

Taha A. Taha

Florida A & M University

**The lexicon in endangered languages:
The case of Dongolawi Nubian**

Abstract. Lexical change and attrition is one of the main signs or symptoms of language endangerment that can eventually lead to structural changes. And although the phenomenon of language endangerment/death has received much attention in sociolinguistic studies, the changes in vocabulary associated with it has not been given the same attention. This paper examines the sociolinguistic situation of Dongolawi Nubian^{*}, a language variety that belongs to the Eastern-Sudanic group of the Nilo-Saharan family which is spoken in the northern region of Sudan. More specifically, the paper analyses a sample of DN lexicon with the purpose of identifying the extent of semantic change, including lexical change, attrition, borrowing, and other additions. Analysis of data reflects extensive borrowing from Sudanese Arabic (SA), loss of items associated with traditional ways of life, some of which are replaced while others are not. The study indicates that, despite heavy borrowing, the basic structure of the language variety still remains intact, with no apparent major changes in syntax such as word order. Hence, it is argued that the DN situation is not hopelessly irreversible, and that the variety could still be revitalized as long as there is willingness, commitment, and collaboration of efforts and resources on the part of policy makers, speakers of the language variety, and other organizations concerned with language endangerment.

Keywords: Dongolawi Nubian, endangerment, Sudan Arabic, attrition, borrowing.

* The following abbreviations are used in reference to different language varieties: Ar. =Arabic; DN = Dongolawi Nubian; Eng = English; Egy. Ar.= Egyptian Arabic; Fr= French; It = Italian; SD = Sudan Arabic; Tur = Turkish.

1.0 Introduction

Although language endangerment and loss are as old as the contact among linguistic communities of asymmetrical socio-economic, political, and demographic status, the seriousness of the crisis was sounded in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Krauss (1992), for example, gave us a gloomy forecast, “I consider it a plausible calculation that –at the rates things are going –the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind’s languages.” (p. 7). Though that forecast may be a bit exaggerated, the issues of language loss and/or spread, maintenance, revitalization are now inseparable from the greater question of globalization. This is because in today’s world of continuous changes in means of transportations and communications, speakers of different languages are extensively “exposed with increasing regularity to languages of wider communications, the national languages in which they are embedded and non-traditional economic habits” (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 3). In the African context, this is particularly the case as indicated in many studies that have been carried out regarding the issues of language endangerment and language death (Brenzinger, 1992; Sasse, 1992; Batibo, 2005; Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005, among others). The studies have given us a good picture of the dynamic linguistic situation in the African continent and the formidable challenges facing the maintenance, revitalization and documentation of the indigenous vernacular languages. Batibo, for example, maintains that “the main cause of language endangerment – and by implication language shift and death – is the pressure that the weaker languages experience from more powerful and prestigious languages” (2005, p. 93). Some of the causes of language death that he identifies are “extra-linguistic,” including speakers attitudes to their language, in addition to other factors such as structural changes. This approach to endangerment and death, in a sense, is similar to Sasse’s (1992) approach of considering external context and structural outcomes in

the endangered language.

According to Thomason (2001), language “attrition is a gradual process in which a language recedes as it loses speakers, domains, and ultimately structure; it is the loss of linguistic material that is not replaced by new material” (p. 227). This gradualness, a main feature of language shift and death scenarios in Africa, is also one of the four types of language death mentioned by Campbell & Muntzel (1989): “sudden death,” “radical language death,” “gradual language death,” and “bottom-to-top language death.” However, in the end and regardless of the manner of endangerment and death, whether gradual or sudden, the ultimate result is the loss of the culture and a valuable heritage – the language, that encodes important knowledge about the natural world. The DN situation is characterized by a gradual shift to the dominant language, Arabic, as a result of many factors, including hundreds of years of contact of unequal power relations (economic, political, social, demographic, etc.). In such contexts, as Mohanty (2011) observes, “dominated languages are marginalized with considerable domain shrinkage, and are barely maintained in the domains of home and close in-group communication, with signs of declining intergenerational transmission” (p. 5).

2.0 Vocabulary in Language shift and Endangerment Situations

The changes that are constantly affecting a living language can be easily seen in the vocabulary. In different sociolinguistic situations where two (or more) languages and/or language varieties exist side by side, an enormous transference of vocabulary items from one variety to the other is inevitable. In such cases, three types of influence are generally identified: superstratum, adstratum, and substratum. The first is the result of a politically and socioculturally powerful language on another language(s) in contact; the second is a situation where the two languages in contact have equal status with each influencing the other; and the third is the effect of a clearly

non-dominant language (politically, culturally and socially) on a dominant language spoken in the area (O'Grady et al., 2002, p. 316). In the DN/SA situation, SA is clearly considered the superstratal in relation to DN (the substrate variety).

Although borrowing, one of the major outcomes in contact situations, is generally carried out by the weaker language, sometimes it could be mutual, albeit on a limited scale. Examples of this kind of borrowing from the history of English include the Celtic influence on old English (Baugh & Cable, 2002). On the other hand, many languages around the world have borrowed heavily from English, particularly with the new trends of globalization. Borrowing itself may not necessarily be the result of lexical gaps, for in many cases it happens even if the borrowing language variety has equivalents of the borrowed items. Nonetheless, technological innovations and developments play a vital role in this area in addition to contact.

In language shift and endangerment situations, as sociolinguistic literature indicate, (Fasold, 1992; Walfram, 2002; Batibo, 2005; Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005) shrinkage and decline in lexicon is one of the main traits noted with regard to the phenomenon. Depending on the specific language endangerment context, the decline may take a variety of forms, including lexical loss with or without replacement of already existing indigenous items, difficulties in vocabulary recall or recognition, particularly by younger generations, since objects no longer discussed or talked about on daily basis tend to gradually disappear or be forgotten. Attrition may also extend to semantic change, such as generalization and semantic distinctions. In addition, in such endangerment situations the nature and type of cultural changes that the community undergoes may lead to fundamental changes in vocabulary related to life style changes. For example, in the case of DN, as will be shown, abandonment of traditional ways of agriculture and irrigation and the adoption of new and mechanized means has lead to the loss of scores of

vocabulary items associated with them. It also meant the introduction of a whole new set of borrowed items, specifically from English via Sudanese Arabic. The same goes for the many items associated with certain customs and traditions that have become obsolete. Furthermore, zoological and botanical terms as well as culture-specific terms (Fabumi & Salawu, 2005) may also be impacted as part of lexical change. Other items and terms affected may include general market transaction or even specific nomenclature (Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005) and the numerical system (Gabsi, 2011). Another area of vocabulary that may be affected as a part of lexical attrition is address terms. Elsewhere (Taha, 2010) I have discussed the influence of Arabic, among other languages, on the DN address terms. Generally, some vocabulary items pertaining to human body parts may be regarded among the terms that are resistant to loss.

3.0 Dongolawi Nubian

DN belongs to the Nilo-Saharan family of African languages. Its predecessor was Old Nubian, “the only indigenous African language whose development we can trace for over a millennium” (Browne, 2002, p.1). The speakers of DN usually refer to their variety as “*Andandi*, literally ‘our own/home language’ or simply Dongolawi (from the name of the tribe, Danagla). The Arabic word *rutana* (meaning ‘foreign/unintelligible speech’) is often used by non-Nubian speakers (i.e. Arabic speakers) to refer to all Nubian varieties and to other vernacular languages. Some DN speakers themselves use it to refer to their variety. Regarding the actual number of speakers, no exact and reliable figures are available; this is simply due to the fact that the censuses usually do not include specific questions on language use. Nonetheless, Ethnologue (2004) reports an approximate figure of 180,000 DN speakers in Sudan; however, the report does not indicate whether the figures cover all the speakers in the country (i.e. including those who migrated to other parts or to other countries – a major factor in endangerment itself – or just those who still

live and reside in the specific DN region/area.

In the past five decades or so, many fundamental changes of social, economic, cultural, political, educational and demographic nature have taken place in Sudan that, in turn, have impacted the sociolinguistic fortunes of DN as well as other vernacular languages in Sudan. For the purposes of this paper, I will give a brief overview of some of the major factors, for a detailed account would be beyond the scope of the paper. First, since independence of the country in 1956, Arabic has been the official language of the country and the only medium of instruction in schools and now the main language of study in university education. In fact, school authorities in the 1950s and 1960s used punitive measures to discourage pupils from the use of their own native vernaculars in the school. As such, the vernacular varieties were denied any role or development, and the relative spread of literacy coupled with other socio-economic factors and political pressure have enhanced the spread of Arabic and consequently further marginalized the indigenous vernaculars (which are not written). This has also influenced the attitudes of many Arabic as well as vernacular speakers, for they consider Arabic to be ‘the real’ language whereas other languages are regarded as just dialects, or *lahajaat* in Arabic.

Another major factor that has impacted DN is economic, mainly emigration to urban, semi-urban centers, and to other countries. The relatively poor region represented by a tiny cultivatable belt along the Nile and the lack of job opportunities, coupled with occasional natural disasters such as flooding, has traditionally constituted a major factor. In fact, the Northern Province in Sudan which covers the DN area and its sister Mahasi dialect is the least populated of the Sudan provinces, although it is geographically the largest. On the other hand, recent development in means of transportation and communication systems and the introduction of electricity have all led to changes in the sociolinguistic profile of the region, including more and

more encroachment of Arabic, the official language, into the domains where traditionally DN was dominant, including homes.

Furthermore, due to increasing contact with Arabic (education, TV, radio, etc), bilingualism has become the norm; in fact, according to one of my DN informants ⁽¹⁾, in the particular island where the study was carried out, there is virtually no monolingual DN in the island any more. Code-switching and code-mixing has become a wide spread practice in the island. Extensive borrowing from Arabic and, to a lesser degree, English (directly or via Arabic) as well as changes in life style and traditions-as will be shown below-is associated with a gradual decline in DN native vocabulary.

Changes in traditional ways of life and the abandonment of traditional agriculture and irrigation systems in favor of more modern /mechanized methods has meant the gradual disappearance of native vocabulary items associated with them. For example, in the area of irrigation system, the traditional method of drawing water from the Nile was the wood-made water wheel (or *kolay* in DN), operated or pulled by cows/oxen. This very old apparatus was a key factor in the survival of the Nile Nubians for hundreds of years. It was regarded highly, for it was the main method of irrigation and thus having a living. The Nubians took extra care of it, and they often mentioned it in their songs and poems. And as Burchkardt (1822), travelling across the Nubian country in the early 1800s, observed “a man’s property is valued...by the number of water wheels he possessed” (p. 61). This implement is now abandoned and has been replaced with gas operated water pumping machines. All the vocabulary associated with it is now archaic, since nobody actively uses it in daily interactions. This specialized vocabulary includes items such as *aglo* ‘crosspieces of wooden-strips upon which the jars carrying water are tied’, *fasho* ‘limbs at the end of each spoke of a wheel raising water, over which the cables with water jars pass’,

toray ‘the horizontal axle of the wheel that raises water, which extends to the small cog wheel’, and *ewiratti* ‘the driver of the water wheel’.

4.0 Lexical loss and lexical addition in DN

Modifications in DN vocabulary and other Nubian varieties go as far back as Old Nubian (the immediate predecessor of the contemporary varieties) and possibly earlier. Browne (2002) indicates that “loan words [in ON] are mainly Greek ... Arabic, Coptic, Pre-Coptic Egyptian and Meroitic” (p. 28). Regarding the orthography of ON which was a written language, unlike contemporary Nubian varieties, he notes “The ON alphabet consists of 30 letters, of which 24 are Greek, three are Coptic, and three are enchoric, derived – with varying degrees of probability – from Meroitic” (p. 7)⁽²⁾. It is likely that with the collapse of the Christian Kingdom of Nubia and the consolidation of the position of Arab Muslims, the influence of Greek, Coptic, and Meroitic decreased, and at the same time the Arabic impact increased through Islamization, intermarriage, and social/cultural intermingling.

In general, DN lexical change involves two processes: vocabulary attrition/loss and vocabulary addition. These processes mirror socio-cultural changes that result in new or novel notions/objects and the disappearance of out-dated items. Additions to vocabulary are generally provided by either borrowing or through the creation of new items via the word formation methods available to the language variety, which may include revival of old words, extension of meaning of already existing words, blends, compounding, among others.

4.1 Vocabulary loss

As I indicated earlier, the cultural, political, and socioeconomic changes that have been taking place over the years have impacted DN in many ways. For example, as a result of abandoning certain traditions, ways of life, and customs, many DN words have either been lost or become

archaic or no longer in active use of the speakers. Some of these words are associated with marriage ceremonies and festivities. The following examples, by no means exhaustive, illustrate the point. In gathering data for this study and determining the status of certain lexical items, I have relied on interviews with several native DN speakers⁽³⁾ in addition to my own observations and experience as speaker of the two language varieties discussed in this paper.

<u>Word</u>	<u>meaning</u>	<u>current status</u>	<u>Replacement</u>
<i>Uwar</i>	a procession (usually on donkeys, camels, horses riding through the community informing and inviting to attend circumcision/initiation of boys)	obsolete	—
<i>Bichar</i>	Gathering of friends of bride/bridegroom on the second day of marriage	archaic	—
<i>Suru t</i>	the custom of staying for a week in the bride's house after the First day of marriage	obsolete	—

4.2 Other examples of loss also include

<i>sinne (sinnay)</i>	get angry/mad	obsolete	zalay (Ar.)
<i>birbe (birby)</i>	old/ancient temple	obsolete	ma'abad (Ar.)
<i>moshono</i>	Friday	obsolete	Juma (Ar.) ⁽⁴⁾
<i>neu or new</i>	inherit	obsolete	werthay (Ar.)
<i>sokeray</i>	(register a letter)	archaic	sejilay (Ar.)
<i>kabkab</i>	fever	archaic	huma/wirda (Ar.)
<i>wogga</i>	weight of 2 ¾ lb.	obsolete	ratul (Ar.) is used
<i>utombeel</i>	< Fr. vehicle	archaic	arabiyya/sayarra (Ar.)
<i>urta,</i>	<Tur. Battalion	rare	katibaa (Ar.)
<i>kos</i>	deep wooden –bowl	archaic	Sahan (Ar.)
<i>ko</i>	lion	obsolete	esaid (Ar.)
<i>dode</i>	type of grasshopper	obsolete	DN word <i>banga</i> is used
<i>gabbday</i>	woman's waist –cloth	archaic	skirt (Eng.)
<i>kubodar</i>	messenger on donkey riding throughout The community declaring loudly the death of someone and informing people of the funeral. Nowadays cell phones and texting are used.	archaic	-

As is the case in many other contact situations, borrowings from Arabic sometimes resulted in duplication of words already used in DN. In some cases, both words continue to be used, sometimes with slight distinctions in meaning and usage. In other cases, one of the two

words eventually get lost (usually the native one) as some of the examples above show. Another example is the native word for ‘earth/ground’ *gou(r)* which also means ‘the weather’, depending on its specific use. So *gour taig* means ‘sit down (on the ground)’ whereas *gou jougri* means ‘the weather is hot’. On the other hand, the Arabic loan *arid* is used for ‘ground/earth’ as in *aridir taig* ‘sit on the ground’ but it is also used with an extended meaning (land in general, as for example for agriculture). Thus, both are used with slight distinction in meaning.

Another area that lost tens of DN words is related to traditional means of irrigation. *Kolay* (*Saqiya* in Arabic) ‘waterwheel’ used to be the major method of drawing water from the Nile for agricultural purposes. With the introduction of new mechanical means that use of petrol or gasoline, the name of this locally made wooden apparatus has been abandoned. Now that the wheel has been replaced with petrol-run engines, all the special terms referring to different parts of the it have become archaic or obsolete, since it is no longer in use and nobody talks about it unless from a historical perspective and only by the very old, who may still remember the terms. These specialized waterwheel vocabulary items no longer in use include over sixty words. On the other hand, the vocabulary items associated with the new engines, together with their different parts, were borrowed (primarily from English via Arabic (See borrowing below). These loans include, for example, *babour* < Ar. *babour* < It. *vapore* (name of the engine itself), *karbrater* < Ar. < Eng. *Carburetor*, *shassay* < Ar. < Eng. *chassis*, *bistim* < Ar. < Eng. *piston*, *dizel* < Ar. < Eng. *diesel*, etc

4.3 Other Foreign additions to DN vocabulary (borrowings)

Some lexical items that seem to have entered DN in an earlier period apparently came from Greek and Coptic; from the former came *alay* ‘truth’, *kiragay* ‘Sunday’, *dahal* ‘madness’, *koray* ‘festival’, and *kaddi* ‘small clay jar’. As Arbuster (1960) has noted such borrowings are

taken directly from Greek and survived through the Christian period in Nubia up to the present time. Much later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the European scramble for Africa, words such as *babour* (steamer) <Ar.<It, *semafour* (semaphore), *jurnal* (journal), *radiyo* (radio), *bas* (bus), *lori* (lorry), *telafone* (telephone), *telagraf* (telegram), *cinema* and many others were borrowed from English either directly or via Arabic. During the Turkish-Egyptian rule of Sudan (1821-1885) many Turkish words were also borrowed.

In recent times, and with the new globalizing trends, many new words associated with development in life style, transportation, and communication systems have found their way into the remote areas of Sudan including Nubian villages. So in the twenty century words such as *satellite*, *dish*, *cable* were borrowed wholesale. Also, in the late 1990 and early 2000, additional borrowings associated with fast food, arts, fashion and leisure eventually found their way into DN. Some examples include *berger* ‘burger’, *pitsa* ‘pizza’, *hot doug* ‘hot dog’, *CD* ‘CD’, *video*, *stereo*, *fax*, and *internet*, *net*, and more recently words such as *facebook*, *cellular* and or *mobile* (= *cell phone*; Arabic words *jawal* or *mutharik* are also used) are added. And although some of these newly borrowed items may have their equivalents in Arabic, generally people tend to use them anyway. For example, a DN speaker (even SA speakers in general) may usually use the borrowed word *kombuter* (computer) instead of the Arabic equivalent *hasub*.

5.0 The Extent of Borrowing from Sudan Arabic

Hundreds of years of contact between DN and the local variety(-ies) spoken in the region has resulted in extensive borrowing into DN; some of the borrowed items were eventually assimilated while others are taken whole sale without adaptations. On the other hand, the Arabic varieties in the area have also borrowed from DN (not on the same scale, though- see Taha, 2012, forthcoming). Loan words from Arabic have, however, surpassed the simple process of

enrichment, for they have infiltrated and covered various word classes and the common everyday vocabulary. They include not only the relatively and easily borrowed items such as nouns, but they also cover other categories such as verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and even conjunctions, items that are generally more resistant. A very conservative estimate of borrowed words used in DN today would probably be over 55% of the total lexicon. The following sections provide specific examples of borrowed vocabulary items that cover different word classes to give an idea of the extent of borrowing.

5.1 Nouns

Nouns constitute the largest group of borrowed words into DN compared to other word categories. They include several sub-categories including items pertaining to food and drinks, market and transactions, animals, household items, the environment, administration and the law, religion, government, education, and many others. Note that some of the borrowed items were originally borrowed into SA from other languages including English.

<u>Loan word</u>	<u>Arabic source</u>	<u>gloss</u>
<i>sukkaar</i>	sukkar	sugar
<i>shai</i>	shai	tea
<i>ruzzi</i>	ruz	rice
<i>batatis</i>	batatis < Eng.	Potatoes
<i>kahki</i>	k`aak	cake
<i>shrbat</i>	shrbat < Egypt. Ar.	Sweet cold drink
<i>aish</i>	`aaysh	bread
<i>hodar</i>	xodar	green vegetables (general term)
<i>sahan</i>	Sahan	plate
<i>ades</i>	`aades	lentils
<i>tabah</i>	tabax	cook
<i>beraad</i>	baraad	kettle/tea pot

In the area of health, borrowed words via SA include *illaj* < Ar. `ailaj ‘medical treatment/medicine’, *dawa* < Ar. *dawwa* ‘medication’; *shafahana* ‘health center’ < Ar. *ShafaXana*

<Tur.; *Izbitaala/istibaala* <Ar. *Isbitaliya* ‘hospital’, *doktour* < Ar. *doktour* < Eng. ‘medical doctor’, *temerji* < Ar. < Turk. *temerji* ‘nurse’ (now *mumarid* is used). *Hakeem* < Ar. *hakeem* lit., ‘wise man, doctor’; *afiya* < Ar. *aafiya* ‘health, good health’

In the area of agricultural seasons and calendar, several words of Arabic are used. For example, *shita* < Ar. *shita* ‘winter’; *saif* < Ar. *sayif* ‘summer’; *damira* < Ar. *damirah* ‘inundation’; *sa* < Ar. *sa`ah* ‘hour’; *youn* < Ar. *youn* ‘day’; *osbu* < Ar. ‘*osbu`a*’ ‘week’; *shahar* < Ar. *shahar* ‘month’, *senna* < Ar. *senna* ‘year’. The native word *jain* is now considered archaic. Other borrowed words include *nahar* < Ar. *nahar*, lit. ‘daylight’; *ograis*, the native word for ‘daylight’ as opposed to *ogo* ‘night’ is also used. However, the meaning is also extended to cover ‘day’ (e.g., *samtay naharki ta* = ‘come on Saturday’). And, all words naming the five-times daily prayers, such as *fijer* ‘dawn’, *migrib* ‘dust’, etc., are borrowed from Arabic.

In the government, administration, and legal department, the following examples reflect the extent of borrowing from Arabic.

<i>hukuma</i> < Ar. <i>hukumah</i> ‘government	<i>bolis</i> < Ar. < Eng. ‘police’
<i>gadi</i> < Ar. <i>gaDi</i> ‘judge’	<i>amur</i> < Ar. <i>amur</i> ‘order’
<i>ardahal</i> < Ar. <i>a`ardHal</i> ‘petition’	<i>haraj</i> < Ar. <i>xaraj</i> ‘tax’
<i>sijin</i> < Ar. <i>sijin</i> ‘prison’	<i>mahiya</i> < Ar. <i>mahiyah</i> ‘salary’
<i>mufetish</i> < Ar. <i>mufetish</i> ‘inspector’	<i>mahkama</i> < Ar. <i>mahkamah</i> ‘court’
<i>maktab</i> < Ar. <i>maktab</i>	<i>mudeer</i> < Ar. <i>mudeer</i> ‘manger’

In education departments, since the medium of instruction is Arabic, borrowed words include-among many others, *madrassa* < Ar. *madrassah* ‘school’, *jamma* < Ar. *jami`aa* ‘university’, *kitab* < Ar. *kitaab* ‘book’, *galam* < Ar. *galam* ‘pen/pencil’, *mudaris* < Ar. *mudaris* ‘teacher’, etc. Also, since the Nubians profess Islam, hundreds of Arabic words and phrases associated with the religion are used, even by illiterate speakers. These phrases include, *alhamdo lilah* ‘praise Alla’, *alsalamu alayikum* ‘peace be on you’, etc. Other borrowed Arabic words in this area include *ennabi* ‘prophet’, *gama* ‘mosque’, *mesjid* ‘small mosque/neighborhood mosque’,

afu ‘pardon’, *fatiha* ‘opening sura or chapter of Quran’, *gabur* ‘grave’, *gani* ‘evil spirit’, *gehenneb* ‘hell’, *ibilis* ‘devil, demon’, etc.

In the area of housing and household items, borrowed words include *shibbak* < Ar. *shiback* ‘window’, *bab* (native *kobid* is also used) < Ar. *bab* ‘door’, *kubaih* < Ar. *Kubaayah* ‘cup’, *kos* < Ar. *kooz* ‘mug, or large metal cup’, *kursi* < Ar. *Kursi* ‘chair’, *tarabaysa* < *tarabizah* ‘table’, *Malaga* < Ar. *m`alagah* ‘spoon’, *awuda* < Ar. *audah* ‘room’, *housh* < Ar. *hosh* ‘courtyard’, *fanus* < Ar. *fanoos* ‘lantern’, *mahada* < Ar. *maXadah* ‘pillow’. Some of these borrowed items have their equivalents in DN (like the word *bab* above, but many speakers use the borrowed word any way).

Animal names and other borrowed words associated with the environment include *bagala* < Ar. ‘mule’, *hartid* < Ar. *xirteet* ‘rhinoceros’, *feel* < Ar. *feel* ‘elephant’, *esed* (the native word *ko* is now archaic) < Ar. *asad* ‘lion’, and *shidar* < Ar. *shiger* ‘tree of any kind’.

Words associated with the market place and transactions include *tajir* < Ar. *tajir* ‘merchant’, *teshash* (now archaic) < Ar. *tashash* ‘traveling merchant’, *sug* < Ar. *sug* ‘market’, *tahuna* < Ar. *tahunah* ‘mill’, *sheirik* < Ar. *shareek* ‘partner’, *saraf* < Ar. *saraf* ‘cashier’, *ratul* < Ar. *ratul* ‘pound-weight’, *mekseb* < Ar. *maksab* ‘profit’, *goshay* < Ar. *ghosh* ‘deceive, cheat’, *shawal* < Ar. *shawal* ‘sack’, and *budaa* < Ar. *buda`ah* ‘merchandise’. In general, the language of business/trade is primarily Arabic. In this area, the DN usage incorporates an enormous amount of Arabic material at all levels of borrowing.

5.2 Verbs

Arabic verbs that entered DN are relatively smaller in number compared to nouns, for verbs tend to be more resilient and resistant to borrowing. This appears to be the case in other contact situations where nouns are generally the first to be transferred. Old Nubian does not appear to

have borrowed any verbs from the languages in contact with it (e.g. Coptic, Greek, Egyptian, etc.). So, one can assume that Arabic verbs started to appear in DN in a later period, around A.D. 1053 (Armbuster, 1965). They include the –y/e Nubian verb. The following list gives an idea of the nature and types of verbs borrowed into DN:

<i>safaray</i> ‘travel’	<i>waznay</i> ‘weigh’	<i>kesbay</i> ‘gain, earn’
<i>hissay</i> ‘feel’	<i>hasibay</i> ‘count, calculate’	<i>alimay</i> ‘teach’
<i>harbay</i> ‘ruin, destroy’	<i>gerribay</i> ‘try’	<i>geray</i> ‘read, recite’
<i>gawilay</i> ‘make a contract’	<i>fehmay</i> ‘understand’	erday ‘consent’
<i>wafigay</i> ‘consent’	<i>beddiray</i> ‘be early’	<i>ajiray</i> ‘hire’
<i>Aminay</i> ‘believe/trust’	<i>hamday</i> ‘thank, praise’	<i>afay</i> ‘pardon’
<i>temmay</i> ‘finish, complete’	<i>hadiray</i> ‘prepare’	<i>abbiray</i> ‘measure-area, length’
<i>abday</i> ‘pray to, worship’	<i>agibay</i> ‘wonder’	

Again, some of these verbs have native counterparts; for example, *korkir* for *alimay* or *ar* for *fehmay* (depending on context of use), but there is a tendency among many speakers to use the Arabic loan. This is another area of DN usage that needs to be studied.

5.3 Adjectives and words that function as adjectives and nouns

<i>daruri</i> < Ar. <i>daruuri</i> ‘necessary’	<i>falla</i> < <i>faalih</i> ‘smart, good, adroit’
<i>washan</i> < Ar. <i>wasxan</i> ‘dirty’	<i>fogir</i> < Ar. <i>fageer</i> in the sense of ‘poor’, but also used for ‘unfriendly person’
<i>galban</i> < Ar. ‘tired, also poor’	<i>agiz</i> < Ar. <i>‘aajiz</i> ‘disabled, powerless’
<i>gedeed</i> < Ar. <i>jadeed</i> ‘new’ (the native word for <i>gedeed</i> is <i>er</i> or <i>eer</i> which is now obsolete)	
<i>miskeen</i> < Ar. <i>miskeen</i> ‘poor, needing financial help’	
<i>Rahis</i> < Ar. ‘raxis ‘cheap	<i>gali</i> < Ar. <i>ghali</i> ‘expensive, costly’
<i>Kamil</i> < Ar. <i>kamil</i> ‘complete’	<i>hayin</i> < Ar. <i>hayin</i> ‘easy’
<i>Gedeem</i> < Ar. <i>gadeem</i> ‘old’; N. <i>Kurus</i>	<i>gasheem</i> < Ar. ‘simple, lacks experience’
<i>Fadi</i> < Ar. <i>fadi</i> ‘empty, vacant’ (the native <i>sudo</i> is also used)	
<i>Ahsen</i> < Ar. <i>ahsan</i> ‘better’ (the native <i>seren</i> is also used)	
<i>afrangi</i> < Ar. <i>afranji</i> ‘European’ (also manner of dressing, i.e., Western, contra the Sudanese Jellabiya)	
<i>Agil</i> < Ar. <i>‘aagil</i> ‘wise’	

5.4 Adverbs

A few number of Arabic adverbs that have eventually found their way into DN include words

such as *bes* < Ar. *bes* ‘just, only’, *emkin* < Ar. *imkin* ‘perhaps’, *gabul* < Ar. *qabl* ‘before’, *kulyoum* > Ar. *kul youm* ‘everyday’, *kulwahid* < Ar. *kul wahid* ‘every one’, *husususan* < Ar. *xusususan* ‘particularly, especially’, *abaden* < Ar. *ababan* ‘at all, ever, never’ (used without negation), *tameli* < Ar. *tTamale* ‘always’, *baadir* < Ar. *b`aad* ‘after, afterwards’, and *ahiro* < Ar. *axir* ‘at the end’.

5.5 Structure words (closed categories)

Structure classes including pronouns, demonstratives, articles, conjunctions, etc. are usually the most resistant to borrowing. Nonetheless, there are a couple of borrowed words that show the extent of borrowing and how Arabic has managed to penetrate this area of DN usage. For example, the Arabic conjunction *laakin* ‘but’ is rendered *laken* in DN. Another example is the Arabic word *walla* ‘or’ borrowed into DN as *wala* (e.g. x: *kub doolay wala kinnary?* ‘is the boat big or small?’). *Walla* used with another *walla* (*wala...wala*) ‘neither...nor’ is also borrowed into DN. It is generally used with negatives, e.g.

X: *shaigi walla bunigi doli?* ‘Do you want/drink tea or coffee?’

Y: *shaigi* ‘tea’

DN has no indefinite pronouns; however, the idea is expressed by using the native numeral ‘*were*-‘one, anyone, someone’. In addition, the Arabic loan word *fulan* ‘a certain individual/person’ is sometimes used by DN speakers.

6.0 Forming Compounds/Hybrids

DN makes use of compounding and the creation of hybrid words as one way of forming new lexical items. In addition to relying on the variety’s own resources in making compounds (N+N, N+Adj., etc), sometimes borrowed Arabic words are conjoined with native words to construct new words. In expressing self-explaining compounds – an important method of adding new

words – for example, DN makes use of indigenous words and joins them with other native and/or borrowed Arabic or even English words to form compounds and other words. For example:

ka DN ‘house’ + *fadi* Ar. ‘empty’ = *ka-fadi* ‘empty house’

ishkari DN ‘guests’ + *awuda* Ar. ‘room’ = *ishkarin-awuda* ‘guest room’

fas Ar. ‘axe’ + *add* DN ‘handle’ = *fas-add*

galam (Ar. ‘pen’) + *add* = *galamn-add* ‘penholder’

shakush Ar. ‘hammer’ + *add* = *shakushn-add* ‘handle of hammer’

tellaga Ar. ‘fridge’ + *e* (DN ‘hand’=*tallagn-e* ‘(the fridge-handle’

samtay (Ar. Sabit or Saturday’ *tal* DN ‘next’ + *door* Ar. ‘week’ forms the noun-complex
samtay tal door ‘next Saturday week’

tub-galay Ar. ‘brick’ + DN. ‘red’ = ‘red-brick’

silindar-nur Eng. ‘cylinder’ + DN. ‘head’ = ‘cylinder head’.

7.0 Other features of lexical change

As part of the process of language change over a long period of time, words may change their meaning. This process may entail extending the meaning of a word to cover more than its original meaning or notion. DN lexical change includes extension of meaning (as well as generalization) or “semantic broadening” (O’Grady, 2001, p. 319). For example, The Arabic loan in DN *babour* < It. *vapore*, referred to earlier under borrowed nouns, originally was applied to steamer, usually with a barge on each side used for transporting passengers and merchandise along the Nile. However, over time the meaning has been extended to include or denote any gasoline/kerosine operated oven for cooking, engines used for pumping water from the Nile for irrigation purposes, a railway train, a mill that uses gas, etc. The word *utombil* < Ar. *autombeel* < Fr. *automobile*, originally meant any four-wheeled vehicle for carrying passengers. Although the word is now rarely used (archaic), its original notion was extended to specifically name different types of vehicles (trucks/lorries, busses, trailers, small passenger cars, etc. with even further specification of brand names, e.g. Toyota, Ford, Nissan, etc.). The opposite of this process, narrowing the meaning, has also occurred. The DN word *kabkab* ‘(any type of) fever’, is now

archaic and has been replaced by Arabic *huma*₂ and it has become less general. Speakers now distinguish among different types of *huma* ‘fever’ (e.g. malaria fever, typhoid fever, etc.).

7.1 Uses of Numerals

Another area of lexical change in DN concerns the uses of numerals. Traditionally, the DN numeral system is based on a “quinary” system related to the Cushitic numerals (Armbuster, 1960). For example, one is *were*, ‘two’ *owwi*, ‘three’ *toski*, ‘four’ *kemsi* ‘up to ten’ or *dmin*. The cardinals from 11 to 19 are constructed by adding/joining the digit to *dimin* ‘ten’ by suffixing *-do*; so ‘eleven’ is *dimin-do were*, ‘twelve’ is *dimin-do owwi*, etc. ‘Twenty’ is *ari*. The cardinal numbers 20, 30, 40, etc. are constructed by adding ‘ten (10)’ to the requisite factor; for example, *dimin-kemsi* = ‘40 (forty)’. However, the corresponding forms borrowed from Arabic (e.g. *`ashreen* / ‘20’, *talateen* / ‘30’, *xamseen* / ‘50’, etc) are widely used, and they are gradually replacing the DN ones.

With regard to ordinals, the Arabic loan *awel* ‘first’ is generally used. However, from the second onward many speakers, particularly the older speakers, the original numeral is formed from the cardinal by suffixing *-inti* (e.g. *owwinti* ‘second’, *toskinti* ‘third’, *kemsinti* ‘fourth’, etc). In working with fractions, Arabic loans are also used, depending on the speaker. For example, *weri-ila-tilid* ‘2/3’, literally one (1) minus (-) 1/3. In such structures, only the first word is native DN, in this example, *weri*, while as the rest of the words are Arabic loans *ila* ‘minus’ and *tilid* ‘a third’.

8.0 Syntax

It is worth noting here that despite the heavy borrowing from Arabic that seemed to have penetrated deeply into popular everyday DN vocabulary, the backbone and the skelton of the language still remains Nubian. In other words, the basic structure, syntax, and grammar are not

fundamentally changed and seem not to have been affected by Arabic, in contrast to the sweeping changes in lexicon. For example, basic word order remains the same: S O V (subject, object, verb) with the alternative O S V (object, subject, verb). DN's predecessor, Old Nubian, employed the same word order (S/O/V) (Browne, 2002, p. 2). Furthermore, DN employs postpositions instead of prepositions, and the adjective tends to follow the noun, not precede it.

9.0 Conclusion

The question that poses itself here is not whether the language is revitalizable or not, but whether there is serious enough will, commitment, and resources to address these challenges. Up to now the various governments that have ruled the country since independence in 1956 have all ignored the Sudanese vernacular languages, including DN. Arabic has always been the recognized official and 'national' language; the vernaculars were never allocated any function beyond the mere recognition that they exist. They have been and continue to be marginalized by politicians and decision makers, including some DN speakers.

An unprecedented departure from this state of affairs came in 2005, which marked a new era in the country. As a result of the comprehensive peace agreement between the current government and south Sudan (SPLM/A) signed in Nagasha, Kenya, a historical change in language policy was undertaken. The agreement gave a brand new recognition of the long ignored linguistic diversity of the country and the linguistic rights of all the people of Sudan, not only the south (which eventually seceded after a referendum in 2011 forming the newest country in the world that same year). The parts of the agreement that concerns us here include two articles:

Article 2.8.1 states: "All the indigenous languages are national languages which shall be *respected, developed, and promoted.*" (Emphasis added)

Article 2.8.4 states: “In addition to Arabic and English, the legislature of any sub-national level of government may adopt any other national language(s) as additional official working language(s) at its level. (Cited in James, 2008, p. 65).

This is probably the most rational official provisions regarding vernacular languages ever made in Sudan. Although this may sound an ideal that will not be easy to implement, it is, nonetheless, encouraging. And if there is a strong will/commitment on the part of not only policy makers but also other stakeholders, including the speakers themselves, other regional, national, and international bodies such as UNESCO, the tide could be reversed. In this regard, currently there are calls for and proposals to develop a writing system for the Nile Nubian varieties (see Jaeger, 2008, for example). Furthermore, there is a growing interest in teaching these varieties⁽⁵⁾. And, there are signs of more and more outlets on Sudanese media, particularly television, in the form of songs, poetry, and other creative forms of art using these varieties. Although the different types of efforts in this direction are encouraging, still there is an urgent need for coordination and collaboration, not only among native speakers concerned with the state of the language, but also national and international bodies and organizations working to save and revitalize human languages.

Notes

1. A. A. Kheiri, Personal communication (April 5, 2012).
2. Since DN is not yet officially written and there is no one single orthography used by all, although there are serious efforts in this direction, some native speakers use the Arabic script in trying to write DN; other DN scholars (e.g. Jaeger use the ON script with some adaptations), while others, including the writer, use transliteration system based on Latin alphabetic system. This is a complex area of debate in sociolinguistic circles that involves ideological and political dimensions. There are proponents and opponents to different types of orthographies, and different systems have their advantages and disadvantages. This debate is beyond the scope of this study, and it needs to be addressed and agreed upon for the purposes of developing a unified orthography to be used by all speakers and learners, researchers and others interested in DN.
3. For the purposes of this ongoing study on DN, I have interviewed several native speakers with varying age groups, including A. A. Kheiri, A. M. Ahmed, A. S. Abdel Haleem, M. M. Yaseen, S. M. Ahmed, among others. I thank them for their cooperation and support.
4. For Wednesday and Thursday, the Arabic loans *arbaha* <`arba'aa and *hamis* <Khamis are generally used.
5. M. Jaeger, Personal communication, (April 2012)

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