# One tribe, one language. Ethno-linguistic identity and language revitalization among the Laggorí in the Nuba Mountains

Stefano Manfredi

*Chapter 15*

# 'One Tribe, One Language'

## Ethnolinguistic Identity and Language Revitalization among the Laggorí in the Nuba Mountains

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This chapter aims to analyse the effects of language revitalization on the ethnolinguistic identity of a minority community living in the Nuba Mountains, the Laggorí. It deals with an intervention aimed at language revitalization by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and with the consequent dispute surrounding the affirmation of exclusive ethnic rights over the linguistic variety named Laggorí. Beyond this, the chapter describes the complexity of actors implicated in the process of ethnolinguistic identity building in the Nuba Mountains, drawing particular attention to the role played by Sudanese national language policy and by the system of Native Administration in South Kordofan.

The first part of the chapter introduces the sociohistorical background of the Laggorí. A short survey of bilingualism and language uses follows. After that, I focus on the modalities of language revitalization adopted by the SIL and on their political consequences in terms of tribal reshaping. Last, I analyse the changes that have occurred in the domain of ethnolinguistic identity and language attitudes as a consequence of language revitalization. The chapter argues that the link between language and ethnic identity among the Laggorí has been visibly strengthened by the SIL intervention and by the incoherent implementation of minority languages pursued by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).[2]

## Ethnicity, Language and Language Revitalization

Before examining the issue of ethnolinguistic identity and language revitalization among the Laggorí, it is necessary to introduce some of the basic concepts adopted in this chapter. The notion of 'ethnicity', and its relationship with language, is crucial. Broadly speaking, definitions of ethnicity have always been at variance over the role of objective and subjective factors (Liebkind 1999: 140). The first approach assumes that a given ethnic group can be defined according to objective criteria such as a common geographical context and the possession of a single set of customs, religion and language. According to this first perspective, ethnicity is ascribed and invariable and, consequently, people take it for granted. Running counter to this approach, the second approach stresses that ethnicity always depends on a certain degree of subjectivity given that individuals define ethnic membership on the basis of their empirical categorization. On this basis, ethnic identity has been defined as 'a sociopsychological variable which may not be at all conscious but one of which minorities are more often conscious than majorities' (Fishman 1999: 155). Departing from this theoretical dichotomy, one of the most influential models of ethnicity was outlined in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* by Fredrik Barth (1969). By focusing on the transactional nature of ethnicity, Barth embraced a predominately social interactionist perspective, arguing that ethnicity depends on two mutually interdependent processes, namely, the internal definition and the external categorization of ethnic boundaries.

The different standpoints in relation to ethnicity are evidently reproduced in interpretations regarding the link between language and ethnic identity. By and large, spoken languages are one of the most salient features of ethnically defined groups simply because people tend to identify with the other speakers of their own language. Consequently, it is generally claimed that ethnic identity is inextricably connected with language (Bourhis 1979). In contrast, some scholars (Appel and Muysken 1987: 15) deny any necessary link between language and ethnicity, arguing that there are more important factors that intervene in the determination of ethnic identity (i.e., racial generalization, political affiliation and class identity). In a sense, both of these interpretations are unsatisfactory as an explanation of the variations underlying the adoption of language as an ethnic marker. For his part, Barth argued that language may be optionally used as a marker of ethnic identity depending on processes of social interactions in conflict or cooperative social contexts. As I will show, the variable relevance of language in shaping the Laggorí ethnicity is perfectly in line with Barth's approach.



An additional aspect of this issue relates to the theoretical grounds of language revitalization. In recent decades, language revitalization has become a significant focus of concern because of the role played by language in expanding minority rights. Language revitalization aims to recover the use of languages that risk extinction because of the declining number of their native speakers. It often implies the development of a standard orthography to be adopted in specific education curricula. The outcomes of language revitalization vary greatly in relation to the motivations underlying the recovering intervention (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 17–19). In some instances, language revitalization directly emanates from the community's determination to promote its own language. In other cases, revitalization efforts originate from a top-down approach, as an external subject takes the initiative in recovering someone else's language by supposedly acting on the object's behalf. Given the potential link between ethnicity and language, both of these approaches to language revitalization may have strong repercussions on the ethnic identity of linguistic minorities. In this regard, I agree with Costa (2013), who argued that language revitalization is primarily a social phenomenon in which language is invested with particular ideological meaning, thereby redefining the terms of the contact between a minority group and a majority group language. Accordingly, if rights over the recovered language are limited by exclusive ethnic rights, language revitalization may lead to conflict sparked by the issue of access to the language. In this regard, the dispute that followed the standardization of the Laggorí language demonstrates that every revitalization intervention should take into account the power relationships between neighbouring linguistic communities in order to avoid the triggering or the aggravation of ethnolinguistic conflicts.

## Sociohistorical Background

### *The Laggorí and Their Language*

The Laggorí language (also referred to as Logorí or Liguri) is classified within the eastern Sudanic subgroup of the Nilo-Saharan family (Bender 2000: 47). Laggorí, together with the Shatt Damam of the southwestern Nuba Mountains, represents the eastern branch of the so-called Daju languages. There is broad agreement on the fact that the Daju moved from their homelands in Wadai (eastern Chad) after the rise of the Tunjur dynasty in the fifteenth century. They subsequently went through a sequence of displacements that led them to Dar Sila and eventually to Dar Fur and Kordofan (Henderson 1931: 51; Hillelson 1932: 59). With regard to the Lag-

gorí, it seems reasonable to think that they originated as an offshoot of the Daju of Logawa, with whom they share oral traditions about their western origins. We do not possess historical documentation describing the arrival of the Laggorí's ancestors in the Nuba Mountains. Nevertheless, when Baggara Arabs penetrated Kordofan at the end of the eighteenth century, they found Laggorí people already living in their current location in the northeast of Kadugli.

Laggorí is generally considered to be a dialect cluster including three different varieties that are respectively referred to as Laggorí, Soborí and Tillew (Tucker and Bryan 1956: 60; Thelwall 1981: 168; Thelwall and Schadeberg 1983: 220; Grimes 2000: 223). This subclassification is based on lexicostatistical comparisons that demonstrate a higher lexical affinity between the Laggorí dialects as compared with other Daju languages (MacDiarmid 1931: 201; Thelwall 1981: 170–71). This means that, in spite of the adoption of different glossonyms, the three dialects are mutually intelligible.[3] In this regard, it is important to underline that a common characteristic of Nuba groups is the use of the ethnonyms applied to them by Baggara Arabs. Unlike Arab groups, which are usually defined according to anthroponyms stemming from patrilineal filiation, the majority of Nuba ethnonyms originated from locality names. For the purposes of this chapter, it is interesting that Nuba toponyms and ethnonyms are also used to refer to languages regardless of the fact that neighbouring communities may speak dialects of the same language (R. Stevenson 1956–57: 98, 101). Thus, different glossonyms may not reflect an effective linguistic differentiation. Moreover, the correspondence between toponyms and ethnonyms demonstrates that in the Nuba Mountains the basic factor in determining ethnic boundaries is not language, but locality (Jakobi 1991: 156–57).

The ethnonym 'Laggorí' is derived from an Arabic distortion of the syntagm *lág k-kòrí*, which literally means 'Kòrí's house'.[4] Arabs originally applied this name to the hill inhabited by the Laggorí (*jebel laggorí*). The term has subsequently expanded its semantic reference, and it is nowadays used to indicate both the Laggorí people and their language. According to my informants, the Laggorí formerly used to refer to themselves as *èggá t-bá*, which literally means 'the people of the house'. This earlier ethnonym clearly denotes kinship solidarity rather than a specific geographical origin. In spite of this, the adoption of the ethnonym 'Laggorí' was decisively encouraged by the British colonial administration, which adopted it in the process of establishing tribal borders in the southwestern Nuba Mountains. The acceptance of the new ethnonym eventually contributed to the shaping of a new autochthonous basis of identification for the Laggorí and to the severing of their historical links with outsider



For the purposes of this chapter, it is also necessary to take into account the reasons for the differentiation between the Laggorí and the Soborí. Laggorí people generally have a negative attitude towards the Soborí and their language. This state of affairs dates from the Turkiyya period (1821–81), when the Laggorí were used to control a slave camp located on the slopes of today's Soborí hill. The Soborí, in fact, are thought to be the descendants of slaves captured from different Nuba groups who intermarried with Laggorí after the end of the system of ṣlavery. According to my Laggorí informants, the ethnonym 'Soborí' is related to the Arabic expression *ṣobor-o*, meaning 'they remained', in reference to the former slaves who settled in that area. In addition to the stigmatization related to their status as former slaves, Laggorí people argue that the mixed origins of the Soborí represent the main cause of the linguistic differentiation between the two groups. In reality, even if it is generally accepted that Laggorí and Soborí constitute two different dialects, the linguistic data for determining the degree of linguistic divergence between the two varieties are still scant. Nevertheless, Laggorí people tend to stress the originality of their language as compared with Soborí and Tillew, and to claim a prominent position within the Laggorí dialect cluster. This state of affairs evidently contributed to the rise of the ethnolinguistic dispute that followed the adoption of the glossonym 'Laggorí' for referring to the language targeted by the SIL revitalization intervention.

## *Settlement Processes*

At the turn of the twentieth century, a significant majority of the Laggorí community was found on the ridges of today's Laggorí hill. A minority group was located on the Tokswana hill, approximately five kilometres north of Laggorí. Most of them practiced a system of intensive hill cultivation with a limited involvement in the rearing of livestock. This situation gradually changed from 1930, when Nuba groups were forced by the British administration to descend from their hills to the surrounding plains (Manger 1994: 18). Even if many Laggorí remained on their hill until as late as Sudanese independence (i.e., 1956), the majority gradually moved to a nearby plateau and formed the village of Laggorí-Umm Bres. This downward movement resulted in a shift from traditional hill cultivation to a more extensive kind of agriculture. The diffusion of cotton in the Nuba Mountains required larger field cultivation for commercial production. As a result, many Laggorí moved to neighbouring localities such as Tarai, Dorot and Daldakó, where they started to enjoy close relations with Baggara Arabs.

The Laggorí have been highly affected by forced urbanization since the beginning of the civil war in 1987. The first massive urbanization expe-

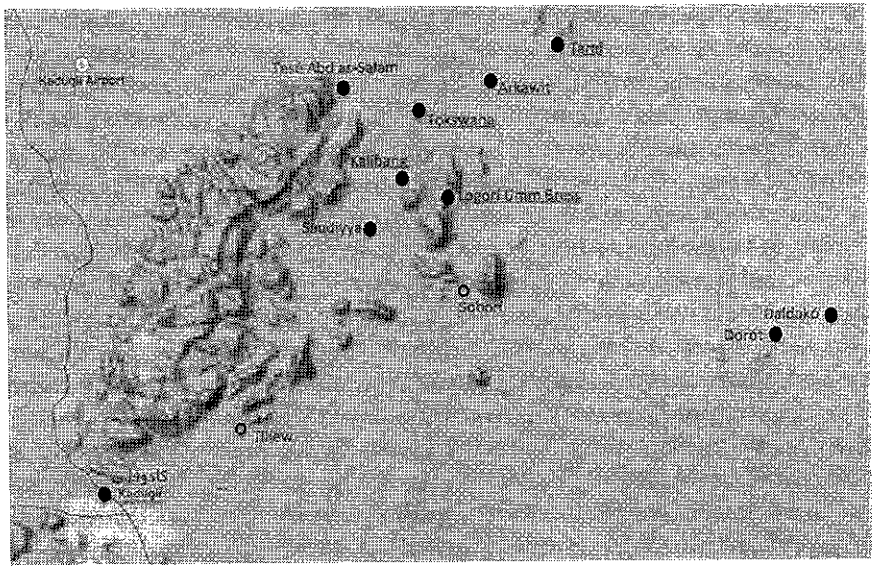


*Figure 15.1.* Map of Laggorí Settlements
• Kadugli: Localities touched by the fieldwork
• Sa'udiyya: Localities with a presence of ethnically defined Laggorí
◦ Tillew: Other localities

rienced by Laggorí people began in 1991, when many of them settled in Kadugli (mainly in the quarter of Ḥajar al-Makk). The outbreak of war also forced many Laggorí to move to northern Sudan. Indeed, a significant proportion of the ethnically defined Laggorí currently reside in Khartoum (mainly in the quarters of Umbadda and in Ḥājj Yūsif) and in other northern Sudanese urban centres (Wadi Ḥalfa, Atbara, Wad Medani and Kosti). It should be recalled that after the signing of the CPA in 2005, internally displaced people, of whom Nuba groups living in northern Sudan represented an important number, were allowed to go back to their homelands. Thus, many Laggorí started to move back to the Nuba Mountains in 2006 to constitute sizeable returnee communities in Arkawit and Kalibang. This situation dramatically changed with the eruption of a new armed conflict after the referendum in 2011.

## *The Dynamics of Arabization among the Laggorí*

Despite the fact that the Laggorí have remained culturally distinct from Arabs, they are characterized by a relatively high degree of Arabization when compared with other Nuba groups. In this regard, it should be stated that the linguistic Arabization of the Laggorí worked independently from



their Islamization. The Laggorí started to acquire a form of Arabic from their first contacts with the Baggara Arabs at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, they did not begin to Islamize until the installation of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. The socioeconomic relations with Rawāwga Arabs (a section of the Ḥawāzma tribe) represented the most important cause of the Arabization of the Laggorí. It is well-known that under Turkish rule Baggara Arabs systematically engaged in slave-raiding expeditions in the Nuba Mountains. Nevertheless, Nuba-Baggara relations also depended on economic patterns, namely, on the marked complementarity between the sedentary and the nomadic modes of production.

The Laggorí traditionally rely on rain-fed cultivation of cereals, whereas Baggara Arabs are basically cattle nomads. In their first phase, the economic relations between the Laggorí and Baggara Arabs consisted of the exchange of sorghum for animal products. Similar to the situation described by Haaland (1969) with reference to the Fur, the need for economic differentiation eventually led some Laggorí to become engaged in livestock raising and to establish themselves in Baggara nomads' camps. At the same time, the most economically marginal Rawāwga nomads gradually settled in Tarai and Tokswana and became sedentary farmers alongside the Laggorí people. More recently, the introduction of extensive cotton cropping intensified the links between Nuba groups and Baggara Arabs, mainly because of the interethnic managing of cultivation (Saavedra 1998: 241). With regard to the Laggorí, it is interesting to note that this collaborative mode of production brought about a balanced pattern of bilingualism in which they rapidly incremented the use of Arabic, while Baggara children started to acquire Laggorí as a second language (Manfredi 2013: 466).

The strong economic relations between the Laggorí and Baggara Arabs came to an end with the beginning of the civil war in 1987. The ethnicization of the conflict pursued by both the Inqādh government and the SPLM drove a profound wedge between the Nuba groups and the Arabs. Nonetheless, the interruption of the relations between the Laggorí and Baggara Arabs did not result in a decrease in Arabization. The evidence indicates that, following urbanization, the Laggorí became more exposed to institutional Arabization as a consequence of the spread of formal education.

## *Establishing Tribal Structures*

In this section, I briefly describe the evolution of the Laggorí tribal organization, as it represents an important element for understanding the political consequences of language revitalization. Prior to British colonial

rule, the Laggorí did not possess a centralized tribal structure; they were an assembly of self-reliant households that could barely claim to comprise a collective political organization. In 1921, the British introduced a Native Administration policy aimed at installing tribal leaders in the three hierarchically related positions of *nāẓir*,[5] *'omda* (*makk* for certain Nuba groups) and sheikh in order to facilitate tax collecting (A. Ibrahim 1985: 30–31). Administrative devolution to Arab tribes generally conformed to preexisting agnatic structures, whereas the definition of Nuba tribal entities depended on geographical proximity. On this basis, the Laggorí were subdivided into fourteen *mashāikha* under the leadership of the *makk* of Kadugli. This situation endured until 1969, when under Nimeiri's rule the Native Administration system was abolished.

In 1995, the Inqādh government reintroduced the Native Administration system, and this led to a new tribal configuration for the Laggorí. In consideration of their demographic expansion, the Laggorí formed a new *'omodiya* within the *amāra* of Eastern Kadugli, which also included the Soborí, the Tillew, the Keiga, the Timoró and the Damík. Thus, in line with the British model of Native Administration, Nuba tribal boundaries were not traced according to the criterion of a common ethnolinguistic background inasmuch as they were determined by geographical proximity. Indeed, the administrative boundaries of Nuba groups started to have conventional ethnic connotations only after the end of the second Sudanese civil war. As I will explain, the tribal conferences that anticipated the codification of the regional constitution of South Kordofan established a direct correlation between tribal membership and sociocultural setting. Against this background, access to an ethnically defined language became a strong argument for affirming the aspirations to self-determination of many Nuba groups.

## The Sociolinguistic Situation of the Laggorí

### *The Sample*

We do not possess reliable data on the number of Laggorí speakers, although UNESCO (2009) considers Laggorí to be a 'critically endangered language'.[6] In the following section, I do not attempt to quantify the number of Laggorí speakers inasmuch as I draw an overview of the Laggorí sociolinguistic situation based on a statistical survey on bilingualism and language uses. The quantitative data are primarily intended to give information about the present-day linguistic vitality of Laggorí. Previous statistical information[7] will also allow me to examine the degree of linguistic regression diachronically.



The sample, which was conducted using questionnaires, consisted of 587 individuals with annotations on gender, age, ethnic affiliation, residence, literacy, first language, second language and patterns of language use. The sample was selected based on the function of the opposition between urban and rural contexts. This choice was justified by the assumption that urbanization in Sudan often encourages the acquisition of Arabic, whereas rural environments are generally less affected by linguistic normalization. On this basis, I investigated both urbanized Laggorí in Kadugli and rural communities in Laggorí-Umm Bres, Tokswana and Tarai. In addition, I surveyed the two returnee communities of Arkawit and Kalibang. Children under five years of age were not included in the survey. The surveyed sample was organized into five age groups (5–15, 16–30, 31–45, 46–60 and >60 years). With regard to the literacy variable, almost 70 per cent of my sample claimed to be able to read and write in Arabic. This demonstrates that Laggorí have a fairly high degree of literacy compared with other Nuba and Arab groups of the region (H. Bell 1976: 13; Casciarri and Manfredi 2009). Table 15.1 summarizes the composition of the sample according to the gender, age, literacy and residence variables.

***Table 15.1.*** Composition of the Sample Group

| | | Individuals | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Men | 307 | 52.2 |
| | Women | 280 | 48.8 |
| Age | 5–15 | 185 | 31.5 |
| | 16–30 | 192 | 32.7 |
| | 31–45 | 135 | 22.9 |
| | 46–60 | 50 | 8.6 |
| | >60 | 25 | 4.3 |
| Literacy | Literate | 415 | 70.6 |
| | Illiterate | 172 | 29.4 |
| Residence | Urban | 243 | 41.4 |
| | Rural | 170 | 28.9 |
| | Returnee | 174 | 29.6 |

Note: Respondents numbered 587 in 89 households (a ratio of 6.6 per household).

### *Bilingualism and Ethnic Membership*

Statistical data drawn from questionnaires on bilingualism cannot realistically reflect the sociolinguistic situation of a given community, as they depend on the subjective views of the respondent in determining an ar-

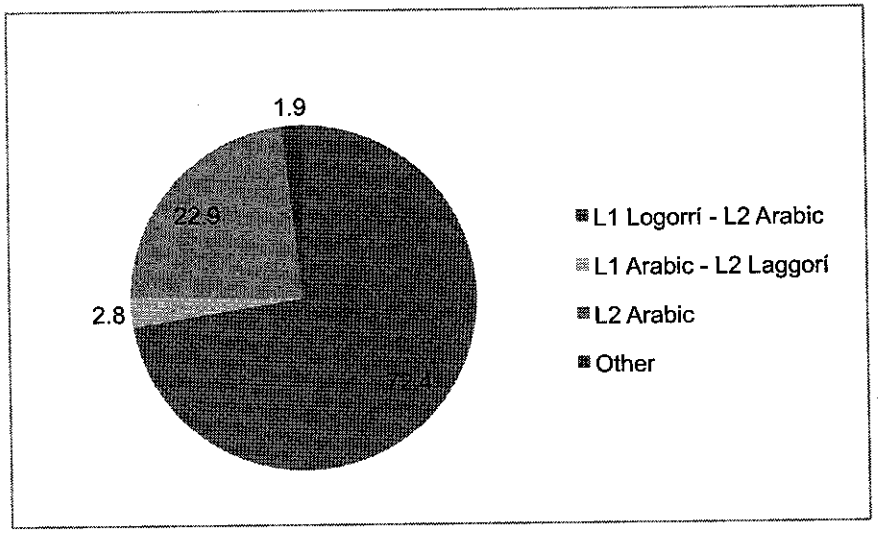


*Figure 15.2.* Laggorí/Arabic Patterns of Bilingualism

bitrary cutoff point between the first and second languages. Nonetheless, some important trends can be observed.

The Laggorí can be considered a bilingual community in the course of assimilation, where Arabic is passing from the status of a second language to that of the main native language. On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of my sample (425 individuals, 72.4 per cent) claimed to have acquired Laggorí as a first language and to speak Arabic as a second language. On the other hand, there are no longer any Laggorí monolingual speakers. Arabic monolinguals represented almost a quarter of the sample (135 individuals, 22.9 per cent), whereas only 2.8 per cent (17 individuals) declared that they had acquired Laggorí as a second language. Furthermore, despite the fact that the majority of the respondents claimed to be able to speak Laggorí, a tendency towards language abandonment clearly exists. However, the acquisition of Arabic as a first language does not result in the abandoning of the Laggorí ethnic identity. In fact, all of the respondents claimed to be ethnically defined as Laggorí, or more generally as Nuba.

In diachronic terms, we can note that 87.8 per cent of Bell's sample acquired Laggorí as a native language, compared with 7.8 per cent who claimed to have learned Arabic (H. Bell 1976: 3). This means that, independently from the differences between the two surveys, a noticeable decrease in the acquisition of Laggorí has occurred during the last thirty-five years. If we examine the present-day composition of Arabic monolinguals, we can better understand the causes of the regression of the Laggorí language.



*Table 15.2.* Detailed Information about Arabic Monolinguals

| | | Individuals | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Men | 77 | 57% |
| | Women | 58 | 43% |
| Age | 5–15 | 104 | 77% |
| | 16–30 | 28 | 20.80% |
| | 31–45 | 2 | 2.20% |
| | 46–60 | 0 | 0% |
| | >60 | 0 | 0% |
| Literacy | Literate | 119 | 88.20% |
| | Illiterate | 16 | 11.80% |
| Residence | Urban | 75 | 55.60% |
| | Rural | 16 | 11.80% |
| | Returnee | 44 | 32.60% |

Note: Arabic monolinguals consisted of 135 respondents.

The most striking point is that almost all of the respondents who are not able to speak Laggorí are less than thirty years old (104 + 28 = 132 individuals, 97.8 per cent). This figure can be easily interpreted in light of the changes that accompanied the beginning of the second Sudanese civil war, the most important of which was forced urbanization. Currently, 55.6 per cent of Arabic monolingual respondents reside in Kadugli, in contrast to only 11.8 per cent who live in rural villages. The trend towards language abandonment by urban groups is also confirmed by data about returnees, who constitute almost one-third of the Arabic monolinguals (44 individuals, 32.6 per cent). Urbanization also induces an increase in literacy that in turn encourages a higher level of exposure to the official language. As a reflection of this trend, only sixteen Arabic monolingual (11.8 per cent) speakers are illiterate. Furthermore, we can observe that language regression is less evident among women (58 individuals, 43 per cent).

An additional remark relates to the respondents who declared that they had acquired a language different from both Laggorí and Arabic. From a general point of view, Laggorí people rarely acquire other local languages mainly because of their endogamous marriage strategies. The few respondents (11 individuals, 1.6 per cent) who declared that they had learned a local language other than Laggorí were children born in two mixed marriages between Laggorí men and outsider women. Five respondents declared that they spoke Dilling and Arabic. More interestingly for the purposes of this study, the remaining six respondents affirmed that they had acquired Soborí as their mother tongue and Laggorí as a second language.

Arabic, for its part, was reported as a third language. This could mean that these respondents recognized a linguistic difference between Soborí and Laggorí to such an extent that they judged them to be two distinct languages. However, if we consider that Laggorí and Soborí are mutually intelligible, the stigmatization of a linguistic distinction between the two varieties may be a more plausible explanation for the use of different glossonyms for referring to similar linguistic varieties.

### *Language Uses*

In this section I focus on the language uses of bilingual respondents who acquired Laggorí as a native language. First, I limited the inquiry to the domestic domain, mainly because the Laggorí always adopt Arabic for their interethnic relations. Second, given that linguistic uses in the domestic domain significantly affect language acquisition, I intended to evaluate the possible gap between the degree of acquisition of Laggorí and its actual use.

As a matter of fact, of a total of 425 respondents who acquired Laggorí as their first language, only 57 individuals (13.5 per cent) claimed to speak it at home. Unlike the acquisition of Arabic as a first language, the gender variable is not relevant for understanding the decrease in the use of Laggorí. In contrast, language uses are highly influenced by both the respondent's place of residence and his or her age.

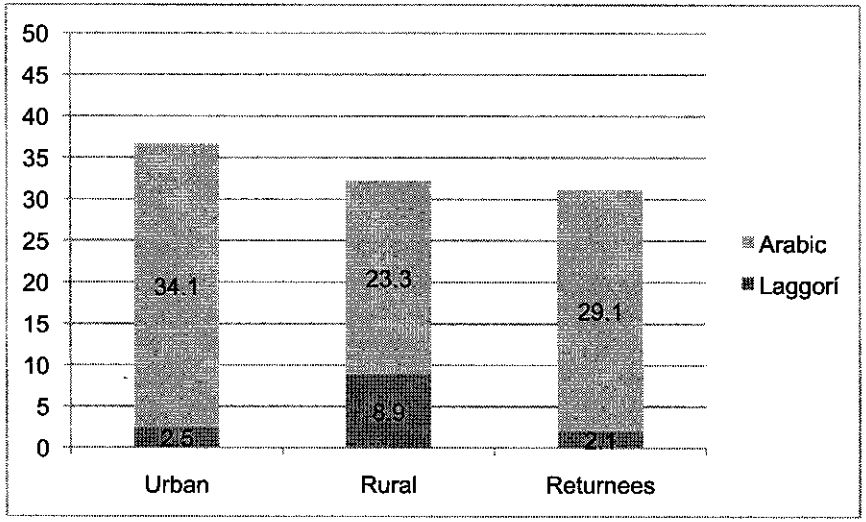


***Figure 15.3.*** Language Uses According to Type of Residence



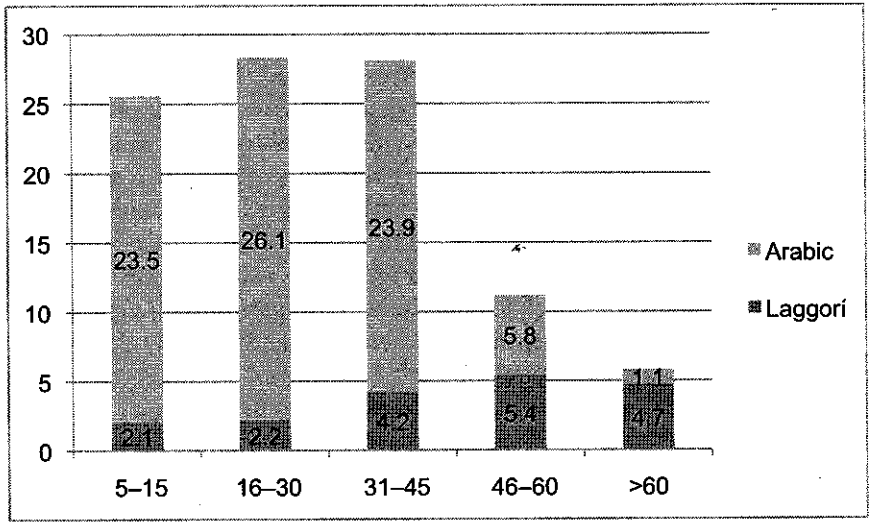


***Figure 15.4.*** Language Uses According to Age

If we consider the residence variable, we find that only a minority of the rural respondents (51 individuals, 8.9 per cent) showed an appreciable use of the Laggorí language. Urban and rural returnee respondents, for their part, virtually spoke only Arabic at home. As regards the age parameter, it is not surprising to find that the largest proportion of the respondents who declared that they speak Laggorí at home were more than forty-five years old. Nevertheless, in light of the larger quantitative representation of the class aged thirty-one to forty-five, a relatively important part of middle-aged respondents still use Laggorí for domestic communication. Respondents under the age of thirty-one, for their part, are characterized by a critically low use of Laggorí. It should be remarked that H. Bell (1976: 9) already stated that there was some evidence that Laggorí was declining in 1976. However, if we consider the relatively high number of Laggorí who still claim to have acquired Laggorí as a first language, it seems that the adoption of Arabic for domestic communication is a relatively new phenomenon that is now posing a serious risk to language transmission.[8]

## Language Revitalization and Tribal Reshaping

### *The SIL Intervention and the Linguistic Dispute with the Soborí*

The SIL is one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the field of language development and revitalization. Founded in 1934 in the United

States, the SIL promotes a faith-based approach to language revitalization. Officially, 'the SIL's service is founded on the principle that communities should be able to pursue their social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual goals without sacrificing their God-given ethnolinguistic identity'.[9] Despite the benevolent intent of its initiative in revitalizing minority languages around the world, the SIL's approach to language diversity and language revitalization has been the subject of severe criticism (Calvet 1987; Errington 2004).

In 1993, the Laggorí language was included by the SIL in its Programme of Local Languages Development in Sudan (*barnāmaj li-taṭwīr al-luġāt al-maḥalliya fi al-sūdān*). This project aimed to provide courses in descriptive linguistics to native speakers of almost thirty minority languages spoken in Sudan and to involve them in the development of their own standard languages. At the time, Arabic was the only official language of Sudan; even so, the SIL project was intended to produce didactic materials for teaching minority languages in primary schools. It should be noted that, despite the direct involvement of native speakers, the SIL's intervention also had largely ineffectual aspects. First, the SIL's approach to language revitalization was mediated exclusively through the standardization of written languages. This meant that, contrary to what it is generally considered an indispensable condition for sustainable language development (see Fishman 1991), the SIL did not encourage the oral use of local languages, but rather encouraged their institutional recognition by means of formal education. Second, all of the native speakers involved in the project were internally displaced people residing in Khartoum. Thus, the SIL did not permit the wider linguistic community to share in the modalities of the standardization of their own language.

As regards the Laggorí language, the SIL started to work with four educated native speakers, two of whom were from the Soborí tribe. Thus, at the beginning of the project there was real collaboration between Laggorí and Soborí individuals for the development of a common standard language. This cooperative situation changed in consequence of the formal adoption of the glossonym 'Laggorí' to refer to the new standardized language. In 1997, the Soborí members of the project explicitly asked for a broader label that would reflect the multiplicity of the Laggorí ethnolinguistic communities. The Laggorí, for their part, rejected the appeal and started to organize teacher training workshops on the 'Laggorí' language. In an attempt to hinder a possible institutionalization of an exclusive ethnic label for the standard language, the Soborí members of the project finally called for a response from their tribal leaders.

At that point, the central government took advantage of the mounting ethnolinguistic dispute and imposed a new tribal organization under a politicized and co-opted leadership. In 1998, with the pretext of unifying the Laggorí, Soborí and Tillew languages on the basis of their common linguistic background, the government established the new *amāra* of Umm Mulewwiye.[10] This new tribal entity also included the linguistically unrelated Tesé-Umm Danab, who were at the time engaged in a conflict over land with their Laggorí neighbours. In 2000, the Umm Mulewwiye leaders organized a summit in Khartoum, where they finally decided to prohibit the use of the glossonym 'Laggorí' in reference to the new written language. In response to this decision, the Laggorí members of the project turned to an administrative tribunal in an attempt to validate their choice of the ethnonym. During the case, the SIL played an active role in supporting the 'Laggorí' ethnic label on the basis of British colonial documentation, but the court finally decided to resolve the dispute by the adoption of the earlier glossonym *ŋákà t-ba*, meaning 'the language of the house'.



Following the court decision, the process of language revitalization came to a standstill. By this time, the SIL had already published education textbooks bearing the glossonym 'Laggorí'. Notwithstanding this, the absence of trained teachers precluded the implementation of a bilingual curriculum in the SPLM primary school of Kalibang. This state of affairs has in some ways deadened the ethnolinguistic attrition between the Laggorí and the Soborí. Afterwards, the establishment of an independent Laggorí tribal conference rekindled the debate concerning the affirmation of ethnic rights to the language.

## *'One Tribe, One Language': The Affirmation of Exclusive Ethnic Rights to the Laggorí Language*

Following the signing of the CPA in 2005, Sudan passed from a prohibitive policy of Arabization to a permissive policy of multilingualism. According to the CPA, Arabic and English were the official languages of the former unified Sudan, whereas the other 'indigenous' languages were categorized as national languages (Miller 2009: 28). The CPA also inaugurated a promotion-oriented language policy according to which any Sudanese language might be used at the subnational levels of government and in education (Abdelhay 2008: 226, 2010a: 28). In line with the federal reform of Sudan, regional governments were then supposed to recognize the constitutional status of each 'indigenous' language.

In December 2002, in anticipation of the imminent peace agreements, the Nuba branch of the SPLM organized the All-Nuba Conference in Kawda. This conference was primarily intended to prepare the Nuba communities for the oncoming federal reform of Sudan and to propose new political strategies for local representation. It finally suggested the orga-

nization of single tribal conferences to report the different administrative and sociocultural claims of Nuba groups to the Ministry of Regional Affairs of South Kordofan. By this time, several groups were already in possession of a standardized language because of the intervention of external actors such as the SIL. Subsequently, the use of local languages in primary education became a basic demand of many Nuba conferences.

The Laggorí political leaders inaugurated their own tribal conference in May 2005. The establishment of a separate Laggorí conference was primarily aimed at affirming an independent tribal status within the future Native Administration system of South Kordofan. On this basis, the pronouncement of sociocultural claims was part of a larger political endeavour to achieve autonomy and jurisdiction over the tribal organization. With regard to language, the conference explicitly advocated the right to use the 'local language' (*luġa maḥaliya* in Arabic) for traditional ceremonies and primary education. Even if the tribal statute did not directly mention the 'Laggorí' language, the exclusion of Soborí and Tillew from the consultations determined the definitive affirmation of exclusive ethnic rights to the local language. Two months later, the first tribal conference of Umm Mulewwiye was instituted. The conference was basically intended to discredit the autonomous aspirations of the Laggorí and to formalize the existence of the new tribal ensemble. As a result, all of the Laggorí boycotted the Umm Mulewwiye summit, even though the Umm Mulewwiye conference did not ask for specific linguistic rights.

When I finished my fieldwork in January 2009, the drafting of the regional constitution of South Kordofan was still underway. I was not then able to analyse the administrative resolution that followed the proclamation of two contradictory tribal statutes. However, it is clear that during the CPA the absence of common criteria for determining the representation range of the single Nuba conferences favoured the triggering of conflicts between neighbouring communities.

## Ethnolinguistic Identity and Language Attitudes

### *Variation in Ethnolinguistic Identity*

The following paragraph is based on the analysis of qualitative interviews that aimed to assess the relationship between language and ethnic identity among the Laggorí. The interviews also investigated language attitudes to better understand the quantitative data concerning Laggorí/Arabic bilingualism. As already remarked, the decline of Laggorí as a native language did not result in a decrease in Laggorí ethnic identity. This state of affairs evidently shows the incongruence between linguistic and ethnic identity.



In spite of this, language has recently become an important factor for the definition of the Laggorí ethnicity.

The Laggorí living in their home territory (i.e., Laggorí-Umm Bres, Tokswana and Tarai) are to an extent aware of the fact that their ethnic identity is directly related to the early establishment of tribal borders imposed by the British. Most of my rural informants, in fact, grounded their Laggorí ethnic membership on the fact that their ancestors resided within the territory assigned to the Laggorí by the British administration. It is true that attachment to a specific territory is a common characteristic of ethnically defined groups, but the Laggorí heavily strengthened this tendency following the 2005 tribal conference in which they reaffirmed their hereditary rights to the tribal territory. Rural middle-aged male informants claimed that the Laggorí ethnic identity is also linked to the individual's patrilineal filiation. Thus, in the face of the former tradition of matrilineality, the acquisition of the Islamic patrilineal inheritance had important consequences for the identity of Laggorí men. In this regard, it is interesting to note that some informants interpreted the ethnonym 'Laggorí' in light of a supposed patrilineal descendent group having reference to a common agnatic ancestor known as Kòrí.

In this overall situation, the adoption of language as a marker of Laggorí ethnicity seems to be a relatively new phenomenon limited to a highly educated segment of the community. Even if the Laggorí always stressed the originality of their language in comparison with Soborí, there was not an exclusive connection between the language and its speaker's identity. Contrary to this general outlook, several educated young and middle-aged informants overtly claimed that if an individual is unable to speak Laggorí, he or she could not be considered a member of the Laggorí. The fact that Arabic monolinguals also affirmed that knowledge of the local language is an indispensable prerequisite of Laggorí ethnic membership suggests that this opinion is somewhat ideological and that it does not correlate to a preexisting link between language and Laggorí ethnic identity.

Furthermore, the role played by language in the definition of Laggorí identity may be influenced by multiple group membership. In more detailed terms, urban informants tended to define themselves as Nuba rather than Laggorí. In this way, they stressed their relationship with other non-Arab groups of the region, deadening their narrower ethnolinguistic identification. Consequently, many Laggorí residing in Kadugli are not motivated to stress the specificity of their linguistic background because they think that the use of local languages may hinder the affirmation of a common Nuba identity. Moreover, two highly educated informants rejected the larger Nuba ethnic membership by affirming that their ethno-

linguistic identity must be reconnected to the Daju. Founding their statements on the study of the Daju by Hillelson (1932), they rationally pointed to the inclusion of Laggorí in the Daju languages. Consequently, they believed that the only way to leave behind the Laggorí-Soborí dispute was to promote the use of a supratribal language drawing on the resemblances between the different Daju varieties (including Soborí).

To conclude, the Laggorí language increased its identity-making value mainly in consequence of an ideological understanding of linguistic diversity in postwar Sudan. The need for ethnolinguistic recognition induced the Laggorí to consider their language as a political resource for affirming their aspirations to self-determination. Nevertheless, multiple group memberships still impede the language from being collectively recognized as a marker of Laggorí ethnic identity.

### *Language Attitudes*

Despite the fact that the Laggorí largely adopt Arabic for their domestic communication, most of them display a positive attitude towards their local language and its revitalization. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of my informants stated that it was necessary to preserve the Laggorí language because of its ritual function in traditional ceremonial activities such as the *kambala*.[11] In addition, they stressed that Laggorí can be used as a sort of secret idiom for excluding outsiders from intraethnic communication. Yet Laggorí speakers generally do not contemplate the possibility of expanding the use of their language to everyday communication. Apart from a small number of highly educated persons, my informants did not associate Laggorí with the institutional domains of language use. When I asked about opportunities to learn Laggorí at school, the majority of the informants declared themselves to be well disposed to a bilingual curriculum, but only subject to the primary role of Arabic in education.[12]

It should be recalled that a basic feature of many multicultural societies is that the language of the dominant group is also seen as the most important language (Liebkind 1999: 144). As far as northern Sudan is concerned, the connection between Arabic, Islam and national identity has favoured the acquisition of the national language as the basic means of communication. In this context, failure to speak Arabic may have severe repercussions for the socioeconomic integration of minority communities within the wider Sudanese society. Thus, despite the ethnolinguistic revival, the majority of the Laggorí have maintained a positive attitude towards Arabic. Male middle-aged informants generally adopt the Koranic standpoint on Arabic, remarking on the uniqueness of the language of Islam in contrast



to the ephemeral nature of any local language (*ruṭāna* in Sudanese Arabic). In this regard, it is also interesting to note that few people affirmed that they would have preferred the Arabic alphabet rather than the Latin alphabet for the standardization of their language. An opposing viewpoint is that expressed by the most ideologized and educated part of the Laggorí community, which instead has asserted the necessity of limiting the use of Arabic and preserving their language from the integration of Arabic linguistic material. However, this antagonistic attitude towards Arabic that has arisen as an ideological reaction to the policies of Arabization pursued by different Sudanese governments seems not to affect the majority of Laggorí speakers, given that they still integrate many lexical and grammatical borrowings from Arabic into their language (Manfredi 2013).

## Conclusion

From the beginning of the second Sudanese civil war in the Nuba Mountains (1987), the Laggorí language went rapidly into decline, losing ground to Arabic due to the forced urbanization of its speakers. In 2009, the majority of the Laggorí still claimed to have acquired their language as native speakers, but most of them had already adopted Arabic for domestic communication. This situation shows an increasing detachment from the Laggorí language mainly as a consequence of the dominant status of Arabic in Sudan. However, the abandoning of the Laggorí language does not directly affect the ethnolinguistic identity of its speakers. In line with other minority groups in the Nuba Mountains, locality represents a foremost component of the Laggorí ethnic identity. Following the acceptance of Islam, patrilineal kinship also became an important factor for the definition of Laggorí ethnicity. The acknowledgement of language as an ethnic marker thus represents a relatively new phenomenon that has been strengthened by external actors. First, the SIL intervention and its subsequent support for the adoption of the glossonym 'Laggorí' not only reinforced the link between the Laggorí language and ethnic identity, but also excluded a linguistically related community from the process of language revitalization. In truth, regardless of the fact that the attempts to limit Laggorí aspirations to self-determination emanated from the central state, the refusal to adopt a broader ethnolinguistic label definitively excluded the Soborí from future access to the standardized language. Second, the new policy of multilingualism in Sudan contributed to the affirmation of a direct association between linguistic, ethnic and tribal boundaries. The temporary political situation of the CPA encouraged a belief that language is a key marker of ethnicity, and that group negotiations over political status

would therefore be enhanced by an overt insistence on the use of a local language.

It is clear that the safeguard of the ethnonym 'Laggorí' was functional in supporting an autonomous status within the Native Administration of South Kordofan, rather being aimed at preserving a specific ethnolinguistic heritage. This overall situation eventually resulted in the adoption of the language as a concrete resource through which the community tried to reconstitute itself during a period marked by political change (i.e., the CPA). However, if we consider that even after the SIL intervention Laggorí people still preferred to speak Arabic, the language revitalization seems to have affected Laggorí ethnolinguistic identity and political relations more than it affected the domain of actual language use. This state of affairs clearly shows the failure of the SIL top-down approach to language revitalization, and it proves the risks inherent in recovering languages without taking into account the power relationships between minority linguistic communities.

## Notes

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1. This chapter is the result of original fieldwork financed by the CEDEJ in Khartoum. The fieldwork was carried out from December 2008 to January 2009. The fieldwork covered several Laggorí communities residing in Kadugli, the administrative capital of South Kordofan, and in several rural settlements (i.e., Laggorí-Umm Bres, Tokswana, Tarai, Kalibang and Arkawit). In light of the recent political changes that have affected this area, it should be remarked that all of the data presented in this study were gathered during the temporary political situation determined by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005–11). Furthermore, the continuation of the armed conflict that started in June 2011 (just two months before South Sudan's declaration of independence) precludes any possible consideration regarding the present-day sociolinguistic and political situation of South Kordofan.
2. At the present time, only the Laggorí and Soborí dialects have a relatively stable number of native speakers. The Tillew dialect, for its part, is nearly extinguished.
3. Kòrí is a male given name traditionally applied to second-born children (Tayara 2006: 10). The expression *lágg kòrí* could be interpreted as an ethnic designation referring to a common agnatic ancestor known as Kòrí. However, the majority of my informants denied this interpretation, claiming that the origin of the word 'Laggorí' arose in interactions during the early contacts with the Baggara Arabs.
4. In the Native Administration system adopted during the CPA, the *amīr* replaced the *nāẓir* in the higher level of tribal organization. The group of people dependent on an *amīr* was referred to as an *amāra*. The group of people dependent on an *'omda* was referred to as an *'omodiya*. Last, the group of people dependent on a sheikh was referred to as a *mashāīkha*.
5. UNESCO defines different degrees of linguistic endangerment according to the age of speakers and to the frequency of language use. According to the UNESCO classification, a language is to be considered critically endangered when 'its youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially or infrequently'. As I will explain, this picture does not apply to the Laggorí sociolinguistic situation nowadays. See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/ (accessed 6 February 2014).
6. In 1972 the Institute of African and Asian Studies of the University of Khartoum launched the first language survey of Sudan. The data concerning the Laggorí were part of a survey of twenty-nine localities in the Nuba Mountains coordinated by Herman Bell in April 1976. Bell included Laggorí-Umm Bres and Tesé-Abd As-Salam in a single sample of locality reporting data on the Laggorí and Jirru languages. Even if it is useful for understanding the historical dimensions of language regression, Bell's sample was fairly limited because it consisted of 180 informants, only 79 of whom were from Laggorí-Umm Bres.
7. It is interesting to note that for more than forty years, all sociolinguistic surveys of Sudan have indicated that the youngest generations of minority groups were shifting to Arabic. This means that those who acquired Arabic as a first language and were less than twenty-five years of age in 1976 are now over fifty-five years old. In contrast, the present information concerning Laggorí shows that the decisive shift towards Arabic, which was declared in the 1970s, in fact took place almost ten years later.
8. See http://www-01.sil.org/sil/ (accessed 24 January 2013).
9. *Umm mulewiyye* is an Arabic expression that means 'wrapped'. Baggara Arabs applied this term to different Nuba groups to refer to their way of wearing the *sutra*, the traditional skin loincloth. Both the Laggorí and the Soborí are strongly averse to this ethnonym because of its deprecatory connotations.
10. The *kambala* (an Arabic distortion of the word *kámàl*) is the most important agricultural ritual of the Laggorí. It is traditionally celebrated at the end of the sowing season.
11. Arabic is the only language of instruction in northern Sudan. In contrast, it is not contemplated by the 'New Sudan' curriculum adopted in SPLM-controlled areas. Regardless of the fact that Arabic is the wider spoken language in the Nuba Mountains, English is the primary language of instruction in the SPLM schools of South Kordofan. Local languages, for their part, can be taught as an additional subject in primary schools.