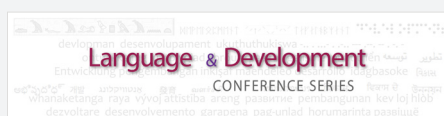


# The dynamics of local languages facing the challenge of socio-economic integration of migrants in the Lake Chad Basin: The case of Hausa, Fulfulde and Kalam Arabic

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'Whatever they may be, adopt your host place's manners because as the visitor you will eventually leave.' (Shuwa Arab Proverb) curricula and course design and is also motivated to conduct researches in English language teaching.

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# Introduction

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it is to investigate the role of the three major cross-border vehicular languages (Fulfulde, Hausa, Kalam Arabic<sup>1</sup>) in providing urgent response to mobility crises in the Lake Chad Basin. Second, it is to explain the migrants' lack of interest in the re-integration process through the use of another European language.

Owing to droughts, floods, wars and economic opportunities, Lake Chad border countries (Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Central African Republic) are well known to be either arrival or departure countries of migrants (Krings and Platte, 2004:204–06), sometimes known as 'mobile people'. There are three categories of mobile people in our fieldwork: migrants, refugees and displaced persons. First, *migrants* are individuals who leave their home in order to gain better life conditions by working. Second, *refugees* refers to people who should leave their country of origin to save their life in the neighbour host countries because of war or political crises. Third, displaced persons are those who must abandon their houses and settle within their country, but at safe places. This situation highlights the question of the management of migrants at the sub-regional, international and local levels. In order to help in this process, the UNHCR, OAU, AU and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) have been backing the countries concerned in their

attempts to integrate those migrants<sup>2</sup>. Among these efforts, official reports do not appear to mention the positive impetus brought about by the learning or the use of Fulfulde by the refugees in northern Cameroon, Hausa by the displaced persons in north eastern Nigeria, and Kalam Arabic by the migrants in the Logone-and-Chari Division of Cameroon. For example, the PARSEBALT<sup>3</sup> 2018 LCBC's report emphasises the integration of out-of-school young migrants in the host countries in European official languages.

Thus, the stance of this paper is that cross-border deployment of Fulfulde, Hausa and Kalam Arabic through private investment offer hope for such migrant communities to establish themselves in one of these neighbouring host countries and continuing to practise one of these lingua francas. Unfortunately, they often put aside both sides' official languages in their quest for socio-vocational survival.

The position in this paper is founded on three famous crises that triggered human mobility in the Lake Chad Basin. First, the drought in the 1970s and 1980s in the Lakes' closest banks of Darak in Logone-and-Chari Division of Cameroon. Second, the socio-political crisis in Chad (1979–1982) and, finally, third, the Boko Haram Insurgency across the entire region that has been ongoing since 2009.

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Philip J. Jaggar specific studies on Hausa (2001); Henry Tourneux works on Fulfulde (2000; 2007); his book with Jean-Claude Zeltner (1986); and Ahmat Hessana scientific communications on Kalam Arabic (2015; 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.cbilt.org](http://www.cbilt.org) for further details.

<sup>3</sup> The PARSEBALT is the Support Project for the socio-economic Reintegration of Vulnerable groups in the Lake Chad Basin. This Project already contributes to combating youth unemployment and idleness by improving training provision in official languages and its alignment with local economic needs. See: [www.afdb.org](http://www.afdb.org) for more information.

# The Lake Chad Basin: a linguistic landscape dominated by the local context

The Lake Chad Basin, a wide oasis in the heart of Africa, consist of 28 per cent of the Chad's surface, 22 per cent of Nigeria, 13 per cent of Niger, 12 per cent of the Cameroonian territory and 32 per cent of the Central African Republic territory (Magrin, Lemoalle and Pourtier, 2015:20). It is a region where unexhausted natural resources is a reason for competition among a multi-ethnic population of about 34 million people according to our 2020 estimates<sup>4</sup>. An under-developed-but-rich area, the Basin has growth population of about three per cent per year and is at the bottom of World Ranking Human Indicator, which covered 186 countries in 2014 (Magrin and Perousse De Montclos, 2018:75).

There are 70 ethno-linguistic groups made up both of a blending of cultures and attachment to ethnicity<sup>5</sup>. Emerging inter-tribal alliances are determined by religious affiliation under control of the political powers through language. Most of those Animist, Muslim or Christian groups speak many languages be they mother tongue, national or official languages. However, Hausa and Fulfulde (in the four States) and Kalam Arabic (in Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria) are currently the dominant linguistic pattern, which is a legacy of the Bornu, French and British colonisers. They have become the three major cross-border vehicular languages widely used by the people of the region, which is 55 per cent of the Hausa

speakers, 32 per cent of the Fulfulde speakers and 21 per cent of the Kalam Arabic users. Based on the Ethnologue statistics data<sup>6</sup> and estimates in public reports and books on those major Lake Chad lingua francas, I ascertained these percentages of speakers per language.

French and English are both official languages in Cameroon whereas it is either one or the other in the other States. Very often these languages are used in the administration, justice, legislation and education, but are superseded by the three major local cross-border languages in markets, religious places and radio.

<sup>4</sup> Based on 2017 estimates (293 million *inhabitants*) in the Magrin and Perousse De Montclos book (page 39); I contributed to the writing of paper 5.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.cbtl.org/en/population](http://www.cbtl.org/en/population)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/shu>

# Linguistic policies across the region

As it was more popular than Kanuri, which was widely spoken in the Borno State of Nigeria and Niger, Arabic was instituted as the State language by the *Mai* (emperors) of the Kanem-Bornu Empire (1046–1893). This was done in order to garner favour with the administration of the wide Muslim group made of the vassal kingdoms spread across the Basin. In its Nigerian north-eastern possession, Britain then promoted the use of Hausa in inter-ethnic communication as well as in churches and education. This decision was prompted by the British willingness to counter the spreading of the Arabic language within the large communities of the Chad Basin (Cohen, 1971). Therefore, the position of second language of Islam and Christianity was given to Hausa in Nigeria. This is similar to Fulfulde in northern Cameroon, demonstrating that the preservation of the local linguistic heritage is attributable mainly to the European settler rather than to the Basin people themselves.

The strategy of the four post-independent countries is in keeping with this legacy. After being adopted in schools in 1962 and after the 1993 National Sovereign Conference in Chad, Arabic was instituted as the second language with French (Julien De Pommerol, 1999:328). Yet the practical reality is that Chadians speak more Kalam Arabic in markets, at cultural events and even in public service offices. In Cameroon, section 1.1.3 of the 1996 Constitution entrenches the promotion of mother tongues, meaning vehicular languages like Fulfulde whose prevalence in the northern part is not always accompanied with enhancement measures. In Nigeria and Niger, Hausa is taught at Western schools, like English in the first of these countries, and French in the second, but has dominated the media. Since 1981, most citizens were using Hausa rather than the Igbo and

Yoruba languages after the authorities in Lagos encouraged them to make a choice (Olagbaju and Akinsowon Idowu, 2014:126). In Niger, over 48 per cent of nationals speaking this national dialect approved the reform of 1971 that combines its learning with the French language (Diawara, 1988:13) and in 1998, with four other majority national languages. This prevalence of the three main local cross-border languages fuelled a feeling of being assimilated among the people who thrive to keep their minority dialects while being educated in English or French. This led to the following:

- The formal exclusion of languages reported as minor from projections in education reforms
- Governments' priorities still focused on official languages during exchanges with third parties
- Political stakeholders' carelessness in completing social programmes geared towards formalising local languages in place of French/English (with regard to multilingual education)
- Lessening investment by the diaspora in local languages once returning home
- The learning of the vehicular dialect of the host country by a citizen migrating from his or her country of origin to improve their life conditions.

# Language choices for migrants

On a wider perspective, the status of migrant in the Lake Chad Basin can be seen in many different ways. If colonisers restricted him or her to the role of providers of cross-border taxes on cattle or trade, contemporary States make him or her a visitor residing on their territory, compelled to obey the rules of the country and enjoying basic rights. In most cases, such people take out citizenship of the asylum country.

In reality, the migrant moves to escape natural and human-made disasters and to seize economic opportunities. The peculiarity of such mobility lies on the impact. Entry across the border requires this person to stay in the same region of the Lake Chad and therefore enables the migrant to find similar activities to those he or she left in their country of origin. However, some changes occur in habits when they face language challenges.

## The arrival of drought migrants in Darak

When displaced persons fled natural disasters like droughts in the 1970 and 1980s, many joined the Lake's habitat sites, which provided substantial food resources. So, when thousands of Nigerian fishermen of the Hausa, Margui, Djoukoun and Igbo communities who rushed to the fishery area of Darak located in the Logone-and-Chari Division, northern Cameroon, they met at their arrival Shuwa Arabs, Musgum, Massa and Kotoko populations whose Kalam Arabic is lingua franca (Interviews with Alawane Youssouf in Karena and Atim Ouda'a in Darak on 13 August 2010).

As the most common language in Darak Islands, Kalam Arabic is being promoted by the Shuwa Arabs<sup>7</sup>, the native speakers. As they gained the traditional power and hold commercial monopoly, they opened up to Hausa-speaking newcomers by encouraging them to learn their dialect. Co-habitation between Kalam Arabic and Hausa makes easy cross-comprehension, thus helping for the settlement of those migrants in 14 islands and 21 villages that emerged as a result of a change in Lake Chad water levels in Darak region (Abdouraman, 2008:62–3).

From a toponymic perspective, the migrants' settlement coinciding with the variation in the water levels of Lake Chad produced a significant effect. Some of the 30 occupied islands were named after the Hausa language (such as Lokonaira, Kamouna<sup>8</sup>) whereas others such as Gore Al Goutoun ('cotton right area'), Hile Wanzam ('Wanzam village'), Hile Adji ('Adji village') suggest the influence of Kalam Arabic in Darak (Interviews with Mal Garba in Darak on 02 March 2011 and Modou in Kousseri on 14 June 2018). Such a substitution of Hausa by Kalam Arabic is an indication of free promotion of the migrants' native language in the refuge area where a common language is practised.

In terms of education, the settlement of Nigerian migrants reflects a constancy. The Anglophone education system left in Nigeria has been used in the new villages as well as the inhabited Islands of Darak. A factor in this has been the absence of a Francophone school system, which has provided an opportunity for the learning and use of English in schools.

<sup>7</sup> The Shuwa Arabs are Semites from interbreeding of Arabs, Ethiopians, Fulani, and Black Sudanese. Instead of 'Arabs' like in Chad, they are called 'Shuwa Arabs' in Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. 'Shuwa' is using first by Kanuris in order to qualify their good figure at Kanem-Borno empire era.

<sup>8</sup> Kamouna means 'camouflages'. According to a Darak's migrant who requested silence when I conducted an interview in 2011 and the second migrant I called in 2018, they have given that name to express silently their economic ambitions on fishery resources. Lokonaira ('lonely') would reflect Nigerian migrant's intention to fight lonely against drought consequences near to their houses because they didn't get help from the Federal Government.

# Language and the settlement of Chadian refugees in northern Cameroon

The conquest of power by force of arms in Chad, against the backdrop of North against South ethno-regionalism and political games between France and Muammar Kadhafi, gave vent to civil war from 1979 to 1982 in the capital city of N'Djamena. This resulted in 4,000–5,000 deaths and close to 250,000 Chadian refugees in bordering northern Cameroon (Debos, 2013:83). Thanks to the presence of ethnic components on both sides of the border, no xenophobia concerns arose at the beginning of their settlement (Interviews with Dari and Mbairobe in Garoua on 15 February 2019). As a result of the scourge of war, some settlers claiming to settle definitively in the host country have been applying for the Cameroon nationality.

In family groups, and at the refugee camp of Kousseri, the UNHCR and the Government of Cameroon did not need to interact in French (both countries' common official language) with the Chadians refugees. The UN mission and the authorities of Yaounde have not only recruited Kalam Arabic-speaking agents to enable the provision of basic commodities to those Chadian newcomers, but have also relied on recruits to talk in Sara, Moundang, Massa and Tupuri languages with a majority at the second Poli-Faro Refugee Camp. Those people at the Poli-Faro Camp have denied their status of Kalam Arabic users since this language is considered as being a factor for supremacist attempts of Muslim Chadians over Christians (Interviews with 28 Chadian refugees in Ngaoundere on the 8 January 2012 and in Moundou on 5 December 2015). Although the majority of them are Christians, they are Kalam Arabic speakers, which is the first lingua franca in Chad. As in the pre-colonial era, that language

has also enabled the conversion of many to Islam. A good number working as servants in the Muslim communities' villages were seen as slaves. That's why from French colonisation, learning Kalam Arabic is perceived to them as the way to be under Islam (Ousmanou, 2016:215).

However, though refugee children stopped their primary and secondary learning in Chad, they took advantage of French as the language of instruction in the non-English-speaking North Cameroon in order to quickly return to school in towns like Maroua, Garoua, Guider and Yagoua. In addition, refugee teachers have requested to work in Cameroon villages and even at urban centre schools (Interviews with 12 student Chadian refugees in Ngaoundere 2009 and 2010).





# The context of Hausa in Boko Haram migrations and displacements

In 2009, the extra-judiciary killing of the first Boko Haram leader, Mohamed Yusuf, by the Nigerian military, and corruption by the wealthy Muslim elite led to armed Islamist insurgency of his followers headed by Abubakar Shekau (Magrin and Perouse De Montclos, 2018:123 and 142), which ended up drenching the entire Lake Chad region in blood.

The media coverage of the abuses of Boko Haram and military response of the LCBC Joint Task Forces has led to migratory crisis (Magrin and Perouse De Montclos, 2018:155). Close to 2.7 million displaced people were forced to leave their homes, including 1.9 million in the North-East of Nigeria. Over 541,000 people in Cameroon, Chad and Niger have migrated to alternative settings<sup>9</sup>. If any of the Nigerian migrants appeared to have acquired Hausa culture through language, the UNHCR used field agents and State officials to instil in them

the hope of a better future through the use of the Hausa language. They are permanent users of Hausa language in their refugee camps and through media communication. Nigerian and humanitarian international officials are still making use of the rich lexicon of peace and tolerance proper to the Hausa in order to promote inter-religious dialogue to refute the Islam/Christianity war.

Maiduguri, an asylum town of 800,000 displaced persons in Nigeria and the refugee camps of Dalorin Kabewa Minawaou, Dar Es-Salaam have not been promoting school children (Interviews with seven displaced persons in Abuja on 13 and 14 September 2019). Instead, in a situation where they can be hired by Boko Haram, education to counter terrorism was made a priority. Hausa has become the best awareness-raising language.

## The social and economic inclusion of migrants: linguistic aspects

In June 2018, February and September 2019, I conducted interviews with a relevant sample of 85 migrants, displaced persons and 60 refugees in Abuja (Nigeria), Garoua, Maroua, Kousseri, Yagoua (Cameroon) and N'Djamena (Chad). This field investigation is enriched by research findings collected in Gambaru (Nigeria), Darak, Karena, Garoua and Ngaoundere (Cameroon) in August 2010, March 2011 and in Moundou (Chad)

in December 2015. The evidence showed the vitality of Hausa, Fulfulde and Kalam Arabic with regard to their integration within the wider community. Since the economy is dominated by the *Alhaji* or *Al Hadj* (local businessmen) Hausa speakers, the need to fit in is strong among migrants, even if this involves initiation into one of these three languages spoken by these businessmen and their customers.

<sup>9</sup> More data available at [www.reporting.unhcr.org](http://www.reporting.unhcr.org)

# Kalam Arabic learning by Darak migrants

In this sub-section, the aim is to outline language issues in terms of the access of thousands of Nigerians to employment and education in Darak. As mentioned, the main economic activity of Darak is fishing. Once the famine was over, migrants organised the fish trade to increase their profit. In addition to the biggest regional market of Maiduguri, capital city of Borno State (Nigerian Federated State), they plan, through the learning of Kalam Arabic, to conquer the internal outlets of Kousseri Fotokol as well as enabling a route to education for their children (Interviews with seven migrants in Darak on 14 August 2010 and 16 June 2018).

An initial step was led by two famous Shuwa Arab private investors<sup>10</sup>, Al Hadj Wobri Ramat and Al Hadj Ahmat Tom, who then created a traders' network in Kousseri. As a result, Nigerian workers in Darak started learning Kalam Arabic and, by examining food rationing costs and the variation of Kousseri/Fotokol population's menus, these Hausa-speaking traders managed to master the culinary and economic glossary of their Cameroonian hosts within three months (Interviews with Wobri Ramat in Karena on 9 March 2011 and with two migrants from Darak in Kousseri on 12 February 2019). Thus, through their mastery of Kalam Arabic, and given the proximity of Kousseri with N'Djamena (Chad), they had access to the second big external market in the Lake Chad Basin Maiduguri.

The second step consisted of the migrants of Darak offering a Koranic school in Arabic to their children and, from 2004, primary education in English and French. In addition to the Hausa Islamic system, Nigerian relatives entrusted their offspring to the Shuwa Arab masters (Interview with two migrants from Darak in Kousseri on 12 February 2019) whose reputation extends beyond the African continent<sup>11</sup>. The Cameroonian local authorities have allowed the promotion of the English language system, which became Nigerian from the illegal occupation of Darak by the military forces of Lagos in 1987 before their retirement in 2004 following a verdict of the International Court of Justice (Abdouraman, 2008:63).

<sup>10</sup> Before he died in 2019, Al Hadj Wobri Ramat is the only local investor who won millions by exporting corns and beans from Darak area to Nigeria and Chad. His billionaire cousin Ahmat Tom built a big financial company in the whole Basin.

<sup>11</sup> See Ahmat Hessana's Presentation in Dakar at the 12th Language and Development Goals Conference in Dakar.

# Chadian refugee status of Fulfulde speakers

Between 1979 and 1982, Fulfulde facilitated the integration of Chadian refugees into the northern Cameroon economy. These refugees were already aware of jobs acquired by previous migrants in 1968 in the SODECOTON industrial company, Brasseries du Cameroon and CICAM. The SODECOTON is the Cotton Development Company and CICAM the Industrial Cotton Company of Cameroon. These are two major public Cameroon companies in the northern part of the country. The acting Minister of Agriculture and rural Development, Mr Mbairobe Gabriel, was a former Chadian migrant whose career is marked by his commitment at SODECOTON Technical department. The new migrants chose to move to this neighbouring border region. The main driver for such moves was the construction of the Lagdo irrigation and hydro-electric dams in 1977 as well as those in Lake Maga in 1979 (Watang Zieba, 2016:8). For the Chadians, this was a welcome windfall.

When they arrived in their host region, the majority looking for jobs moved to the SODECOTON and the Lagdo rice plantations. It took them two months to understand first Fulfulde, the lexicon of its seeds, local hydrography and distribution of crop products. Before they ascended the ranks, they were employed as simple field workers. Through their experience as agricultural workers and the success which crowned their mastering of fishing and handicraft activities, many requested Cameroonian citizenship (Interviews with 17 Chadian migrants in Yagoua, Garoua and Maroua on March 2018 and February 2019).

Their dynamism and contribution to the financial support of the families left in Chad are the main reasons for the opening of the Chadian Consulate in Garoua, which is the main city in northern Cameroon. Those who became Cameroonian citizens are better known as daily Fulfulde speakers, through which they have won not only the compassion of powerful officials from the North Cameroon, but also the *Aladji* confidence who integrated them into their own companies (Anon. (personal communication) 16 February 2019).

Observing the break of schooling of their children employed in handicrafts and transport, the Chadian Government has signed educational cooperation agreements with the Cameroon Ministry of Education in order to make easy their integration in the Cameroonian System. In secondary and higher education, the young Chadian refugees have the same rights as that of Cameroonians.

# Reconstruction through Hausa language in the Boko Haram context

The Hausa language is still promoted in the prevention of radicalism in north eastern Nigeria, which is led by the Islamist group, Boko Haram. This includes young and women refugees because they are mostly manipulated in terrorist attacks. The Hausa expansion in more than half of the 36 Federated States and with two-thirds of the inhabitants of Maiduguri is the primary tool used to raise awareness about Boko Haram radicalism to those people. The Holy Koran and Bible are mostly translated and read in Hausa language. This appears to be a sign of religious tolerance. Inspired by the Peace Initiative Network established in 2006 in Kano, the Operation Safe Corridor De-radicalisation Programme aims to demobilise and

de-radicalise repentant ex-Boko Haram insurgents through socio-vocational reintegration (Olufemi Sodipo, 2013) through Hausa. The programme is funded by the official Nigerian Victims Support Fund (Magrin and Perouse De Montclos, 2018:187).

Hausa is spoken to re-learn the delights and life challenges that extremist speeches have wiped out. Thanks to this talk, refugees are psychologically prepared and have managed to settle in areas of good opportunities (Interviews with seven displaced persons in Abuja on 13 and 14 September 2019). Hausa is used more to preach to the women God's truth and tolerance.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has not been to focus on French or English language education in the mobility contexts in the Lake Chad Basin States, but to highlight the central role played by the three dominant cross-border languages of Hausa, Fulfulde and Kalam Arabic in the socio-vocational inclusion of refugees, migrants and other displaced persons. Thus, in terms of providing the children of migrants with stable schooling and education, the following proposals are offered:

- Compulsory schooling in two of the three cross-border vehicular languages in each country of the Basin. The ambition will be to prepare the control transfer on African identity from French and English cultural systems to these local languages.
- The adoption of Hausa as the sub-regional organisations working language such as the LTBC and the Niger Basin Commission (SBC). Like Swahili in the functioning of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), officials should be able to make themselves understood in Hausa by people on current issues of human mobility, youth employment and women diverse integration.

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