele</b>	<b>Malikiya</b>	<b>Total</b>
More than 4	8 (6.5%)	6 (2.1%)	14 (4.5%)
4 languages	31 (25%)	16 (9.5%)	47 (15 %)
3 languages	63 ( <b>50.8%</b> )	69 (36.4%)	132 ( <b>42%</b> )
2 languages	21 (16.9%)	86 ( <b>45.2%</b> )	107 (34%)
1 language	1 (0.8%)	13 (6.8%)	14 (4.5%)

Within such a multilingual scene Table 3 shows clearly that Juba Arabic is by large the first language of socialization for almost half of the respondents. Flying in the face of an official policy of utter disregard for Arabic and its speakers, (Sudanese) Arabic ranks second, with almost 10% of the interviewees declaring Arabic their first language. This figure is of particular interest because it shows that people are generally aware of the difference between Juba Arabic and Arabic, and they view them as separate languages even in the absence of a direct input question from the interviewers.

Multilingualism is better reflected in Gudele than in Malikiya. Most importantly, Juba Arabic is the only shared medium, with 6.37% only claiming *not* to speak it. The fact that more people do *not* speak Juba Arabic in Malikiya than in Gudele is *prima facie* odd, but is probably due to the higher impact of Arabic, the second language in the neighbourhood.

**Table 3.** First language: answers to the question: 'Which language you have first acquired?'

	<b>Gudele</b>	<b>Malikiya</b>	<b>Total</b>
Juba Arabic	33 (26.6%)	114 (60%)	147 (47%)
Arabic	5	26	31 (9.8%)
Bari	6	22	28 (9%)
Moru	11	8	19 (6%)
Zande	13	0	13 (4.1%)
Pojulu	6	6	12 (3.8%)
Dinka	5	4	9 (2.9%)
Madi	6	0	6 (2.0%)
Mundari	6	0	6 (2.0%)
Baka	5	0	5 (1.6%)
Kakwa	3	2	5 (1.6%)
Acholi	3	1	4 (1.3%)
Kuku	4	0	4 (1.3%)
Nyangbara	4	0	4 (1.3%)
Nuer	3	0	3 (1.0%)
Balanda	3	0	3 (1.0%)
Other	2	0	2 (0.7%)
Juba Arabic unknown	7 (5.65%)	13 (6.84%)	20 (6.37%)

### 5.3 Language uses

Speakers can flexibly call upon different parts of their linguistic repertoires to achieve effective communication in diverse contexts. This part of the survey was intended to assess language uses in four social domains, namely 1) at home, 2) within the neighbourhoods, 3) at the market place, and 4) at public offices (see Table 4). The use of the different languages is revealing: Juba Arabic is present in all of the four investigated domains (even ‘in public offices’, where English and Arabic clearly predominate). On the other hand, Juba Arabic is the first medium at home, although in competition with other languages. It is still the first home language in Malikiya – a sign of a longer history in the town. The differences with Gudele, although telling, should not be overstated: in Gudele, Juba Arabic is the only home language for a quarter of the interviewees, while another third uses it alongside an ethnic language. In both neighbourhoods almost the same percentage claims to use an ‘indigenous’ language only at home. Which language is of course a matter of the different history of the two neighbourhoods. Juba Arabic is the preferred medium to talk with neighbours and, to a lesser extent, at the market.

**Table 4.** Language use: Answers to the question ‘Which language do you speak most often...?’.

	<b>Gudele</b>	<b>Malikiya</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>At home</b>			
Juba Arabic only	34 (27.5%)	85 (44.7%)	119 (37.8%)
x+Juba Arabic	40 (32.3%)	54 (28.5%)	94 (30%)
x only	21 (16.9%)	30 (15.8%)	51 (16.3%)
Juba Arabic+x	24 (19.3%)	14 (7.4%)	38 (12.1%)
x+y +Juba Arabic	5 (4%)	7 (3.6%)	12 (3.8%)
<b>With neighbours</b>			
Juba Arabic only	83 (66.9%)	155 (81.6%)	238 (75.8%)
x only	8 (6.5%)	25 (13.2%)	33 (10.5%)
Juba Arabic+x	20 (16.1%)	8 (4.2%)	28 (8.9%)
x+Juba Arabic	8 (6.5%)	0	8 (2.5%)
Juba Arabic+x+y	3 (2.4%)	1 (0.5%)	4 (1.4%)
Other patterns	2 (1.6%)	1 (0.5%)	3 (0.9%)
<b>At the marketplace</b>			
Juba Arabic only	79 (63.7%)	115 (60.6%)	194 (61.7%)
Juba Arabic+x	31 (25%)	21 (11.1%)	52 (16.6%)
x only	8 (6.5%)	25 (13.2%)	33 (10.6%)

x+Juba Arabic	2 (1.6%)	18 (9.4%)	20 (6.3%)
x+y+Juba Arabic	0	7 (3.6%)	7 (2.2%)
Juba Arabic+x+y	2 (1.6%)	4 (2.1%)	6 (1.9%)
x+y	2 (1.6%)	0	2 (0.6%)
<b>At public offices</b>			
English	39 (31.5%)	34 (18%)	73 (23.3%)
Arabic	5 (4%)	54 (28.7%)	59 (18.8%)
Juba Arabic	21 (17%)	23 (12.2%)	44 (14%)
English + Arabic	6 (4.9%)	14 (7.5%)	20 (6.4%)
English + Juba Arabic	10 (8%)	4 (2.1%)	14 (4.5%)
Arabic + English	3 (2.4%)	7 (3.8%)	10 (3.2%)
Juba Arabic + English	8 (6.4%)	2 (1%)	10 (3.2%)
Other patters including Juba Arabic	1 (0.8%)	13 (6.7%)	14 (4.3%)
Not applicable	31 (25%)	39 (20.5%)	69 (21.3%)

## 6 Official discourse

This section investigates the official discourse about language as expressed by government representatives. The analysis is based on formal interviews with two government officials of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology recorded in August 2013 in Juba.<sup>7</sup> These officials were Mr. Moses Mading, a Director of the Department of National Languages at the time of our fieldwork, and Mr. Edward Kokole Juma, Director of the Department of Teacher and Education Training. The aim of this section is basically to explore the ideologies lying behind the regimentation of the linguistic situation of South Sudan as well as to assess their possible impact on the language attitudes and language uses (cf. sections 2 and 5). We concentrate our attention on the following issues:

- The definition of ‘indigenous language’.
- The definition of Juba Arabic vis-à-vis Arabic.
- The status of monolingual Juba Arabic speakers.

We first asked the interviewees to elaborate on the meaning of ‘indigenous language’; Mr. Moses Mading provided the following answer:

Indigenous means that, that particular people, grouping, of the languages are indigenous, like Murle, like Bari, like Dinka. These are the indigenous communities. But they have different languages. These languages were said to be dialects or they were said to be local languages. But they are not local, because God created languages all the same, what made other language not

spread all over the world is that they don't have power. Like the British they invaded all. Like French. So these are languages with power, but they are the same.

Even if Mr. Moses Mading gives a mere tautological definition of 'indigenous language', the above excerpt is of particular interest for several reasons. First, the interviewee argues that there is a direct link between 'indigenous languages' and a 'grouping' of people or 'indigenous communities'. This reveals an ideological understanding of 'indigenous languages' as invariable entities. As anticipated in section 4, this notion can be traced back to the Rejaf Language Conference, and has been more recently implemented by the CPA and the South Sudanese language policy (cf. section 3).<sup>8</sup> Second, when Mr. Moses Mading affirms that 'indigenous languages' cannot be considered 'dialects' nor 'local languages' because 'God created languages all the same', he provides strong evidence of the pervasiveness of the SIL faith-based approach to language diversity. However, the asserted linguistic ecumenism is evidently incoherent with the position expressed vis-à-vis Juba Arabic, which, since not indigenous, is evidently 'less equal' than others (see below). Third, the reference made to European languages 'with power' can be explained by the assumption that 'indigenous languages' have been historically subordinate to former colonial languages. This, however, reveals that 'indigenous languages' as a category cannot be defined without an explicit reference to an alien counterpart.

Mr. Edward Kokole Juma's answer to the question of how to define an 'indigenous language' is more articulate, but also much more controversial:

Long time ago, when we were under the Arabs, all our national languages were called indigenous languages. They made them very inferior. Indigenous languages, very local languages. Inferior. So our late leader John Garang in 2004 declared that all indigenous languages in South Sudan are now national languages, before the CPA. [...] That means to raise a culture, to raise an ethnic grouping to national status. Just the languages are promoted from being indigenous to be national, because they are a modern system of languages. Now you don't talk of any mother tongue as indigenous, they are all national languages. [...] When you learn about the background, about the struggle, it can tell you that the war was about domination, was about oppression of all ethnic languages, to be extinguished, so that people are dominated only to speak Arabic. Now we have just liberated ourselves, and we find ourselves that Arabic is widely spoken everywhere. Right now in fact is the uniting language, the language that unity all the different ethnic groups of South Sudan. We are aware about that.

Here 'indigenous language' bears the strong negative connotation of 'very local', or 'very inferior' language. However, the fact that the South Sudanese

Constitution overtly cites ‘indigenous languages’ and assigns them the status of national languages does not seem to bother the interviewee as incoherent. The interviewee further assumes that the adoption of the label ‘indigenous language’ is a consequence of the Arabs’ domination in the former unified Sudan, rather than of the colonial language policy (cf. section 3). Second, just like Mr. Moses Mading, Mr. Edward Kokole Juma argues that there is a direct link between ‘indigenous languages’ and ‘ethnic groupings’. Furthermore, using a very common biological metaphor, Mr. Moses Mading explains that the present-day regimentation of ‘indigenous languages’ as ‘national languages’ is a reaction to the former domination of Arabic, which was intended to ‘extinguish ethnic languages’. In contrast to that, the interviewee also affirms an awareness that ‘Arabic’ is the only language that can pull ‘the different ethnic groups’ of South Sudan together.

This leads us to the second issue of our analysis: the definition of Juba Arabic vis-à-vis Sudanese Arabic and other languages. Given the confusion surrounding the glossonym ‘Arabic’ in his previous statement, we asked Mr. Edward Kokole Juma to address the distinction between Juba Arabic and (Sudanese) Arabic:

Q: Are you speaking of Arabic, or Juba Arabic?

EKJ: Arabic in general. Juba Arabic has been there before the independence of South Sudan itself. People from different parts of South Sudan came to the capital city, and that is where Juba Arabic emerged. But in the mind of politicians, this idea is not in their mind. It has not been caught in the policy. But the policy says in broad terms that all indigenous languages are promoted, from indigenous to national languages.

As a reaction to our question, Mr. Edward Kokole Juma affirms that he is referring to Arabic ‘in general’ as he does not acknowledge any particular distinction between Juba Arabic and Arabic. At variance with this affirmation, he also highlights the longstanding presence of Juba Arabic in South Sudan and, distancing himself from the decisional sphere, deplores the fact that this situation has not been formalized by the national language policy.

Different from Mr. Edward Kokole Juma, Mr. Moses Mading expresses an unambiguous position concerning the definition of Juba Arabic in comparison to Arabic, as we can see in the following excerpt:

In this forum we discussed something about Juba Arabic. It was brought up that they are no longer using Juba Arabic, they are using classical Arabic. Because Arabization here came in and all schools were in Arabic, and they were speaking Arabic, everything was done in Arabic. [...] Even children who are Bari speakers when you, when you, when you hear them, they speak Arabic in the streets and all this. You will have Juba Arabic outside. In Lanya, in all these areas, Rokon, and all these. So we discussed this thing. The churches, the

two churches, Catholic and Protestant. They tried to write what is called Shukuru Yesu with Roman alphabet. When we come, when we come as linguist, come and test it exactly, it will not come exactly. [...] When we discussed about Juba Arabic in the forum, they said why to write with Roman script, Juba Arabic with roman script, if we have rules already for Arabic. Arabic will be used of course; even in the churches we have Arabic bibles. So it can be like that Arabic, while we use the 'mother tongue'. [...] So Juba Arabic will not written in the Roman script. Because we have rules already. Arabic will be though in P5.

Q: But it will be Arabic...

MM: Yes, it will be Arabic. Not Juba Arabic, it will be Arabic.

Q: Is Juba Arabic different from Arabic?

MM: It is not different from Arabic. It's a dialectical thing. [...] Arabic came during the time of the Turkish rule, they were using some of the people and recruited them in the army. So they have been ordered in Arabic like that. So they used what is called colloquial Arabic. But now after Arabization came here. Now when they speak orally, they speak very clear Arabic.

The interviewee makes reference to a 'forum' in which the status of Juba Arabic was discussed. That is the Practice and Planning of Multilingual Education Workshop, organized by SIL and the government of South Sudan in 2006, and which was intended to make proposals on the choice of the 'indigenous languages' to be used in primary education (Ferdinand, Mading, Marshall and Spronk, 2008; Spronk, 2014). According to Mr. Moses Mading, during the workshop it was argued that, because of the institutional Arabicization of the former unified Sudan, Juba Arabic is no longer spoken, except in rural areas such as 'Lanya' or 'Rokon'. This is evidently in contrast with the fact that Juba Arabic is mainly spoken in Juba where it is undergoing a massive process of nativization, while being a vehicular language in the rural areas. Accordingly, it seems that the interviewee identifies Juba Arabic with its pidginized version characteristic of rural speakers, rather than with the creolized form that is widely used in the capital city. It should also be stressed that the influence of Sudanese Arabic on Juba Arabic in terms of decreolization (cf. section 2) is particularly evident in the South Sudanese capital as a result of the recent arrival of returnees from Khartoum; this may have had an influence on the interviewee's assumption that Juba Arabic has been replaced by 'classical Arabic', where this latter term obviously refers to Sudanese Arabic (perceived as the high linguistic variety in terms of prestige). Finally, the interviewee affirms that there have been some attempts to standardize a Juba Arabic orthography in the Roman alphabet, but these failed because there are already orthographic rules for Arabic. Mr. Moses Mading thus states that Arabic should be taught as a foreigner language starting from P5 and not as an 'indigenous language' starting from P1. This statement led



us to ask the question whether Juba Arabic is different from (Sudanese) Arabic. In this connection, the interviewee makes clear that in his understanding Juba Arabic 'is not different from Arabic' since it is 'a dialectical thing' and that at the present time people speak 'very clear Arabic'. This means that, in contrast with the metalinguistic representations expressed by the majority of Juba Arabic speakers, the interviewee overtly considers Juba Arabic as a variety of the former dominant language.

As a last point, during the interview with Mr. Moses Mading we drew his attention to the presence of Juba Arabic monolinguals in South Sudan:

Q: In urban centres like Juba you find children who only speak Arabic or, let say, some form of Arabic, like Juba Arabic.

MM: Some of them came from East Africa. They came from east Africa.

Q: Some of them. But, as you observed, there are also people who say: we are Bari, but we only speak Juba Arabic. So, will these people learn Bari at the primary school or will they study directly in English?

MM: What we are putting is a policy. They are Bari, of course. And if they are Bari, they must know their mother tongue. [...] It is the system; they must know their mother tongue. Because their fathers and their mothers, they speak Bari.

Mr. Moses Mading overtly affirms that Juba Arabic monolingual speakers are returnees from East Africa; by doing that, he denies these 'outsiders' any linguistic right in South Sudan. However, this does not correspond to the sociolinguistic profile of the majority of Juba Arabic monolinguals, who are basically South Sudanese individuals born and raised in the capital. We therefore urged Mr. Moses Mading to comment on the presence of Juba Arabic monolinguals that preserve their ethnic identity (as in the case of many Bari located in Malikiya, cf. section 5) and on the language to be adopted for their primary education. The answer given by the interviewee does not leave any doubt: by affirming 'if they are Bari, they must know their mother tongue', he overtly states that the first and foremost criterion for choosing an 'indigenous language' for primary education is neither location nor language use, but ethnic affiliation. In such an ideological context, it is evident that a non-ethnic language such as Juba Arabic has no room.

We can sum up the main points of the official discourse towards Juba Arabic as follows:

- As an ideological reaction to the process of Arabicization enacted by the former unified Sudan, Juba Arabic is considered as a variety of Arabic. It is therefore not recognized as a 'national language'.
- Being an inter-ethnic means of communication, Juba Arabic cannot fit with the ethnic understanding of 'indigenous languages' inherited from

the colonial language policy and renewed by the CPA, and South Sudanese independence.

- Despite the fact that linguistic rights are formally recognized on the basis of language uses, ethnic membership remains the foremost factor underlying the choice of ‘indigenous languages’ in education. As a consequence, Juba Arabic monolinguals do not have a statutory right to education in their own language, and they will be forced to learn an ‘indigenous’ language.
- It seems that the official discourse does not affect the metalinguistic awareness of Juba Arabic speakers, as they tend to make a clear distinction between the pidgincreole and its lexifier (cf. section 2). Likewise, the fact that Juba Arabic is not recognized as a national language does not limit its use as a vehicular language and its ongoing nativization (cf. section 3).

## 7 Conclusions

The analysis of the official discourse revealed that the non-recognition of the pidgincreole could be explained by different ideological factors. First, despite its linguistic and sociohistorical peculiarities, Juba Arabic is officially considered a variety of Arabic. It is not constitutionally recognized as an ‘indigenous language’ on a par with other South Sudanese languages, and it will not be standardized and/or taught in primary schools. Secondly, being an interethnic means of communication, Juba Arabic cannot be linked to any specific ethnic group. As a consequence, the sociolinguistic status of Juba Arabic does not fit with the ethnic understanding of ‘indigenous languages’ promulgated, at first, by the British colonial rule and boosted, at a later time, by the CPA. Even if ‘indigenous’ languages are formally recognized on the basis of location and language uses, the analysis of the official discourse clearly shows that the individuation of an ethnically defined linguistic community remains the main principle underlying the recognition of linguistic rights in South Sudan.

In this overall situation, ideology is not absent in the speakers’ attitudes toward language(s), and it is apparent for example in a frequently heard nationalist statement about Juba Arabic being ‘the language which unites South Sudanese people’ (Manfredi 2017b). Despite this, pragmatic considerations play a much bigger role than ideology: the speakers stress the usefulness of an already existing local *lingua franca* in order to surmount the problems inherent in everyday communication. The relative weight of ideology and practical considerations is reversed in the case of the government’s perception of the language problem. The

choice of English as the language of education may be supported by economic and practical considerations, whereas the recognition of indigenous languages may be seen as a tactical move to prevent possible criticisms of a lack of attention to the diversity of the country; but ideological considerations had the upper hand in the choice of English as the sole official language of the country, in spite of the fact that it is barely if at all known by the vast majority of the South Sudanese. ‘Indigenous languages’, for their part, are mentioned in the Constitution, but Juba Arabic, which is considered a ‘non-indigenous’ language, is not. This state of affairs is potentially harmful when considering the fast process of nativization of Juba Arabic in post-independence South Sudan (cf. section 5).

## Notes

1. A previous version of this article was entitled ‘A new state, an old language policy, and a pidgincreole: Juba Arabic in South Sudan’.
2. Fieldwork in South Sudan was made possible by a grant from the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research within the project ‘Areas of Linguistic and Cultural Transition in Africa’ (ATrA). Our partner in South Sudan was the Department of Arabic at the University of Juba. We thank its Director, Prof. Siham Osman, for her assistance in the field. We express our gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, which allowed us to carry out a number of interviews with key officials. We also thank the Embassy of France for their logistical help. We are especially thankful to our language consultants, and in particular to Lowani Duku Dimas, who passed away on 12 April 2014.
3. Interestingly, Leonardi (2013) insists on the structural distinctiveness of Juba Arabic. However, this is not reflected in the choice of the glossonym ‘South Sudanese Arabic’, which does not highlight the specificity of Juba Arabic but posits a connection between the South Sudanese pidgincreole and common Arabic national koines such as ‘Egyptian Arabic’, ‘Sudanese Arabic’, etc.
4. At the time of our fieldwork, Juba was the capital city of the Central Equatoria state. Following the 2015 federal reform, Central Equatoria was dissolved, and Juba now falls within the new state of Jubek.
5. Spronk (2014), a SIL member collaborating with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on the definition of the guidelines of multilingual education of South Sudan, overtly uses the disputed term ‘mother tongue’. Not surprisingly, the same term also crops up in the discourse of government officials who worked with SIL when referring back to ‘indigenous’ languages (cf. section 6).
6. The data were gathered through anonymous interviews carried out by two students, Claudius Waran Patrick and Sara Bojo Lokudu, from Juba University. Interviews were conducted in Juba Arabic and were written down and tabulated by us.

7. The interviews were conducted in English. The excerpts presented in this paragraph are transcribed orthographically. We did not correct morphosyntactic and/or lexical incongruences.
8. One of the main aims of the Rejaf Language Conference was ‘to make recommendations as to whether a system of group languages should be adopted for educational purposes, and if so, what languages would be selected as the group languages for the various areas (of the Southern Sudan)’. In this regard, Abdelhay, Makoni, Makoni and Mugaddam (2011:470–471) observe that ‘The lasting effect of the Rejaf Language Conference as a language-planning device was the production of a linguistic cartography of “immobile languages” anchored to a specific space: the South’.

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(Received 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016; revision received 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017;  
accepted June 2017; final revision received 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018)