

Fulfulde as a Vehicular Language: An Opportunity or a Threat to Minority Languages in Maroua?

*James N. Tasah**

Abstract

It is increasingly recognized that most minority language speakers tend to give up their languages in favour of a vehicular language as they move to urban centres. In recent years, the degree of endangerment of indigenous languages seems to be accelerating due to the increased dominance of Fulfulde. This study seeks to find out whether the seeming progressive abandonment of local languages in the Far North region of Cameroon is due to Fulfulde or French. Data was obtained through participant observation and questionnaire administration. The results indicate that Fulfulde, and to a certain extent French tend to monopolize most of the proposed domains of language use. The findings show that the respondents have limited fluency in their Mother Tongues. They also reveal that Fulfulde is gradually becoming participants' Mother Tongues, and they considered it as a potential threat to minority languages. It concludes that minority languages are threatened more by Fulfulde than French in Maroua.

Key words: *Endangerment, shift, multilingualism, contact, domains*

Introduction

Major languages are accelerating their expansion in most urban centres of Africa, and in some cases threatening the existence of small languages, as speakers shift towards more prestigious or socio-economic dominant languages. Urbanization is therefore one of the major factors that causes language shift, as the children of urban migrants invariably adopt the language which is commonly spoken in a given urban centre. The process of language shift from one language to another is very widespread in Africa, where languages are not only in constant contact, but also differ in size, status, prestige and function (Brenzinger 1991; Smieja 1996, 1998; Sommer & Visser, 2000). Cameroon is one of the countries in Africa with extensive linguistic diversity where more dominant languages are displacing less dominant ones in the cities. Usually, language shift takes place in favour of the more viable language, like Fulfulde that is acting as an attraction to the students and youths to develop negative attitude towards their MTs in Maroua. It is becoming increasingly clear that linguistic diversity that appeared to be a part

* Lecturer, Department of English Language, University of Maroua, Cameroon, E-mail: jntasah@yahoo.com

of nature's gift is now becoming a threat through language contact situations. It has put many languages, especially, small languages, on the endangerment list (cf. Romaine, 2000; Crystal, 2000; Ohiri-Aniche, 2006; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998). Scholars and researchers alike are pondering on what, as a result of contact, would become of some minority languages at the turn of the century. In effect, language loss, with its attendant consequences such as loss of cultural identity, has become a subject of discussion among linguists and non-linguists alike. This study examines patterns of language use among some secondary school students from three selected schools in Maroua in order to establish whether their knowledge and use of Fulfulde favourably enriches their linguistic repertoire or acts as a potential threat to the vitality of their respective indigenous languages. The study is motivated by the fact that the use of minority languages in Maroua seem to be progressively abandoned to the advantage of Fulfulde, which has become a lingua franca not only in the area, but also in three Northern regions. It uses Batibo's (2005) MBM as a relevant theory that captures the phenomenon of language shift and endangerment. Data will be obtained through participant observation and questionnaire administration. The findings show that the respondents have limited fluency in their respective Mother Tongues (MTs). The analyses also reveal that Fulfulde is gradually becoming not only participants' MTs, but is also considered as a potential threat to their minority languages. On the basis of findings, it is clear to indicate that indigenous languages are threatened more by dominant languages like Fulfulde than French in Maroua. If Fulfulde is a threat to the indigenous languages in this area, its brief description here is necessary.

The Fulfulde Language

Fulfulde is a lingua franca that covers the regions of Adamawa, North and Far North. It connects the people from different ethnic communities not only in Maroua, but also in other Northern regions. It is very crucial as a communication bridge because it links a Giziga to a Mundang, a Gavar to a Mefe, a Tchuvok to a Mofu, a Mbedamto a Buwal, a Podoko to a Mofu, a Mafa to a Massa and to a Tupuri, an illiterate Peul to a literate Peul and generally, all categories of people in the region irrespective of their educational status, linguistic background, etc. It is spoken as a first language by about 350,000 people and as a second language by three million people (Echu, 2003b). The number given by Ethnologue is 668,700 (Gordon, 2005).

According to Chumbow (2008:29), Fulfulde (also known variously as Pulaar, Fulani...) is a vehicular language that spans the whole of the savannah belt of Africa from Senegal to Sudan, with a consolidated population of about 17,700,000 of which there are about three million in Cameroon. Three million out of a national population of more than 20 million and 286 languages makes Fulfulde the most dominant indigenous language in Cameroon spoken in the three Northern Provinces of Adamawa, North and Far North. From the above facts and figures, it is clear that Fulfulde will continue to dominate and endanger the vitality of other minority languages in Maroua because of its sociolinguistic, demographic, and prestigious status. After briefly describing the language, the characteristics that govern dominant and minority languages are also crucial and that is precisely the concern of the following section.

Some Characteristics of Dominant and Minority Languages

What are the main characteristics of dominant and minority languages? Chumbow (2008) characterizes dominant versus minority languages in terms of power, prestige, status, function, domain, and population:

Power refers to dominant languages that are powerful as a result of the cumulative impact of the functions they assume and the domains they occupy and monopolies, (domains that have economic advantages, social prestige and/ or political power), while minority languages are powerless because of the limitations in their functional loads and domains of usage.

Prestige means esteem and correlates with status, in the sense that a language with a high status has high prestige and esteem and vice versa.

Status distinguishes between minority languages with low status and (a dominant or official language) with a high or higher status.

Chumbow (2008) maintains that while status is conferred by the functional load of the language, determined by the number, type and quality or value of functions acquired by or allocated to the language in the nation or state function refers to the uses to which a language is put in the service of the nation. It may vary in type and perceived quality.

Domain is concerned with the different fields of use. Language is used differently (as a result of choice or constraint) in the home, school, government, church, media, etc. Chumbow (2008) indicates that domains are like territories in multilingual settings and the languages tend to be limited to certain territories to the exclusion of others. Function and domain in his opinion are related without being identical.

The low status of minority languages in his opinion stems essentially from the fact that they tend to be limited to a few basic domains, mainly the home domain, while the dominant language dominates most of the important and highly valued domains such as education, public administration, media, and internet and information technology and in fact, monopolizes certain domains.

Population: while most minority languages are smaller in size than dominant languages; this is not always the case because dominant languages may also be smaller in size than many minority languages. To Chumbow (2008), minority refers more to the status of the language than to its demographic strength. It is for the same reason that usage in the Language Planning industry opposes minority languages to majority languages rather than dominant languages. This is done with the understanding that majority simply means the most powerful language, not necessarily in demographic terms. Generally speaking, these languages do not have high vitality partly because they have low status and are restricted in roles.

Sociolinguistically, a minority language is defined not only by its relative demographic inferiority but also, and more so, by its limited functions. In fact, it is their marginalization and exclusion from serving in secondary domains (that is, public functions) as well as having no social status or prestige, that most characterizes them as minority languages (Batibo, 2005).

Some minority languages in Maroua that are not being transmitted from the older to the younger generation may appear to be irretrievably lost in future. Consequently, this is due to the language's disproportionate prestige in this area and the fact that the more powerful and functionally dominant a language is, the more it will pull speakers to shift towards. There is a need to understand and underscore some facts discussed in Batibo's theoretical perspective for a clearer grasp of the context of Fulfulde in Maroua.

The Process-based Perspective

This study uses the “Marked Bilingualism model” (MBM) propounded by Batibo (1992, 1997) following his language surveys in Tanzania and Botswana. This model was propounded by Batibo (2006) which states that language shift is accelerated by situations where there is a sharp gradient of imbalance between the dominant and the dominated language. It is based on the following assumptions:

- a. Language shift can only take place when there is a state of bilingualism as, clearly, no community can afford to abandon its language and become mute.
- b. In order for the speakers of one language to be attracted to another, there must be a significant difference of prestige and status between the two languages.
- c. The rate of language shift depends to a large degree on the amount of pressure (attraction, from the dominant language on the one hand and the degree of resistance from the minority language on the other. It is divided into five phases but only phases two to five are relevant to this analysis as follows:

Phase two: Bilingualism with L1 Predominance. This stage involves a dominant or more prestigious language, such as Fulfulde that dominates most of the respondents’ language use. The respondents use it as a lingua franca or second language in the secondary domains. Since indigenous languages seem to be considered unworthy of being used in secondary contexts and because of their low developmental status, the respondents prefer Fulfulde to their local language which is a source of threat to the vitality and existence of indigenous languages.

When a diglossic situation arises, the L2 (Fulfulde) is used in the higher (H) public functions or for wider communication, such as inter-ethnic interaction, trade and local administration while L1 (MT) remains the language used in most village communication, inter-ethnic interaction and family life. Thus, each language has its own defined domains of use.

The third phase (Bilingualism with L2 Predominance) is observed when the predominant language (Fulfulde) becomes the primary language. This is because it is in an asymmetrical relationship with

indigenous languages, i.e one of unequal partners and is therefore unstable. This model can be applied synchronically either by categorizing a set of languages according to their degree of language shift or diachronically by looking at how the language shifts process evolves over time or how the different age groups shift progressively to another language. The model postulates five phases that a language goes through on its way to extinction as its speakers shift to the other language. Batibo sees these phases to be arbitrary points in a continuum from one end of the process to another. Due to the great prestige and more extensive use of Fulfulde and the French language to an extent, they are increasingly used in the wider domains until the former is gradually becoming the respondents' MT as they are more at ease while communicating in Fulfulde. However, the respondents' respective MTs are to a little extent restricted mostly to family and cultural activities. The relegation of minority languages to family and cultural activities may gradually lead to their endangerment.

The restrictedness of the use of L1 competence is the fourth phase. This is the stage in which the use and even the competence in L1 have become highly restricted. The stage is reached when the functions of L1 are so reduced that people use L1 forms only in specific situations, such as initiation ceremonies, rituals, or folkloric performances. Thus, communities in such a situation have lost the ability to use L1 in its original form and by implication, their stylistic competence in the language. In most cases, they will not have learnt it properly and so their structural competence is also greatly reduced. Only a few old men and especially women might still be familiar with the linguistic forms as originally used. Nevertheless, the language may remain a vibrant part of their ethnic identity.

The fifth phase is L1 as a substratum. This is the stage where the predominance of L2 such as, Fulfulde or French to an extent may gradually become dominant to the point where it may eventually replace L1 (indigenous languages) completely. It is the stage at which the local MTs can be described as dead as they may no longer be used in the community. However, the community may have kept some of its traditional values. Some of the linguistic characteristics of L1 often remain as residual features in L2. Such phenomena known as substratum features according to Batibo (2005) may involve prosodic, phonetic, phonological, semantic, or lexical elements.

In conclusion, he maintains that due to the often contradictory information, it is not always possible to be certain at what stage a language is on the continuum. Given that Fulfulde is one of the most dominant languages not only in Cameroon in general and the Northern regions in particular and has been accorded socio-political status, and is used as a lingua franca in different sectors in Maroua, it has multiplied its weight and attraction over other minority languages. Unless the other indigenous languages are documented and standardized and some public domains are accorded to them, they may continue to be vulnerable and their speakers especially the youths may see them as entities that have no utilitarian value, as they are not used in key domains like education, administration, judiciary, and the media or in assessing job opportunities. The relevance of this model is that it captures the phenomenon of language shift and death from the time a language is dominated to the time it becomes extinct and is replaced by another.

Methodology

Selection of Participants

Data for this study was obtained from 159 selected Secondary and High school students of both sexes from Lycée Bilingue, and Lycée Domayo, and Lycée Kakatare in Maroua. They were selected based on their relative competence and proficiency in three languages. The respondents were not only from different indigenous language backgrounds, but also from different divisions or regions of Cameroon.

Description of Participants

The subjects in this study were 159 Secondary and High school students of both sexes. While 83 constitute males, 76 were females. Participants were categorized into different age groups, and from questionnaire analysis, the respondents' age ranged between 15-25 years. Participants were also categorized according to gender and language of parents.

The Survey Items

To address the study's objective, the target students were surveyed by the use of a questionnaire that investigated their language use patterns. The questionnaire had three sections. The first section was an exploration of the participants' family background information in order to determine whether their MTs were being maintained or they are shifting to dominant languages.

The second section was designed essentially to assess participants' language use patterns in some proposed contexts. The last section evaluated not only the respondents' degree of multilingual competence in the proposed languages, but also the factors that might have contributed to their fluency or lack of it and the language that can be considered as a potential threat to their MT.

Data Analysis

This section examines the patterns of language use in the proposed domains in order to find out if respondents' level of bilingualism or multilingualism is thriving or is a threat to their respective indigenous languages. Data was analysed from the home, neighbourhood, education and social gathering (church, market etc.) domains. The domain analysis is useful in the understanding of language choices based on individual behaviour at the level of face-to-face verbal encounter; the reflection of widespread socio-cultural norms and expectation. On the basis of the respondents' knowledge of linguistic repertoire, the respondents consciously or unconsciously use an appropriate language to fit a specific domain. Before analysing the use of language in the proposed domains, the following table presents domains of preferred language use.

Table 1: Respondents' Preferred Domains of Language use

Languages		House	Neighbours	School with Classmates	Social Gathering	Total
Fulfulde	Count	58	75	14	12	159
	%	36.48	47.17	8.80	7.55	100
Fulfulde and Mother Tongue	Count	11	2	0	4	17
	%	6.91	1.26	0	2.52	10.69
Fulfulde, Mother Tongue and French	Count	3	0	0	13	16
	%	1.89	0	0	8.17	10.06
Fulfulde and French	Count	16	34 32	45	64	159
	%	10.07	21.38	28.30	40.25	100
French and Mother Tongue	Count	9	3	0	4	16
	%	5.66	1.89	0	2.52	10.06
Mother Tongue	Count	34	3	1	0	38
	%	21.38	1.89	0.63	0	23.90
French	Count	30	32	76	21	159
	%	18.87	20.13	47.79	13.21	100

This table explores the respondents' multilingual capacities in the different domains. The first domain analysed and presented in the table above was the home domain because the pulse of any language lies solely with the younger generation and therefore parents have to ensure perfect transmission of their indigenous languages to their children at home. The statistics clearly show that the majority of the respondents 58(36.48%) interact in Fulfulde while only 34(21.38%) use their indigenous languages at home. In addition, 30 (18.87%) claimed to use French at home at home. A close observation of the results reveal that Fulfulde and even French are already used as Mother Tongues by some of the respondents in their homes.

The following observations are made on the basis of the percentage of those who claim to use Fulfulde at home. Firstly, the preference of Fulfulde by most of respondents at home is an indication that it is gradually replacing or threatening the respondents' respective MTs. The exclusive use of Fulfulde by 58% of the sample also suggests that the different respondents' minority languages may at a given time in future be seriously endangered because there will be fewer or no middle aged parents and grandparents left to pass on the language to their own children thereby providing more opportunities for the children to acquire or learn Fulfulde and probably French. This scenario is possible because the percentage of respondents who are using Fulfulde may increase with decreasing age group. For instance, the young respondents who are more competent in Fulfulde and use it dominantly now will be parents and grandparents in future and in turn, will transmit the language to their children and hence increase the number of Fulfulde speakers at the expense of their minority languages.

Related to home is the neighbourhood domain where the respondents were also asked to indicate the language(s) they use frequently with their neighbours, the results analysed indicate that 75 (47.17%) of the sample exclusively use Fulfulde in their neighbourhood. The analysis indicate a low percentage use of Fulfulde and MT and Fulfulde MT and French but a reasonable number 34 (21.38%) of the respondents who communicate either in Fulfulde or French. Some of the participants 32(20.13%) whose interlocutors may be strangers or non-natives, use only French with their neighbours. It is observed from the results analysed that in the neighbourhood domain, the respondents probably encounter and interact with neighbours and strangers mostly in Fulfulde and French because it is a language of

inter-ethnic communication while French is their First official language as pointed out in Section 1.1 above.

An analysis of the proposed languages with classmates show that only 14(8.80%) of the respondents interact in Fulfulde while 45 (28.30%) use both Fulfulde and French, and 76 (47.79%) communicate only in French. Although the results show that only 14% use Fulfulde and 45% use both Fulfulde and French with their classmates and friends in schools, observational data reveal that Fulfulde is sparingly used in class but dominate most students' interactions outside the classroom setting. Thus, their exclusive use of French is possible only in situations where teachers are in class but once outside the class, they switch back to Fulfulde except for those who are still learning the language.

Data analysed in the domain of social gathering, indicate that a majority of the participants 64 (40.25%) use Fulfulde and French but for those who used both languages separately, the results indicate 12 (7.55%) for Fulfulde and 21 (13.21%) for French respectively. It is worthy to note that these percentages are relatively similar to information obtained from observational data that indicates a reasonable use of both languages in social gathering interchangeably in the markets, death celebrations, political meetings and in the religious circles where the translation from French to Fulfulde or vice versa is usually the case. The following figure clearly represents respondents' domains of language use.

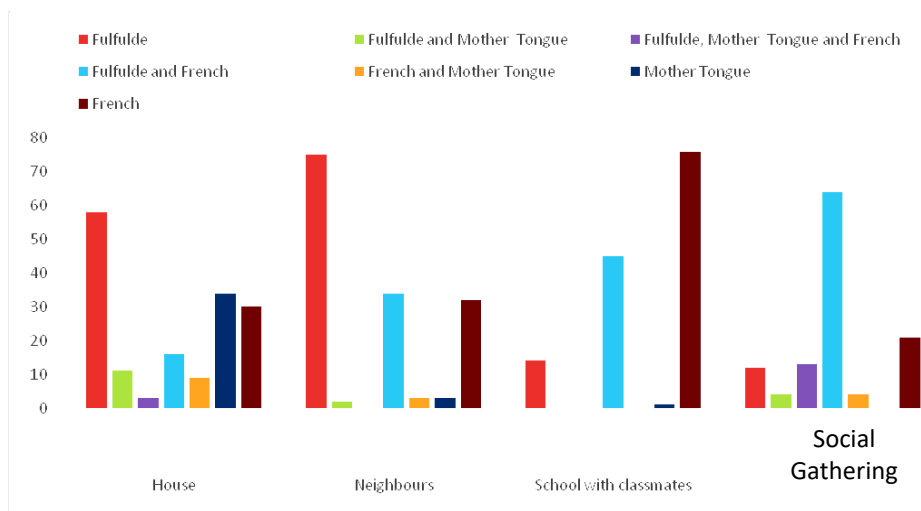


Figure 1: Respondents' Preferred Domains of Language Use

The figure above clearly shows that Fulfulde is the most frequently used language at home with neighbours and in social gathering. Although most of the respondents claim to use French 76 (47.79%) more than other languages while at school, the use of Fulfulde and French simultaneously at school is still relatively high. This is buttressed by data from participant observation which reveal that Fulfulde is predominantly used in school. The percentage of the exclusive use of the respective MTs at home, neighbourhood, school and classmates and school gathering is relatively low compared to Fulfulde and French which is an indication that the respondents' respective indigenous languages are gradually shifting to Fulfulde and French in Maroua. Looking at the different percentages obtained for the home domain, a number of factors can be established but only two are worthy of note here. The first factor is that this state of affairs may be interpreted as an indication that the respondents among other students in Maroua may already be assimilated into the cultural norms and values of Fulfulde language to the detriment of their own MTs. Some of the participants' frequent use of Fulfulde at home with parents, brothers and sisters may be seen as deviating from the expected cultural norms of self-identity and pride in one's MT. The second factor refers not only to the composition of the ethnic groups living in the town with diverse indigenous languages that may be spoken sparingly at home domain, but also the likelihood that Fulfulde is gradually becoming the MT of most respondents.

It is also important to indicate that almost always, the respondents will reasonably maintain the language acquired from their parents and perhaps learn additional languages such as Fulfulde, French and English to varying degrees particularly while young. They may switch these languages back and forth, depending on the context, whether it is at home, church, school, workplace or market, etc.; depending on each individual's exposure to the language(s) spoken in the immediate environment. But without safeguards for language use at home sufficient to ensure transmission, attempts to prop the language up outside the home will be like blowing air into a punctured tire. It will be impossible to achieve a steady state based on the incoming air due to the continual losses resulting from the un-mended puncture (Nettle & Romaine, 2000:178). On the whole, the results obtained for this domain already show signs that if perfect intergenerational transmission from parents to children is not reinforced at home, the respective minority languages seemingly threatened by the region's lingua franca may eventually swallow them up in future.

Respondents' Communicative Competence in Three Languages

The communicative ability that people have in their languages may motivate their use in different domains. Respondents were also asked to assess their communicative competence in Fulfulde, their respective mother tongues (MT), and French in order to determine their competence and fluency in the three languages.

Table 2: Respondents' Degree of Communicative Competence in the Three Languages

Level of Competence		Languages		
		Fulfulde	Mother Tongue	French
Very good	Percent	56	22	44
	%	35.22%	13.84%	27.67%
Good		39	23	80
	%	24.53%	14.47%	50.31%
Average		44	32	34
	%	27.67%	20.13%	21.38%
Fair		17	47	1
	%	10.69%	29.56%	0.63%
Null		3	35	0
	%	1.89%	22.01%	0%
Total		159	159	159
	%	100%	100%	100%

The results of the analysis in the table above indicate that 56 (35.22%) of the respondents have a very good level of competence in Fulfulde against 22 (13.84%) who claim to be very competent in their MTs while 44 (27.67%) claim to be competent in French. Data analysed for those who claim to be good in the different languages show that the majority 80 (50.31%) are competently good at French, followed by Fulfulde 39 (24.53%) and only 23 (14.47%) in their minority languages. These results are an indication that a growing number of the respondents are relatively very good and more competent in French and Fulfulde than in their respective languages. This implies that the phenomenon of language attrition may be taking place in this multiannual context. These results are clearly represented in the following figure.

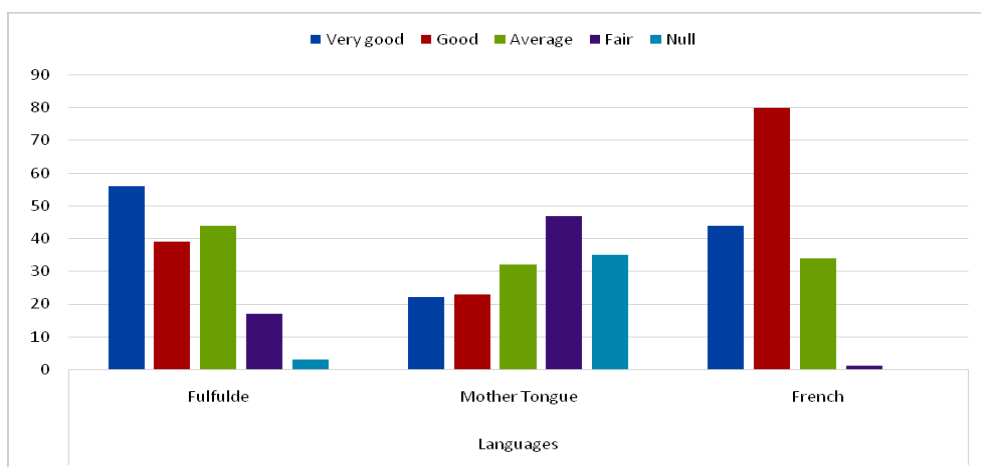


Figure 2: Respondents' Communicative Competence in Fulfulde, MT, and French

As already analysed in the table above and represented clearly in this figure, there is a disproportional use between the three languages. The majority of the respondents have more communicative competence in Fulfulde and French than in their respective minority languages. The paucity 13.84% of the respondents who have a very good and good communicative competence and 14.47% who have only a good competence in their local languages respectively may still be shifting progressively to Fulfulde and French whenever the need arises. Thus, the widespread use of both Fulfulde and French languages is due to most respondents' self-assessment claim of having more communicatively competent in these languages than their native languages. The different degrees of communicative competence following the respondents' self-assessment are an indication that intergenerational transfer of the first language (LI) from parents to children is not sufficient enough.

In addition, a comparative assessment of respondents' communicative competence in their MTs and Fulfulde clearly reveal that the percentage of those knowledgeably competent in Fulfulde is more than those communicatively competent in the indigenous languages as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents' Degree of Communicative Competence in Fulfulde and the Indigenous Languages

	Fulfulde	Mother Tongue
Very good	56	22
	35.22%	13.84%
Good	39	23
	24.53%	14.47%
Average	44	32
	27.67%	20.13%
Fair	17	47
	10.69%	29.56%
Null	3	35
	1.89%	22.01%
Total	159	159
	100%	100%

This table presents the respondents' degree of communicative competence in Fulfulde and the respective indigenous languages. A comparative assessment analysis show that 56 (35.22%) of the participants were very good at Fulfulde against 22 (13.84%) for Mother tongues. A reasonable number 39 (24.53%) are also good at Fulfulde while only 13 (14.47%) were communicatively competent in their indigenous languages. The fact that most of the respondents' degree of communicative competence was more in Fulfulde than in their respective local languages is another indication of the vitality and spread of Fulfulde and the decline of minority languages in Maroua. From these results, it is important to indicate that comparatively, the percentage of respondents who claim to have a very good and good communicative competence in Fulfulde are generally more than those of MT. The percentage of those who claim to have only an average, fair communicative competence in Fulfulde certainly represents some of those whose parents are from different divisions or regions in Cameroon. This information is further presented clearly in the following figure.

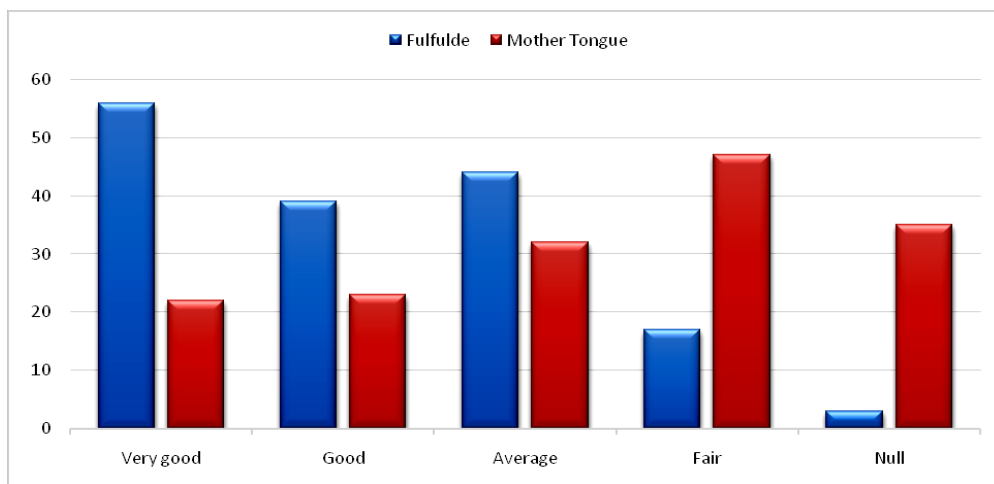


Figure 3: Respondents' Communicative Competence in Fulfulde and Mother Tongue

The results of Figure 3 are a clear indication that the majority of the respondents communicate more in Fulfulde than in their respective indigenous languages because they claim to be more communicatively competent in Fulfulde. As presented clearly in Figure 2 above, an overall comparison of respondents' communicative fluency between MT and Fulfulde shows that most of the respondents are more communicative competent in Fulfulde. This may be one of the reasons why most of them prefer to use Fulfulde in the proposed domains. In effect, the more a language is spoken, the more it will become stronger and healthier and the less it is spoken, the weaker it will become. This scenario not only provides signs that most of the respondents are gradually shifting towards Fulfulde, but also the extent to which it is progressively spreading.

The Spread of Fulfulde and the Progressive Weakening of Minority Languages

As Fulfulde keeps widening and spreading in Maroua, respondents' indigenous languages are also being weakened. That is why Batibo (2002:280) rightly indicates that the ex-colonial languages do not pose a threat to the survival of the local languages: the indigenous languages that have been elevated to national status do:

The minority languages of Africa are threatened not by the ex-colonial languages, which have now become the official media in most states, but rather by the dominant indigenous languages, especially the ones which have assumed lingua franca or national importance.

This statement is pertinent in the context of this study on the basis of data obtained from table1 and Fig 1 above where Fulfulde is largely preferred by the respondents because of its spread and attraction to their socialization.

The participants were also asked to indicate some of the reasons they think could have contributed to their fluency or lack of fluency in their respective MTs. While they varied widely in their responses, there were some recurring factors among which were the following:

Including limited use of the language at home and even the influence of dominant and official languages

- “Parents from different ethnic communities (intertribal marriage)”
- “Refusal of parents to speak the local language at home”
- “Lack of native speakers with whom to speak the Mother Tongue”
- “Attitude and representations of city dwellers that use Fulfulde everywhere in town”
- “Living in the urban areas where the native language is not regularly spoken”
- “Not being taught in the MT early enough by parents”
- “Native language is not useful in Maroua”
- “Relating and having friends who are not from the same ethnic community”
- “The influence of friends with whom interaction is carried out frequently thereby motivating the use of Fulfulde”.
- “No effective use of the local language by parents while at home”
- “Brought up in an urban area where the MT is not spoken frequently”.

From the reasons provided by some of the participants among others, it can be established that the socio-economic advantage that Fulfulde has over minority languages in Maroua is one of the reasons why the minority languages are progressively being abandoned. Those participants who reported fluency in their minority languages gave factors that they consider important in the maintenance of their local languages. Many participants who considered themselves fluent felt that the fluency was an obvious result of having spent enough time in the rural areas or in homes where the languages are spoken.

Some of the responses are given below.

- “Staying in rural areas where many people use the language”
- “Visiting relatives in the rural areas during holidays”

“Having been raised in rural areas where the language is widely spoken and the ability to have been using it frequently”.

“Attachment to the language because of its importance”.

“Being brought up in a family where parents speak the same language”

Findings

It is evident from this study that indigenous languages in Maroua are losing ground to Fulfulde to a large extent since the results of analysis indicate that 58 (36.48%) of the respondents exclusively use it at home and the language in which the majority are most competent. Fulfulde is also the language most respondents prefer to use in their interactions with friends and neighbours. The results of the analysis in figure 2 clearly indicate that it is Fulfulde and French that is in the greatest competition for the different domains of language use. Generally, if the majority of the respondents largely prefer Fulfulde and French to indigenous languages in the proposed domains, it may be as a result of insufficient proficiency in their respective MTs.

Thus, the socio-economic advantage that Fulfulde and French have over minority languages in the town and the region in general is one of the reasons why minority languages are gradually becoming the respondents' MTs. Also the reasons provided by the respondents above largely account for the progressive abandonment of the respective indigenous languages to adopt Fulfulde and French. It is important to note that findings are also buttressed by the issues discussed in Batibo's theoretical perspectives above where is seemingly becoming the region's *Lingua Franca* and used mostly in higher public functions alongside with French particularly in school while the respective indigenous languages are used mostly at home with some family members and other more restrictive village communication during village traditional meetings in Maroua. Most of the respondents living with their parents in Maroua do not know their MT sufficiently enough. They may not necessarily have a negative attitude towards their MTs but most have simply grown up using Fulfulde or French and when they go to school, where Fulfulde relatively dominates most of their interactions. This is an issue that is of great concern and strategies have to be taken to reverse Fulfulde's progressive endangerment of other indigenous languages in Maroua.

Community Involvement

The centrality of speakers of the different languages is extremely important in the whole process of revitalization. Thus, the elites of the various languages spoken in Maroua can take centre stage in the promotion and empowerment of their respective languages. This can either be at the oral and written levels as a strategy for language maintenance. In fact, as well noted by Grenoble and Whaley (2006:20), for sustained success in language maintenance, however, language revitalization must be “a community-driven, a bottom-up kind of movement”.

The Use of Languages in Education

The exclusion of local languages in schools as is the case in Cameroon among most African nations is bound to be interpreted as a formal condemnation of these languages and cultures, thus providing further motivation for their speakers to assimilate to the economically dominant languages. In this connection, Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO in (UNESCO, 2008), maintains that:

We must act now as a matter of urgency, by encouraging and developing language policies that enable each linguistic community to use its first language, or mother tongue, as widely and as often as possible, including in education.... Only if multilingualism is fully accepted, can all languages find their place in our globalized world.

Thus, the oral introduction of all indigenous languages in schools in this region in particular and Cameroon will increase literacy and community mobilization for the revitalization of these languages. This is considered as one of the surest means of increasing their status, prestige and perceived utility as well as improving educational outcome among minority language speakers.

Language Revitalization

An advantage of revitalizing a language is to reverse the influence of dominant languages on the minority language so that the minority language can be activated, used in public domains, increase its speakers' population and their socio-economic power (Ó Laoire, 2008; Fishman, 1991). In this way, a language can get a new status from the old that it held before (Sarivaara & Uusiautti, 2013). The attitude of the different speech communities to their languages is also an important indicator of language endangerment. Both

subjective and objective attitude towards a language are important for its maintenance. Subjective and objective attitudes imply that while members of a particular speech community may feel attached to their language and culture and express a positive attitude towards the language, it may be found, on investigation, that they do not use the language in practice. Therefore, it is the objective use of language that matters and not the subjective willingness to do so without using it. Members of a speech community with a positive attitude towards their language are less likely to shift to another language. The opposite is true – those who detest their language and see it as inferior are likely to shift to the one they see more prestigious (Dorian, 1998). The maintenance of indigenous languages in their fullest sense entails the preservation and promotion of diversity at all levels.

Conclusion

This study has no doubt revealed that Fulfulde and to an extent French language are a threat to the vitality of minority languages in the Far North region. It has been established that Fulfulde is a potential threat to most of the indigenous languages in Maroua and could replace them through its progressive spread as a language of trade, education, administration, and religion. The prediction is that it will continue dominating indigenous languages and progressively weakening them if they are not revitalized and used in wider domains particularly in education. Although the pervasive influence and dominance of this language on other indigenous languages cannot be stopped because the process is driven by powerful socio-economic forces, all the region's indigenous languages should not be allowed to be endangered and disappear unrecorded and revitalized, since they will continue to have a scientific, socio-economic, pedagogic, cultural, and spiritual role to play in an increasingly globalized world.

References

- Batibo, H. M. (1992). The Fate of Ethnic Languages in Tanzania. In M. Brenzinger (ed.). *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations, with Special Reference to East Africa*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter: 85–98.
- Batibo, H. M. (1997). The Fate of the Minority Languages of Botswana. In B. Smieja & M. Tasch (eds.). *Human Contact through Language and Linguistics*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang: 243–252.

- Batibo, H. M. (2002). The Fate of the Khoesan Languages of Botswana. In M. Brenzinger (ed.). *Endangered Languages in Africa*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe: 187–205.
- Batibo, H. M. (2005). *Language Decline and Death in Africa: Courses, Consequences and Challenges*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Batibo, H. M. (2006). The Bilingualism Markedness Model. *Malilime*, 1: 1–26.
- Brenzinger, M. et al. (2003). Language Vitality and Endangerment. Paris: UNESCO (Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit).
- Brenzinger, M., B. Heine & Summer, G. (1991). Language Death in Africa. In R. H. Robinsand & E. M. Uhlenbeck (eds.). *Endangered Languages*. Oxford: RERG: 19–44.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chumbow, B. S. (2008). Vehicular Cross-border Languages and Endangerment of Minority Languages: Mediating a Symbiotic Functional Relationship. Forthcoming. *The Journal of the African Academy of Languages*, 3: 25–33.
- Echu, G. (2003b). Multilingualism as a Resource: The Lexical Appropriation of Cameroon Indigenous Languages by English and French. *TRAOS. Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*. No.13/2003.
- Gordon, R. G. (ed.) (2005). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (15th Edition). Dallas: SIL International.
- Grenoble, L. & Whaley, L. (eds.) (1998). *Language Loss and Community Response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grenoble, L. A. & Whaley, L. J. (2006). *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dorian, N. C. (1998). Western Languages Ideologies and Small Language Prospects. In L. Grenoble & L. J. Whaley (eds.). *Endangered Languages: Current Issues and Future Prospects* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 3–21.
- Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lewis, M. P. (ed.) (2013). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (16th Edition). Dallas, Tex.: SIL International.
- Muaka, L. (2011). Language Perceptions and Identity among Kenyans. Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville Selected Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African

- Linguistics, African Languages and Linguistics Today. Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA.
- Nettle, D. & S. Romaine. (2000). *Vanishing Voices. The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ohiri-Aniche, C. (2006). Marginalization of Nigerian Languages in Nursery and Primary Schools: Path to Indigenous Language Death in Nigeria. Presented at the 20th Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria, NERDC, Sheda, Abuja. 13th–17th November 2006.
- ÓLaoire, M. (2008). Indigenous Language Revitalization and Globalization. *TeKaharoa*, 1: 204–216.
- Romaine, S. (2000). *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sarivaara, K. E., Uusiautti, S. & Mááttá, K. (2013). How to Revitalize an Indigenous Language? Adults' Experiences of the Revitalization of the Sámi Language. *Cross-cultural Communication*, 9(1): 13–21.
- Smieja, B. (1996). Language and Identity: Language Shift and Language Loyalty in Botswana. A paper presented at NIR Staff seminar on 13th December 1996. University of Botswana.
- Smieja, B. (2000). Code-switching in Botswana. Exception or Rule? In H. M. Batibo & B. Smieja (eds.). *Botswana: The Future of the Minority Languages*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang: 153–76.
- UNESCO (2008). *Thematic Debate: Protecting Indigenous and Endangered Languages and the Role of Languages in Promoting EFA in the Context of Sustainable Development*.
- UNESCO (2008). *Multilingualism a Critical Perspective*. Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese UNESCO.
- Visser, H. (2000). Language and Cultural Empowerment of the Khoesan People: The Naro Experience. In H. M. Batibo & B. Smieja (eds.). *Botswana: The Future of the Minority Languages*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang: 193–215.