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Small-scale multilingualism in Fouta-Djallon

Western Africa occupies a central place in the research on multilingualism due to the studies on the sociolinguistic situation in Cameroon (di Carlo 2018) and the Casamance area in Senegal (Lüpke and Storch 2013; Lüpke 2016). The present study focuses on yet another case of multiligualism in Western Africa by discussing the multilingualism patterns in the area of Fouta-Djallon plateau in Guinea. The situation will be analyzed in the perspective of communities speaking Kakabe, a minor language spoken in about fifty villages. The involved languages are Kakabe, Maninka, Pular, and, to a lesser extent, Sussu, with Pular belonging to the Atlantic family and the three other languages to the Mande family.

The Fouta-Djallon area is characterized by a lower degree of multilingualism as compared to the Casamance area, geographically close to it. Whereas in the Bainounk communities of Lower Casamance individuals report speaking from five to ten languages (Lüpke 2016) people in the Kakabe community usually claim two or three languages in their repertoires and, less frequently, four or five languages. The Kakabe-speaking communities are spread over a relatively large area, with the town of Labe as the North-Western limit and the town of Dabola the South-Eastern limit. This zone is not linguisitcally homogenous: Poular plays a more prominent role in the North, whereas Maninka is more prominent in the South-East. This is due the fact that, to the east of Fouta-Djallon, there is an area with a big number of Maninka villages (Davydov 2012, 2017), whereas the area of Labe is strongly dominated by Pular (Diallo 2013).

Pular and Maninka are associated with a greater prestige than Kakabe which reflects the political and historical situation in the region. The name "Kakabe" (more precisely, Kakkaɓe) can be translated from Pular as 'non-Fulbe population of a land governed by Fulbe'. Fulbe, the speakers of Pular, invaded Fouta-Djallon in the second half of the 18th century which was followed by two centuries of slavery for the local communities such as Kakabe (Botte 1994). Maninka is the descendent of the language of the Mali empire and has been associated with political and symbolic power for many centuries. Therefore, the social contexts of the coexistence of Kakabe, on the one hand, and Maninka and Pular, on the other hand, cannot be describe as symmetric and egalitarian. Nevertheless, and this is crucial for the present study, Fulbe, Maninka and Kakabe attest a certain level of reciprocity in their linguistic practices. Thus, individuals from Pular villages adjacent to Kakabe villages often include Kakabe as a part of their repertoire and the same is true for Maninka. Besides, neither of the three languages, has any close connections to institutions of power at a national level. In general, the situation with Pular, Kakabe and Maninka is closer to that of small-scale multilingualism than polyglossia, as the latter are understood in Singer and Harris (2016) and Lüpke (2016).

In my talk, I will analyze the Kakabe, Maninka and Pular multilingualism patterns in different types of language practices. The study is based on a multi-media oral corpus representative of a variety of genres and containing data that I have been collecting in the region since 2009. The data for the corpus comes from nine different villages, some of them widely set apart geographically and, therefore, apart from the genre diversity, reflects the differences in the multilingualism patterns depending on the geographic area. Here are several examples of what will be discusses in the presentation. In tales (mostly told in Kakabe), refrains are sung in Maninka, but also in Pular, when the Northern part of the dialectal zone in concerned. Next, practices associated with sorcery involve speech in Maninka. Thus, a recorded divination session is carried out in Maninka by a Kakabe marabout, but when the latter talks about his life with his former client, the discussion is carried out in Kakabe. In a speech in the course of an election campaign that was pronounced in a Kakabe village, the candidate, who is Maninka, addresses his official speech to public in Kakabe, but when talking to a number of men from the same public in the course of a more private exchange. The analysis of these, as well as a number of other cases, will help to question the mechanism lying behind the choice of various lects from the speakers repertoire depending on the type of interactional setting.

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