Tokombere: From Interethnic Battles to Linguistic Conflicts: A Sketch of Language Practices Management

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ABSTRACT: This article provides an outline of the development of language practices in the mountains and plains of Tokombere characterized by the identity response and inter-ethnic conflicts which have raged there for decades or even centuries (Socpa: 1999, Bebey: 2018). An analysis of the behaviour of speakers of different languages reveals that, unlike other localities in the Mandara Mountains where we observe a considerable difference between majority languages and minority languages (Bebey: 2020, Tourneux et al.: 2010, Jean Tabi Manga: 1999 and 2000), none of the many local languages emerges singularly to impose itself on the local scene. It demonstrates that inter-ethnic conflicts, the confinement, then the emancipation of small Kirdi peoples brought into play the conquest of certain Islamist languages which, although present and slightly dominant, no longer assume more than a few functions; an observation which leads to the proposal of trilingualism which would like a native of this region to be able to practice the African mother tongue for their cultural roots and the two official languages for their openness to the world; this, contrary to our previous proposals (Bebey, 2021).

KEYWORDS: Tokombere, linguistic planning, trilingualism, identity retreat, linguistic conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Tokombere, the name given to this town located 10 km from the national road N° 1, and then to the entire administrative unit between Maroua and Mora, has its origins in the conflicts which raged for decades between different ethnic groups, religious groups and movements of survival and conquest of territory. Zulgo word, unlike Baimada (2020: 201) who attributes it to the Mada language, which comes from "kuɗum-ba" (kill each other), pronounced by other peoples "kuɗumbar" then fulfulnized into "kuɗumbare" to mean the place of battle (Baskouda 1988 and Christian Aurenche 1987). When the French settlers arrived (who were in collusion with the Islamo-Fulani knights (Socpa 1999)), they were content with their relays who translated the Zulgo version into "tooke mbare", which means "follow and kill" (Baimada, 2020) and Frenched as "tokombere". More than the Zulgo word, the Fulfulde version highlights the aggressiveness of different peoples whose objective in this fight is nothing other than "the death" of the other, whatever its nature: physical, cultural, linguistic, etc.

It is a basin, better a crossroads, located equidistant from the different hills and icebergs which each bear the name of a people: Muyang, Mboko, Zulgo-Gemzek, Mada, Moloko, Ouldeme. War was the characteristic mode of relations between the latter, each of which was equipped with an intrepid army (Alawadi Zelao, 2017) well organized and trained to which each male child pledged allegiance. The conquest of the plain and the piedmonts, so rich in pasture, fish and above all in arable land, was the main objective of the warlords. Thus, whether with regard to the Islamo-Fulani peoples (Fulani, Mandara, Kanuri) or other Kirdi ethnic groups, each people established a technique of confinement which results in what Jean-Yves Martin (1970) calls "the qui-vive mentality." For Alawadi Zelao (2017), the war arsenal available to each Tokomberean recalls this moment when the mountain people were besieged; sparking unprecedented resistance and distrust. Even the jihad, slave raids and colonization could not have been a leveling of consciousness that would have served as a rallying point capable of reunifying and fraternizing these smaller, less experienced and more vulnerable peoples.

Every Tuesday "talaka or talaki", market day at this crossroads of combat, assimilation, killing, and therefore death, each people deployed all their war tactics against another people. If they all fought the Fulani knights and Mandara and Kanuri traders and slavers, it remains curious to know that they fought more among themselves, and this even within the same ethnic and therefore linguistic group. These perpetual conflicts will prevent people from opening up to the outside world for decades (Bebey, 2018). The small connections that we are experiencing these days in Tokombere was made possible thanks to the Catholic missionaries from Europe and South Cameroon who will go beyond the gospel to offer health, education and agropastoral assistance which, unfortunately, were unable to allow a local African language to impose itself on others. This situation also served the spread of French as a lingua franca giving Kuɗumbar-Tokombere the name "Petit Paris" (Little Paris) or "Tokombere-Petit Paris".

Tokombere: From Interethnic Battles to Linguistic Conflicts: A Sketch Of Language Practices Management

This research work reviews the various social, religious and economic conflicts which have mutated into linguistic conflicts. It attempts to show how these conflicts have impacted the language practices of the populations of Tokombere before proposing an appropriate linguistic arrangement which preserves all socio-cultural identities, and promotes peace and harmonious cohabitation among populations whatever their origins, languages and religions.

1. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The overall observation of language practices in Tokombere-Petit Paris led us to find out if there is a strong local African language which imposes itself on other languages. Appropriate answers to this question required more specific secondary questions below:

- What language(s) do people speak at home? For what?

The objective of this question is to evaluate the vitality of different local mother tongues, the attachment of speakers to their cultures, their role in the perpetuation of their mother tongue and to identify the possible dominant languages as well as the reasons for this domination.

- Do the different populations speak neighbouring languages? How often and why?

We seek to know the reasons why the languages of neighbouring peoples are or are not spoken by certain peoples. It is more the reasons for rejection and voluntary refusal of languages which could naturally have been learned and practiced which interests us at this level.

- Do people believe that language practices have a link with the history of settlement of the district and specifically the town of Tokombere? How?

Information relating to the past of Tokombere allowed us to establish the link between the conflicting historical past and the relationships between the languages of different communities.

- Which language(s) do people think are the most widely spoken and loved in the district?

This is to evaluate the populations' motivated language planning in Tokombere.

2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Our exchanges with the populations during our stay in Tokombere showed us that no local African language exists in this district as a vehicular language. Because of various conflicts, the identity turning in would have prevented people from opening up and accepting each other. Such an experience would indicate that the practice of trilingualism among the speakers of the said territory, namely: a mother tongue among the multiple languages represented there, the first official language and the second official language, would be the linguistic arrangement appropriate to Tokombere.

3. DATA COLLECTION

The present section deals with the presentation of languages and ethnic groups of Tokombere, data collection methodology, the theoretical framework and literature review.

3.1 Languages and ethnic groups of Tokombere

Christian Seignobos and Iyebi-Mandjeck Olivier (2004) in The Atlas of the Far North Province identify Muyang, Zulgo, Gemzek, Mada, Moloko, Ouldeme and Mboko as languages whose speakers are known as natives of the Tokombere district. To these languages, we must add Mandara and Fulfulde imported and imposed by the jihad, then French and very rarely English which are the two official languages of the country.

3.2 Data collection and analysis instruments

Two instruments allowed us to collect the data necessary for writing this article: the semi-structured interview and observation. We were able to interview people from different linguistic communities, different religions and different ages and genders living in Tokombere around four questions as described in the research question. Also, for the purposes of verification and additional information, we observed the vitality of languages as they are practiced in public places; particularly in hospitals, in markets, in churches, in administrative structures, etc.

3.3 The theoretical framework

This article is produced from a language contact perspective, a sociolinguistic perspective to be more precise. It is Savan's (2005) "pop language theory" whose objectives are the popular uses of languages that best suits such a description. Lear (2011), speaking about this theory, writes that "pop language theory" is the result of language contacts in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Used by the people and emanating from ordinary media, this sociolinguistic theory will allow us to better describe linguistic practices in Tokombere and to propose more suitable planning.

3.4 Literature review

Social conflicts and their impact on human relations from generation to generation, and especially on cultural and linguistic heritage, have been the subject of numerous studies. In the Mandara Mountains, they were characterized either by an identity turning in or by the assimilation of the weakest.

Tokombere: From Interethnic Battles to Linguistic Conflicts: A Sketch Of Language Practices Management

According to Socpa (1999), the jihad, with the complicity of the French settlers, imposed languages such as Fulfulde, Mandara and Kanuri on the Kirdis. Reasoning in the same vein, Alawadi Zelao (2017) notes the political consequences of such clashes with the hegemony of the Islamo-Fulani.

Regarding languages, Bebey (2018) indicates that Kirdi peoples refuse to acquire Islamist languages because of poor historical pasts. He continues by asserting that the identity turning in which characterized them for decades has even created a hostile climate even within their communities, thus preventing them from practicing each other's languages. This statement is corroborated by Baimada (2020) who reveals that the six local languages of Tokombere are equitably practiced at the Saint Joseph Parish of Tokombere. This is just because none of them has been able to establish itself as the language of communication for everyone.

4. ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION
This section is the place for processing the data, their description as well as analyses and discussion.

4.1 Data analysis
This section describes the different factors which highlight the balance of power between the different languages spoken in Tokombere.

4.1.1 Historical conflicts
The settlement of the Mada, Ouldeme, Zulgo-Gemzek, Mboko mountains and the Muyang and Moloko icebergs between the 17th and 19th centuries (Seignobos and Iyébi-Mandjeck 2004), then the jihad and colonization deeply fragmented cultures and especially languages. If the jihad rather built a more or less harmonious identity, that of Islam, with languages such as Fulfulde, Kanuri and Mandara in Mora, Banki-Amchide and in Logone and Chari (Bebey, 2020), that could not have been the case of the Kirdi who will congregate in the impregnable mountainous caves, giving rise to the strengthening of stronger and more protective singular cultures. To the question of whether the historical past driven by conflicts is at the origin of the non-acquisition of neighbouring languages, many respondents answered in the affirmative as summarized in the following table.

Reasons for not practicing other local languages Answers	Yes	No	Total
Historical past	54	49	103
Utility	41	62	103
Religion	19	84	103

Table N°1: reasons for not practising neighbouring languages

A view of Table1 reveals that it is the previous conflicting relations which do not allow the populations of Tokombere to acquire the languages of their former enemies. More than the half of our respondents consider that this past has profoundly destroyed any opportunity for relationships that provide communication and the acquisition of different cultures and languages.

This conservatism characterized by Islamo-Kirdi and Kirdi-Kirdi conflicts is an indication that it is the historical past of the peoples of Tokombere which has remained as a brake on the diffusion of an African language and its imposition on others; this regardless of the numerical superiority of its native speakers. Also, such a turning in on oneself could not allow the languages of the different belligerents to be more useful and, of course, their speakers more enviable.

4.1.2 The role of translators/interpreters between speakers of local languages and state agents
The plurality of languages and the illiteracy of populations force the administration to use more adapted linguistic practices in order to avoid any misunderstanding and ambiguity in decision-making. To do this, careful organization is put in place by each community around the language of communication with state agents who use official languages. The cantons or chiefdoms being predominantly homogeneous, therefore made up of people speaking almost the same local language, translators/interpreters were made available to them; the latter had a preponderant role, but also a place of choice for Islamo-Fulani languages such as which we can see in the diagram below:

Kirdi language � Mandar ➡ Fulfulde➡French

Table N°2: translation/interpreting scheme in the administrative services of Tokombere

An observation of the diagram above reveals that between the citizen speaking local languages and the State stand two translators/interpreters who speak the Islamo-Fulani languages: Mandara and Fulfulde. This exercise confirms the hypothesis of complicity and conspiracy between the Islamo-Fulani and the French colonizer against the Kirdi populations and princes. It relegates non-Islamo-Fulani and Indo-European languages and cultures to the background. According to our informants, a good number of translators/interpreters, who have no link with the traditional chiefdoms established for decades or even centuries, were also rewarded in the 1940s with positions as canton chiefs.

Tokombere: From Interethnic Battles to Linguistic Conflicts: A Sketch Of Language Practices Management

In health centres in particular, positions for multilingual translators/interpreters have been opened to enable health workers to better diagnose the illnesses of patients who do not speak the official languages.

However, it should be noted that the presence of translators/interpreters has considerably reduced the enthusiasm of populations to acquire vehicular languages. Indeed, this practice assumes that speakers of local languages have no interest and no obligation to learn another language regardless of its usefulness. Except for a few borrowings and tracings from Fulfulde and Mandara in the areas of justice, militia, commerce, etc., the systematic and massive transmission of widely spoken languages (Fulfulde, Kanuri, Mandara (Tourneux et al. 2010, Bebey 2018 and 2020)) does therefore not take place in Tokombere.

Finally, it is the desire and need for emancipation of the Kirdi (Baskouda 1988, Christian Aurenche 1987) with the permanent presence of French citizens and the creation of numerous schools and Maternal and Infant Promotions (MIP) for the popular French to be adopted as language vehicle in Tokombere.

4.1.3 The role of religions
Unlike state agents, religions will play different roles.

4.1.3.1 Christianity
In his article entitled "Language management in post-conflict multilingual communities: the case of Saint Joseph Parish of Tokombere", François Baimada Gigla (2020) demonstrates that the linguistic identity of church leaders, the sociolinguistic profile of large communities of pastors and their engagement in church activities determine which languages to practice. For him, this Catholic parish located in an urban area whose leaders have always used French as a language of mass communication uses local languages such as Muyang, Mada, Zulgo-Gemzek, Moloko and Mboko for specific activities, the others being carried out in French. If this observation is true, it remains that Tokombere is full of many other parishes and branches of Protestant and 7th-day Adventist churches that carry out activities with diverse needs in terms of linguistic practices as contained in the table below:

Church ⟍ Langue	Catholic churches		7th Day Adventist Churches		Protestant churches		Born again churches	
(Area)	urban	rural	urban	rural	urban	rural	urban	rural
French	60%	9 %	16 %	2 %	53%	31%	81%	60%
Fulfulde	0,7%	0,02 %	63 %	51 %	39%	18%	12%	8%
Mandara	0%	3,4 %	0%	4,2 %	2%	4,7%	0%	01%
Local Language	39,3%	80,58 %	21%	42,8%	6%	44,3%	07%	31%

Table N°3: Language practices in churches in Tokombere

One notices after a look at the table above that French and Fulfulde are more used in the city while local languages are more common in the countryside. The exceptional case of "born again" churches which make more use of French in town and in the countryside can be explained by the assignment of pastors who use French much more during their pastoral exercise.

In other words, one notes that if the Sunday churches promote French as a lingua franca, those of Saturday prefer Fulfulde in town. Meanwhile, the more populous countryside cowers down to the respective local languages; a practice that is gaining ground with the translation of Bibles and hymns into these languages.

Roughly speaking, apart from Mandara, the churches promote all the languages spoken in Tokombere without any emerging singularly throughout the territory.

4.1.3.2 Islam
One of the missions of the jihadists during the Islamization of the Kirdi populations of North Cameroon was the propagation of Arab-Muslim cultures like the imposition of Arabic languages, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Mandara, etc. (Socpa, 1999 and Bebey, 2018). To confirm this assertion, let us observe the information in the table below:

Language ⟍ Area	Rural	Urban
French	0%	0%
Fulfulde	44%	51,7%
Mandara	29%	11,3%
Local language	0%	0%
Others (Arabic)	37%	37%
Total	100 %	100 %

Table N°4: Language practices in the mosques of Tokombere

Tokombere: From Interethnic Battles to Linguistic Conflicts: A Sketch Of Language Practices Management

An observation of the picture of linguistic practices in the town and country mosques of Tokombere reveals that Islam continues to exceptionally promote the Fulfulde and Mandara languages inherited from the jihad to the detriment of local languages. No prayers and no preaching are said in Kolkoch, Godoba, Baka, Makalingai, Tindrime, Moundouvaya, Serawa where almost all the faithful are native speakers of the Mada, Muyang, Moloko, Mboko, Zulgo-Gemzek languages, in a local language.

According to our informants, this situation is explained by the fact that some conditions for the Islamization of Kirdi disbelievers are ignorance and denigration, better still the rejection, for life of their parents, their origins, their culture including their own names. Thus, all Muslim neighbourhoods and families predominantly use the Fulfulde and Mandara languages in the Tokombere district.

4.1.3.3 Traditional African religions

For followers of traditional African religion, it is the local African language that serves as a means of communication with God and ancestors. Let us look at the following data:

Language / Area	Rural	Urban
French	0%	0%
Fulfulde	0%	0%
Mandara	4%	0%
Local languages	96%	100%
Others	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

Table No. 5: Use of languages by followers of traditional religion in Tokombéré

Unlike Christianity and Islam, table 5 reveals that followers of traditional religions make almost the majority of use of local languages. It is also a serious sin to Islamize among the Ouldemes, Muyang, Mboko and Moloko to such an extent that even circumcision, a sign of Islamization, is prohibited. The curious 4 uses of Mandara come from the Makdawar clan among the Muyang of Palbara who, originally, spoke this language.

To conclude, we can say that the discrimination of languages by the multiple religions in Tokombere is a source of balance and preservation of the existing languages. As long as these religions exist in these territories in the city and in the countryside, vernacular languages will survive the threat from vehicular languages.

4.1.3.4 Exchanges in the markets

The market is the place par excellence for the proliferation of cultures, for obligatory contact with other peoples. In Tokombere, like everywhere else, the market is a platform where each individual, seller or buyer, comes to present articles and exhibit themselves. As demonstrated in Bebey (2018), the market in Tokombéré is also suffering the pangs of inter-ethnic conflicts and identity turning in. One of the characteristics that we know about it is the territorialisation and specificity of linguistic practices in the different markets of the district as we can observe in the table that follows:

Village/ language	French	Fulfulde	Mandara	Muyang	mada	Zulgo	Molko	Ouldeme And plata
Tokombere	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mayo-plata	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+
Dala-zulgo	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
Makalingai	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-
Mekéri	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
Godoba	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-
Tindrime	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Kolkoch	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+

Table N°6: Languages present in the Tokombere markets

A look at the table above reveals that urban and rural markets reflect varying linguistic practices in Tokombere. If the central market, the one which gave its name to the whole district, is the place of practices of all the languages, this is not the case of the rural markets which are dominated by the languages and cultures of the local populations. We observe that, overall; Mandara and Fulfuldé are used in several markets unlike French which is perceived as the most used language in other areas of life in Tokombere; a situation which, according to Bebey (2020), is attributed to the dynamism of Fulani and Mandara traders.

Also, it should be noted that each market is specific in the sense that it promotes the socio-cultural values of different peoples. The Mayo-plata market, for instance, is the place for selling materials made by plata blacksmiths (hoes, knives, axes, daba, etc.) and cereals (wandzou, quackgrass, etc.) and rare meats (dog, horse, donkey, pig, etc.). In Mekeri, tobacco and salt are the most sold, while sugar cane, peanuts, oil and the bark of the quail are more present on the Dalazulgo market. For basketry, tannery and other wood-related craft products, go to the Makalingai market.

4.2 Discussion

This section is based on the description of language practices and proposes linguistic planning in the administrative district of Tokombere.

Linguistic practices in different areas of life and in different places in the Tokombere district suggest, following Tadadjeu (1984), trilingualism as a linguistic policy. It is:

- The two official languages: French and English,

If English is practiced exclusively in classrooms during English lessons and is used as a language of research and opening to the world, popular French is, for its part, the language most used in Tokombere. It is nicknamed Tokombere-Petit Paris because of the presence of French people, but especially the practice of French in different areas of life and between people speaking different local African languages. Thus, French is no longer only the language of administration and education, but also of daily interaction in the street, in church, in the market, in hospitals, etc. It is the language of information. In other words, popular French is a language of openness to the world and the development of the Kirdis of Tokombéré; it is the vehicular language, the language of local integration.

- A local African mother tongue:

These possible mother tongues include Muyang, Moloko, Mada, Ouldémé, Mboko, Zulgo-Gemzek, Mandara or Fulfulde. They are used for cultural roots. Given the conservative nature of speakers of different local mother tongues, their acquisition allows ethnic integration and appropriation of the social and cultural practices of the clan.

Roughly speaking, failing to learn the multiple languages, every citizen of Tokombere must practice both official languages for their local and national integration, for their training and their openness to the world; and a local African mother tongue for its cultural roots. This approach will allow each of the languages, regardless of the number of its native speakers, to be useful and survive the threats from majority languages.

CONCLUSION

This article reviewed language practices in the territory of Tokombere. Adopting a sociolinguistic approach, it revealed that the very conflictual historical past, the role of translators/interpreters between speakers of African languages and state agents who practice official Indo-European languages, the confinement of populations, the rejection of Islam and Islamo-Fulani languages and cultures contributed to the emergence of popular French as a widely spoken language in Tokombere. This analysis led to the proposal of trilingualism, namely, the practice of two official languages and one of different local African languages as a linguistic planning policy in order to preserve peace, national integration and the sustainability of languages and local cultures.

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