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## Language Shift and Gender Dilling Town, Sudan: Who Leads the process?

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### ABSTRACT

Language shift from a local language to Arabic bilingualism to the exclusive use of Arabic is occurring in vernacular speech communities in Dilling town, in the Nuba Mountains. Females are further along in the direction of shift than males. The contrast between males and females within the framework of language shift reflects the social change resulting from migration from rural areas to the urban ones. Language choice in everyday interaction appears to have been part of a speakers' identity. Women in Dilling are increasingly attracted to Arabic for the practical function the language plays in their life. The growing role of women in the changing society of the Nuba Mountains has contributed much to the process of language shift among themselves, as they have to use Arabic in more domains of communication. Women go to school, are employed in government institutions, and participate actively in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic life in the region. In this perspective women tend to move away from their traditional domain, the house, to a more open and interactive setting involving people from different ethno linguistic background whose only lingua franca is Arabic. The paper confirms Gal's (1978) findings that women's speech choices may best be understood within the framework of their social status, their life choice, and the symbolic values of the code at their disposal.

**Keywords:** Language shift, language maintenance, gender and language.

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### 1. Introduction

The approximately 29 million inhabitants of Africa's largest country, the Sudan, speak at least 135 distinct languages belonging to three different language families, Afro-asiatic, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan. Sudan's current political boundaries were established at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In 1899, the country was placed under the jurisdiction of Britain as well as Egypt in nominal recognition to the historical claims of the khedive of Egypt, though reserving supreme civil and military authority to an official nominated by the British colonial government. This so-called Condominium Period, which lasted till Independence on 1. January 1956, was preceded by the Turco-Egyptian period, which began in 1821; prior to this era, the Sudan did not form a unified political

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entity. During the Turco-Egyptian Rule, Arabic spread as the language of administration in northern and central Sudan. Because of the government's desire for a southward expansion, in order to have access to human resources (slaves) and ivory, male adults from the Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains were captured and recruited for the army. It was probably in the multilingual garnison camps in the southern Sudan that pidginized versions of Sudanese Arabic emerged which came to be known as Nubi and Juba Arabic. Nubi subsequently became the mother tongue of certain communities which today are also spread over Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda.

The unpopular Turco-Egyptian regime was replaced by the Mahdist State in 1881, which ruled over two-thirds of the Sudan until 1898, when the British, in the scramble for Africa, took over power in the Sudan. The British colonial government developed a policy which aimed at the checking of the Arabic language as well as Islam in the southern Sudan. In line with a more general policy in their colonies, the colonial government stimulated not only the use of English as an official language, but also the instalment of local or regional languages in the educational system. At the Rejaf Conference (1928), for example, six intergroup languages from the southern Sudan were selected for development and for use in schools: Bari, Dinka, Ndogo, Nuer, Shilluk and Zande. Schools in the southern Sudan were run mainly by missionaries; non-governmental schools in the north and missionary schools in the south were only placed under the responsibility of the government in Khartoum in 1957.

Even before independence (1956), the legislative assembly of the country had stated that Arabic should be the official language of the whole Sudan, also stating that the southern provinces were indivisibly part of the Sudan, and this was to be reflected eventually in a new language policy. After independence, northern intellectuals played a significant role in the development and empowerment of Arabic in the south. This policy resulted in a virtual exclusion and neglect of remaining Sudanese languages. This move was further enhanced by Arabicizing secondary and university education in the entire country in the following decades. In the late 1960s, Arabic became the official language of instruction in government schools throughout the country, although at the National Conference for Education in Khartoum it was ordained that southern vernaculars written in Arabic script could be used as media of instruction in the first two years of education in the rural areas of the southern provinces; starting from the third year, however, Arabic should be the medium. From 1972 onwards, final examinations in Grade 6 took place in Arabic throughout the country. The issue of language policy and planning in the Sudan thus underwent rather dramatic changes in the course of the 20th century.

Arabic probably had spread across the Sudan ever since the 8th century, also reaching more remote parts of the (future) country, for example in the west, between the 16 and 19th century. In areas such as Darfur, Arabic had already developed into an important lingua before the 19th century. Among several individuals in the region, e.g. ethnic Fur or Daju, this situation resulted in a gradual shift towards Arabic as the primary language of communication, often accompanied by loss of the original first language.

The Sudanese language policy after independence, whereby the crucial instrumental (and integrative) role of Arabic was emphasized and the role of other Sudanese languages (or English) was reduced, had a partly negative effect on attitudes towards local and regional languages. As in other parts of the world, urbanisation had an additional catalyzing factor on language attitudes. The studies by Miller and Abu-Manga (1992) and Mugadam (2002) clearly show that second-generation migrants in the larger Khartoum area, for example, hardly acquire the first language of their parents. Although there are differences in language solidarity between the various ethnic groups, there is a clear tendency among second-generation speakers to use Arabic as the first language. In this respect, Khartoum is comparable to many other major urban centres in Africa; in such multilingual areas, there is a strong tendency to switch to the national language of the country (or to an important regional lingua franca) for daily communication purposes.

Whereas today Sudanese Arabic is used widely in the streets, markets, government and educational institutions across the country, vernaculars are used mainly within their immediate speech communities, although there are differences in language attitudes between the different generations as well as between ethnic groups (Mugadam 2002, Mugaddam et al 2020). For example, Sudanese from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, or northern regions use more Arabic in their everyday communication than ethnic groups from the south.

Southern resistance against the predominant role of Arabic and the Islamization of the entire country resulted in a civil war in the Sudan between 1955 and 1972 as well as between 1983 and 2004. In the Addis Ababa peace agreement (1972), Arabic was recognized as the official language and English as the principal language for the southern region without prejudice to the use of languages which may serve a practical necessity for the executive and administrative function of the region. In the same year, "the Language Survey of the Sudan" was initiated by the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum (after similar surveys had been conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) in order to investigate patterns of language use, also with an eye on future language policies. The Addis Abeba Accord did not fully realize its objectives because of the renewed outbreak of civil war in the south in 1983. Interestingly, whereas subsequent Sudanese governments did not support the official use of languages other than Arabic, non-governmental organizations in the Sudan developed orthographies and produced primers over the past decades. For more than sixty different languages.

## 2. Background

Relationship between gender and language is essential for understanding sexism. Studies on gender issue started as a field of investigation and developed during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Research has focused primarily on gender bias in language, and the nature of gender differences in language use (ibid). Lakoff (1975) argues that the marginalization of women and their lack of power are reflected in the ways women and men are expected to talk. Weatherall (2002) goes further arguing that power relation between men and women shapes the language of the respective community and that men's power is shown in the language they use in different ways. Weatherall argues that language differences can be viewed as deficits in women's speech. In the Western World, women are thought to be talkative and their speech is trivial. There are many proverbs that support this view (e.g. a woman's tongue wags like a lamp's tail). Jespersen (1922) notes that women have more limited vocabulary than men, use simple sentences, and speak without thinking which leads to incomplete sentences. Moreover, Lakoff (1975) writes that women's speech style conveys weakness, uncertainty and unimportance. She considers women's language as inferior to men's language which is direct and clear. As such, Lakoff views differences in women's and men's speech as a reflection of their different status in society.

The relation between language and power is viewed by some scholars as a political issue. That is, gender bias in language is obviously a political rather than neutral or trivial issue. This is because language tends to demean women granting them an inferior status in society. For example, naming system (e.g. a woman takes her husband name) and titles, such as mentioning Mr. before Mrs., are used as a means of degrading women position in society. Cameron (1995) contends that rules of language and standards of correct speech are important in understanding the norms of speech that are linked to power and privilege in society. Thus, standards ways of using language are essentially ideological and norms about speech are strong factors influencing peoples' perception and evaluation of others. Brown (1980) assumes that negative politeness is associated with people of inferior position namely; women. That is, speakers apologize for intruding by using impersonal structures such as hedges. This assumption is confirmed by O'Barr and Atkins (1980) who observe that male and female witnesses differ in their linguistic usage. Accordingly, lawyers treat female witnesses as a special case, which put women in inferior status.

According to O'Barr and Atkins (1980) women's usage of powerless language is due to their powerless position in society rather than to their gender. West (1984a; 1984b) takes a different view. The researcher tried to find out whether women in powerful position can dominate conversation. Analyzing doctor-patient interaction, west found that doctors regularly interrupted their patients unless the doctor is a female and the patient is a male and white, in which case the doctor is interrupted. This finding shows that even when a woman is in a powerful position her gender, not her status, is responsible for interruption. Going on the same line, Based on analysis of conversation between work colleagues of different occupational status, wood (1989) found out that that man dominates the floor, whether he is a boss or a subordinate. This study demonstrates that low status men do not use powerless language; instead, they dominate interaction by using powerful language such as interruption.

Zimmerman and West (1975) maintain that men tend to dominate speech by using more interruptions as a means of controlling talk in mixed sex interaction, and by speaking more than women. Zimmerman and West believe that, in mixed sex conversation, men's topics are more dominant while women play a supportive role. For instance, when a man introduces a topic which is related to men's domain such as politics or sports in mixed sex interaction, women tend not to interfere by introducing female's topics (e.g. family or personal issues). Rather, they facilitate interaction by supporting and commenting on the existing male's topic. Going in the same line, West and Zimmerman (1977) assume that the use of interruption is due to gender differences. They perceive gender and power as inevitably linked. Interruptions which are practiced daily in our conversations are gestures of power. This linguistic behavior helps in forming female's subordinate status. However, West and Zimmerman maintain that the use of interruptions is not related only to gender differences and that it can also be found in other speech such as parents/children conversation.

Swann (1989) assumes that dominance in speech may be practiced in different ways, both linguistically and non-linguistically. Any analysis of male dominance of talk should take into consideration the different conversational features of non-verbal behavior, such as contextual factors (e. g. seating arrangements and any activities that accompany the speech). Swann believes that power relations can be responsible for the linguistic differences between males and females. She maintains that women have been considered as powerless social groups not only in studies of male-female interactions but also in further studies of women's position in society. Men hold more powerful positions in society and women have less chance to occupy high positions in the government/ authority even when they are educationally equal to men (ibid). Moreover, both women and men view men as the dominant sex. So when gender is salient in conversation, when it seems to be seen as a woman or a man regardless of their occupations, men often dominate interactions (ibid). This view is supported by Woods (1989) who believes that male's dominance in conversation can be due to the fact that men hold higher position status than women. Based on the model of conversational Turn-Taking proposed by Sacks et al (1974), Woods summarizes the linguistic differences between men and women in the following points:

1. In mixed sex interaction, men who hold higher status than women are selected to speak or self selected to speak more than women.
2. Men tend to interrupt and overlap more than women
3. Men speak through Transition Relevance Place (a place where speaker change occur more than women. That is, they continue to speak without a pause between unit-types.
4. Men take up speakership more than women.
5. Men receive more assent terms than women.

Coates (1996) states that since men's discourses are dominant, women see themselves in relation to men. However, dominance of women's discourse takes place only when the function of discourse is in favor of men. Women only have importance if they are in the positions of mothers, wives or daughters, otherwise, they are marginalized. According to Holmes (2006), in the last two decades women began to occupy roles with real power, responsibility, and status in professional organizations. Holmes examines the relationship between leadership and gender, as well as gender styles in leadership discourse. Holmes suggests that the key requirements of effective leadership are depicted in masculine style. This is because men are decisive in directiveness and giving instructions. Holmes proposes two ways of giving instructions in the workplace in relation to gender. The more direct ways of speaking index masculinity while more indirect styles tend to be feminine. Linguistic forms such as imperatives (e.g. check that out) or need statements (e.g. I need to see the file) index masculine style of giving instructions or asking someone to do something. This direct masculine discourse strategy makes managers more confident and authoritative as leaders. When giving directives, female leaders use less direct discourse strategies, which include some features such as interrogative rather than imperative forms (e.g. can you write that up a bit neater?), modal verbs (e.g. we might need some more help), and paralinguistic features such as hesitations and pauses. These indirect forms index more feminine style in doing leadership (ibid).

Holmes (2006) argues that the strategy of giving directives can be done in a work place meeting either by an authoritative masculine style or an empathetic feminine way. That is, as women have the sense to understand other's feelings, they use language strategy which enables them to direct

their employees regarding their status. This means that women tend to use mitigated, hedged and indirect forms for giving directives that index their feminine style in leadership. Both male and female leaders' styles work effectively in practicing leadership. However, some women in leadership positions adopt masculine style in directing their workers. These women believe that the choice of male strategy is a skilful means of giving directives. By so doing, women work in men's domain which is a far from women-friendly realm (ibid).

Berryman-fink (1997) further states that workplace organizations operate on masculine assumptions and ways of life. In other words, a men's world is conveyed in their workplace. Speech style is one of the most prevailing behaviors men adopted within their organizations. Women who seek effective leaderships and success in workplace adopt a male model in the belief that leaders should use masculine domination and authoritarian styles of behavior. These women, Berryman-fink argues, often dress in ways that indicate their wish to be identified in the realm of male-dominated business. They tend to talk in the same way men do as well.

More interesting, Berryman-fink claims that some women challenge the gendered discourse found in their workplace in different ways. They believe that in order to be treated with respect, women need to prove that they can do the job better than their male colleagues. In other words, women adopt male strategies in order to claim leadership. At the same time, they contribute to de-gendering these male model strategies. Women perceive the authoritative style as a leadership discourse rather than a male style. However, Berryman-fink claims, some senior women show their femininity clearly and look confident in different ways within the workplace interactions, imposing a feminine sphere in the presence of their male colleagues.

## 2.1 Gender differences in Language

In the 1960s and 1970s feminists were interested in sex differences in language. Weatherall (2002) believes that gender differences in language cover a wide range of language (gender and voice, verbal ability, etc.). Linguists, on the other hand, are more interested in sex variation at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels. There are two central themes for sex differences in the literature- first, biological essentialism/determinism which focuses on the biological causes for sex differences (e.g. voice differences), and second: social disadvantage for women; the way sex differences are used to disadvantage women. In other words, priority in giving to men in language use such as the naming system (e.g. Mrs Tom) and titles (e.g. male and female) (ibid).

Than name-changers. On the other hand, women who change their names view name changing as symbolic of the partnership between men and women. However, both categories do not differ in terms of love towards their husbands and perception of their mutual control levels. Name keepers, on the other hand, consider the issue of identity when dealing with marital naming.

To conclude, we think the practice of marital naming is a way of degrading women. Such a practice eradicates women's identity. Ignoring women's original names is the starting point of husbands' domination. That is, when a wife takes her husband's name, the husband gets the feeling of ownership of the woman; then he would practice his power over her. In contrast, keeping women's own names after marriage does not mean that marriage or family relationship is not tied or strong. Rather, it is a kind of keeping women's identity as actual members in society, besides keeping partnership as well as sharing family issues.

Another feature of naming conventions in English which defines women in relation to others is discussed by Weatherall (2002). Mrs and Miss, are used traditionally as titles that precede women's names to indicate whether they are married or singles, whereas the equivalent title Mr comes before men's names whether a man is married or not. A recent strategy to remove this inequality in titles is the emergence of the unmarked title Ms. Since 1960s Ms has been adopted by women who object having a marked title for marital status. Dion and Schuller (1990) have found in a study that working women who prefer the title Ms are judged by business people to be like a man, and their personality traits are equal to those of successful managers.

Apart from surnames and titles, personal naming is another aspect of naming conventions. Weatherall (2002) argues that some studies have suggested that there are stereotypes associated with names. Such stereotypes may affect a person's self-concept and the perception and behavior of others towards the people who have those names. Betrie and Johnson (1991) have found, in a British study,

that there is a relationship between the perception of sex typing of a name and to what extent the person with that name is sex typed. Another study by (Zweigenhaft, Hayes and Hagan, 1980; cited in Weatherall, 2002) compares self-ratings of men and women with ambiguous names (e.g. Kim, Leslie) with those of men and women with clearly gendered names (e.g. Mark, Pam). They found that there are no differences between men with ambiguous names and those with gender-clear named in self-ratings. But women with ambiguous names tend to rate themselves higher in status and lower in femininity than women with clearly gendered names.

The third aspect of sexist language that affects women negatively is that women being depreciated by language. (Henley, 1987; cited in Weatherall, 2002) claims that language might demean women as well as ignore and define them narrowly. Evidence of this, as stated by Weatherall (2002), is that in English language masculine forms of words have more positive connotation than feminine ones. (Lakoff, 1973; cited in Coates & Cameron, 1989) supports this view with examples. She compares the connotation of (bachelor and spinster, master and mistress, lord and lady) to illustrate the positive connotation of males' forms. Moreover, words that have the same form (e.g. professional, secretary) have positive connotation when attached to men than to women. Such perception is applied to some words that are used to refer to the opposite gender. For example, (tomboy) has positive connotation while (sissy) is used as insult (ibid).

Weatherall (2002) maintains that language provides evidence of social and moral order where men and masculinity are valued more than women and femininity. She argues that English has fewer linguistic forms that are used to indicate gender compared to French, German and Arabic. For instance, gender can be marked in English by the use of suffixes to indicate femininity such as –ess (actress, waitress) and –ette (suffragette), or by the use of adjuncts (e.g. woman doctor, male nurse). However, (Schulz, 1975; cited in Weatherall, 2002), and Spender (1980) state that some researchers criticize the use of adjuncts in marking femininity. For these researchers, such a usage implies that the world is male unless proven otherwise.

Conversely, some researchers criticize the addition of feminine suffixes and adjuncts for they have weak, diminish, and trivial effects (Weatherall, 2002). Stanley (1977) maintains that such feminine markers create negative semantic effect for women. Thus, language marks women as being different regardless of what they do (e.g. female surgeon, woman lawyer) or less important than men who do the same thing (e.g. waiter vs. waitress, steward vs. stewardess). In the case of adjuncts, Weatherall argues that gender marking is sexist and it provides information about normative gender roles in general. For example, masculine markers may be used as an indication of a man entering a stereotypically women domain (e. g. male nurse, male prostitute).

Women and men do not speak in exactly the same way in many speech communities. In an Amazon Indian community, for instance, the language used by a mother is different from the father's language. This is attributed to the fact that men have to marry outside their own tribe, and each tribe is distinguished by a different language (Holmes 2001). In such a situation men and women speak different languages. Less dramatically, there are communities where the language is shared by men and women, but certain linguistic features occur only in women's speech or only in men's. These differences lie mainly in pronunciation, grammar, morphology, and lexical choice (ibid). While some sociolinguists believe that women are status conscious (this is reflected in their use of standard speech form), Lakoff (1973) argues that women tend to use languages which reinforce their subordinate status (Gal, 1978).

The differences in language use between men and women have attracted the attention of dialectologists in different parts of the globe. Research findings indicate that the linguistic differences between men and women appear at different levels of grammar, phonology, syntax, pragmatics, and vocabulary (Anshen 1969; Sankoff and Cedergren 1971; Keenan: 1974; Lakoff 1973). Labov (1972) states that the sexual differentiation of speech often plays a major role in the mechanism of linguistic evolution. Research on language shift, on the other hand, considers the linguistic differences between males and females in terms of maintaining a community's mother tongue or shifting away from it. For example, Gal's 1979 study indicates that women were leading language shift in Oberwart, a Hungarian-German bilingual community in the eastern part of Austria (very close to the Hungarian borders). They even rejected husbands speaking Hungarian for the fear that this would deny them the chance for economic and social upgrading. A different picture is expected in some African contexts where women tend to maintain their own ethnic languages, because their contact with other speech communities is

limited. The fact that indigenous women in Africa are less educated and thus they play a minor role in sociopolitical and socioeconomic life in some parts of the continent could be another factor contributing to the high level of language maintenance among them.

Holmes (2001) contends that the social and economic goals of individuals in a community play an important role in the process of language shift and maintenance. Rapid shift occurs when people are anxious to get on in a society where knowledge of the dominant language is a prerequisite for success. Young upwardly mobile people are likely to take the lead in the process. It has also been found that language shift may be led by women or by men depending on the availability of job opportunities. Young women in Oberwart were found to be ahead of men in the shift towards German language because they were taking advantage of the new jobs created by the industrial changes in the village. Newly arrived immigrant women in New Zealand, on the other hand, often have less education than their husbands, tend to stay at home maintaining the minority language. When they get work it is always in low-paid jobs, where they work with other immigrants belonging to the same ethnic affiliation, and thus they use their ethnic languages in the work domain too.

It is then the socioeconomic role of women or men respectively in their community that determines their contribution to language shift. Women in Sudan which represent the context of the present study, play a substantial role in all aspects of life. They go to schools and universities, and participate actively in sociopolitical and socioeconomic activities (there is no reliable numbers for women assuming leading positions). The main objective of this paper is to describe the way in which women in Dilling town have contributed to a change in patterns of language use. The community is gradually and systematically changing from using an ethnic language to the use of only one language in everyday interaction.

### **3. Methods, data analysis and discussion**

Dilling is a town located in the State of Southern Kordofan, Sudan. The town hosts people from different ethnic backgrounds speaking languages belonging to three of Greenberg's (1966) language families: Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Kongo, and Afro-asiatic (represented by Arabic). The outbreak of war in the Nuba region, together with other sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors, has caused many people to desert their homelands and settle in the town as well as other urban areas in the Sudan. During the last two decades the town has grown significantly as one of the most important places in the region. It has developed as a commercial center, attracting more immigrants. The new settlers constituted a good number of monolingual Arabic speakers as well as bilingual speakers of Arabic and a local language. After the ceasefire agreement in 2003 many ethnic Nuba individuals who fled their own towns and villages settling in Khartoum, Jazeera, and other major urban areas in the Sudan have returned back to the Nuba Mountains. The present survey has registered 36 different languages from the Nuba Mountains as well as other parts of the Sudan.

Most of the indigenous bilinguals have previously engaged in the subsistence of peasant agriculture. Since the eruption of war in the region, most of the peasants have given up their original jobs and got involved in the local economy of Dilling or other big towns in the Sudan. That is, their life has changed significantly from agriculturalists to traders (simple trade activities such as selling agricultural products, food stuff, tea-making, etc.), government employees, or workers in different sectors. In the language usage investigated by the present author, women are more advanced in the process of shift towards Arabic than men. This pattern correlates well with studies of language change in urban areas. The use of the newly introduced linguistic forms by women is motivated primarily by the belief that such forms are prestigious (Trudgil 1972).

### **4. Data collection**

This study is based on questionnaires administered to 572 females and 924 males belonging to three age groups. The survey covers 37 different ethnic groups living in Dilling town. To facilitate data organization we prefer to focus on the three largest groups (as suggested by the survey), Ama, Dilling, Gulfan and label the remaining ones as 'others'. Three different age groups (adult, youths and children) constitute the sample of the present study. Since the main objective of this paper is to highlight the role of sex in the process of language shift and maintenance in a Sudanese context, age differences (though

it is very important in the process) has been overlooked in the first instance. The questionnaire contains questions on language proficiency, language use in different domains, and language attitudes. Data were quantified and analyzed statistically using the SPSS software program.

## 5. Data analysis and discussion

Data analysis is organized into three main sections: language proficiency, language use in different domains, and language attitudes. Table 1 below summarizes the language respondents master as a primary language.

Table 1.

*Distribution of primary language by sex.*

Sex	Arabic		Ethnic language		Total	
Male	572	61.9%	352	38.1%	924	100%
Female	417	72.9%	155	27.1%	572	100%

Table 1 clearly shows that the difference between females (72.9%) and males (61.9%) in ethnic language shift is slightly significant. Females have surpassed males in the process by 11%. The growing role of women in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical life in the Nuba Mountains must have contributed to the high rate of language shift among them. This is because women were more exposed to Arabic, the dominant language, as they were involved actively in the everyday life business of the region (increasing numbers of Sudanese women go to school and university and have different job opportunities). Considering the fact that women in these societies are almost exclusively responsible for raising children, their role in language shift is expected to be even more influential. Women's contribution to ethnic language shift was found to be phenomenal by a number of studies such as Gal's (1979), Demos' (1988), and Naji and David's (2003). However, the lower rate of ethnic language retention among women as opposed to that among men suggested by the present study seriously contradicts Silver's (1974) and Holmes's (2001) observations that women in New were the least affected by ethnic mother tongue shift. The low level of education women have in some communities and the limited job opportunities are responsible for the ethnic language maintenance they experience. They tend to remain at home, which helps them maintain their own languages. When they get work, it is always in low paid jobs working with people from the same ethnic group and therefore they are able to use their language in the home domain too (ibid).

Women and men differ in language choice in a variety of domains. Labov's (1972) study in New York City, for instance, indicates that women tended to use prestigious linguistic forms more than men. Recent research suggests that Japanese women and men use grammatical patterns with different frequencies (see Holmes 2001). In line with such results we may assume that male and female respondents in the present study use the languages at their disposal quite differently. That is, women use Arabic, considered a prestigious language in Sudan, more than men. In any interaction between speakers of a local language in the city a choice must be made between Arabic and a local language. While in some cases either Arabic or a local language is used, in other cases both are equally appropriate. In this situation it may not be easy to speculate which code will be employed by which speaker? Code switching (from Arabic to the ethnic language) is the best term to describe the situation. Speakers of local languages tend to switch code whenever they want to exclude others from their conversation or to show that they are highly proud of their language and ethnic affiliation. When speakers of a given language want to talk about something very special at the presence of people outside of the group, they switch to their own language. In other instances of conversation, ethnic individuals resort to their own languages as a strategy of emphasizing the group's identity. This tendency is particularly true of males who appear to be very keen to preserve their language and emphasize their tribal identity. The fact that tribalism plays a crucial role in political and social upgrading in Sudan may justify why men who are politically ambitious stick to their respective tribes in order to win their support in election or other political concerns. Table 2 gives the distribution of language use in the home domain by sex.



Table 2.

*Language use in the home domain by sex.*

Language	Male		Female		Total	
Arabic	628	67.96%	437	76.39%	1065	71.18%
Ama	102	11.03%	49	8.56%	151	10.09%
Dilling	18	1.94%	37	6.46%	55	3.67%
Gulfan	64	6.92%	9	1.57%	73	4.87%
Others	112	12.12%	40	6.99%	152	10.16%
Total	924	99.95	572	99.97%	1496	99.97%

Compared with males, Table 2 shows clearly that females are using more Arabic within the family context. 76.39% of the female respondents in our sample reported that they spoke Arabic primarily in the home domain. This means that only 23.4% (if you change the previous figure to 76.39, this has to be correspondingly changed to 23.61) of the females in the sample still use their ethnic languages within the home domain. The Table also shows that the use of ethnic languages in the home decreases consistently across the different groups. The highest rate of ethnic language use by females is as low as 8.56% by Ama women. The status of Arabic as the only lingua franca in the region as well as its dominance over all educational, economic, and other social settings must have played a significant role in the process of language shift experienced by women in the Nuba Mountains.

In predicting an individual's language choice (Arabic, the local language, or both) the habitual role relationship between participants in the communication event is a very important factor to consider. Other aspects of the situation such as the setting and purpose of the conversation may not be important (Gal 1978). Speakers always tend to emphasize their identities. While males tend to use a local language more often when interacting with interlocutors from the same ethnic group, females tend to use more Arabic for the same function. The use of Arabic predominantly in communicating with relatives appears to have been prevalent among young females who go to schools and universities. Some of the young women interviewed have indicated that avoid using their ethnic languages so as not to be offended by others. They believe that speaking a local language is associated with low social status. This tendency is quite common among vernacular speaking females in urban areas in Sudan, especially Khartoum, the capital city. Table 3 gives the distribution of language use with relatives.

Table 3.

*Language use with relatives according to sex.*

Language	Males		Females		Total	
Arabic	539	58.33%	388	67.83%	927	61.96%
Ama	122	13.20%	63	11.01%	185	12.36%
Dilling	33	3.57%	50	8.74%	83	5.54%
Gulfan	84	9.09%	16	2.79	100	6.68%
Others	146	15.80%	55	9.61%	201	13.43%
Total	924	99.99%	572	99.98%	1496	99.97%

It is clear from Table 3 that females use Arabic more than males in communicating with relatives. Males, on the other hand, tend to use their own ethnic languages more than females who use more Arabic. This pattern is consistent across the different groups except for Dilling, where women appear to have used the group's language more than their men. This may be due to the fact that Dilling women live in their own territories where they can use Dilling language in their daily communication. The Table also indicates that the highest rate of ethnic language use in this domain was found among those belonging to the groups categorized as others (over 33 different ethnic groups). In other words, a tiny minority of women in the sample tend to use the ethnic languages in their everyday interaction. We may assume that these groups use their own languages as a defensive strategy against assimilation in the dominant community. The fact that these groups constitute the smallest ethno linguistic communities may strengthen the need among them to emphasize their ethnic identity.

The analysis also shows that Gulfan women registered the lowest rate of ethnic language use within in-group communication. The difference between females and males in ethnic language use comes to 6.6% in favor of men. This suggests that Gulfan females are the most affected by the process of language shift towards Arabic. Following the claim that women are status conscious, we may assume

that Gulfan women have the strongest tendency to identify with Arabic language. Use of Arabic predominantly by females is expected to be more prevalent outside the home domain, where communication events involve people from different ethno linguistic backgrounds. Socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors must have shaped language usage pattern in this setting. Table 4 gives the distribution of language use outside the home domain by sex.

Table 4.

*Language use outside the home domain according to sex.*

Language	Male		Female		Total	
Arabic	814	88.09%	521	91.08%	1335	89.23%
Ama	37	4%	12	2.09%	49	3.27%
Dilling	11	1.19%	20	3.49%	31	2.07%
Gulfan	28	3.03%	3	0.52%	31	2.07%
Others	34	3.67%	16	2.79%	50	3.34%
Total	924	99.98%	572	99.97%	1496	99.98%

As demonstrated in Table 4, Arabic is the most dominant code outside the home domain among both sexes (88.09% of the males and 91.08% of the females). The difference between females and males in using Arabic is not significant, about 3% of women in favor of Arabic. This suggests that ethnic languages are still spoken in the neighborhood, street, schools, and workplaces by 11.91% of the males and 8.2% of the females. Another related observation is that which women in this particular context tend to use more Arabic and less vernaculars compared to men. The findings suggest that, with the exception of Dilling, males consistently surpass females in using ethnic languages outside the home domain. Only 20 Dilling females claimed that they used Dilling language outside the home context. This pattern of language use has been observed consistently among men in the streets and the neighborhoods throughout the town. If we put in mind the fact that most of these females belong to the first generation respondents (60 years and above), it will be logical to assume that they use the group's language to communicate with people of their age in the neighborhood, streets, markets, etc.

Table 5.

*Language use on social events according to gender.*

Language	Males		Females		Total	
Arabic	793	85.82%	524	91.60%	1317	88.03%
Ama	38	4.11%	14	2.44%	52	3.47%
Dilling	10	1.08%	11	1.92%	21	1.40%
Gulfan	32	3.46%	3	0.52%	35	2.33%
Others	51	5.51%	20	3.49%	71	4.74%
Total	924	99.98%	572	99.97%	1496	99.97%

In another domain, social occasion, as suggested by Table 5 above, females appear to have used Arabic more than males. Males, on the other hand, used vernaculars more than their female counterparts. This is consistent across the different groups except for Dilling, where females slightly surpassed men in using the ethnic language. The Table also shows that the biggest gender difference in terms of ethnic language use on social occasions is registered by Gulfan group, where males used their Gulfan language more than women. As Arabic is considered a prestigious language by many, its use predominantly in this domain may be interpreted as an attempt to claim high status on the women's part. Evidence of women claiming social status through use of language is widely documented in the literature. Women interviewed in New York and Norwich indicated that they used standard forms more than what they actually did (Holmes 2001). In the Sudanese context in general and the Nuba Mountains in particular, women used to lack social recognition, but as more educational and employment opportunities are open for women in recent decades, the need for social upgrading increases significantly. In this case, at least, some of them may try to achieve social upgrading by using Arabic, the most prestigious language at their disposal.

Again, the ethnic groups labeled as others have shown the highest rate of ethnic language loyalty. Although gender distinction in the use of ethnic language is pronounced, females and males in this particular group significantly surpassed the remainder (i.e., Ama, Dilling, and Gulfan) in using their own ethnic languages on social occasions. This is because, as mentioned previously, these people tend

to emphasize their ethnic identity by all means including using the ethnic languages in as many domains as possible.

As mentioned previously, the changing role of women (this change has affected all women in Sudan in recent two decades) in the Sudanese society has shaped their language choice significantly. Now, women's life possibilities do not depend only on marriage, but also on availability of jobs in the public or private sector (e.g., working in the market as a trader, food seller or tea maker). This situation enables women to have more opportunities to go beyond their traditional roles (as a mothers or daughters remaining at home), and get them actively involved in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical life. As Arabic is the only lingua franca in this very context, women's extensive exposure to the language is inevitable. Their success in the market economy depends largely on their proficiency in Arabic. That is, the more a woman is proficient in Arabic, the more the chances she has to benefit from in her work in the market or other settings where Arabic dominates everyday interaction.

## 6. Language attitudes

Language attitudes have been investigated by asking respondents about the language(s) they prefer to speak in different domains and that (those) they prefer for their children to learn. Table 6 summarizes language preference by gender.

Table 6.

*Language preference by gender.*

Language	Males		Females		Total	
Vernacular	265	28.67%	121	21.15%	386	25.80%
Arabic	557	60.28%	396	69.23%	953	63.7%
English	102	11.03%	55	9.61%	157	10.49%
Total	924	99.98%	572	99.99%	1496	99.99%

Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference in language preference between males and females in our sample population. Females tend to prefer more Arabic (69.23%) and less local languages (21.15%) than males. The table also shows that a similar percentage of men and women in the sample population agreed that English is very useful for their children. The visible presence of NGOs in the region providing good job opportunities for those with good command of English could be responsible for such an attitude. If we compare these figures with those about language used in the previous section, we may conclude that females value Arabic highly, therefore they are leading the process of shift towards it. Women's preference for Arabic is expected to extend to the language(s) they would like their children to learn. Table 7 below gives the distribution of language preference for children by sex.

Table 7.

*Language preference for children by sex.*

Language	Male		Female		Total	
Arabic	341	57.4%	253	70.67%	594	62.39%
Vernacular	202	34%	77	21.5%	279	29.3%
English	51	8.58%	28	7.82%	79	8.29%
Total	594	99.98%	358	99.99%	952	99.98%

Analysis of Table 7 reiterates the finding that females prefer Arabic more than males in the community under study. The crucial role of Arabic in people's everyday life seems to have inspired them that their children have to learn the language if they want to improve their living conditions. Being the only medium of education and a key to success in socioeconomic and sociopolitical life in Sudan, Arabic has further strengthened its position at the expense of other Sudanese languages. The analysis shows that more than 70% of the mothers and/or potential mothers have expressed their wish to see their children learn Arabic. Again, there is no significant difference between females and males in preferring (i.e., less than 1% in favor of men) English. If this is the case, we may expect that women would be very keen to use Arabic with their children. This tendency has been found stronger among women than men in the sample population. As women in Sudan have shown a growing interest in educating their children, one can expect Arabic to receive more attention as parents will ensure that their children pick up the language in order to lead a descent life in the future. In this respect, local languages will be

seriously threatened, because people may question the usefulness of their ethnic languages in their life and consequently lead children to desert the ethnic language.

## 7. Conclusion

Analysis of language status and use among ethnic languages-speaking women and males in Dilling, a city located in the Nuba Mountains, reveals that females in the city tend to use and prefer Arabic more than males. This may be the main reason behind the language shift towards Arabic they experienced. The study suggests that the growing role of women in the present Sudanese society could be the driving force behind the process of language shift. Women now go to schools and universities and have more job opportunities in the government institutions and the private sector. In all these settings Arabic is the only medium of communication and/or instruction.

Language choice and attitudes among male and female respondents in Dilling appear to have changed the language usage pattern. Young women do not tend to present themselves as speakers of local languages. Instead, they use Arabic intensively in all domains of communication. Education and job opportunities they get in both private and public sector requires extensive use of Arabic. The fear of being stigmatized when speaking a local language can be another factor influencing language shift among women in the city. Male respondents, on the other hand, used both codes, Arabic and local languages with varying degrees of frequency. Local languages would be employed whenever the need for marking group identity arises. Gal (1978) has presented evidence that women in Oberwart evaluate peasants' life associated with Hungarian language more negatively than men, and consequently reject the social identity of a peasant wife. Hungarian was rejected by women because it marked its speakers as peasants. Women in the village felt the need to embrace the new opportunities of industrial life associated with the German language.

This paper confirms Gal's (1978) argument that women's language choices and linguistic innovativeness in a given community reflects their greater role in social change. The linguistic pattern in which women are involved can be understood better by considering the social meanings of the languages at hand and the strategic choices and evaluation made by men and women regarding the ways of life symbolized by language (ibid: 15).

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