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An Initial Report on Tabaq Knowledge and Proficiency

Khalifa Jabreldar Khalifa

1. Introduction

The Tabaq language is part of the Kordofan Nubian (or Hill Nubian) group in South Kordofan, Sudan. The Tabaq people have preserved very clear traditions of their origin and history. Originally, these traditions state that the ancestors of the Tabaq people first migrated southwards from Abdelbakka in the Godayat region between Rahad and El-Obeid in northern Kordofan. This migration is said to have taken place under the Sultans of that Kingdom following the conquest of Kordofan by the Funj general Mohamed Abulkeilik in about 1748.¹ They moved first to Jebel Tukuma (16 kilometers east of Dilling),² stayed in Tukuma for a short time and then moved to their present location in the western part of the Nuba Mountains near the town of Lagawa.

At present, the Tabaq home area consists of four main villages. These villages are Shingil, Kambal, El-Igheebish, and Karkuur, in addition to a seasonal village called Nahala. The area of the Tabaq people is surrounded by areas belonging to other ethnic groups, such as the Tima area about 15 kilometers to the east, the Tulishi area about 15 kilometers to the south, the Abu Jinuk area to the west, the El-Hujeirat area to the northwest (about 50 kilometers away), and the Daju area about 40 kilometres to the south of the Tabaq area.

This paper attempts to investigate Tabaq demographic characteristics, language acquisition, bilingualism, and multilingualism. It aims at examining sociolinguistic factors influencing language shift and maintenance. Since Arabic is the official language and lingua franca in Sudan, the spread of the Arabic language among the Tabaq people receives special attention in this study.

1 STEVENSON, *The Nuba People of Kordofan Province*, p. 38.

2 NADEL, *The Nuba*, p. 360.

The author of the present paper was supposed to conduct fieldwork in the Tabaq area in the Nuba Mountains.³ Unfortunately, war broke out in June 2011, at the same time that the researcher would have traveled to the Tabaq area. The author decided to carry out this study outside the Tabaq area because of safety concerns. This decision was furthermore justified by the fact that a majority of Tabaq speakers no longer lived in their homeland, but had migrated to cities in northern Sudan.

Tabaq is considered a poorly known language due to the few linguistic⁴ and sociolinguistic studies that have been carried out. In a previous sociolinguistic survey of the Nuba Mountains, which covered the Lagawa locality, Tabaq was only implicitly included, as it was considered as a dialect of the genetically closely related Dilling language. The result of that survey was published by the Institute of African and Asian Studies in 1979.⁵ The present study differs from that survey, as it concentrates on only one particular group, the Tabaq language community living outside of its homeland.

This paper is based on a sociolinguistic survey carried out as part of a linguistic research project documenting the Tabaq language. Written questionnaires were distributed and gathered between February and June 2012. Their distribution was conducted by a number of well-trained educated Tabaq people. The survey covered the Tabaq people in the following states of Sudan: Khartoum, White Nile, Jazeera, Gadarif, Kassala, and the Red Sea.

The questionnaire was designed for this study in 2011. This paper is an evaluation of the first part of the questionnaire which contains 25 questions on demographic characteristics of the respondents, e.g. sex, age, ethnic group, place of birth, social status such as profession, education, and language knowledge.

Before the start of fieldwork, the questionnaire was tested among ten members of the Tabaq community including men and women from different ages. The questionnaires were either administered in written form for educated people in the community, or orally for illiterate people with the help of research assistants who recorded the information of the respondents. The questionnaires were distributed for those aged 15 years and older; respondents less than 15 years of age may be influenced by the ideas of the person recording responses.

3 The present study is part of a project that documents the sociolinguistic situation of the Tabaq ethnic group. The title of the project is "Documenting Tabaq, a Hill Nubian language of the Sudan, in its sociolinguistic context." It was initiated by Gerrit J. Dimmendaal, University of Cologne. From 2011 to 2013 the project was sponsored by The Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

4 The linguistic studies of Tabaq comprise ISMAIL, "The Noun in Tabaq," HELLWIG & SCHNEIDER-BLUM, "Tabaq," and ISMAIL "Tabaq Kinship Terms."

5 BELL, *Language Survey of the Sudan*, p. 1.

2. Demographic descriptions

The respondents consisted of 559 members of the Tabaq community who lived outside of the Tabaq area. In the sample their age ranges from 15 to 90 years. There were slightly more male respondents than female.

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2.1 Responses according to sex and age group

Table 1 provides the figures for the different ages and the proportions of male and female respondents.

age group	female	% of total	male	% of total	total	%
15-25	87	16.5	82	15.6	169	32.1
26-40	93	17.6	100	19.0	193	36.6
41-60	48	9.1	73	13.9	121	23.0
61+	13	2.5	31	5.9	44	8.3
total	241	45.7	286	54.3	527	100.0

Table 1. Respondents according to sex and age group*

It should be noted that there are variations in the age brackets of the four age groups; that means, the age bracket of the 15-25 age group equals 11 years. However, the age bracket of the 26-40 age group equals 15 years, and the age bracket of the 41-60 age group equals 20 years. It should also be noticed that there is a big difference in number between male and female in the old age category.

2.2 Responses according to education level and age group

Table 2 reveals that the Tabaq respondents are well educated: many respondents have completed primary school (37.6%) and a large proportion is receiving or has received secondary school education (38.9%) or even university education (17.8%). In sharp contrast, only 3.1% of Tabaq respondents are illiterate, the majority of them in the older generation.

education level	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%	15-25	%	total	%
illiterate	9	30.0	3	3.2	2	1.1	0	0.0	14	3.1
literacy class	2	6.7	5	5.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	1.5
Quran school	2	6.7	3	3.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	1.1
primary school	15	50.0	42	44.7	74	42.3	40	25.6	171	37.6

Table 2. Respondents according to education level and age group†

* 32 missing responses (age not specified in 29 cases, sex not specified in 3 cases).

† 104 missing responses (age not specified in 29 cases, education level not specified in 75 cases).

education level	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%	15-25	%	total	%
secondary school	2	6.7	34	36.2	62	35.4	79	50.6	177	38.9
university	0	0.0	7	7.4	37	21.1	37	23.7	81	17.8
total	30	100.0	94	100.0	175	100.0	156	100.0	455	100.0

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2.3 Responses according to education level and sex

Table 3 also shows that the respondents have received a good education. In absolute numbers, there are more males than females who received or are receiving primary and secondary education (217 males as opposed to 147 females). Proportionally, however, the gap is not as big: 79.8% of all male respondents and 72.1% of all females fall into this category. A comparable result emerges for university education: this time, the proportions for males are slightly lower than for females, but again the difference is not big (15.8% of all males and 19.6% of all females attended or are attending university). Males were the only respondents who studied at Quran schools,⁶ because this type of class is restricted to children between 7–12 years. And females constitute the majority of respondents who had attended literacy class. Literacy class is a class that enables illiterates to make use of basic education and pursue knowledge.⁷

Table 3. Respondents according to education level and sex*

education level	female	%	male	%	total	%
illiterate	9	4.4	6	2.2	15	3.2
literacy class	8	3.9	1	0.4	9	1.9
Quran school	0	0.0	5	1.8	5	1.1
primary school	77	37.7	101	37.1	178	37.4
secondary school	70	34.3	116	42.6	186	39.1
university	40	19.6	43	15.8	83	17.4
total	204	100.0	272	100.0	476	100.0

2.4 Responses according to profession and age

Occupation is often a key factor in assigning speakers to different socioeconomic classes because occupation has a major impact on an individual's status and life chances.⁸ From table 4 it can be seen that equal proportions hold blue-collar and white-collar jobs. 25.3% were employed in blue-collar jobs. The most common of the blue-collar jobs was unskilled manual work or farm work (79.2%) and skilled manual work (working as mechanics, house builders, electricians,

* 83 missing responses (sex not specified in 3 cases, education level not specified in 80 cases).

6 In Sudan, these schools are known as Khalwa. It teaches children to learn the Quran by heart and to learn how to read and write in Arabic.

7 Ministry of General Education, National Council for Literacy and Adult Education Report, 2008.

8 MEYERHOFF, *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, p. 196.

welders and blacksmiths) (20.8%). White-collar professions represented 24.3% of the responses. The most common white collar profession was work as soldiers/policemen (46.2%); another 26.5% of white-collar jobs was office work in private and public sectors such as railway and sea port corporations. Finally, teachers 10.2%, and retirees 17.1%, the majority of them having been employed in the military. Housewives were represented by 26.8%; the majority of them were between 26–60 years of age. Students were 23.7%; all of them were in the 15–25 and 26–40 age groups. With respect to sex, the majority of females were housewives (52.3%), or students (25%). The majority of males were students (19%), or employed in white-collar jobs as soldiers/policemen (17.3%).

profession	61+	%	41–60	%	26–40	%	15–25	%	total	%
white-collar	16	38.1	36	30.5	51	29.0	14	9.6	117	24.3
blue-collar	16	38.1	41	34.7	49	27.8	16	11.0	122	25.3
housewife	10	23.8	41	34.7	61	34.7	17	11.6	129	26.8
student	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	8.5	99	67.8	114	23.7
total	42	100.0	118	100.0	176	100.0	146	100.0	482	100.0

Table 4. Respondents according to profession and age*

2.5 Responses according to period and place of residence

Table 5 shows the current settlement patterns of the Tabaq community: the left-most column lists the places of residence (grouped into states). The majority of Tabaq people who migrated from their homeland live in towns. With the exception of West Kordofan state, they live in towns in the northern states. The periods of the settlement categories are based on the age group categories. But it should be noted that there are some crucial incidents that may have affected ethnic community stability and migration patterns at various times, such as the time of armed conflict erupting at the end of October 1989,⁹ and the current conflict starting at the beginning of June 2011.¹⁰ It should be noted that if the respondents moved more than once, only the last move was considered. For example, if they moved in 1986 to Khartoum and in 2005 they moved back to Tabaq and in 2011 they moved again to Madani, we only consider the last move.

The majority of the respondents were born outside the Tabaq area (60.7%). Of those respondents who left Tabaq, only very few migrated before 1951 (slightly less than 1%): the 4 respondents reside in the cities of Rabak and Gadarif. Less than 1% reported that

* 77 missing responses (age not specified in 29 cases, profession not specified in 48 cases)

9 [Africa Watch Committee], "Sudan," p. 8.

10 KOMEY, "The Historical and Contemporary Basis of the Renewed War in the Nuba Mountains," p. 43.

they still live in Tabaq: this is not surprising because the survey was conducted outside of the Tabaq area, and these 3 respondents came temporarily to Khartoum, Gadarif, and Rabak. 10% of the respondents left Tabaq during the period 1952–1971. 14.3% of the respondents moved from Tabaq during the period 1972–1985; they settled in the following states: White Nile, Khartoum, Gadarif, and Kassala (mainly in Khashm el-Girba) states. And 14.1% of the respondents moved from Tabaq during 1986–2012 and settled mainly in the following states: Khartoum, White Nile, Kassala (mainly in Khashm el-Girba) states.

Note that the majority of respondents migrated to Khartoum (31.8%), followed by migration to White Nile (24.8%), Gadarif (18.6%), Red Sea (11.6%), and Kassala (9.1%). But note that these results may not always be representative, because the survey was not conducted in all states. For example, West Kordofan recorded a much lower proportion than the other states, i.e. less than 1 percent. This is because the survey did not cover this state. But at the same time, West Kordofan is not an ideal place for Tabaq people to move in order to improve their living conditions, find better education or cure themselves. Similarly with Jazeera (3.7%). The majority of Tabaq people who live in Jazeera State live in Madani city, the capital of the state, where they depend on white collar jobs either in the public or the private sector, and these jobs are not easy to find there.

Table 5. Respondents according to period and place of residence*

current residence	since birth	%	before 1951	%	1952–71	%
Tabaq	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
West Kordofan	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Kordofan	2	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Khartoum State	146	33.2	0	0.0	16	3.6
White Nile	33	7.5	2	0.5	14	3.2
Jazeera (Madani)	10	2.3	0	0.0	4	0.9
Blue Nile	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Gadarif	36	8.2	2	0.5	5	1.1
Kassala (Khashm el-Girba)	22	5.0	0	0.0	3	0.7
Red Sea (Port Sudan)	18	4.1	0	0.0	2	0.5
total	267	60.7	4	0.9	44	10.0

* Note that only 78.3% of the respondents reported on when they took up their current residence. For example 79.8% of the Khartoum state respondents replied to the question about the date of moving from the Tabaq area, and among them 28.8% were born in the Tabaq area. Some respondents were excluded because their answers did not include the date of moving from Tabaq. For example, they answered the question about the date of moving from Tabaq as follows: I moved when I was married, since the death of my father, years ago, or I don't remember. The majority of the respondents (33.2%) who recorded the period and current place of residence were the Khartoum state respondents.

current residence	1972-85	%	1986-2012	%	total	%
Tabaq	1	0.2	2	0.5	3	0.7
West Kordofan	0	0.0	2	0.5	2	0.5
North Kordofan	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.5
Khartoum State	15	3.4	28	6.4	205	46.6
White Nile	18	4.1	9	2.0	76	17.3
Jazeera (Madani)	2	0.5	4	0.9	20	4.5
Blue Nile	0	0.0	1	0.2	1	0.2
Gadarif	12	2.7	4	0.9	59	13.4
Kassala (Khashm el-Girba)	10	2.3	8	1.8	43	9.8
Red Sea (Port Sudan)	5	1.1	4	0.9	29	6.6
total	63	14.3	62	14.1	440	100.0

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2.6 Responses according to period of residence and sex

Table 6 shows patterns of residence according to sex. As we can see from the table, the majority of the respondents of both sexes were born outside the Tabaq area; that is, 69.1% of females and 59.1% of males. Less than 40% of respondents were born in Tabaq and migrated to reside outside the Tabaq area. A low rate of migration for both sexes was recorded for the period before 1951. A high rate of migration was recorded for males who migrated from the Tabaq area during the period between 1972-1985 (15.4%). Females recorded a high rate of migration from their homeland to their current residence during the periods between 1972-1985 and 1986-2012. In the next section we will see the reasons for migration out of Tabaq.

sex	since birth	%	before 1951	%	1952-71	%
female	152	69.1	1	0.5	17	7.7
male	150	59.1	3	1.2	27	10.6
total	302	63.7	4	0.8	44	9.3
sex	1972-85	%	1986-2012	%	total	%
female	25	11.4	25	11.4	220	100.0
male	39	15.4	35	13.8	254	100.0
total	64	13.5	60	12.7	474	100.0

Table 6. Period of residence according to sex

2.7 Reasons for migrating to the current place of residence

There are often a number of reasons for people leaving their native lands.¹¹ This is also true for the Nuba Mountains region, where thousands of people have left their homelands in search of better jobs and educational opportunities and a more secure life.

11 MAFUKIDZE, "A Discussion of Migration and Migration Patterns and Flows in Africa," p. 124.

In this section, I will outline the reasons why Tabaq people have moved to their current places of residence. The primary reasons are presented in table 7 below.

252 Table 7.
Reasons for
migrating to
the current
place of
residence

state	mar- riage	%	educa- tion	%	econom- ical	%
West Kordofan	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Khartoum State	10	4.1	16	6.6	43	17.8
White Nile	7	2.9	11	4.5	39	16.1
Jazeera (Madani)	1	0.4	1	0.4	7	2.9
Gadarif	7	2.9	5	2.1	29	12.0
Kassala (Khashm el- Girba)	4	1.7	5	2.1	9	3.7
Red Sea (Port Sudan)	1	0.4	3	1.2	20	8.3
total	30	12.4	41	16.9	147	60.7
state	medical	%	war related	%	total	%
West Kordofan	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	0.4
Khartoum State	1	0.4	7	2.9	77	31.8
White Nile	2	0.8	1	0.4	60	24.8
Jazeera (Madani)	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	3.7
Gadarif	0	0.0	4	1.7	45	18.6
Kassala (Khashm el- Girba)	0	0.0	4	1.7	22	9.1
Red Sea (Port Sudan)	0	0.0	4	1.7	28	11.6
total	3	1.2	21	8.7	242	100.0

It is clear from table 7 that only an insignificant proportion of migrants (1.2%) migrated for medical reasons. As can be seen from the table, economic opportunities (job assignments, search for a better life, improving living situations) are the most important reasons: 60.7% of the respondents reported that they migrated for economic opportunities. Migration for education opportunities (16.9%) proved to be a stronger factor than migration to escape war (8.7%). That is to say, most Tabaq migrants can be defined as voluntary migrants. Furthermore, 12.4% of respondents migrated for reasons of marriage. Note that women are more likely than men to migrate in order to join their spouses (rather than for economic reasons).

2.8 Marriage patterns

This section looks at marriage patterns, investigating the proportions of exogamous and endogamous marriages among the Tabaq. Callister et al. refer to intermarriage as exogamous (meaning, a marriage where the two partners come from different ethnic

groups).¹² In contrast, an endogamous marriage would be where both partners come from the same ethnic group. Mugaddam¹³ shows that intermarriage between ethnic groups contributes significantly to language shift. That is to say, when ethnic communities are small, there is a high possibility that marriages will be exogamous. And exogamous marriage, in turn, is one factor contributing to the use of a common lingua franca, which is also aided by rapid urbanisation and the growth of commercial centers.¹⁴ And all this, in turn, leads to language shift. According to Callister et al.,¹⁵ this will have an impact on future generations, which become either assimilated into a dominant culture or acculturated.

The present section provides information on the marriage patterns of a sample of Tabaq respondents outside the Tabaq area.

2.8.1 *Marriage patterns of Tabaq respondents*

Table 8 reveals that endogamous marriage is a common phenomenon among Tabaq respondents; 95.2% of the respondents' mothers and 96.4% of the respondents' fathers are from the Tabaq ethnic group. The recorded intermarriages cover spouses from Fur, Daju, Zaghawa, Abu Jinuk, Kujuriya, Wali, and Masalit.

The figures below illustrate intermarriage patterns among the respondents. When reading the next two sections, the following two points should be kept in mind:

1. intermarriages constitute only a small proportion of all marriages (respondents reported a non-Tabaq origin for 27 mothers and 20 fathers); and
2. the ethnic origin of the non-Tabaq parent was only known in a few cases (for 13 mothers and 4 fathers).

ethnic group	mother's origin	%	father's origin	%
Tabaq	535	95.2	542	96.4
Daju	4	0.7	0	0.0
Abu Jinuk	0	0.0	1	0.2
Kujuriya	1	0.2	0	0.0
Wali	0	0.0	1	0.2
Fur	3	0.5	2	0.4
Zaghawa	4	0.7	0	0.0
Masalit	1	0.2	0	0.0
unknown	14	2.5	16	2.8
total	562	100.0	562	100.0

Table 8. Marriage patterns of Tabaq respondents

12 CALLISTER et al. *Ethnic Intermarriage in New Zealand*, p. 2.
 13 MUGADDAM, *Language Maintenance and Shift in Sudan*, p. 121.
 14 BATIBO, *Language Decline and Death in Africa*, p. 94.
 15 CALLISTER et al. *Ethnic Intermarriage in New Zealand*, p. 6.

2.8.2 Intermarriage with respect to mothers' origins

As we can see from fig. 1, in the case of exogamous marriages, Tabaq men marry both from within the Nuba Mountains (Daju and Kujuriya) and from Darfur (Zaghawa and Masalit). Interestingly, Gadarif¹⁶ is the current residence of all Tabaq respondents whose mothers are not Tabaq.¹⁷ The reason behind this may be, as pointed out by Miller,¹⁸ that the agricultural development of both the irrigated schemes and mechanized farming in the 1960s-70s attracted a large number of landless wage labourers mainly from Western Sudan and Western Africa which led to the development of Gadarif. All respondents whose mothers are non-Tabaq claim that they belong to Tabaq themselves (i.e., to the ethnic group of their fathers).

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Figure 1.
Intermarriage
with respect to
mother's origins

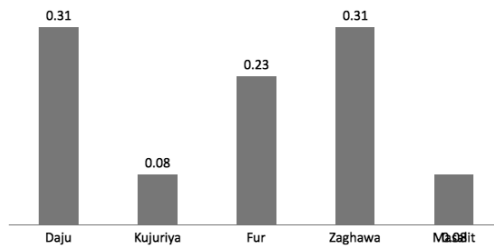
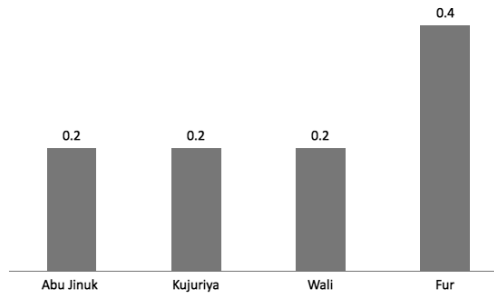


Figure 2.
Intermarriage
with respect to
father's origins



2.8.3 Intermarriage with respect to fathers' origins

Fig. 2 shows that Tabaq women also marry both from their own linguistic group (i.e. from the Kordofan Nubian groups: Abu Jinuk, Kujuriya and Wali) and from Fur. Khartoum is the current residence of almost all respondents who reported that their fathers are not from Tabaq (with the exception of one respondent whose father belongs

16 Gadarif is situated in the eastern part of Sudan.

17 This is because of the influence of Arab ideology. An individual is considered to belong to the Tabaq ethnic group if his/her father originates from that ethnic group.

18 MILLER, "Power, Land and Ethnicity in the Kassala-Gedaref States," p. 17.

to Abu Jinuk and who resides in Khashm el-Girba). All respondents whose fathers are non-Tabaq claim that they belong to their fathers' ethnic group, i.e., they do not consider themselves Tabaq.

3. Language knowledge and proficiency

Language proficiency, as it is used in this study, means to “use speech fluently and in such a way that it effectively conveys the intended meanings or messages.”¹⁹ In this study, respondents were asked three questions about their language knowledge: about what languages they speak, which languages they understand but do not speak (i.e. passive knowledge) and where they learnt each language. They were also asked four questions about their language fluency in each language they speak, about how well they spoke Tabaq and Arabic before migrating from their homeland in the Tabaq area, about how often they use Tabaq and Arabic now and about whether they find it easy or difficult to speak Tabaq with a Tabaq person who spent most of his life inside or outside the Tabaq area. Table 9 below gives the details of language knowledge and proficiency according to sex and age groups.

3.1 Language knowledge and proficiency according to sex and age group

The data in table 9 illustrates that a large proportion of both males and females are monolingual Arabic speakers. This proportion is especially high amongst the two younger age groups (covering 71% of the 15–25 year olds, and 62% of the 26–40), while only 30% of the age group 41+ is monolingual in Arabic. These figures thus indicate a language shift to Arabic among the younger (15–25) and middle-aged groups (26–40) in both sexes. Furthermore, Arabic is represented in all patterns of language knowledge among all respondents.

language	female					
	61+	%	41–60	%	26–40	%
Tabaq only	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tabaq/Arabic	8	61.5	12	25.0	8	8.6
Arabic/Tabaq	1	7.7	18	37.5	19	20.4
Arabic only	4	30.8	13	27.1	60	64.5
Arabic/English	0	0.0	2	4.2	3	3.2
Tabaq/Arabic/English	0	0.0	2	4.2	0	0.0
Arabic/Tabaq/English	0	0.0	1	2.1	3	3.2
total	13	100.0	48	100.0	93	100.0

Table 9. Language knowledge and proficiency according to sex and age group

19 ARUA & MAGOCHA, “Patterns of Language Use and Language Preference of Some Children and Their Parents in Botswana,” p. 454.

language	female					
	15-25	%	un-known	%	total	%
Tabaq only	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tabaq/Arabic	10	11.5	5	33.3	43	16.8
Arabic/Tabaq	9	10.3	5	33.3	52	20.3
Arabic only	61	70.1	4	26.7	142	55.5
Arabic/English	7	8.0	1	6.7	13	5.1
Tabaq/Arabic/English	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.8
Arabic/Tabaq/English	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.6
total	87	100.0	15	100.0	256	100.0
language	male					
	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%
Tabaq only	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tabaq/Arabic	14	45.2	16	21.9	7	7.0
Arabic/Tabaq	9	29.0	14	19.2	9	9.0
Arabic only	7	22.6	26	35.6	60	60.0
Arabic/English	0	0.0	11	15.1	13	13.0
Tabaq/Arabic/English	1	3.2	5	6.8	6	6.0
Arabic/Tabaq/English	0	0.0	1	1.4	5	5.0
total	31	100.0	73	100.0	100	100.0
language	male					
	15-25	%	un-known	%	total	%
Tabaq only	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tabaq/Arabic	11	13.4	4	23.5	52	17.2
Arabic/Tabaq	5	6.1	6	35.3	43	14.2
Arabic only	59	72.0	5	29.4	157	51.8
Arabic/English	7	8.5	2	11.8	33	10.9
Tabaq/Arabic/English	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	4.0
Arabic/Tabaq/English	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	2.0
total	82	100.0	17	100.0	303	100.0

The data in table 9 shows that there are no monolingual speakers of Tabaq. And while Tabaq was reported as a first language (L1), that is, a language that a child acquires first as a mother-tongue,²⁰ and a second language (L2), that is, a language that is acquired later than the first language,²¹ among all age groups and sexes, there is a clear decrease in its knowledge among the younger generations: 62% of the 41+ age group, but only 28% and 12% of the two younger age groups, respectively, reported any knowledge of Tabaq. English was found to be the L2 and L3 in some bilingual and trilingual cases.

20 LYON, *Becoming Bilingual*, p. 48.

21 CUNNINGHAM-ANDERSSON & ANDERSSON, *Growing Up with Two Languages*, p. 151.

3.2 Comparison of proficiency in Tabaq and Arabic according to level of education

Table 9 has shown that language proficiency correlates strongly with age group (but much less strongly with sex). In this section we now look at a correlation with the level of education. Table 10 provides a comparison between language proficiency in Tabaq (as one of the languages spoken) and Arabic (as the only language spoken) among respondents according to level of education.

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education level	Tabaq	%	Arabic only	%	total	%
Illiterate	9	64.3	5	35.7	14	100.0
Literacy class	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	100.0
Quran class	3	60.0	2	40.0	5	100.0
Primary school	64	36.0	114	64.0	178	100.0
Secondary school	37	19.9	149	80.1	186	100.0
University	8	9.6	75	90.4	83	100.0
total	125	26.3	350	73.7	475	100.0

Table 10. Comparison between language proficiency in Tabaq and Arabic among respondents according to educational level

Table 10 shows clearly that education plays an important role in the process of language shift. There seems to be a positive correlation between education level and the use of Arabic only, suggesting that advances in education lead to an increase in the use of Arabic. This is not surprising, since Arabic is the dominant language in the whole country. It should be noticed that respondents who claimed Tabaq knowledge also know Arabic.

3.2.1 Linguistic repertoire of the respondents

Monolingualism, as defined by Batibo,²² that is, the knowledge of only one language, is rare as individuals are often exposed to at least one neighbouring language or to the major language of their area in addition to their mother-tongue. According to Batibo, monolingualism has two phases. The first phase is a phase in which the speakers are conservative and not yet exposed to the dominant language, where they live in their rural homeland, have not migrated or are not exposed to formal education; in this case, the majority may speak only their mother-tongue. And the last phase is a phase in which the dominant language is replacing the mother-tongue in its domains of use and becomes the first language of the community. In this case the mother-tongue can be described as dead, as it is no longer used in the community, although the community may have kept some of their language traditions for ceremonial purposes. This process of language shift from monolingualism in one language to monolin-

22 BATIBO, *Language Decline and Death in Africa*, p. 16.

gualism in another includes a number of different phases; that is to say, in between these two phases there are stages in which the community shifts from their mother-tongue to the second language. In these stages, the speakers are bilingual. After speakers acquire the second language, this language may compete with the first language in some domains and eventually may dominate all domains, especially if the second language has power or is well supported institutionally. This stage is reached when the second language becomes the primary language, that is to say, the mother-tongue is acquired as a second language.²³

In the next section we will look at the stages of gradual shift from Tabaq to Arabic.

3.2.2 *Distribution of multilingualism according to age groups*

The following table investigates the distribution of multilingualism among respondents broken down according to age group.

Table 11.
Distribution of
multilingualism
according to age
groups

pattern	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%
monolingual	11	25.0	39	32.2	120	62.2
bilingual	32	72.7	73	60.3	59	30.6
trilingual	1	2.3	9	7.4	14	7.3
total	44	100.0	121	100.0	193	100.0
pattern	15-25	%	un- known	%	total	%
monolingual	120	71.0	9	28.1	299	49.9
bilingual	49	29.0	23	71.9	236	39.4
trilingual	0	0.0	0	0.0	24	4.0
total	169	100.0	32	100.0	599	100.0

Looking at table 11 on language knowledge and proficiency, three patterns of language use are evident. By far the most dominant language use pattern is monolingual: note that we know from the discussion of table 9 that “monolingual” means monolingual in Arabic. This pattern is not surprising, because Arabic is the sole official language of administration in Sudan.²⁴ Since independence, the policy of governments in the Sudan has been to replace the indigenous non-Arabic languages with Arabic in all domains of official interaction, especially in education, where this ideologised language policy is being implemented.²⁵ It is used extensively in all domains including the media, the government and administration, the army, the education and the economy. Arabic is the main language of higher education throughout the country. Knowledge of Arabic is a prereq-

²³ MAHMUD, *Arabic in the Southern Sudan*, p. 94.

²⁴ BERAIR, *Linguistic Politics in Sudan*, p. 89.

²⁵ NYOMBE, “Survival or Extinction,” p. 111.

uisite for employment, and proficiency in the language is required for positions in the civil service, the media, and in any other domains dealing with the public such as hospitals and banks. In addition Arabic is used as a medium of instruction in many schools, which has the potential to strongly influence the development of language proficiency.²⁶ Furthermore, Arabic is the lingua franca of the whole country. The predominance of Arabic facilitates the language shift towards Arabic since Tabaq receives no institutional support.

As table 11 shows, the next dominant pattern is bilingualism in Arabic/Tabaq, Tabaq/Arabic and Arabic/English (39.4%). We know from table 9 that there are only few respondents who reported English as a second language. This is because English is learnt as a subject mainly at school and university, and English is not a language of wider communication in Sudan. If we exclude the few respondents who claim knowledge of English, the pattern includes bilingualism in Arabic/Tabaq and in Tabaq/Arabic. This bilingual pattern is less dominant in the younger age groups (in favour of monolingualism in Arabic) and the responses thus indicate that bilingualism may indeed be a transitional stage towards Arabic monolingualism.

The third pattern is trilingualism in Arabic/Tabaq/English or Tabaq/Arabic/English. English was found to always be the third language among those claiming knowledge of three languages. With the exception of 6 respondents, all those who reported English knowledge either studied at secondary school or at university. One may thus claim that English knowledge correlates with education level among the Tabaq community. It should be noted that not all respondents who claimed English knowledge are actually proficient in it because they do not have many opportunities to interact with English speakers and they only learned English as a subject at school.

Interestingly, there is a noticeable absence of knowledge of any other indigenous Sudanese language. No respondent claimed to know any of the languages that are spoken in neighbouring villages.

3.2.3 *Distribution of Tabaq, Arabic, and English as L1 (or mother-tongue), L2, and L3*

It is usually expected that the gradually decreasing use of the L1 may eventually result in a language shift, that is, in the monolingual use of the former L2. This is a situation in which a L2 becomes the primary language. This shift is facilitated if the L2 is the language of power so that speakers can accomplish most of life's necessities without their mother-tongue. This is the situation of Arabic in Sudan.²⁷

26 GIBBONS & RAMIREZ, *Maintaining a Minority Language*, p. 81.

27 MILLER & CAUBET, "Arabic Sociolinguistics in the Middle East and North Africa," p. 247.

Based on this, we can hypothesize that the spread of Arabic as a lingua franca and towards most domains of language use at the expense of Sudanese indigenous languages has exposed these languages to the risk of endangerment.

The following table investigates the distribution of Tabaq, Arabic and English as L1, L2 and L3 as reported by respondents.

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Table 12.
Distribution of
Tabaq, Arabic,
and English as L1
(mother-tongue),
L2, and L3

language	L1	%	L2	%	L3	%	total	%
Tabaq	109	19.5	105	18.8	0	0.0	214	38.3
Arabic	450	80.5	109	19.5	0	0.0	559	100.0
English	0	0.0	46	8.2	24	4.3	70	12.5

Table 12 indicates that only 38.3% of the respondents claim to speak Tabaq at all, all respondents reported that they speak Arabic and only 12.5% that they speak English. In more detail; only 19.5% of the respondents claimed the use of Tabaq as a mother-tongue and only 18.8% claimed the use of Tabaq as an L2; there are no respondents who reported to use Tabaq as L3. The majority of the respondents reported that they use Arabic as L1, that is 80.5% and only 19.5% reported the use of Arabic as L2 (and all of those claim the use of Tabaq as mother-tongue). No respondents claims the use of Arabic as L3. Only 8.2% of the respondents (those who shifted to Arabic) claim the use of English as an L2 and less than (5%) reported the use of English as an L3. This table shows clearly that the majority of Tabaq respondents have shifted to Arabic; that is to say, Arabic has replaced Tabaq as an L1 for most Tabaq people.

3.2.4 *Passive knowledge*

Passive knowledge in this study means being able to understand the language but not being able to speak it. This characterization is based on Mesthrie²⁸ who defines “passive bilinguals” as those who have a full understanding of the ancestral language, but are unable to use it in productive speech, i.e., they can understand the language but have limited production skills. According to Skutnab-Kangas,²⁹ passive knowledge often leads to the death of minority languages.

In our survey, respondents were asked a closed question which focuses on spoken language skills only. The crucial question was “List all the languages or dialects you understand (but do not speak).”

In table 13 we illustrate the responses with regard to passive knowledge of languages.

28 MESTHRIE, “Language Change, Survival, Decline,” p. 173.

29 SKUTNAB-KANGAS, *Linguistic Genocide in Education*, p. 369.

Tabaq						
age group	female	%	male	%	total	%
15-25	33	29.7	32	30.8	65	30.2
26-40	55	49.5	42	40.4	97	45.1
41-60	20	18.0	22	21.2	42	19.5
61+	3	2.7	8	7.7	11	5.1
total	111	100.0	104	100.0	215	100.0

Kordofan Nubian						
age group	female	%	male	%	total	%
15-25	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
26-40	3	75.0	2	22.2	5	38.5
41-60	0	0.0	3	33.3	3	23.1
61+	1	25.0	4	44.4	5	38.5
total	4	100.0	9	100.0	13	100.0

English						
age group	female	%	male	%	total	%
15-25	4	44.4	0	0.0	4	33.3
26-40	5	55.6	3	100.0	8	66.7
41-60	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
61+	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
total	9	100.0	3	100.0	12	100.0

Table 13. Passive knowledge of languages according to sex and age groups

Table 13 shows that Tabaq respondents reported passive knowledge in three languages, including their language of origin, i.e. Tabaq. Note that the percentages in table 13 reflect percentages of the overall number of respondents in each age/sex category. Altogether, there are 214 Tabaq respondents who claim active knowledge, and 215 respondents who have a passive knowledge in Tabaq (leaving 130 respondents without any knowledge). Only 13 respondents reported passive knowledge in other Kordofan Nubian languages. And only 12 respondents reported passive knowledge in English. The table also gives details of passive knowledge among different age groups and sexes in each of the languages, i.e. Tabaq, Kordofan Nubian, and English.

Table 12 indicates that the highest ratio of passive knowledge in Tabaq is reported by middle-aged speakers (26-40). One may ask why middle aged speakers scored a higher proportion of passive knowledge in Tabaq than the younger generation. This is probably because the younger generation has already shifted completely to Arabic, that is to say, 134 out 169 respondents of the younger generation shifted to Arabic, and only 35 of the respondents claimed to be speaking any Tabaq, see table 9. Note that there seem to be more females than males who have a passive knowledge of Tabaq (in all age groups). This is interesting, because there seem to be no signifi-

cant differences between female and male respondents in terms of their active knowledge of Tabaq; see table 9. This difference in passive knowledge, however, may indicate that females still play some role in guarding their society's values.

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Table 13 also shows that some respondents have a passive knowledge in other Kordofan Nubian languages, but they did not specify which languages. The largest proportion (11.4%) was in the older generation, with slightly more males than females.

With regard to passive knowledge in English there are slightly more females than males, and the two older age groups did not report any passive knowledge of English.

3.3 *Settings for acquiring language knowledge*

This section will investigate where respondents learnt the languages which they speak, i.e. Tabaq, Arabic, and English. This is considered to be relevant because people grow up in homes where "the images of childhood, expressed in myths, proverbs and beliefs, patterns of childrearing and education are powerful bases of a primary identity that become norms and values for later life."³⁰ If their language, as Fishman³¹ proposes, is being passed on in the home domain, there is some chance of long-term survival of the language. Otherwise efforts to prop up the language elsewhere (e.g. in school, or at a place of worship) may end up being largely symbolic and ceremonial. In cases where parents are native speakers of the minority language, the children may learn the majority language for the first time not in the home, but in the neighbourhood, playground or when they start at pre-school or school. In the case of Sudan, Arabic is the majority language, and minority groups may encourage their children to use Arabic in a number of domains, possibly even the home domain. On the other hand, English was the language of instruction in government secondary school³² up to 1969; the majority of older elites thus have a good command of it, and it is taught as a subject at the intermediate level.

Attempts to Arabicize secondary education were started when the first Conference of Secondary Schools Teachers³³ was held in 1965. The conference decided that the Arabic language would be the medium of instruction in secondary schools from June 1965 onwards.³⁴ Since that time Arabic has been the language of instruction from primary level up to secondary level of education in the northern part of the Sudan.³⁵ This language policy, known as the

30 LAMB & HWANG, "Images of Childhood," p. 3.

31 FISHMAN, *Reversing Language Shift*, p. 5.

32 THELWALL, *Aspects of Language in the Sudan*, p. 2.

33 MUGADDAM, *Language Maintenance and Shift in Sudan*, p. 56.

34 ABDELHAY, *The Politics of Language Planning in the Sudan*, p. 160.

35 THELWALL, *Aspects of Language in the Sudan*, p. 2.

Arabicization project, which led to the domination of Arabic and the exclusion of linguistic minorities, was accompanied by attempts to Sudanize the civil service, i.e. to liberate the country from the colonial legacy.³⁶ According to Abdelhay,³⁷ the policies of Arabisation, especially of higher education since 1989, have had a negative impact on the status of the English language. However, the Naivasha peace accord signed in 2005 has brought English back as an official language, side by side with Arabic, and English is still taught as a subject on all levels of education from primary to university levels.

All respondents were asked about where they learnt the languages which they know. Note that table 14 includes all respondents who have indicated either active or passive knowledge of a language. In their answers to this question, 377 of the respondents (that is, 93.3%) reported that they have (actively or passively) learned the Tabaq language in their homes. Only 21 of them (that is, 5.2%) reported that they learned Tabaq at school; probably, they learnt it from their friends and colleagues, because Tabaq has not been introduced in the educational system. Only 6 respondents (that is 1.5%) reported that they learned Tabaq in other places, such as at the place of work, from neighbours, etc.

By contrast, the overwhelming majority (that is, 57.9%) of the respondents reported that they learnt Arabic at school. However, a fairly large proportion (that is, 36.2%) reported that they learnt Arabic from their parents in the home. About 25 of the respondents (that is, 5.8%) reported that they learnt Arabic in other places; such as at markets where members of different ethnic communities meet.

Forty-four Tabaq respondents claimed that they gained English knowledge, mostly at school (that is, 93.2%). Only 3 people claimed that they learned English in other places. This is a reasonable distribution because English learning is available in many parts of the Sudan and it is used to varying degrees,³⁸ for example, at the British Council in Khartoum and English teaching centers in Khartoum and other cities. None of the respondents claimed that they learnt English at home. Table 14 below gives the details about the settings for acquisition.

36 BERAIR, *Linguistic Politics in Sudan*, p. 89.

37 ABDELHAY, *The Politics of Language Planning in the Sudan*, p. 36.

38 ABU-BAKER & ABU-MANGA, "Language Situation and Planning in the Sudan," p. 4.

Table 14. Settings for acquiring language knowledge according to age groups

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Tabaq								
Age group	home	%	school	%	other	%	total	%
15-25	97	89.0	11	10.1	1	0.9	109	100.0
26-40	144	92.9	10	6.5	1	0.6	155	100.0
41-60	96	97.0	0	0.0	3	3.0	99	100.0
61+	40	97.6	0	0.0	1	2.4	41	100.0
total	377	93.3	21	5.2	6	1.5	404	100.0
Arabic								
Age group	home	%	school	%	other	%	total	%
15-25	39	30.5	84	65.6	5	3.9	128	100.0
26-40	45	27.3	117	70.9	3	1.8	165	100.0
41-60	50	49.5	38	37.6	13	12.9	101	100.0
61+	21	61.8	9	26.5	4	11.8	34	100.0
total	155	36.2	248	57.9	25	5.8	428	100.0
English								
Age group	home	%	school	%	other	%	total	%
15-25	0	0.0	14	93.3	1	6.7	15	100.0
26-40	0	0.0	15	100.0	0	0.0	15	100.0
41-60	0	0.0	12	85.7	2	14.3	14	100.0
61+	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	100.0
total	0	0.0	41	93.2	3	6.8	44	100.0

3.4 Language fluency

Language fluency in this study means the degree of knowledge of Tabaq and Arabic that is claimed by the respondents. It deals with the question of how well a respondent speaks Tabaq or Arabic. The questionnaire asked respondents to rate their fluency based on the following scales: "fluent," "intermediate" or "little." Table 15 summarizes the answers of all respondents who claimed either active or passive knowledge of Tabaq and/or Arabic.

As indicated in table 15 below, only 109 respondents (that is, 26.8%) reported that they speak Tabaq fluently, 99 respondents (that is, 24.3%) were intermediate Tabaq speakers and 199 respondents (that is, 48.9%) have a little knowledge of Tabaq; the rest (that is, 152 respondents) have neither active nor passive knowledge of Tabaq. By contrast, the majority, 451 respondents (that is, 88.6%) speak Arabic fluently. The table also reveals that Tabaq speakers among the two younger age groups are less fluent in Tabaq, which contrasts with the high percentage of respondents (97%) among the older generation who claim fluency. The reason behind that may be the growing number of members of the younger generations who were born outside the Tabaq area or who moved away from their homelands to the larger towns in the northern part of Sudan in search of work and education. This would then confirm what Li Wei proposed: if a

person moves away from the neighbourhood or area in which the minority language is spoken or loses contact with those who speak it, he or she may lose fluency in the minority language.³⁹ Note that the responses correlate with active and passive knowledge: the overwhelming majority of respondents who claim a passive knowledge in Tabaq also reported intermediate and little fluency in Tabaq.

To sum up, members of the older generation who speak any Tabaq speak the language fluently, the middle generation has varying fluencies in Tabaq, and the younger generation speaks Tabaq with little fluency only, while they speak Arabic fluently. According to Grenoble and Whaley,⁴⁰ who try to assess the vitality of languages, all languages that are ranked at any level below safe tend to have communities which include semi speakers, i.e., not fully fluent speakers, who lack native proficiency; the ratio of semi speakers to fluent speakers varies among communities and with the level of endangerment. Given that table 15 shows the presence of large proportions of semi speakers of Tabaq, we may take this as another indication that Tabaq is an endangered language.

Tabaq										
Fluency	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%	15-25	%	total	%
Fluent	32	97.0	31	44.9	31	19.1	15	10.5	109	26.8
Intermediate	1	3.0	18	26.1	44	27.2	36	25.2	99	24.3
Little	0	0.0	20	29.0	87	53.7	92	64.3	199	48.9
total	33	100.0	69	100.0	162	100.0	143	100.0	407	100.0
Arabic										
Fluency	61+	%	41-60	%	26-40	%	15-25	%	total	%
Fluent	31	70.5	91	80.5	171	91.4	158	96.3	451	88.8
Intermediate	8	18.2	17	15.0	14	7.5	5	3.0	44	8.7
Little	5	11.4	5	4.4	2	1.1	1	0.6	13	2.6
total	44	100.0	113	100.0	187	100.0	164	100.0	508	100.0

Table 15. Levels of fluency in Tabaq and Arabic

3.5 Distribution of Tabaq speakers and Arabic monolinguals according to four variables

According to Mesthrie et al.,⁴¹ language shift refers to the replacement of an indigenous language by another language, which becomes the primary medium of communication and socialization. Language shift can be measured against a number of sociolinguistic parameters, such as status, demography and institutional support,⁴²

39 WEI, "Dimensions of Bilingualism," p. 5. See also WEI, "Bilingualism," p. 38.

40 GRENOBLE & WHALEY, *Saving Languages*, p. 241.

41 MESTHRIE et al. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, p. 253.

42 HULSEN, *Language Loss and Language Processing*, p. 29.

and people choose to maintain or shift to other languages as their social relationships change.⁴³ Language shift or maintenance may also result from economic changes; recall that table 7 indicated that more than 60% of those who migrated from Tabaq did so in search for economic opportunities. People strive to improve their language proficiency, particularly their proficiency in a dominant majority language, in order to get a better job or earn more money.⁴⁴ This section investigates the relative importance of different sociolinguistic variables, and table 16 below shows the distribution of spoken Tabaq against sex, age, marriage pattern, and employment.

Table 16.
Distribution of
Tabaq speakers
and Arabic
monolinguals by
four variables

variable	Tabaq	%	Arabic	%	total	%
female	91	37.8	150	62.2	241	100.0
male	103	36.0	183	64.0	286	100.0
15-25	35	20.7	134	79.3	169	100.0
26-40	57	29.5	136	70.5	193	100.0
41-60	69	57.0	52	43.0	121	100.0
61+	33	75.0	11	25.0	44	100.0
intermarriage	3	18.8	13	81.3	16	100.0
white collar	47	37.0	80	63.0	127	100.0
blue collar	49	41.9	68	58.1	117	100.0
housewife	59	47.2	66	52.8	125	100.0
student	14	12.5	98	87.5	112	100.0

Table 16 illustrates that language shift to becoming a monolingual speaker of Arabic applies equally to both sexes (female 62.2%, male 64%). Age, by contrast, is a crucial differentiating factor: the lowest rates of language shift were found among those aged over 60 years (25%), then in the 41-60 age group (43%), then in the 26-40 age group (70.5%) and then among the youngest generation, 79.3%. The Tabaq community is characterized by endogamous marriages, i.e. less than 5% of married Tabaq respondents lived in exogamous marriages, as indicated in table 8. Table 16 shows that 81.3% of respondents who grew up with one non-Tabaq parent speak monolingual Arabic, but the absolute numbers are too low to give any further generalizations.

Table 16 also shows that many holders of both white and blue collar jobs are monolingual Arabic speakers. It is possible that this reflects the predominance of economic migration among the Tabaq community. The majority of Tabaq respondents migrated in search of better job opportunities and an improved lifestyle, and they live side by side with other ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in their new residences, mainly in urban areas such

43 MILROY & MILROY, "Linguistic Change, Social Network and Speaker Innovation," p. 343.

44 GIBBONS & RAMIREZ, *Maintaining a Minority Language*, p. 62.

as Khartoum, Rabak and Gadarif. Arabic is the sole medium of daily communication between all members of these multi-ethnic communities. And work in these areas requires knowledge of Arabic, regardless of the type of the job, whether it is a white or a blue-collar job.

The majority of females are housewives. And while housewives tend to retain their knowledge of Tabaq to a larger degree than people with other occupations (47.2% of housewives knew some Tabaq), it is still noticeable that the majority of them have become monolingual speakers of Arabic, too. This shows the pervasiveness of Arabic and the fact that Arabic has intruded well into the home domain, and is not solely tied to paid work outside the house.

Students recorded the greatest shift towards Arabic, that is 87.5%. This is not surprising, since education is available only in the majority language, and once a child starts school, the second language will begin to play a major role.

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4. Conclusion

This study has shown that language shift from Tabaq to Arabic is pervasive. All respondents speak Arabic. The majority (57.9%) acquired Arabic at school, but there is already a relatively large proportion (36.2%) that has acquired it at home. The spread of Arabic is facilitated by the fact that it is the official language and the lingua franca in the Sudan; it is also used as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Age is the most important factor in the acquisition of Arabic and Tabaq. Over 90% of the two younger generations are fluent in Arabic: see table 15. Only 38.3% of the respondents claim to speak Tabaq, and only 26.8% claim to be fluent speakers of Tabaq. Most of the Tabaq speakers are from the older generation, and only few young Tabaq speak Tabaq. More than 60% of the respondents speak Arabic monolingually. And 34% of the respondents are bilingual in Tabaq/Arabic and Arabic/Tabaq. It should be noted, however, that this survey was conducted among the Tabaq migrants in northern Sudan, who mainly migrated for socio-economic and educational purposes. It is not known how the sociolinguistic situation in the migrant communities compares to the sociolinguistic situation in the Tabaq homeland. In the migrant communities, however, it has to be said that the Tabaq language is severely endangered, and is fast losing ground to Arabic.

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