

## The village interviews

During the course of the research it became clear that it would be useful to define the nature of Arabic that contributed to urban Maiduguri Arabic. To this end an extensive survey was undertaken of the various Arabic-speaking regions in Nigeria. Maiduguri lies in the SW quadrant of Arabic-speaking Nigeria, though not on an extreme border, so that Arabic-villages are found in every direction relative to the city.

A total of 22 villages were visited and recordings made in each. As multiple residents were sometimes interviewed in them, a total of 52 individuals were included in the original study (Owens 1998). The purpose of collecting the village data was not a dialectological survey as such, and hence classical dialectological sampling methods with a dedicated questionnaire was not used (see Behnstedt and Woidich, 2005). Rather, the purpose of the survey was to determine the extent to which the variables defined in the Maiduguri portion of the study could be readily extracted from a rural source. Therefore, the same corpus-based methodology that was the basis of the Maiduguri study was also used for the villages, the data consisting entirely of recorded texts.

To this end a set of questions were drawn up which, to one degree or another, formed the basis of an oral questionnaire, the basis of the conversations in the interviews. There is therefore a great deal of thematic overlap in the texts. The questions elicited basic information about the interviewees, including a short biography of each speaker including where they had spent their life, questions about language use, in particular the interplay between Arabic and Kanuri, means of livelihood in the village, a domain which effectively came down to descriptions of farming and of daily pasturing of domesticated animals, questions about the historical background of the village, as well as various other topics, often picked up spontaneously. For instance, if the interviewee was a village head, questions were often asked about what this function entailed.

The interviews were often carried out by the senior editor of the texts, though the villages were always visited together with Maiduguri Arabs, who were always encouraged to take part in the interviews themselves. The junior editor was responsible for many of the later interviews.

Virtually all of the interviews can be deemed to have been successful in the sense that the dialectal profile of the village always comes out in the interview. In terms of fluency and interaction, the interview as an event, the results are generally good and some are excellent. Some, however, fail to engage the interviewee in extended dialogues. This is due to different reasons. First, it was decided to make the village interviews a mini-version as it were, of the Maiduguri interviews, to make them considerably shorter. This was so that a number of villagers could be interviewed in one village.<sup>1</sup> There was thus not as much time to get into various issues and work the shier interviewees into a more relaxed mode. Secondly, in some cases the senior editor, Owens, stumbled on fairly rudimentary issues, which tended to disrupt the interview. For instance, if the farmers were complaining about grasshoppers eating their crops, a direct follow-on question was what procedures could be taken “against” (*didd*) them. It turns out that the preposition *didd* is not in common use in Nigerian Arabic, so an intervention was needed to explain what the question was (the verb “prevent, drive away” is needed, *keef tidher-han*, “how do you protect against them” < \*daħar). Thirdly, the interviewees themselves were of different dispositions as to the interviews themselves. Those who had been out in the world, had lived in Maiduguri or elsewhere, as well as the

---

<sup>1</sup> Most villages were reached by day trips to Maiduguri, so effectively one had at most 12 hours to get to the village, establish basic rapport, and conduct the interviews. Usually a group to two or three villages was visited on a trip.

government representatives of the villages, the bulama, tended to be quite relaxed about speaking. Those who had less contact with outsiders were sometimes more reluctant.

In the texts all native Nigerian Arabic is transcribed, to the extent that it is audible. Less care is taken with Owens' questions, and in some cases, where the interlocutor is reticent, a summary of the question is given rather than a transcription.

## Dialects

The village interviews give a good overview of the two major dialect areas in Nigeria. We have termed these two areas the western region on the one hand, as it largely encompasses the western extensions of the Arabic dialect region, and the Bagirmi variety. The Bagirmi variety is generally in the more easterly region of Nigeria, the area bordering Cameroon, but it extends further eastward into Cameroon and Chad. This area overlaps to a large degree with the sphere of influence of the northern part of the Bagirmi empire, which formerly, beginning in the sixteenth century, dominated a region south of the Kanem-Bornu Empire.

The linguistic contrasts between the western and Bagirmi dialects are particularly obvious in the set of texts from the Gulumba region, representing a Bagirmi variety, and the cluster of villages around the village of Muba, representing the western. These will be described in more detail below. The main dialectological points contrasting the Bagirmi and western dialect features are the following, giving illustrations from the texts themselves. For the Gulumba area, mainly TV71-Rafa-Abdallahi is used, and for the Muba area, mainly TV44a-magonari-chari from Magoonari.

### 1. Stress

Bagirmi	Western
'CVCVC	CV'CVC
<i>al bagár a</i>	<i>be l bágár</i>
the cattle?	

### 2. Short /a/ raising

\*h/ʕa > \*h/ʕe > h/?e    \*h/ʕa > ha/?e

Rafá

<i>ha</i>	<i>al kaafi</i>	<i>bi-ʔerrit</i>	<i>a</i>	< *ʕarrad
DM	DEF-grasshopper	IND-run away	Q	
“Will the grasshopper run away?”				

*alellem-t-e hineen* < \*ʕallam

“I learned it here.

Magoonari

<i>bakaan</i>	<i>i-lʔallam-a</i>	<i>fiy-a</i>
place	he-learn	in-it
“a place he can learn it in.”		

The medial state (\**baḥar*) in the Bagirmi dialect no longer is attested anywhere, though needs to be assumed, given that \**ha* stays *ha*, cf. *behér* “river, lake” vs. *šahár* “month, moon”

### 3. Reflex of \*θ

\*θ > s t

Rafá

*tušur šałaaša* “three months” (s > š in the context of the emphatic [!])

Magoonarí

*goolit beet ind-a hamiir tałaata tałaata*  
each house at-it donkeys three three  
“Every house has three donkeys each.”

Note that \*đ in both dialects has the pan-western Sudanic reflex of either ɖ or d, depending on lexeme, e.g. *axad* “take” < *axad* vs. *ɖubbaan* < *ɖubbaan* “fly”.

### 4. Object pronouns

Bagirmi Western

3MSG, 3FSG

After front vowel: -e, he -a, -ha

After mid or back vowel: -a, -ha -a, -ha

Rafá

*ana be-yerf-e yeen*  
I I-know-it.M where  
„How should I know it.M?“

Magoonarí

*nalimm-a*

We join it.M

*nijiib-he hineen le l beet, wai? nuşubba-ha fi n nugaar*

“we bring it.F home and then pour it.F in a hole”

Magoonarí

*aj ju yee i-šiil-ha*  
DEF-hunger not 3-take-it.F  
“so that hunger doesn’t affect it”.

3FPL

-han -hin

Rafá

*akaad ad jidaad bibki da, kan be-tijiib-han tidissa-han min aɖ ɖubbaan*

“Before the chickens crow, you’ll have brought them [cattle] and put them inside away from the flies.”

Magoonarí

*bi-šaggug-úu-hin*  
IND-divide-M.PL-them.F

“they divide them.F up”

It can be noted that this feature in particular tends to drift out of the Bagirmi area into the western dialect region.

#### 5. Intrusive –in

On an active participle, an –in is added before a suffixed object pronoun (Owens, to appear b). –in neutralizes the M-F/SG-PL (Ø-a, -iin/aat) contrast which the active participle bears:

(Gulumba TV70b-Gulumba-Abiso)

*da bas aarf-inn-a<sup>2</sup>*  
this only know-IN-it.M

“That is the only things which I know

In the western region, the object pronoun is added directly to the AP stem (or gender/number suffix), as in most Arabic dialects.

Magoonarí

*mine kula mi aarif-ha*  
who all not know-it.F

“Doesn’t everyone know it.F?”

Muba area: Yuramti, Magoonarí, Babbari vs. Gulumbá

A good way to experience the difference between the two dialects is to compare the dialects spoken around the area of Gulumba (11° 38’59N x 14° 06’10E) with those around the town of Mafa (12° 5’60N x 13° 41’60 E). The Bagirmi dialect is illustrated in a collection of texts from four villages, centered on and including the district headquarters of Gulumbá. The other three villages from this sample are Guldubá, Mingelé and Rafá. These texts have the numbers TV69, TV70, TV71 and TV72. These villages in fact lie towards the extreme western end of the larger Bagirmi region. In addition, to the north, the village of Mada (TV112) very close to the district capital of Kaala, falls within this general dialect region.

Opposed to the Bagirmi-Arabic complex of villages, three villages around the area of Mubá (Arabic = Mafá) have been chosen (TV36, TV44, TV45). These lie northwest of Gulumba, on a direct line barely 50 miles away, yet, as can be seen from the above summary as well as from the texts themselves, they are contrastive in important structural respects. The two areas will eponymously be referred to as Muba and Gulumba, even if the small town of Muba itself is Kanuri speaking.

Beyond the clear linguistic contrasts between the two areas, the global sociolinguistic configuration of the two areas is also quite different. In the Muba area, as in most of the region, Arabs are a minority against the Kanuri. Indeed, one of the village. Ibrahimti (Yuramti in Kanuri) is a mixed Kanuri-Arab village. All Arabs in the interviews said they know Kanuri. Indeed, 36TV is telling. Asked what languages he knows besides Arabic, he replied, none. When specifically asked about Kanuri he was somewhat surprised, replying of course he did, since he lived among them, i.e. knowledge of Kanuri is assumed in the area.

Gulumba, typical of much of the Nigerian Bagirmi dialect area, is interesting in that in most of it Arabs are the majority group, the only area in Borno where this is the case.<sup>3</sup> Telling in

---

<sup>2</sup> -in geminates before a –V-initial suffix.

this respect is that of the nine individuals interviewed from the Gulumba area, five said they are monolingual Arabic speakers. Even Umar from Mingelé, a mixed Kanuri-Arabic village, said that he knew only Arabic. In the early 1990's at least, monolingual Arabic in this region was common, if not the majority norm.

#### Other villages

The village selection is rounded off at this point in the preparation by six more villages. Four clearly belong to the western dialect region. Daala Axaderí (TV58) and Mule Shuwarí (TV57) are both located just south of Maiduguri on the road to Damboa. Indeed, in the years since the interview (1990), Daala has virtually become a part of the greater Maiduguri conurban area. This is a village far removed from the Bagirmi area. While this has the same typical western features as do the Muba villages (see above), it also has one important characteristic difference, namely that the preformative vowel of the imperfect verb in this region is always a-, whereas in Muba it varies between a- and i- (where i- = high vowel, either [i], [ə] or [u]). Further villages included in this first set of texts are Mallis (TV65B) and Ambuda (TV65B), which lie west and slightly to the north of Muba and which have similar dialectal features as the Muba group, and Kirenawa (TV53), located just south or southwest of Lake Chad (12° 26'0N x 13° 56'0E).

In addition there are two villages from near the very northerly Cameroonian-Nigerian border, Kirisakata (TV111) and Kinembago (TV111a, b). On the border between the western and the Bigirmi regions, these texts have mixed and sometimes variable dialectal features as defined above (e.g. both *'bagar* and *ba'gar* "cattle").

#### A note on numbering

The texts were originally recorded on a cassette tape recorder (Sony TC-D5M) and numbered consecutively following the date of the recording. In the villages interviews up to three interviewees were recorded per cassette. In the digitalized versions each interview is given its own file. In most cases each interview has maintained its original cassette number, individual interviewees within a cassette being differentiated as "a, b, c". In a few cases, however, a different number was assigned the interviewee.

---

<sup>3</sup> This Arabic-speaking majority region cuts across the adjoining northern strip of Cameroon and goes into Chad.