

A Socio-Linguistic Profile of Nigeria's Eastern Borderlands

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Abstract

The paper examines the phenomena of language maintenance, shift, separation, and spread of the demographic proportion of the ethnolinguistic groups on either side of the borders, and argues that language use in various public domains is consistent with language policy, planning, and development. The paper is anchored on visible data in a conceptual framework that offers a triglottic configuration that has been used in both and within various multilingual states in Africa, and more specifically with Cameroon by Tadedjeu (1975) and Nigeria by Brann (1981). The Tadedjeu and Brann framework enabled an analysis of the border configuration concerning languages. It is indicated that the seemingly autochthonous peoples of the border are so deeply rooted that it appears most of them wandered there within the last few centuries. Thus, with the growing level of interdependence across the border region, it is considered that the younger generation of the border peoples will someday wander into cities, become bilingual, and forget their language, leaving behind a vanishing generation of chthonophones.

Keywords: Language; Border people; Migration; Autochthonous; Dominance; Pidgin.

INTRODUCTION

In the classification of autochthonous ethnolinguistic groups (Chthonolects), Nigeria shares the Chadic sub-family deriving from the north with the Republic of Niger (Western Chadic), Chad (Eastern Chadic), and Cameroon (Central Chadic), the largest ethnolinguistic fragmentation being on the Nigeria and Cameroon border. The northeastern border has Kanuri as the dominant Saharan language in Nigeria, but now it is shared with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon; dialectal Arabic (Shuwa) with Chad and Cameroon in the same border area together with Kanuri. Stretching downwards in the area between Borno and Adamawa, the border area shares the Fulfulde, the only West Atlantic language in Nigeria throughout the eastern border, north of the Benue; the fragmentation belt of the Adamawa language group in the area of that name in Nigeria and Cameroon. Finally, the northeastern border area shares smaller Bantoid language groups on both sides of the divide, perhaps originating in Cameroon. In addition to settled groups, nomads

(Tuareg, Borno), immigrants (Banana, Ngambai, Kabba) and migrant workers (kaka) came into Nigeria from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, respectively (Brann 1989, p. 213).

At the level of lingua francas (Demolets) for inter-ethnic communication, Hausa sweeps across the northern borders into Niger, where it is also a major autochthonous (and national) language but serves as a lingua franca between the many Chadic-speaking minorities, more on the Nigerian than the Chadian or Cameroonian side. Fulfulde, as the lingua franca of Nigerian Adamawa, is fast being replaced by Hausa, whilst it remains the lingua franca of Cameroon's Adamawa and Province du Nord (the former Fombina). Dialectical Arabic links the northeastern tip to its Chadian congeners but is also the lingua franca of the Islamised minorities, as well as the traditions of the Kanembu-Kanuri (Brann 1989). Pidgin is the lingua franca on both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border south of the Benue River.

At the level of exolects, or imported languages, the northeastern borders were disputed by four colonial powers: the Arabs under Rabeh reinforced an initial Arab presence. Arabic is now considered a native as well as an inter-ethnic language. The short-lived German colonial hegemony, which disappeared without a trace, and the lasting official use of French and English French is used in Niger and Chad (which also elected Arabic as a co-official language), and French and English in Cameroon. Whereas the borders north of the Benue are divided into English and Nigeria, and French in Cameroon, south of the Benue, English is officially used in Cameroon, in diaglossia with pidgin (Brann 1989, p. 214).

From the foregoing, it can be metaphorically argued that the northern border region is characterised by wide open savanna and plains, facilitating the movement of people and goods on horseback or camel in the primitive era, and by motor vehicle and train in modern times. Additionally, there was the waterway of Lake Chad. The region has therefore favoured the incursion and spread of the Chadic-speaking peoples from the north and northeast, of which the Hausa are now the dominant representatives in historic times. The classical Hausa Bakwai was established in what is now southern Niger and northern Nigeria, which thus forms a mono-ethnic linguistic bloc (Brann 1989, p. 215). However, Hausa is more than an ethnic group, being the most dynamic of all West African languages in absorbing rapidly not only minority groups but also members of major groups in the diaspora, as with the Fulbe and Kanuri, who settled among them (Kirk-Greene, 1956, p. 671).

The two major groups of the northwest and the northeast both belong to the Saharan linguistic family, the Songhai and Kanuri. The Songhai Empire spread into what is now Niger and the northwestern border of modern Nigeria, where people crossed easily from one side of the border to the other. The major group of the northeast, the Kanuri, crossed Lake Chad in the fourteenth century, when they gradually overlaid and absorbed prior Chadic-speaking peoples, sometimes collectively called the 'So'. Kanuri is the only major Saharan language spoken in Nigeria, as well as in Niger and Chad in various dialects, though the bulk of the people of Kanem are now in Nigeria. Whereas centuries ago, the Kanuri absorbed Chadic-speaking peoples, it is now the opposite, with particular reference to Hausa. which is fast becoming the lingua franca even in Kanuri cities like Maiduguri. Hausa is thus considered dynamic or aggressive and Kanuri post-dynamic or regressive (Brann 1989, p. 215).

It is important to note that in the northeast border region, the Kanuri live in symbiosis with the Shuwa, who are Sudanese Arabs and have lived in Chad for many centuries. They migrated into the area with the Kanuri many centuries ago, whilst the invasion by Rabeh brought fresh recruits to their numbers, where they are now concentrated at Dikwa in Nigeria, Ndjamena in Chad and Kusseri in Cameroon. Though the Shuwa is the official language, colloquial or dialectical Arabic is widely spoken throughout the northeastern border region, from Chad and Cameroon to Sudan (Eguchi 1975, p. 241). In Chad, Arabic is now also an official language, as well as the language of wider interaction throughout the state.

Another major language group in the northeast border region is the Fulbe (also referred to as the Fulani). Their gradual incursion was first as pastoralists and, later agriculturists, and more recently, Arabic scholar-missionaries and administrators, who brought them from the northwest right across to the central northeast, where their language is still dominant throughout their former kingdom of Fombina (Abubakar 1997), which is partly in Cameroon and partly in Nigeria. Like the Kanuri, the Fulbe are the representatives of a language group in the West Atlantic. Their origin is traced to the Futa Djallon and Futa Toro in Senegal (Erim 2005, p. 46). Interestingly, the 19th-Century Jihads of the Fulbe became a turning point in their historical existence as they came to Adamawa later than in the more central parts of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Jihads lasted from 1806 to 1851, the year in which Yola town was established. It was the largest of the emirates but also contained the smallest percentage of the Fulbe population, of whom some joined the jihadists from Borno.

Apart from the major peoples, the northeast and centre-east border areas are inhabited by the same Chadic-speaking peoples as before the jihads. Whereas the Kotoko are almost all in Cameroon and speak the Shuwa as their second language. The Mandara, whose earlier capital was Kirawa in Nigeria, now have their capital at Mora, in Cameroon. Beyond their various dialects and languages, they speak Kanuri as their second language, having intermingled and intermarried with them. The Sukur, whose origin lies in Psakali near Mokolo, inhabit the mountains. Whilst they have the Fulfulde language of the Fulbe as their second on the Cameroon side, they have Hausa now as their second language on the Nigerian side of the border. The same goes for the Fali of the border area east of Mubi, from whence they are known as the Fali of Mubi. The Bachma-Bata, now known as Bwatiye, occupies the Benue valley, between Garoua and Numa. This language group includes the Gude, who are also vivisected by the borderline.

To the south of the Benue are a number of the Adamawa language family, which straddles the border region between Nigeria and Cameroon, including the Ver-Duru group with Vere, Wom, Mumbake, Kotopo and Kutin, the Nimbarigroup with Nyamnyam, the Mbum group with Laka and the Same group Chamba (Dakka) and Dirim, whilst the extensive Gbaya people occupy contiguous areas in both Nigeria and Cameroon and Cameroon and Central African Republic (CAR). These are the locations mentioned in Brann's (1972) survey as being occupied by the 'Dakkakai,' 'Liro,' and 'Chamba.' the situation astride the Adamawa Mountains, it may be supposed that they are among the oldest settled peoples of that border area. Apart from the Chamba, located mainly in Nigeria, and the Gbaya, found mainly in Cameroon and CAR, these are minority peoples. On the Nigerian side, these people are in the process of what Brann (1989) described as 'Hausanisation', while on the Cameroon side, they have Fulfulde as their language of extant communication.

Further south of this group are many Bantu peoples, evidently related to the vast language family stretching across a third of Africa, which some linguists and anthropologists have supposedly argued that they have their origins in the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The Tiv, a major ethnic group in Nigeria, spill over into Cameroon. To their linguistic group (the Tiv-Banu group) belong the Icheve, Evant, Bitare, Abon, and Batu, among whom there are groups in both Nigeria and Cameroon. Nevertheless, the previously widely spread people, the Jukun, do not appear to have spread into Cameroon. They have retreated from the borders, their lands having been conquered and occupied by other peoples. To the Jukun group also belong the Yukuben and Kuteb, who are sometimes cited as spilling over into Cameroon and vice versa.

Below the Jukunoid is the Mambila-Vute group of languages. Across the Mambila Plateau and on both sides of the border divide, these are the Mambila themselves, who, having Fulbe Chiefs, still use Fulfulde as their second language; while the Kamkam, Ndoro, and Vute (Bute), tend to turn to Hausa on the Nigerian side and Fulfulde on the Cameroon side. In the extreme south of the Nigeria-Cameroon

border and classified under the Benue-Congo language family, is the Cross River branch, which comprises people of the language groups living southwards of the Mambila. Of these, straddling the border are the Becheve-Akwaya, Kutele, Belegete, Boki, Nkome/Olulumo, Korop (Ododop), Ejagham, Efik, Efut, and Balondo, of which the Ejagham is the largest group. They mostly share Pidgin as their lingua franca.

METHOD

The present study employs a qualitative approach. anchored on visible data in a conceptual framework that offers a triglottic configuration that has been used in both and within various multilingual states in Africa, and more specifically with Cameroon by Tadedjeu (1975) and Nigeria by Brann (1981). The Tadedjeu and Brann framework enabled an analysis of the border configuration concerning languages. The analysis here therefore speaks to the need for socio-linguistic profile of the Nigeria–Cameroon borderlands and indicated how several lingua francas are competing for second or third language use on Nigeria’s eastern borders, astride the international boundary with Cameroon.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Appellation and Localisation of Ethnolinguistic Groups: Who and Where?

The reason for the bewildering wealth of names for peoples and languages of Nigeria is partly due to differences in classification by ethnographers and linguists. Ethnographers, like Temple and Meek and their likes, work on criteria of common descent, affinity and locality. Linguists have used criteria like lexical similarity and mutual intelligibility to determine the differences between speech forms (Brann 1989, p. 216). Thus, the *Nigerian Ethnic Groups Survey* of Gandonu (1972), lists 28 ethnic groups along the northeastern and eastern borders of Nigeria, whilst the *Index* of Nigerian languages records some 56 languages for the same borders. Neither of them records fluctuating or migrant populations since both are concerned with sedentary peoples and their languages.

In the North of the Benue, along the border, the Survey list three groups: the Adar, Gobir and Asbin, which in the *Index* are subsumed under the Hausa language, since they no longer speak their languages, but have been assimilated. Similarly, the *Survey* records Manga as a separate group, which the *Index* classified under Kanuri. The *Survey* does not mention either the Mober, of which it is not sure whether they are a Chadic-speaking or Kanuri-speaking people or the Buduma on the Lake Chad, who are Chadic-speaking (Brann, p. 217). On the eastern frontier, the *Survey* also omits the Affade, related to Kotoko on the Cameroonian side. The *Survey* further mentioned the Gwoza, where *Index* has Laamang, Dghwede. *Survey* records Mandara, where *Index* lists Wandala, Glavda, Gusuf, Ngoshe Ndhang including Sukur and Matakam, all across the border. Both list Fali and Higi but *Survey* uses Cheke, where *Index* has *Gude*, the common term for the same people and language. Both *Survey* and *Index* mentioned the Fulbe as straddling the Benue as Fulani and Fulfulde respectively.

On the south of the Benue, *Survey* map shows Yerre, which is presumably Verre, whereas *Index* shows several members of the Vere-Duru groups as straddling the border: Vere, Wom, Leko, Mumbake, Kotopo and Kutin. Also shown in the *Index* is Koma across the Cameroonian border, as an unclassified Adamawa Language, missing in the *Survey* map. Within the same region, *Survey* shows in succession Dakkakai, Luro and Chamba, which could correspond to Chamba Dakka and Chamba Lekko in the *Index*. Perhaps there is confusion here with the Dakarkari or Lele of Sokoto, which *Survey* named Dakarki. Belonging to the Sama (Chamba) group. *The index* also mentioned the Dirim, possibly another name for the Dakka. *The index* also shows the Nyamnyam as straddling the border but not in *Survey*.

The Mambila-Vute group is subsumed under Mambila in *Survey*, whilst *Index* lists Mambila, Kamkam, Ndoro that are somewhat inland in the location on *Survey* map. Whereas of the Tiv-Batu group, *Survey* only records Tiv but does not show its relation with the border, which it straddles. Also belonging to the group, across the border, are the Icheve known as Mesaka in Cameroon, Evant in Cameroon known as Assumbo, Bitare, Abon and Batu. Whilst according to *Index*, no form of the Jukun language cluster straddles the border, *Survey* gives the related Jukunoid Zumperi, but also Kutez, which is given as Kuteb (Mbarike Zumper) (*Index*: p. 176), but not on the border. It would be interesting to ascertain whether the far-flung Jukun language is confined to the Nigerian side of the border with Cameroon.

Of the Cross River languages, *Index* lists Obanliku as straddling the border but the *Survey* did not, whilst Boki is identified by both the *Survey* and *Index*. Kutele is in *Index*, but not in *Survey*; Mbembe in *Index* is known as Tigon in *Survey* and is chiefly in Cameroon. Ikom – Olulumo is shown as being on the border in *Index*, but not in *Survey*; Korop or Ododop is listed in *Index*, but not shown in *Survey*. However, it is suspected it is identical with Nidiri or Agara as indicated in *Survey*, though not identified in the *Index*. In other words, what is shown as Anyang in *Survey* is given as a language near Mamfe in *Ethnologue* and the *Sociolinguistic Survey of Urban Centres in Cameroon* (Koenig and Chaa 1975); whereas, of the Ekoi Bantu groups, Hoffmann (1963, p. xix), indicates that Ekoi is shown as a unit on the *Survey*, which would include Ejagham and Qua across the Nigeria – Cameroon border.

However, of the Efik – Ibibio language cluster, Efik is shown in both *Survey* and *Index*. Apart from the uncertainties in classification, for instance, Mober – a Chadic language, Mbembe, Jukunoid or Delta language group, largely because of the inaccessibility of a greater number of them. This is expressed more frankly in the *Index*, which is currently revised and is evident in the 1972 survey. Of the areas and languages of the borders, the *Index* is seeking information on the Chamba Daka area, the Mober area of Borno and the Niger Republic, several border areas particularly along the Nigeria – Cameroon border which seem to be very sparsely inhabited and difficult area of access, including the location of Kaka and Kamkam mentioned as straddling the borders.

Uncertainties in the appellation of language groups arise mainly from accentuating one or the other clan, perhaps one in Nigeria and another across the border in Cameroon, both belonging to, however to the same ethnos. In language appellation, it must be noted that linguistic indexes give the autonym or self-appellation of the group, such as Ejagham in place of Ekoi, Kamwe, instead of Higi and Laamang, rather than Gwoza, etc (Brann, p. 218). This trend can, of course, become a disruption of information, as one could be tempted to address a German against the Deutsch or Dutch, etc. however, there is a dire need for the standardisation of ethnonyms and glossonyms, not restricted in the Nigerian border areas only, but also between Nigeria and her proximate neighbours.

It has been observed that the chief difference between the *Survey* and the *Index* arose from a difference in definition and analysis. Since 1984, there has been a constant revision of both the *Index* as well as a National Survey of Languages in Nigeria. Perhaps, the time is ripe to reconsider the criteria according to which speech forms are defined as languages, rather than dialects of the same language; language clusters rather than a language, in an attempt to reduce the number of speech forms for standardisation and inter-communication. In the case of speech forms spoken across international boundaries, it is important and necessary to consult researchers from the border communities as with the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun*, which has been going on now for a lustre (Brann 1989, p. 218). This will enable decision whether purely formal criteria of lexis or appreciation of intelligibility should best be supplemented by attitude poll, to see which speech groups can be amalgamated, and which cannot. As a rare example, for instance, it may be recalled that the Bacama and Batta decided to come together and

agreed to name their language Bwatiye, thus, possibly preventing their language from absorption by Hausa.

From a demographic distribution, it is evident to see the dominance of one language group in a contiguous zone adjacent to the border or its distribution across the borders. Thus, the following language groups are predominant outside Nigeria. In Chad, for example, the Banana, Gambai, Kotoko and predominant in its southern part, from where they entered Nigeria through the wedge of Cameroon. They came sporadically either as recent migrants or settlers, or are already wholly absorbed into Fulbe, Kanuri or Hausa society. Sudanese Arabs or the Shuwa, however, are predominant in Chad, from where they originally came, either as traders in the van of the Kanuri conquest or as soldiers in the army of Rabeh (Brann p. 218). In Cameroon, the Baya are predominant though their largest concentration is in the Central African Republic. The other prominent cross-border peoples are Kaka, who came into Nigeria as seasonal labourers; the Korop, the Matakam, the Mbute, whilst most of the language groups on Nigeria – Cameroon border predominate on the Nigerian side of the divide (Abubakar 1977, p. 190).

In between Nigeria and Chad, the Buduma predominate and of course the Kanuri. However, the oldest Kanuri group, the Kanembu, predominate in Chad, whence they came into Nigeria in the 19th Century in large numbers with the court of the El Kanemi dynasty. They have since totally assimilated, although it is known that there are large Hausa settlements in Chadian cities, sociolinguistic descriptions are strangely silent as to their numbers. Available evidence suggests that they constitute an indigenised, though not the autochthonous minority. The Fulbe are equally permeating, though less settled and form another link with Nigeria (Works 1975, p. 105).

In between Nigeria and Cameroon, most of the smaller groups predominate on the Nigerian side, such groups according to Brann (1989, p. 219) include the Bitare, Boki, Dakka, Chambe Leko, Efik, the Fali of Mubi, Glavda, Gude, Higi/Kapsiki, Kutele, Laamang/Gwoza, Mambila, Mumbake, Ndoro, Obanliku, Sukur, Tiv, and Verre. There are the Hausa and Kanuri communities in the northern cities which retain their identities and may for reasons and intent, not be considered autochthonous in Cameroon, whilst the Fulbe are so considered. In addition to language groups that show a predominance, there are some, both small and large, that are balanced as between the border communities. Thus, the Affade are on both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border, the Ejagham are almost evenly divided in their contiguous occupation of the borderlands (Onor 1994, p. 106); the Adamawa Fulbe are equally strong in Nigeria and Cameroonian Adamawa. Though Fulfulde plays a dynamic role as lingua franca in entire northern Cameroon, in Nigeria, it is seen to be regressing, becoming a purely ethnic language, on account of the position of Hausa, which the Fulbe have helped to spread in Nigeria itself, but not in Cameroon. The Kamkam are equally divided, as are the Kotopo, Shua, Wandala/Mandara and Wom.

The Demolects as Lingua Franca astride the Borders

Historically, the major languages in Central Sudan are said to be Songhai, Hausa and Kanuri, apart from Arabic, which is classified under the exolects. Songhai-Zarma is reportedly spoken by a reasonable population in Niger by the Tersis in Barreteau. However, the language range is very limited, being essentially concentrated in the southern margins adjacent Sokoto in Nigeria, which harbours a significant number of Zarma Songhai speakers (Brauner 1985). It could be argued that as an imperial language of wider communication, it has dwindled to a medium ethnic language. Heine (1985) indicate that the Hausa language has become the lingua franca which spreads from southern Niger to northern Nigeria. Whereas, until the 19th century, Hausa was a relatively modest language by comparison with the imperial languages of Songhai and Borno. It is important to note that the Fulbe who spread its first eastward during the 19th

century, through their identification with Hausa city States, and later the British through its adoption as the co-official language of the northern provinces apart from Borno in the 20th century.

Through its remarkable qualities of assimilation (together with English), Hausa became the lingua franca of western Sudan, par excellence; it has since absorbed many of the minority languages of the north within living memory and is in successful competition with both Fulfulde and Kanuri in northeastern Nigeria (Abubakar, p. 197). Similarly, Hausa serves as lingua franca in the northern cities of Cameroon as between the various Nigerian ethnic groups in the diaspora, in such cities as Marwa (Maroua), Garwa (Garoua), whereas for the Cameroonian groups inter alia; Fulfulde also still serves as lingua franca, in addition to French.

Like Hausa, Kanuri has an imperial past through centuries of language and fast in receding before Hausa. For instance, when the Sef Dynasty arrived Borno from beyond Lake Chad in the 14th century, that area was not occupied by Chadic speaking peoples, probably the So, whom the Kanem invaders either pushed back or were absorbed. However, some of the peoples who lived peripheral to the empire, though they spoke Kanuri, retained consciousness of a separate ethnic identity, such as the Manga and the Mober on the fringes of the borders of Niger, whilst the Buduma on the Lake Chad, though they became Islamised, were never completely absorbed. Also, the mountain people of the Mandara, even though dynastic marriages brought them within the cultural trajectory of Borno, and spoke Kanuri as their second language was not absorbed. Indeed, since the 19th-Century jihad of Usman dan Fodio, the conquest of Katagum, the destruction of the capital Birni Ngazargamo by the Fulbe, the area covered by the Kanuri had been shrinking and the language has started to retract as a second language. This is exemplified by some Marghi, whose grandparents spoke Kanuri as their language, their parents Fulfulde and the Hausa, while their children speak only Hausa and English, apart from Marghi. In Maiduguri which became the capital of El Kanemi Shehu only in 1907, the Shehu Umar in the 1930s forbade Hausa to be spoken in his court. Maiduguri was a city where only Kanuri and Arabic was spoken.

In the early days of colonial rule, colonial administrators used interpreters in Arabic to speak to the Shehu and were often posted with prior Sudanese experience. Even before the Second World War, emigrating Chadians, learned Kanuri as their lingua franca, rather than Hausa. All that, however, changed towards the last quarter of the 20th century, especially since the opening of the northeast region through roads, railways and air traffic, and most importantly so, since 1967 when Maiduguri became the headquarters of what was then known as the Northeastern State, bringing thousands of civil/public servants, traders, craftsmen and diplomats from the multilingual areas of Bauchi, Adamawa and Saruwa provinces. As a consequence of the British colonialism, Arabic was replaced by English as lingua franca, while Kanuri was also replaced by Hausa, following post-colonial developments.

It seems probable that Kanuri had suffered a similar fate in Niger. Heine (1979) contends that the population of Kanuri as first language speakers seems infinitesimal even though Kanuri has been declared as one of the five national languages in that country. However, it is significant that the Manga is struggling for linguistic independence by having consented to have the scriptures translated into the Manga dialect. Also, another translation is in the process into Yerwa in Maiduguri, the epicentre of the Kanuri language. This represents a perfect example of international boundaries allowing separate development of the same language across the border region. In northern Cameroon, Kanuri or Borno (or Bornuan in French) is both an indigenous minority and concentration of Kola and hides traders mostly in the city of Marwa. Their lingua franca is largely Arabic rather than Fulfulde. Radio Garoua for instance broadcasts in Fulfulde and Shuwa, but not in Kanuri (Braun 1989, p. 221).

There has, however, been a conscious effort in recent times, both in Niger, Chad and Nigeria to revive and standardize the Kanuri language. Kanuri is broadcast from N'guigmi (Niger), Zinder, Volume 21 Number 1 (2022)

Ndjamena (Chad) and other booster stations and Maiduguri. In Borno, Kanuri is one of the three languages used with English and Hausa in public enlightenment, broadcasting primary and adult education as well as in legislative proceedings in the State House of Assembly. Indeed, Borno remains the only state of the Nigerian federation to introduce a Nigerian language for its legislative procedure other than one of the three (i.e Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). The use of Kanuri in the legislature was strongly supported by Manga members from the Nigeria – Niger border region, who sometimes did not understand Hausa, or did not want to be seen to know it. More so, the Department of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Maiduguri is strongly involved in the revival, and in the process of standardization and modernization, is only a matter of time to determine whether or not the recession of the language is irrevocable.

The difference between the Nigeria and Cameroon situation in their common border area is, however, that in Cameroon Fulfulde is the only predominant lingua franca of the northern region and appears to be maintaining its position, even in the presence of Kanuri (regressive) and Shuwa (stationary), and French (expanding rapidly with western education). Whereas, in Nigeria, the main competitors are Hausa, to which Fulfulde began to yield on political and wide-contact grounds (in fact, from the decade immediately following independence) and English, which has gained grounds at the level of universal basic education and adult literacy.

In the southern sector of the Nigeria – Cameroon border area, Pidgin English has been posited to be a direct lexical successor by a process of relexification to a pidgin of Portuguese, spoken by the coastal traders of the Guinea Coast. It is, therefore, no accident that the concentration of the lingua franca is at present spoken in southwest Cameroon, as well as in Nigeria and Cameroon, with heterogeneous ethnic demography, especially where northerners and southerners are mixed. Braun (1989, p.223) estimated that pidgin English was then spoken by some seventy-five per cent of Anglophone West Cameroon Province, and by thirty-three per cent of the coastal provinces of the west, on which basis Koenig and Chaa (1975, p. 10) have estimated about one and half million pidgin speakers in Cameroon; this by now could easily be six million, making pidgin English the representative lingua franca of southern Cameroon, as against Fulfulde for northern Cameroon.

Even though pidgin is, above all, an intergroup language in a multi-ethnic and hence multilingual society, Adekunle (1981) points out that among the Bamileke it is also an in-group language, in as much as the ethnic group has no one language in common, which is something of an anomaly, Ferlon (1975) pleaded for making it a national lingua franca, and it certainly has a higher prestige in Cameroon than Nigeria. Though, pidginists maintain that there is a growing number of first language pidgin speakers. It is important to note that first language speakers of pidgin occur among the children of inter-ethnic mingling and marriages in Nigeria in the Sabon gari of the north, and also increasingly in towns of the littoral areas such as Warri, Sapele, Port Harcourt, Calabar and possibly Lagos. Unfortunately, the urban Language Survey of Koenig and Chaa (1975) did not take consider pidgin in the second language situation, whereas Adekunle (1981) urban sample in various Nigerian towns clearly shows its use in inter-ethnic relationships.

It has been nonetheless been noted by Bonchuk (2011) that in Cameroon, pidgin or Weskos acts as a significant code between Anglophone and Francophone populations, especially in the south in unofficial commercial transactions. Thus, the greater weight pidgin is given in Cameroon than in Nigeria, can also be seen by its repeated grammatical and lexical description, which is slowly being followed by the Nigerian pidgin. Pidgin is also used in pulpits and some portions of Scripture are translated into it in Cameroon. In both Nigeria and Cameroon, it is over some radio stations and partly in some southern newspapers. However, it is now over the Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), Hit FM, Atlantic FM (Uyo), Ray Power FM (Port Harcourt), Delta FM (Asaba), and Lagos Weekend FM, etc. Thus,

whereas in Nigeria it seems to be limited to joking relationships like public comedy shows and familiar or simple business transactions, in Cameroon it has gained an additional realm, that of worship. In Nigeria, electioneering campaigns and political communications are mostly carried out in pidgin; while Christian worship is performed in over a hundred autochthonous languages, some identical to those in Niger and Cameroon, and there has therefore not been any need for pidgin in the domain. Precisely, since Hausa was for a time associated with Islam, some middle belt peoples have preferred pidgin as an inter-ethnic language, which gives it an area of diffusion complementary to that of Hausa in Nigeria and to that of Fulfulde in Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the socio-linguistic profile of the Nigeria–Cameroon borderlands and indicated how several lingua francas are competing for second or third language use on Nigeria’s eastern borders, astride the international boundary with Cameroon. In the northwest and north-central parts of the border with Niger, the position of Hausa is uniquely affirmed, while in the northeast, Kanuri exerts a traditional dominance and Shuwa an increasing influence bordering Chad. On the central northeastern border, Fulfulde is used in Adamawa, with Hausa increasing in influence down to the Mambila Plateau. On the southeastern border, pidgin is the intergroup lingua franca.

Furthermore, it was shown that the Nigeria–Cameroon international boundary, while dividing languages at the grassroots level (Chthonolects), as well as at the level of official languages of wider communication (Demolects), has also set linguistic boundaries through the exolects adopted on either side of the borders. The communication range of these languages is directly proportional to the demographic strength and concentration of the speech groups concerned. Hence, the communication range of the smaller grassroots languages is small indeed, even if it is across the borders.

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