

# A study of language use and language attitudes of the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum, Sudan

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## Abstract

*The Nuer (aka Naadh and Naath), speaking the Nuer language, are estimated to be around 740,000 in South Sudan (1982) and about 1,160,398 in 1993. The war in South Sudan, which is due to the conflict that started in 2013, has already cost at least 50,000 lives and displaced nearly two million. It also short-circuited a rapprochement between Khartoum and Juba that was only a few months old. The area suffers a lot from this war. After a year, 109,000 refugees had fled to four camps in Maban County, South Sudan. Many others fled to other areas, among which is Khartoum, the capital of the Sudan. By focusing on language use at home, public domains and storytelling and on language attitudes, this pilot study aims at drawing a linguistic profile on the language behaviour of the Nuer immigrants in Khartoum. It also attempts to shed light on their awareness of the preservation of the Nuer language as means of individual and group identity in an Arabic-speaking community. The study is guided by two main questions: do the Nuer immigrants experience a change in their language behaviour and how this change; if it exists, would affect the maintenance of their language? The study is mainly of a quantitative nature, adopting the descriptive-analytical method. It is essentially based upon primary data that was collected mainly through questionnaires and interviews.*

Keywords: language behaviour, language use, language attitudes, language change, individual's and group's identity

## المستخلص

قُدِّر عدد متحدثي لغة النوير في جنوب السودان في عام 1982م بحوالي 740.000، وبحوالي 1,160,398 في عام 1993م. عانت الدولة الأمرين بسبب الحرب التي نشبت في عام 2013م والتي أدت إلى وفاة 50.000 ونزوح مليوني مواطن. وبعد عام من نشوب الحرب، كان هنالك حوالي 109.000 لاجئي في المعسكرات بمابان بدولة جنوب السودان، وكذلك في العديد من دول الجوار من بينها دولة السودان؛ الخرطوم. بتركيزها على الاستخدام اللغوي داخل المنزل وفي الأماكن العامة والقصص الشعبي وكذلك السلوك تجاه اللغة، عمدت الدراسة الحالية إلى دراسة السلوك اللغوي لمهاجري النوير بالخرطوم. وحاولت الدراسة إلقاء الضوء على وعي مهاجري النوير بضرورة الحفاظ على لغتهم بوصفها إحدى مكونات الهوية الفردية والجماعية في مجتمع تسود فيه اللغة العربية. تحاول الدراسة الإجابة عن السؤال التالي: هل يختبر مهاجري النوير بالخرطوم من تغَيُّر في سلوكهم اللغوي، وإلى أي مدى قد يؤثر ذلك- إن وُجد- على حفاظهم على لغتهم؟ ولطبيعة الدراسة النوعية، تبنّت المنهج الوصفي التحليلي وقامت على بيانات جُمعت بواسطة الاستبانة والمقابلات الشخصية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السلوك اللغوي، الاستخدام اللغوي، السلوك تجاه اللغة، التغَيُّر اللغوي، الهوية الفردية والجماعية

## 1. Background information on the Nuer

As mentioned, Nuer is a South Sudanese ethnic group who speak Nuer language. Nuer is a member of the Western Nilotic group of the Nilo-Saharan languages spoken in South Sudan and in western Ethiopia by about 800,000 people. The number of speakers in South Sudan was estimated around 740,000 in 1982 and 1,160,398 people in 1993 and their current population is estimated approximately as 500,000 of Sudan's total estimated population of 26 million<sup>(1)</sup>. Nuer language is widely spoken in the Great Upper Nile area; mainly at the Unity and Upper Nile states in South Sudan (Nashid 2014: 85). The Nuer, a tall and very dark people, are related to the Dinka, who live to their west, and their culture is very similar. The Nuer call themselves *Naath*, meaning "human beings". The Nuer, Dinka and Atwot (Atuot) are sometimes considered one ethnic group. Like many of his pastoral neighbors, a Nuer man's dearest possession is his cattle. Life depends on cattle and a Nuer will risk his life to defend them or to raid his neighbor's cattle. The Nuer worldview is built around the herds and prestige is measured by the quantity and quality of the cattle a man owns. Men and women take the names of their favorite oxen or cows and prefer to be greeted by their cattle names. While they do engage in agricultural pursuits, the care of cattle is the only labour they enjoy. It is said that conversation on virtually any subject will inevitably involve a discussion of cattle<sup>(2)</sup>.

Many linguists and anthropologists studied the Nuer language. The first description of the Nuer language, a grammar, was written by Crazzolara (1933). Evans-Pritchard (1940) published his ethnography on the Nuer, as well as his two other ethnographic works (1951, 1956). Kiggen (1948) published a dictionary, which contains a short grammatical description of Nuer. Welmers (1973) made a brief mention of the Nuer noun morphology. In 1996 an updated ethnography of the Nuer was published by Hutchinson including a liberal sprinkling of Nuer words. Huffman (1927, 1997) made a very small Nuer-English dictionary. The two missions among the Nuer [APM and the Verona Fathers] have a limited number of school-books printed in this language. The American Mission has six readers, one of which contains much folklore. An important study is conducted by Frank (1999). The significance of this study comes from that it is the first systematic collection and detailed description of Nuer nouns. Nashid conducted many studies on loan words in the Nuer language. In (2017) she studied the phonological adaptation of the Arabic loan words in the Nuer language, strategies of semantic changes (2024) is also covered, besides; number marking (2023) is investigated. It is clear that, there is no sociolinguistic study on the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum as far as I know. However, there are five studies on migrants' language behaviour and language attitudes at

<sup>(1)</sup> From: "Nuer." *Encyclopedia of World Cultures Supplement*, *Encyclopedia.com*. 4 Mar. 2018 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

<sup>(2)</sup> From: <http://strategyleader.org/profiles/nuer.html>

Khartoum which partially covered southern Sudanese migrants (for more details see Nashid 2014: 136-156). Miller and Abu-Manga (1992) investigated language change of migrants in *Takamul Quarter in Haj Yousif Khartoum North (Takamul Gharb)*. Mugaddam (2002) investigated the process of language shift and maintenance among minority groups in Khartoum. Idris (2007) examined the status and use of Arabic and other Sudanese languages in the Sudan. The survey was conducted among speakers of Darfurian languages in *Nyala* and southern Sudanese languages in Khartoum. Jabar al-Dār (2008) investigated the process of language shift at *al-Ingādh* area, south of Khartoum by examining language knowledge and language use. Jāhāllah (2012) studied language change of the ethnic groups living at *Māyo* town at Khartoum. As far as the migrants in Khartoum are mentioned, two of the three studies Miller and Abu-Manga (1992) and Idris (2007) agreed on that urbanization is among the factors which led to domination of Arabic language. Furthermore, all studies agree on that the minority groups in Khartoum witness a process of language shift to Arabic in varying degrees. In addition; Miller and Abu-Manga (1992), Mugaddam (2002), Idris (2007) and Jāhāllah (2012) have pointed out that southern Sudanese respondents in Khartoum have a stronger tendency to maintain their mother tongue as first language compared with other ethnic groups (Nashid 2014: 140).

The main reason of the recent immigration of South Sudanese people in general and Nuer in particular is the tribal-based conflict; therefore, the coming section will present a background information on this conflict.

## 2. South Sudan conflict 2018

The combustible situation stems most immediately from the fighting that broke out in South Sudan at the end of 2013 between forces loyal to President *Salva Kiir* and those associated with former Vice President *Riek Machar*, due to the failure to resolve longstanding disputes within the ruling party and the army. The war in South Sudan has already cost at least 50,000 dead and displaced nearly two million, short-circuited a rapprochement between Khartoum and Juba. (*Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflict* 2015: 3). After fighting erupted in Juba in December 2013, Dinka troops systematically killed many Nuer residents of the capital. This triggered Dinka-Nuer animosity across the country; fighting erupted in Unity state between Nuer and Dinka oil workers and then spread throughout the state (ibid: 10). Violence in the Unity began on 18 December, as Nuer oil workers killed their Dinka colleagues in retaliation for the Juba massacre.

The Sudan South-Sudan border hosts three peacekeeping missions: the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), operational only in Sudan; the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), operational in Abyei and the surrounding

border areas of both countries; and UNMISS, operational throughout South Sudan (*Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflict* 2015: 24). In addition to and alongside the military conflict, tremendous ethnic violence has taken place and will continue in the absence of credible mediation. Communal conflicts cannot be separated from the political one and will be difficult to resolve without addressing the conflict between the country's political and military leaderships<sup>(1)</sup>. The political and military figures demonstrate a willingness to be constructive participants in resolving the ethnic conflict, and Sudanese mediators play an important role in the resettling of the conflict between the two the parts. The outcome was the assignment of the peace agreement at Khartoum, August 5, 2018 between the South Sudanese president *Salva Kiir* and the former Vice President *Riek Machar*.

As mentioned, this war forces many of the Nuer people to flee their homeland for more secure areas. Sudan was among the chosen areas. This study addresses many issues resulted from this new migration, besides, it also seeks to find answers of many questions so as to gives insights into the language behaviour of the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum. Migration is among the alternatives of South Sudanese people. Thus, their key migration characteristics as mentioned in the *South Sudan: Country Profile* (2016: 1) can be summarized as follows:

- South Sudan is a major refugee producing country and ranks among the countries with the highest levels of conflict-induced population displacement globally.
- UNHCR estimates that nearly one in four South Sudanese citizens are displaced within its borders or to the neighbouring countries
- More than 930,000 South Sudanese are displaced in neighbouring countries (both pre and post December 2013), with the majority being hosted in Uganda (299,238) followed by Ethiopia (280,221), Sudan (246,809), Kenya (88,032), Democratic Republic of Congo (15,103), and Central Africa Republic (4,103) as of 7 August 2016.
- More than 1.61 million South Sudanese were displaced in various parts of the country as of 31 July 2016, of which 170,000 were sheltered in UN Protection of Civilians sites.
- South Sudan is also destination country for migrants, asylum seeker and refugees from neighbouring countries despite frequent conflict and instability that is affecting the country.
- There were a total of 259,796 refugees and asylum seekers in South Sudan as of July 2016 with the majority of refugees coming from Sudan and lesser numbers from Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Central African Republic.

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<sup>(1)</sup> *South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*: Africa Report N°217 | 10 April 2014

- The US Department of State's 2016 Trafficking in Persons report places South Sudan on Tier 3. According to the report, South Sudan is a source and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.

According to the above-mentioned information, Sudan hosts about 246,809 of the South Sudanese people and since 2016, their number increased. The number of the South Sudanese refugees in Sudan in 2018 is estimated as 677,000. This includes an anticipated 200,000 new arrivals across White Nile, South Kordofan, West Kordofan, East Darfur, South Darfur and North Darfur<sup>(1)</sup>. Unfortunately, the number of the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum is not mentioned but one can assume that they represent a considerable number of the South Sudanese immigrants at Khartoum since they are deeply affected by the mentioned conflict.

### 3. Methods

This pilot survey was conducted in Khartoum; Soba Sharag in the *Bright Future Centre for English Studies*, at April 2019. The main tools of data collection were questionnaire and interviews. The data is collected by the researcher and other five data collectors from 22 students and 4 teachers at the Centre. The interviews were conducted with two Nuer male immigrants. Respondents are mostly basic primary school's students and they are not quite literate, thus, the questionnaire was filled by the data collectors according to the answers given. Although it proved to be time consuming to explain each single question to each respondent, this way of structured interviews proved practical in eliciting information. The questionnaire aims at covering certain issues: demographic information, the respondents' and their family members' language use at home, public domains and folktales, and the respondents' language attitudes. Issues related to the Nuer's culture, ethnicity, and the maintenance of the Nuer language among the Nuer immigrants, migration, and the new South Sudanese war were also discussed and focused on in the interviews.

#### 3.1. The demographic characteristics of the respondents

The data was collected from pupils and their teachers at the *Bright Future Centre for English Studies*. They are all Nuer immigrants, their age ranged between 11-18 years old, 69.2% (18/26) of them are males and the remaining 30.8% (8/26) are female, they started to arrive at Khartoum since 2009 until now. They are all Christians, 73.1% (19/26) was born at South Sudan and the rest of them was born at the Sudan; namely Khartoum. The 4 Nuer teachers are males; their age ranged

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<sup>(1)</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-population-operational-update-south-sudanese-refugee-response-31-january-2018>

between 31-34 years old, Christians, and were born at South Sudan.

Table 1: The demographic characteristic of the informants

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	18	69.2
	Female	8	30.8
	Total	26	100
Age groups	11-15	17	64.4
	above 15	9	34.6
	Total	26	100
Religion	Christian	26	100
Place of birth	South Sudan	19	73.1
	Sudan	7	26.9
	Total	26	100
Level of education	Primary	22	84.3
	Secondary	3	11.5
	University	1	3.8
	Total	26	100
Ethnic origin-father tribe	Nuer	26	100
Ethnic origin-mother tribe	Nuer	26	100
Parents' job	Private	16	61.5
	Jobless	4	15.5
	Soldier	3	11.5
	Others	3	11.5
	Total	26	100

4. Data analysis and discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the respondents' language use, and attitudes. It also includes the findings on the Nuer immigrants' viewpoints on their identity, ethnicity, culture, and the maintenance of the Nuer language at Khartoum.

4. 1. Language use

This section presents the respondents' language acquisition and knowledge since they are directly related to language use. There is a tendency for people to use the language they know better. It also sheds light on the language use of the

respondents and their family members at home, public domains and folktales. Investigating language use is significant for the information it provides on the role played by language in people’s day-to-day communication. The study of the domains of language use provides a realistic picture of the role played by language in a society, i.e. the function of language. One can assume that the more a language is used, the greater its chance to be maintained.

Table 2: Respondents' language acquisition and knowledge

Item	Language	Frequency	percentage
Language acquired first	Nuer	26	100
Languages acquired after	Arabic	11	42.3
	English	4	15.4
	Arabic+ English	11	42.3
	Total	26	100
Languages known	Nuer+ Arabic	8	30.8
	Nuer +English	3	11.5
	Nuer+ Arabic +English	14	53.8
	Nuer+ Arabic +English +French	1	3.8
	Total	26	100

All the respondents acquire Nuer as their first language; besides, 42.3% acquire Arabic as a second language, and the same percentage acquires both Arabic and English. Thus, with the exception of 11.5% (3/26) who do not know Arabic language and 30% (8/26) who do not know English, either Arabic or English are the languages known by the rest of the respondents. This result is reflected in the language they use in different domains.

4.1.1. Language use at home

The study of language use by respondents and their family members at home is important. It may provide insights into language shift if it exists. In the situations of ongoing language shift, the home is the last domain in which the conflict between the spreading and receding languages is introduced. Therefore, language use at home becomes an important indicator of the current tendencies and direction of language shift. Language use at home is examined among four generations: younger brothers and sisters (children), elder brothers and sisters (youth), parents and grandparents (old).



The starting point will be the respondents' and their families' language use at home.

All respondents mentioned Nuer as the only language they use all the time at home, besides; about 19.2% mentioned their use of Arabic sometimes. About 92.3% of the respondents' younger brothers and sisters use Nuer language all the time at home, and the remaining 7.7% use Arabic. 96.2% of the respondents' elder brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, grandparents use Nuer language all the time at home, and the remaining 3.8% use Arabic. Thus, the Nuer respondents together with their family members show a high level of mother tongue (MT) use at home.

#### ***4.1.2. Language use at public domains***

The question on language use in public domains aims at identifying the languages used at work places, schools, streets, market places, and government offices. Nuer language is used by 46.2% of the respondents' family members all the time at the public places, besides; Arabic is used by 53.8%. The increasing use of Arabic at public domains is due to the influence of the Arabic speaking community where the respondents live. This result confirms the findings of most of the studies conducted on migrants in the Sudan where it is found that Arabic is the most dominant language at public domains. This may be due to that Arabic dominates all domains of communication in Khartoum.

#### ***4.1.3. Language use at folktales***

Folklore genres (folktales, songs, etc.) are the most resistant domain to language change. They are mostly performed in the MT, since they are verbal arts in which language is interwoven into their very fabric. A new language can be introduced to this domain if it is increasingly used in home domain. When this language reaches a high level of linguistic complexity to become part of the traditional verbal arts contexts it replaces ethnic language as the vehicle of the performance of verbal arts (Mahmud 1983: 104). About 96.2% of the children are told stories by Nuer, the remaining 3.1% by Arabic. This result indicates that Nuer language plays a significant role in carrying Nuer folklore and shows resistance to MT shift. However, Arabic language finds its way to the Nuer folklore genres.

#### ***4.1.2. Summary***

Language use is examined at home, public domains and in storytelling. Language use at home is examined across-generations: children, youth parents and grandparents. Monolingualism is the most dominant pattern of language use by respondents all the time at home. It transpires that, there is a high degree of MT



retention among Nuer ethnic group. Arabic is used by the respondents' family members at public domains.

Generally speaking, the findings on the Nuer respondents' language use at home, and folktales which indicate high MT use is different from the findings on the southern Sudanese migrants at Khartoum presented in the five studies. It appears that southern Sudanese migrants in Khartoum experience language change with varying degrees and language change is a step towards language shift. The common pattern of language use in most domains, for the majority of them, is ethnic language plus Arabic. This indicated that some functions of their ethnic languages were shifted to Arabic language, although this change varies according to each ethnic group in which some of the southern Sudanese ethnic groups appeared more affected by this change (*see* Nashid 2014: 155). The findings of the five of the studies on southern Sudanese migrants in Khartoum show that Arabic is known by the majority and is increasingly used by some ethnic groups. An exception is the Dinka who tend to use their language in all domains of use; except the younger who prefer to sing in Arabic as mentioned by Idris (2007). Moreover, most of the southern Sudanese migrants in Khartoum are bilingual in which one of the two languages is Arabic (Nashid 2014: 165).

#### **4.2. Language attitudes**

The study of language attitudes is a way to understand what a language means to a society as a means of their social belonging, pride, identity or unity. According to Baker (1992: 9), such a study provides an indicator of current community thoughts, beliefs, preferences, desires and social indicators of changing beliefs and chances of success in the policy implementation. Besides, the measurement of language attitudes provides useful information about the situation of languages or language varieties in a society.

About 69.2% of the respondents prefer to use Nuer, 15.4% Arabic, 3.8% English and the remaining 12.4% prefer the use a combination of Nuer, Arabic and English. The main reasons for their language preference are: being mother/native language (53.8%), job (7.7%), being easy (26.9%) and communication (11.5%).

About 73.1% of the respondents mentioned Nuer as the language they want their children to speak, 11.5% English, 3.8% Arabic and the remaining 11.5% prefer the three languages with different combination. Their children's language preference is due to being the mother/native language (73.1%), education (15.4%), job (3.8%) and communication (7.7%). One can assume that the awareness of the Nuer respondents about the importance of their language in construction of their ethnic identity is noticeable and reflected in the use and preference of their MT. Thus, they

prefer speaking Nuer for themselves and their children. Moreover, the respondents were given a number of statements where they asked to choose one of the three alternatives: agree, disagree or do not know. The aim is to get a deeper understanding about their viewpoints on their attitudes towards the learning of Nuer language, its promotion and maintenance. The following Table shows the respondents attitudes towards the Nuer language:

**Table 3: Respondents' attitudes towards the learning of Nuer language, its promotion and maintenance**

Item/Statement	Agree		Disagree		Total
	F	%	F	%	
I enjoy hearing Nuer language spoken.	26	100	0	0	26
We should work tirelessly to promote Nuer language.	23	88.5	3	11.5	26
I like speaking Nuer language.	24	92.3	2	7.7	26
Nuer is a language worth learning.	24	92.3	2	7.7	26
I would like to learn Nuer language if it were easy to learn.	19	84.1	7	26.9	26
If I don't speak Nuer language, I will not object to it.	13	50	13	50	26
I should be able to read Nuer books.	22	84.6	4	15.4	26
We should learn and use Nuer language in order to develop homeland.	23	88.5	3	11.5	26
It is not true to say Nuer language has no value in the modern world.	20	76.9	6	23.1	26
Knowledge of the Nuer language offers few job opportunities.	17	65.4	9	34.6	26
Nuer language is	22	86.6	4	15.4	26

essential to take part fully in national life in South Sudan.					
We owe it to our country and posterity to preserve the Nuer language.	25	96.9	1	3.8	26
Nuer language should be maintained because it is a symbol of the Nuer nationhood.	24	92.3	2	7.7	26
Being able to speak the Nuer language is an advantage in getting a job in the South Sudan.	22	86.6	4	15.4	26
Nuer Language is a bound up with our national culture.	24	92.3	2	7.7	26
Nuer language ought to be a medium of instruction, not just a subject in the timetable.	17	65.4	9	34.6	26

As shown in Table 3 above, the all respondents enjoy hearing Nuer language spoken, and like to speak it. They show their desire to have programs on its literacy because it is their means to: develop their homeland, gain better job opportunities, and to participate in the national life in South Sudan. This may indicate the respondents' tie with their homeland and that Sudan is a transitional place. The majority of the respondents show their desire that: Nuer language should be maintained, it ought to be a medium of instruction in education in South Sudan, not just a school subject because it is a symbol of the Nuer nationhood, it bounds up with their national culture, and to increase its value in the modern world. The promotion and maintenance of the Nuer language is the responsibility of South Sudan government. Table 4 below presents the respondents' attitudes towards their language.

Table 4: **Respondents' attitudes towards the Nuer language**

Item/Statement	Agree		Disagree		Total
	F	%	F	%	
Nuer language should not be forced on people.	19	73.1	7	26.9	26
Learning Nuer language is a waste of time.	3	11.5	23	88.5	26
Nuer language is difficult to learn.	10	38.5	16	61.5	26
There are more useful languages than Nuer language.	14	53.8	12	46.2	26
I don't want to learn the Nuer language.	9	34.6	17	65.4	26
There is no need to keep Nuer language for the sake of nationalism in South Sudan.	12	46.2	14	53.8	26
Nuer language shouldn't dominate the curriculum in South Sudan.	19	73.1	7	26.9	26
Nuer language is an asset but only dominated by politicians.	22	86.6	4	15.4	26
Nuer has no place in the South Sudan, Sudan and the modern world.	17	65.4	9	34.6	26
Nuer language is not much useful to anybody.	20	76.9	6	23.1	26
The learning of the Nuer language should be left to individual choice.	17	65.4	9	34.6	26
I speak Nuer language but I shouldn't mind if I didn't.	19	73.1	7	26.9	26

These statements are used to make more insights on the respondents' attitude towards their native language. The respondents emphasize that although they want to learn Nuer language, it should not be forced on people and it should be left to individual choice, it is not a waste of time because it is useful, besides, there is a need to keep Nuer language for the sake of nationalism in South Sudan.

The majority of the respondents are aware of that their native language is an asset but only dominated by politicians, Nuer language shouldn't dominate the curriculum in South Sudan, in addition, it has no place in the South Sudan, Sudan and the modern world. The following Table presents respondents' attitudes towards Arabic language. The aim of this part is to have future insights on the role Arabic language could have on the respondents' language behaviour, it also may show a language change if it exists.

Table 5: Respondents attitudes towards Arabic language

Item/Statement	Agree		Disagree		Total
	F	%	F	%	
I'd like to speak Arabic language.	20	76.9	6	23.1	26
It is good to be able to speak Arabic language to be able to communicate and make friends with the Sudanese people.	21	80.8	5	19.2	26
Arabic language is beautiful and easier than Nuer language.	13	50	13	50	26
It is important to know Arabic language since it is the language used by the top political leaders.	22	86.6	4	15.4	26
We need to know Arabic language to enjoy Sudanese music.	19	73.1	7	26.9	26
Arabic language should be taught all over South Sudan.	21	80.8	3	19.2	26
Nuer ought to speak Nuer language, not a foreign language like Arabic.	16	61.5	10	48.5	26
We should leave Arabic language to the Arabs.	10	48.5	16	61.5	26
One shouldn't learn Arabic language too early in life, in case one is lead to disregard Nuer, the national language.	13	50	13	50	26
It is wrong to teach Arabic language to our children while the Arabs don't teach the Nuer language to their children.	15	57.7	11	42.3	26
It is bad to use Arabic language when speaking with the Nuer people.	17	65.4	9	34.6	26

The reasons for positive attitudes towards Arabic language some respondents have is due to that it is beautiful, easy, and it is the language used by the top political leaders. They show their desire for Arabic language to be taught all over South Sudan and this is done at July 23, 2024 when a decision to have Arabic language syllabi in the South Sudanese curriculum is taken. They prefer to know Arabic language to: be able to communicate and make friends with the Sudanese people, and to enjoy Sudanese music. Besides, they emphasize the use of Nuer language when communicating with the Nuer people. For 57.7% of the respondents, Arabic language shouldn't be taught to the Nuer children since Arabs don't teach the Nuer language to their children. This may indicate that Arabic is preferred for pragmatic reasons, i.e. to maintain good relations with the Sudanese people and in intragroup communication in South Sudan. This result confirms the findings on the southern Sudanese migrants at Khartoum. Generally speaking, when compared with other Sudanese ethnic groups, southern Sudanese migrants showed a great tendency to

maintain their ethnic languages which serve as symbols of their ethnic identity, culture, origin and heritage (*see* Nashid 2014: 165).

### **4.3. Language and ethnicity**

This section focuses on the Nuer viewpoints on a number of issues: language in relation to Nuer culture, identity and ethnicity. It attempts to shed light on the way in which Nuer understand ethnicity, ethnic belonging, the categories and criteria have to be taken into account when talking about the Nuer ethnicity, the way they identify themselves, along with many issues.

To the interviewees, ethnicity is seen in a social group that has common traditions, culture, religion, colour (race), language, etc. Ethnically, they considered themselves as *South Sudanese*. The categories and criteria to be taken into account when talking about the Nuer ethnicity are for example: language, religion, colour (race) and tradition. Besides, there is no difference between being a Nuer in the past and now, although there is an influence by the other cultures. Previously, Nuer were the people a viding in their cultural laws, respecting them and making the scared. But now there is slight change in respecting the Nuer cultures due to the influence of the other cultures. They consider themselves a more conservative ethnic group compared with others because they know and respect their norms, customs, tradition, heritages and laws, and also they speak Nuer in order to preserve it for the coming generations.

Nuer culture to them means the way their rituals are made, the way they view things, justice, dance, give respect to the public and to the elders or youngsters. Thus, it should be preserved by different means such as to be used at the family's gatherings, social meetings, writing stories, history, laws, teaching it in the school and the church activities, that contributing in upholding and preserving the Nuer language and culture. Churches and community leaders should take the task of preserving Nuer culture so as to keep it for the coming generations. This could be achieved in the Sudan since the attitude of the central and local authority towards Nuer is really positive. They treat them peacefully which enable them to participate fully in the social life.

### **4.4. The maintenance of the Nuer language**

This section presents the interviewees viewpoints on the maintenance of the Nuer language. When they are asked to describe the present situation of the Nuer language either it is safe, dying, etc., they stated that it is not safe, it is in a danger because there are some adaptations taken place in Khartoum and Nuer kids do not speak the Nuer language fluently. The change of the kids' language behaviour could

be seen in different forms such as code mixing. That is why they should work hard to preserve the language. Thus, is it important to learn the Nuer language at Khartoum. The only bodies that concern with the preservation of the Nuer language, heritage, and culture at Khartoum are: church, authorities, communities, and the Nuer elders. The Nuer are conscious about the assumed danger of their language and they are trying to use the different means to maintain it.

## 5. Results

The present study focuses on language use of the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum, their attitudes towards their language and others languages and their awareness of the preservation of Nuer language as the means of individual's and group's identity. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Monolingualism in Nuer is the most dominant pattern of language use by respondents and their family members all the time at home and in folklore domain. This transpires that, there is a high degree of MT retention among them and Nuer language plays a significant role in carrying Nuer folklore and shows resistance to MT shift. Besides, Arabic is used by the respondents' family members at public domains.
- Moreover, about two-third of the respondents prefer to use Nuer and to be used by their children, the remaining one-third prefer Arabic, and English. The main reasons for language preference are: being mother/native language, job, being easy and communication. All respondents enjoy hearing Nuer language spoken, and like to speak it. They show their desire to have programs on its literacy because it is their means to: develop their homeland, gain better job opportunities, and to participate in the national life in South Sudan. Nuer language should be maintained, it ought to be a medium of instruction in education in South Sudan, not just a subject because it is a symbol of the Nuer nationhood, it bounds up with their national culture, and to increase its value in the modern world. The majority of the respondents emphasize that although they want to learn Nuer language, it should not be forced on people and it should be left to individual choice, it is not a waste of time because it is useful, besides, there is a need to keep Nuer language for the sake of nationalism in South Sudan.
- The reasons behind the positive attitudes few respondents have towards Arabic language are: it is beautiful, easy, and it is the language used by the top political leaders. However, they emphasize the importance of their mother tongue (MT). They show their desire for Arabic language to be taught all over South Sudan. Besides, they prefer to know Arabic language to: be able to communicate and make friends with the Sudanese people, and enjoy Sudanese music.



- The categories and criteria to be taken into account when talking about the Nuer ethnicity, according to the respondents, are: language, religion, colour (race) and tradition. They consider themselves a more conservative ethnic group compared with other groups because they know and respect their norms, customs, tradition, heritages and laws, and also they speak Nuer in order to preserve it for the coming generations. Adding to that, Nuer culture means to them the way their rituals are made, the way they view things, justice, dance, give respect to the public and to the elders or youngsters.
- While the promotion and maintenance of the Nuer language at Khartoum is the Nuer's own responsibility, its promotion and maintenance in the home origin is the South Sudan government's responsibility. Nuer should be preserved by different means such as to be used at the family's gatherings, social meetings, writing stories, history, laws, teaching it in the school and the church activities. Churches and community leaders should take the task of preserving Nuer culture so as to keep it for the coming generations. This could be achieved in the Sudan since the attitude of the central and local authority towards Nuer is really positive. They treat them peacefully which enable them to participate fully in the social life.
- Nuer language is not safe, it is in a danger because there are some adaptations taken place in Khartoum among the Nuer immigrants, adding to that, Nuer kids do not speak the Nuer language fluently. The change of the Nuer kids' language behaviour could be seen in different forms such as code mixing. That is why the Nuer immigrants should work hard to preserve their language. It is necessary to learn the Nuer language in Khartoum. The only bodies concern with the preservation of the Nuer language, heritage, and culture at Khartoum are: church, authorities, communities, and the Nuer elders.
- The awareness of the Nuer respondents about the importance of their language in construction of their ethnic identity is noticeable in their language behaviour. They are conscious about the assumed danger on their native language and they are trying to use the means to maintain it.

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on different issues related to the Nuer immigrants at Khartoum. They show a high degree of MT use in all domains which indicates MT retention. Besides, they emphasize the importance of preserving, using and transferring of the Nuer language to the coming generations, since it is the means of their individual's and group's identity. Thus, they will do their best to maintain it at Khartoum.

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