



## Using Indigenous Languages for Teaching: Tama Language

Mastura Mohamed Ibrahim Dawood<sup>1</sup> - Mahammod Ali Mohammed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>.Sudan University Of Science And Technology -College Of Graduate Studies And Scientific Research -College Of Language – English Department

### ABSTRACT:

The question of which language(s) could be used for teaching and learning is a crucial one in bilingual and multilingual contexts. In former colonial countries, it is a question that has occupied the agendas of many governments since they attained independence. Some countries have made strides towards addressing it (e.g., Tanzania and Nigeria), although it continues to haunt others. In Sudan there are similar cases of indigenous languages, namely the Tama Language in Dar Tam. Tama is such a small minority in Dar Fur that is increasingly growing in numbers and importance. Tama people believe that their language can at least be used at lower levels of general education if an adequate writing system is devised. A number of studies have been conducted in this domain all have the objectives of creating an effective writing system that will Tama young learners to use their language in education. Young learners are already familiar with the Arabic script as they have been exposed to glorious Guran in Khalawa (a pre-school setting). Arabic script can be suggested as the best type of script to be used for writing Tama language.

**Key words:** indigenous language, bilingual context, multilingual context, minority, Khalawa.

### المستخلص:

ما زال للساؤل عن أي لغة يمكن استخدامها في التدريس والتعليم في المجتمعات ثنائية اللغة والمتعددة أمراً قائماً. وقد شغل هذا التساؤل أجندة العديد من الدول التي كانت مستعمرة منذ أن نالت استقلالها، وقد اتخذت بعض الدول مثل تنزانيا ونيجيريا خطوات نحو إيجاد اجابة للسؤال وما زالت العديد من الدول الأخرى تبحث عن حلول غيرها. والسودان كغيره من الدول التي بها العديد من الأقليات اللغوية تحديداً لغة التاما التي تشكل أقلية منتشرة في غرب دارفور ومستمرة في تزايدها وأهميتها حيث يعتقد التاما أن لغتهم يمكن أن تستخدم بعد تصميم نظام خطي لها في التدريس في مراحل التعليم الأولية. وقد أجريت العديد من الدراسات في هذا المجال والتي تصبو جميعها الي تصميم نظام خطي فعال يمكن صغار التاما من إستخدام لغتهم في الدراسة وبفضل تدريس القرآن الكريم للأطفال في مراحل التعليم قبل المدرسي في الخلاوي، فإن الخط العربي مألوف بالنسبة لهم مما جعله أنسب الخطوط لتبنيه في تصميم نظام خطي للغة التاما.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** اللغة المحلية، مجتمع ثنائي اللغة، مجتمع متعدد اللغات، أقلية، خلوة

### INTRODUCTION:

As recently as 1997, African state representatives gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe for an intergovernmental conference on language policies in Africa hosted by UNESCO in order to discuss the question of language planning and policy in Africa. The conferees have arrived at a number of points that all heads of delegates have pledged to observe back home. The Sudan was one of these countries that assembled in that African country, as we are all

aware that Sudan has diverse minorities forming a multi-racial nation and hence a multilingual community. As it was already mentioned a number of crucial points in relation to the issue in question have been voiced. This led to the emerging of a new African vision which reflected in viewing the whole continent as a democratic Africa that seeks to reinforce the partaking of all African citizens in all socio-economic and political institutions. The new



vision also embraced the fact of culturally and peacefully co-existence and mainly thinking of economic development in a narrow manner at the expense of other important variables as peaceful and cultural coexistence. The question of culture is greatly linked with the issues of languages which are considered as the vehicle of thought. Again, all the different minorities need to live within a broader context of justice, fairness and equity for all; respect for linguistic rights as human rights, including those of minorities. This can further be interpreted in looking at the continent as one that acknowledges its ethno-linguistic pluralism and accepts this as a normal way of life and as a rich resource for development and progress. The new vision of Africa as portrayed above is only realizable through the promotion of peaceful coexistence of people in a society where pluralism does not entail replacement of one language or identity by another, but instead promotes complementary of functions as well as co-operation and a sense of common destiny. Living in a pluralistic context can only mean seeking to produce through sound and explicit language policies Africans who are able to operate effectively at local levels as well as at regional and international levels; Africa that provides the environment for the promotion and preservation of an African identity as well as the cultivation of a proud and confident African personality; where scientific and technological discourse is conducted in the national languages as part of our cognitive preparation for facing the challenges of the next millennium. Therefore, for the success of the above cited issues, positive steps must be taken to implement language planning and policy and raising the status of indigenous language to the level of classroom applicability. I would like to discuss in the small project the importance and viability of using the indigenous languages in classroom environment as languages of learning and instruction with

special reference to Tama language paying special attention to our predecessors in this domain that is those African countries that have already walked long strides in this respect like Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The paper shall address certain issues such as the rationale behind using indigenous languages for learning and teaching, and then the paper will give a brief description of the language situation that of Tama in relation to other Sudanese indigenous languages. The paper will conclude by how Tama language can actually be applied to teaching and learning in wider scale, not to mention the discussion of its future use in higher institutions of learning and whether it is possible to extend its use beyond that level to mass media.

#### **Tama minority:**

It goes without saying that Sudan is a country in northeast Africa, the third largest country. The country's north and south stand in stark contrast to one another the thing which made it possible for the south to split and become an independent State. The dry, desert north is populated largely by Arab Muslims, while the west, swampy south is populated by black African Christians and animists. The site of several powerful ancient states, Sudan was controlled by Egypt and Britain until the 20th century. An estimated 1.5 million Sudanese people died in a long and brutal civil war between the north and south, lasting from 1983 to 2004. Another conflict that erupted in the western region of Darfur in 2003 has claimed more than 200,000 lives and left more than 2 million people displaced from their homes. The conflict in Darfur continued in 2007 despite international mediation efforts. Sudan is therefore bilingual and multicultural nation. The population of Sudan is composed principally of Arabs in the north and black Africans in the south; many Arabs are of mixed ancestry. Other ethnic groups in northern Sudan include the Beja, Jamala, and Nubian peoples.



The northern two-thirds of Sudan is an area of Islamic culture. The major black ethnic groups in southern Sudan, before cession is the Azande, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk. European culture and religion have influenced the southern peoples, but traditional customs remain strong. Tama minority folk lives in Dar Fur. Minority groups share common ethnic, racial religious backgrounds, especially when constituting a comparatively small proportion of a given population. Tama, in Sudan, is such a minority with fewer rights and less power than majority groups. Socialists argue that a primary factor in the existence of minorities is immigration, but settlement by one people can also result in the indigenous or conquered people becoming a minority, as in the case of Native Americans or the Aboriginal Australians. In Europe, throughout history, ties of minority peoples with their countries of ethnic origin have led to international disputes and wars, as in the case of the Sudetenland. In a heterogeneous society, cultural and class differences between diverse elements of the population can become more pronounced, causing inequalities through discrimination.

Tama is Non- Arab African ethnic group of people who live in North East Chad and Western Sudan in Darfur, they practice Islam . Population is estimated 63,000 in Chad and 70.000 in Darfur in Guereda province , they are farmers who live in sedentary settlement cultivate millet, beans, cucumber and sesame. Also raise cattle, camels and sheep. (Nasr El deen,2006:46). Due

to the famine that caused by the drought and war many people in Darfur have fled their area to other part of Sudan or into Chad. In the civil war in Chad (2005 – 20100),Tama were involved in ethnic conflict with Zagahawa tribe , consequently refugees frequently exchange between Chad and Sudan ([http://user. Mildura. Net](http://user.Mildura.Net)). Tama are known by their own iron industries, they have many names associated with their industries such as Tema, Tama, Bani Tameem and Tumamm, (Abdal Azeem,2000: p32, in Darfur ministry of culture,1974: p21).

Tama people , in both Chad and Darfour ,are governed by a traditional leader called sultan ,he consults with a council of elders. In Chad sultan has Chadians government soldiers under his command, the sultan successors will be chosen from among his son (Nasr Eldeen,p44). Yousif Ismeel, one of Tama leaders, claims that, the clan of the sultan , the Oroguk is to be descended from the prophet Mohammed and originated in Irag , the rest of Tama clan are said to have originated in the vicinity of Nyere mountain which is considered sacred and is located between Guereda and Amizoer .Tama tribe comprises number of subgroups such as Asungor, Dagi, Erenga, Gimr ,kibet ,Mararri, Mileri, and Tama proper ,the traditional home of the tama is DarTama. In Sudan the most popular subgroup is Argug( the family), and others.The following table shows some divisions of Tama tribe. Table (1) Tama subgroup

Taouruk	Keyeh	Arugog
Messnek	Maganuk	Kadruk
Kararnok	Neri	Foukumuk
Anenga	Baruk	Macau
Sebhybok	Galouluk	Toouruk
.Beyeh	Karaunk	Gilmesi
Keyseh	Maraou	Fudruk
Shala	Tetor	Mouby
.Krarmouk	Kanuk	Mooruk
	Aowra	Marrari



However, Tama people have become more active in fighting discriminatory injustices and all types of discrimination. They have become powerful to such an extent that they now want to have their language be used in equal footings with other languages.

### **Tama Language**

The existence of patterned variations in a language makes it possible to identify ourselves and others as belonging to certain group. social prestige or stigma associated with these variations makes language a source of social and political power (Bernard,1998:p5) A person can commonly be identified by his language because language is inherently involved in socializing ,so the social group whose language a person speak, is an important identity group for him,( Brown,1993: p260) . Although there are other markers of ethnic identity such as food or clothing or religion, but language has special role because it organizes thoughts,(Dulay,1982:p16). Tama people as an ethnic group regularly use their own language as one of their most significant identifying feature . However, it is hard to find other features that distinguish them from their neighbours, so their language is the best medium.Tama language embodies area of other languages , Mararri, Abu Sharb, Keyebt,Mora ,Senyar, and Messeria Gabel.Tama area is surrounded by villages and dwelling centers and around these areas are areas of languages which are intelligible with Tama language some of which are Gemir, Zagahwa, Kobe, Assungor, and others which have different languages but can speak Tama as well ,namely ,Assungor and Mararri, this indicates that Tama language is flexible with its neighboring languages and there is great homogeneity among them. This kind of language behaviour might not be available in many other languages. (Kapeplnios(2013,162) states, while a vast amount of information is available on the internet or elsewhere, much of it

,is inaccessible because of language barriers. Thus barriers of languages distract the amount of information that is transferred between them. Tama language is known as one of the Nilotic Saharan languages, people use Arabic as a mean of communication with other. Tama language compared to all darfurian languages is distinctive except, Assungor and Gimir language these are closely related to Tama, also Assungor is considered to be the most ancient people who came to Chad from Yemen( Nasr El deen,p47) . Relationship between different ethnic and language groups across Sudan are hardly separated, researchers have shown a probable correlation of some 90-95% between Tama and Assungor language , an individual in Tama and an Assungor speaks together and each one can understand the other .Coupland,( 2013,p29) states, the world of languages have been homogenizing by convergence at the expense of cultural divergence.It becomes clear to the language learners that , there are many dialects with a number of confusing differences . Tama language is one of a whole net work of the related language spoken by different tribes in Sudan and Chad the Mararri and Assungor languages are reported to be closely linked to Tama language and all of them come from the same root.

### **Geography of Tama**

Tama land is a fertile land which made people in Darfur in particular the Sultan of Darfur and Wadai competed to conquer it. Tama land located west Dar Gemir at the border between Wodai and Darfur. It is surrounded by areas of some western tribes, the Marrari in the west, Zaghwa in the north , Gemir in the East and Gebel tribe in the South, it has great extension in western Sudan, it stretches from the south to the North. Its Southern part extends towards the area of Marari then extends to the Eastern South where one can find the most important mountains, and Springs( Nasr El deen,



p28). Also it is an agricultural land which contains many mountains and Tama mountain the most important one, it is large and has springs and full of thick complicated tall trees on the top of which Tama traditional governor (Tama sultan) resides. The line that separates Wodai from Darfur is drawn by trig borders, these borders are hills that having gaps, these gaps are filled by stones of two meter high, people do not know when these borders are drawn or existed, but it is said that, they have been built in accordance to an agreement between Wodai governor (sultan) and Tama governor (Abdal Azeem, p76). Tama area which lies East Chad has a hot climate in summer and cold in winter, it has three seasons in the year, summer which is very hot, autumn with plentiful heavy rains, and in winter the dry air blows causes dust especially in the desert area. According to Yousif Ismeel, one of Tama leaders, in Tama land, there are several seasonal valleys which are quite active when rains fall. The most important valleys are Kary, Germa and Behya, all these valleys surrounded Gerada, the current town of Tama people. Tama land is full of long thick trees which provide people with their fruits and wood, among these trees are Habaso trees, they are well known with their remarkable length and their leaves are used as dyes.

### Linguistic Situation in Sudan

There is only one main language in Sudan that is Arabic which acts as a national official language and many other minority indigenous languages. According to Abdal A zeem (p48) classification, the languages of the Sudan belong to three out of four language families. Sudan is, therefore regarded as a multilingual/ multicultural country. Regarding, western Dar fur, Tama language only embodies areas of many languages such as Asungor, Dajo, Erenga, Gimir, Kibet, Marrari, Milris, and Tama proper. And although Sudan is a multilingual country, Arabic is the sole

official language since Sudan obtained its independence, It is used in parliament, trade, industry, the mass media, and education. And it continues to dominate as the national official language. While the minority indigenous languages enjoy some small degree of prominence, Arabic continues to enjoy the central role and considered as the language power and economic wellbeing. In western Sudan, where the majority of indigenous language are spoken along with Arabic which is the medium of instruction, this would make learning difficult for pupils at their basic level, and detract from whatever they would have learnt so far in the mother tongue. This because they were born by parents excessively speak Tama or other indigenous language in their daily conversations or chats, and even in the external environment, when they go to play with their age group, their mother tongue is dominant. Based on my own experience in teaching, in Dar Tam, It appeared that two third of the total number of the pupils spent half of their year, without understanding their lessons. However, those who were exposed to glorious Quran during their study in Khalwa (Quranic school), were much better in getting along with their classes than those who were deprived from this opportunity. Another problem might arise when indigenous languages are used as a medium of instruction, because, the few teachers, who are proficient in the language, are not deployed in the relevant areas, because deployment of teachers does not involve consideration of using minority languages as medium of instruction. There also an added problem in Sudan as well as elsewhere in Africa, bilingualism has tended to be subtractive, because the socio-cultural attribute of indigenous language have been denigrated in favor of Arabic which is considered to be more prestigious. This has even resulted in some



Sudanese who were educated through the medium of Arabic or English.

The above situation has had some of the following serious consequences for educational development in Sudan:

- Indigenous languages have not been taken seriously as subjects of study.
- Too much emphasis has been placed on proficiency in Arabic which in many cases, is introduced to children from the first day of school.
- Proficiency in the mother tongue is, in sometimes threatened, because teachers and parents focus on learning Arabic at school and home. It is sad in some cases that, children come proficient in their mother tongue but soon begin to lose this as the focus is shifted to develop proficiency in Arabic both at school and home.

Despite what appears to be negative picture regarding Sudan's indigenous languages, some steps have been taken towards stabilizing them, this has been felt when Sudan acknowledges its pluralism and accepts it as a way of life and as a source for development and progress. Also many studies have been conducted recently in the field of using indigenous languages and have emphasized that using indigenous languages is basically forming. The present study has gone on the same walk and appeals for using indigenous languages at school.

#### **Indigenous languages in education**

On the question of the status and usage of indigenous languages as medium of instruction at basic level of general education versus Arabic language. Suggestions have been put forward for maintaining the exclusive official status and usage of Arabic language. Although the use of Arabic in education for pupils who do not speak a language rather than their mother tongue, might cause problem, however, it has big advantages, such as access to

knowledge, creativity, and entertainment of the entire Arab world as well as global trade and commerce. Furthermore, indigenous language have become integral part to lives of Sudanese people and are indeed resources to be nurtured and develop.

Another group believe that, learning indigenous language does not involve taking on a new cultural identity So it is possible to adopt a language to give expression to the cultural and intellectual peculiarities of another world, According to William & Sinpper(1990,50) language comprises not only communication, but also heritage, culture, and feelings. It is, therefore, important to note that maintaining speakers' native language has an affective dimension, that of enhancing the speakers' self concept and their pride in their cultural background and identity.

There are other two factors that justify the use of indigenous languages as a language of teaching and learning. First. Kambo(2000,40) states, cognitive and effective development occur more effectively in a language that, the learner knows very well. This is, in the same line of what I concluded from my experience in teaching in Dar Tama within 1990-1992, that most of the learners are not proficient in Arabic, when they enter school since their exposure to Arabic languages, the medium of instruction, is often minimal in home, so they need to be taught in a language that they familiar with( mother tongue). Second, learning in general(including second language learning) occurs more effectively if the required cognitive development has already taken place through the use of a first language as a language of learning. This emphasizes that learning through language tongue provide readiness for the acquisition of the second language, and that the literacy and cognitive skills already acquired in the first language provide easy transition to second- language medium education.



Bilingualism/ multilingualism, is a reality for most people live in bilingual/multilingual societies. So any solution for any linguistic problem should be sought in the context of bilingualism multilingualism. It was believed that bilingualism creates more task for the brain than is necessary, leads to mental confusion as the child tries to work out which language to use in a particular communicative situation , slows down acquisition of the second language, leads to split personality, and created cultural and political division( Sure& Webb,2000,p80)A recent research, however, has pointed out that contrary to the belief above, bilingualism has a number of advantages, Kamo(p47) states, bilinguals perform better in intelligence tests than do monolinguals , that they have greater mental flexibility and superior abstract thinking and concept formation , and that bilingualism stimulates further IQ development. It is noted , however that bilingualism can only be positive when children are trained to a level of stable bilingualism, where competence in the mother tongue is comparable to that in the second language. Bilinguals with a high level of bilingual proficiency showed positive cognitive effects while limited bilinguals , weak in both mother tongue and second , language, showed negative cognitive effects(Williams & ainper,p55). The contradicted two beliefs above are concerned to their writers' own view, for me, Iam with those who positively believe in bilingualism, I think bilingualism endows access to knowledge and provides time to develop cognitive and social skills, and this what the learners need to build themselves.

In seeking to stabilize Sudanese languages , it should be noted that , in Sudan and elsewhere, multilingualism is a norm. Many children grow up in environment where more than one indigenous language is spoken and they develop proficiency in one or more of these (Sure& Webb, p122). It appears here that the conclusion

should be to turn all bad past thoughts into something positive, and bilingual education seems to offer acceptable possibilities. The term bilingual education is used to describe "any system of school education in which , at a given moment in time and for varying amount of time , simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is planned and given in at least two languages."( Hamers& Blanc,1992:p189), they have also identified three categories as follow;

- Instruction is given in both languages.
- Instruction is given first in the first language , and the pupil is taught until such time as he/she is able to use the second language as a medium of learning.
- The largest part of instruction is given through the second language, and the first language is introduced later- first as a subject and later as a medium of instruction.

On the ground of promoting bilingualism , in my view, the first option, instruction given in both languages , would be the most desirable, however in Sudanese contexts and elsewhere, one has to be realistic and consider the practicality of such a move , in view of multiplicity of languages within most countries. Government would need to set aside vast amount of money, for the development of dictionaries, teaching materials, and bilingual teacher- training programs. That kind of money may not be readily available , and the process takes time to plan and implement. A more practicable alternative in the short time is the second option above. Initially a local indigenous language would be used through primary grades while Arabic would be taught as a subject and later as medium of instruction.

#### **Methodology:**

The present study applied descriptive analytic method . The data is collected through a questionnaires which is given to 38 tutors of English at universities to fill in order to



investigate their attitudes towards the possibility of developing a writing system to be used in Tama and what is the most suitable script to adopt in writing Tama language. They are specialized teachers in linguistics, therefore, their attitudes are highly reliable and can be reckoned with, and able to provide the researcher with adequate information she needs for accomplishing the study.

#### **Discussion:**

In order to investigate the area in question empirically the researcher opted for The questionnaire which investigate the possibility of introducing a writing system in Tama to be used as a medium of instruction at least at the basic levels of general education depending on the following factors: First children of Tama were born and brought up to parents who excessively speak Tama language in their daily conversations or chats. Second in the external environment where children play with their mates, the dominant language is Tama. And since Arabic language is language of instruction at school, it is difficult for most of the pupils to understand their subjects, because they need to understand Arabic first, then their subjects so, this is a huge problem. The questionnaire also seeks for what a script should Tama opt, Arabic script or African countries that have language minorities as well as Sudan. Each of the two experiences might be selected for some reasons. Arabic script, for instance, considered to be more suitable as it is used to develop many languages in the world, some pupils of Tama were exposed to Arabic, when they were studying Quran in Khalwa( Quranic school), this somewhat helps them to get with their classes where Arabic is used. It is also possible to adopt the predecessors(African countries), because, their experience might lower the financial cost of Tama experience and save it the troubles of looking for the right method and approach to adhere to, and since

their experience might subject to some verifications and modifications, it could help the national experts or language planners to avoid the potential pitfalls that undergone such experience.

Regarding the discussion on bilingual education, indigenous languages should be taken care of, mother tongue instruction is needed to allow adequate time for the acquisition and development of cognitive, affective and social skills, indigenous languages would continue until indigenous languages are sufficiently developed to be used alongside Arabic. Also a teacher could choose to use either of the two languages in his/her class or could just code- switch as necessary, furthermore, students could be free to write their assignments and examinations in the language of their choice, There is also a need to carry out more research to determine factors underlying bilingual education typologies.

#### **Results:**

Based on the procedures of data collection the study arrive to the following results:

- 1- Tama language is capable of having an independent writing system with full representation of its sound system and can be used at lower levels of general education.
- 2- Arabic writing system is the most suitable script for Tama language to adopt.
- 3- The predecessors' script(African countries which have similar linguistic minorities as Sudan) can be adopt to write Tama language.
- 4- The use of local language in schooling in a country where Arabic is the first language for communication can have serious political implementations.
- 5- Using indigenous language at school can lead to cession.
- 6- Tama language cannot be used at university as English is the language of scientific research and that there is no good host of literature in Tama in various disciplines.





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