

A r t i c l e s

Literature and Linguistics

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Arabic Influence in West Africa: An Overview¹

Abstract

The Arabic influence in West Africa has been studied from the perspectives of linguistics, anthropology, culture and religion. This paper will discuss both the common and divergent aspects of this influence, not only on linguistic material but also on anthropological data. This does not mean that only anthropological data has influenced the languages dealt with, but the donor language is also studied under the perspectives of what is transferred to the recipient. So, for example, Kanuri has been influenced by Arabic loan words for centuries, whereas all the minor languages in the wider Mega-Chad area and even in West Africa received Arabic loan words rather late. This gives us a kind of chronology whereby the *linguae francae* – simply because of their great numbers of speakers - cannot be neglected. An example is Hausa, which from its strong influence on other languages might be heavily responsible for that transmission. Another fact that cannot be ignored is the Fulfulde. Through their historical migrations over the whole Savanna belt of West Africa, they have been considered as carriers of Islam and thus, through the spread of Islam, have infiltrated the various ethnic groups with many loan words. Therefore this paper provides a concise overview of the work done so far on West African languages.

Keywords

West Africa, Arabic, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Hausa.

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Introduction

In this communication, through an examination of the statistics concerning Arab loans in some West African languages, we will try to give an explanation of the paths and modalities that some terms have taken in their diffusion. The arrival of the Arabs and the consequent spread of Islam in Africa undoubtedly led to a great influence of Arabic on many local languages. Apart from the lexicon connected to the new religion, new concepts and terms were introduced by a culture that was immediately perceived as superior, above all in its link to the Koran that is to a written book: a highly innovative factor in the local cultures, which were exclusively oral. The process of diffusion of Islam was slow and often accepted by the dominant classes in a superficial way, for reasons of prestige, while it remained marginal for most of the population. An examination of the nature of loan words in the various languages reveals certain characteristics. The spread of Islam often took place at first among local converts and not from direct Arab contact, as demonstrated by Mervyn Hiskett (1965: 18) in his study of the Hausa language, where there is often the presence of terms from the same lemma but in different forms, since in the first instance they derived from Arabic forms as spoken by converts, and only later, from the classical Arabic used by native-speakers who gradually infiltrated from North Africa and Egypt. Arab interest in spreading the new religion to these lands is shown by the fact that, although the prophet Muḥammad never arrived at Lake Chad, he sent his uncle there.

Loan words are more numerous in widely spoken languages. One thinks of Hausa and Fulfulde, or of languages, such as Kanuri, which was the expression of a militarily organized population that had created a strong state in the Borno region. It was later the Kanuri, who, after having accepted many terms from Arabic, disseminated them in their modified forms, enabling, *inter alia*, Jan Knappert (1970: 79), in an interesting article, to talk of travel-words, that is, loan words that passed from one language to another and were present over large geographical areas, as will be seen later through numerous examples.

In this kind of analysis it should also be noted that the data recorded in the Tables are provided to give an idea of the presence of Arabic loan words in the various languages, but it can in no way be considered completely reliable. In fact, they depend on various factors: the number of existing dictionaries for certain languages (*i.e.* Hausa), often related to geographical areas with different dialects (*i.e.* Fulfulde), the size by number of words in a dictionary (*i.e.* Tumak), the attitude of the population in preserving its own language (see for example the case of Kwami, where the elderly strenuously resisted the influx of Hausa, the pre-eminent language in the region, in order to preserve their own idiom) and, not to be underestimated, the aims of a dictionary compiler (*i.e.* Masa), whose religious bias was unfavorable to Islam.

My study here focuses on West African languages, for two reasons: first I mention the geography understood as the whole Sub-Saharan Sudan zone ranging from the Senegambia region up to what is now the Chad Republic. This geographical

zone can be considered a kind of melting pot of various peoples and their languages around the hub of Lake Chad. The region is characterized by having no natural borders, (such as tall mountains), which makes it very favourable for heavy migrations over long distances. The second reason is that this accessibility – apart from the Trans-Saharan routes – favoured the spread of Islam. Both reasons therefore facilitated the introduction of Arabic loan words into the various languages spoken in the entire Sudan zone. Here we find more than eight hundred languages, which can be classified into the three phyla, i.e. Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan. Of these three main stocks I have chosen the most representative languages spoken in that vast region. It will be obvious in this article that Afro-Asiatic languages, and in particular Chadic languages, outnumber those belonging to Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan. This is due to the fact that my main studies have concentrated on these languages because of their greater exposure to Islamic expansion.

On the basis of the data extrapolated from my *Dictionnaire* (Baldi 2008) and given here, I have reached the following conclusions, according to the three big language phyla:

A – Afro-Asiatic (Table 1)

TABLE 1a

Language	Loans	Nouns	Verbs	Others	Speakers	Linguistic family
Bole	7	7	-	-	100.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Hausa	1245	1051	165	29	50.000.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Kwami	3	3	-	-	10.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Ngizim	81	72	4	5	80.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Pero	11	8	1	2	25.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Tangale	3	3	-	-	200.000	Afro-Asiatic, West Chadic
Total	1350	1144	170	36	50.415.000	

TABLE 1b

Buduma	52	50	1	1	55.000	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Giziga	11	8	-	3	80.000 ¹	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Kotoko	111	106	-	5	49.071	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara

¹ According to Ethnologue the speakers are divided into 20.000 for North Giziga and 60.000 for South Giziga.

Logone	64	61	3	-	10.000	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Mafa	6	6	-	-	215.000	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Malgwa	35	31	-	4	44.000	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Masa	37	31	4	2	230.000	Afro-Asiatic, Chadic
Mofu-Gudur	16	14	-	2	90.000	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Munjuk ²	95	83	-	12	61.500	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Uldeme	14	12	-	2	10.500	Afro-Asiatic, Central Chadic, Biu-Mandara
Total	441	402	8	31	889.071	

TABLE 1c

Bidiya	196	157	37	2	14.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Dangaleat (West)	307	275	32	-	60.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Dangaleat (East)	138	117	12	9		Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Kera	1	1	-	-	50.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Migama	144	71	61	12	20.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Mokilko	178	146	15	17	12.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Mubi	174	76	93	5	35.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Tumak	10	10	-	-	25.000	Afro-Asiatic, East Chadic
Total	1148	853	250	45	216.000	

² This name refers to a group of about 80,000 people living in Cameroon and Chad. In literature, we also call them mousgou, muzgu, mousgoum, musuk, muzuk, mulwi, vulum (see Jungraihtmayr & Möhlig 1983:171).

Considering Afro-Asiatic, I have taken into account 23 languages belonging to the Western, Central and Eastern Chadic Branches. From them I have formed the following picture: of the five East Chadic languages (Bidiya, Dangaleat East and West, Migama, Mokilko, Mubi, Tumak) there is a total of 1148 loan words, which – as I did for the other charts – can be divided into three sections: nouns,

verbs and others. Here again the distribution we find is: 853 nouns, 250 verbs and 45 other words, i.e. particles and interjections. Dangaleat displays the highest number of loan words (307), followed by Mokilko (178) and Mubi (174), which show basically the same, as does, more or less, Migama (144). The last language, Tumak, displays only 10 loan words, all nouns. According to the number of speakers, which roughly number around 250,000, one realizes that the influx of Islam followed a westward trajectory that determined the geographical distribution of the above-mentioned languages.

There are ten Central Chadic languages - Buduma, Gisiga, Kotoko, Logone, Mafa, Malgwa, Masa, Mofu-Gudur, Munjuk, Ouldeme - whose features are as follows. There is a total number of 441 loan words: Four or two to four nouns, eight verbs, and 31 particles and interjections. Roughly one million people speak these languages. From the number of loan words it can be seen, because of the local geography, that the Central Chadi languages were less affected by the advent of Islamisation.

The West Chadic languages - Bole, Hausa, Kwami, Ngizim, Pero and Tangale - contain a total of 1350 loan words: 1144 nouns, 170 verbs and 36 particles and interjections. The high number is explained by the presence of Hausa, which alone accounts for 1245 loan words, of which 1051 are nouns, 165 verbs and 29 other words. So the extreme number of loan words should not be overestimated since the total number of speakers is roughly 51 to 52 million. Here one can recognize the role of *lingua franca*, which Hausa displays in Central West Africa. It is therefore not amazing that Tangale on the Southern fringe of West Chadic extension has only 3 loan words. It is not so strange that Islam had its greatest influence on Hausa since to this day Islamisation has found its greatest proselytizer in Hausa and Hausa mallams.

B – Nilo-Saharan (Table 2)

Concerning the Nilo-Saharan phylum, the following languages were researched for loan words: Bagirmi, Dendi, Kanuri, Mbay, Sar, Songhay, Teda, Tubu and Zarma.

In a geographical grouping, the languages spoken in the East are Teda, Tubu, Zarma, Mbay and Sar. Here we find 260 loan words, distributed as follows: 221 nouns, 12 verbs and 27 particles and interjections.

Westward we deal with the Bagirmi and Kanuri languages, whose total number of loan words is 552, which again are distributed into 12 verbs and 26 other words, i.e. particles and interjections. Not surprisingly, Kanuri displays a high number of loan words (481) since it is the most important *lingua franca* in the Lake Chad area.

The two remaining languages are Dendi and Songhay, where the number of loan words is 561, 405 of which are verbs and 43 particles and interjections. The high number of loan words in Songhay is not so surprising since it also functions as a *lingua franca* in Mali and in Burkina Faso.

TABLE 2

Language	Loans	Nouns	Verbs	Others	Speakers	Linguistic family
Baguirmi	71	66	4	1	45.000	Nilo-Saharan
Dendi	8	8	-	-	32.000	Nilo-Saharan
Kanuri	481	448	8	25	4.000.000	Nilo-Saharan
Mandjia	1	1	-	-		Nilo-Saharan
Mbay	113	94	2	17	90.000	Nilo-Saharan
Sar	106	91	6	9	180.000	Nilo-Saharan
Songhay	553	397	113	43	3.000.000	Nilo-Saharan
Teda	14	14	-	-	42.500	Nilo-Saharan
Tubu	27	22	4	1	2.500.000	Nilo-Saharan
Zarma	5	5	-	-	2.400.000	Nilo-Saharan
Total	1379	1146	137	96	12.289.500	

The conclusion is that only 1378 loan words in all are found in the Nilo-Saharan family, of which 1145 are nouns, 137 verbs and 96 other words. If we consider the expansion of Islam towards West Africa and also the early Islamisation of the Songhay people, it is not surprising that this language, with its approximately 3 million speakers, played an important role, superseded only by Kanuri, with its approximately 4 million speakers. The estimated total number of speakers of the Nilo-Saharan family – at least those we have researched above – is roughly 14 million.

C – The last phylum here described is Niger-Congo (Table 3). We have made the following classification to facilitate loan word distribution:

1) The Gur family

The following 8 languages are included in the Gur family: Buli, Dagara, Dagbani, Gurenne, Gurma, Moore, Sisaala and Vagla. Their total number of loan words is 414. Within this distribution there are 371 nouns and 20 verbs. The remaining 23 words are particles and interjections. Among those 8 languages Dagbani and Moore have the highest number of loan words: 261. This is not surprising since these two languages, with their roughly two million speakers, have the greatest extension with respect to the others. They were also Islamised early on, forming Islamic centres from which the religion spread to smaller surrounding ethnic groups such as the Buli, the Gurenne, the Gurma, the Sisaala and the Vagla. The total number of Gur language speakers is estimated at roughly 6.5 million.

TABLE 3a

Language	Loans	Nouns	Verbs	Oth- ers	Speakers	Linguistic family
Bariba	31	27	3	1	560.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Boko	60	55	-	5	150.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Dogon	92	82	5	5	600.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Fulfulde	614	563	22	29	20.000.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Lamé	11	11	-	-	10.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Limba	25	23	1	1	340.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Nupe	88	84	-	4	800.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Senufo ³	18	15	2	1	2.700.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Serer	50	43	6	1	1.200.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Sherbro	10	7	3	-	140.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Temne	33	27	6	-	2.000.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Wolof	216	184	19	13	3.976.500	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Yoruba	104	91	6	7	28.000.000	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo
Total	1352	1212	73	67	60.476.500	

³ Under the name of this language, I also quote the mimeo document data by Prost (1983), classified as Minianka. Garber (1987) estimates the total number of Senufos at some 1.5 million; the Ethnologue, based on various population estimates, counts 2.7 million.

2) The Mande Family

TABLE 3b

Bambara	227	185	32	10	2.772.340	Niger-Congo, Mande
Bisa	17	16	-	1	590.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Bokobaru	71	68	-	3	67.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Bozo	148	127	17	4	230.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Bobo	87	65	17	5	220.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Busa	83	73	5	5	110.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Dioula	7	5	2	-	2.500.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Kpele	32	28	2	2	1.300.000	Niger-Congo, Mande

Mandinka	116	85	25	6	1.300.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Maninka	125	101	12	12	5.000.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Mende	57	52	3	2	1.500.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Samo	32	29	1	2	230.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Sembla	10	10	-	-	17.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Soninke	108	90	17	1	1.000.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Susu	97	82	11	4	1.060.000	Niger-Congo, Mande
Total	1217	1016	144	57	17.896.340	

Within the Mande Family we have taken into account the following 15 languages: Bambara, Bisa, Bokobaru, Boso, Bɔbɔ, Busa, Dyula, Kpelle, Mandinka, Manninka, Mende, Samo, Sembla, Soninke and Susu. The total number of their loan words is 1217: 1176 nouns and verbs and 65 particles and interjections. The total number of Mande language family speakers taken into consideration here is roughly 17 million.

TABLE 3c

Buli	22	19	2	1	150.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Dagara	6	5	1	-	1.100.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Dagbani	151	145	1	5	830.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Gurenne	24	20	1	3	720.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Gurma	47	38	5	4	1.700.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Moore	110	97	7	6	7.600.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Sisaala	35	32	1	2	180.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Vagla	19	15	2	2	14.000	Niger-Congo, Gur
Total	414	371	20	23	12.294.000	

3) The Atlantic Family

Within the Atlantic Family we deal with the following 13 languages: Bariba, Boko, Dogon, Fulfulde, Lame, Limba, Nupe, Senufo, Sereer, Sherbro, Temne, Wolof and Yoruba, the total number of whose loan words is 1352: 1212 nouns, 73 verbs and 67 particles and interjections. It is no big surprise that among all these languages 3 are of the utmost importance: Fulfulde, Wolof and Yoruba. Apart from the fact that speakers of Wolof and Yoruba constitute a very large population and therefore have an enormous impact on neighbouring languages, Fulfulde – with a total number of

614 loan words – is of the greatest importance in the Sub-Saharan region. The Fulani were to a great extent the nomadic transporters of Islam throughout West Africa from the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries on. Through their influence most of the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa became Islamised and the process of Islamisation still goes on today. Their greatest expansion took place in Senegambia (cf. Wolof), Masina (cf. Songhay), Nigeria (cf. Hausa and Yoruba) and Cameroon-Chad. The population of all the above-mentioned can be estimated at 35 million.

These figures show only the trend of Arabic loan words as a whole, but they say next to nothing about which terms entered most frequently into these languages, their peculiarities from both a phonetic and semantic point of view. Let us examine certain features of the principal languages.

Hiskett (1984:1-2) observes in his book that: “Islam came to the west and central Sudan, not directly from Arabia where the Prophet Muḥammad first preached it in AD 610, but little by little from North Africa and Egypt, across the Sahara and then down into the savanna. That this could happen was largely due to the relatively recent introduction of the camel, for without that essentially beast of burden the great Saharan caravan routes could not have developed and the desert would have remained a more formidable obstacle to human intercourse than in fact it did.” Some Islamic influences may have entered western Sudan as early as the 7th century. The spreaders of Islam were of various stocks: Berbers, Africans from the Atlantic coast, and nomadic Arabs who had drifted into the Sahara from the Nile. One ethnic group that contributed to spreading Islam in West Africa was the Dyulas of Mande origins, also known by the name of Wangarawa².

In Hausa the loan words arrived in two distinct periods, as shown by Hiskett (1965:18-26), in his critique of Greenberg’s article (1947:85-97): a first stage, when Islam was introduced by the Wangarawa, the Mandingo people, and a second one directly by the Arabic *mallams*. One example is given by *dōlè* ‘compulsion’ and *daulā* ‘power’ which show that the second is closer to the Arabic *daula* (Wehr 1966:302b) ‘power’. I have used this example because the same phenomenon occurs in a language spoken in a different part of Africa, Swahili, where we find *dola* and *daulati* meaning ‘government’. Apart from this, Hausa also has the highest Arabic verb loans, not only among Chadic languages, but among all the languages examined. This for two clear reasons: Hausa, being a Chadic language used as a lingua franca, was more in contact with Arabic speaking peoples and its verb system was close to that of Arabic. Here are some examples from Hausa (Baldi 1989: 285-301), where even the Arabic form system influenced the Hausa grade system:

Hausa *hàlariṅà* ‘to attend’ < AR *ḥaḍara* (Wehr 1966:183b) ‘to attend’ and Hausa *hallàrṅà* ‘to send for P.’ < AR *ḥaḍḍara* II (Wehr 1966:184a) ‘to fetch, get, bring’; Hausa *hàlakà* ‘to perish; to die’ < AR *halaka* I (Wehr 1966:1031b) ‘to perish; to die’ and Hausa *hallàkà* ‘to perish; to die’ < AR *hallaka* II (Wehr 1966:1031b) ‘to ruin, destroy’.

² A possible explanation on the origin of this name is given by Hiskett (1984:45).

Another peculiarity of Arabic loan words was the shift of word meanings related to sexual anatomy, where the introduction of such words as *azakàrĩ* ‘penis’, completely unnecessary, modified the old Chadic word, *bũrā*, as scurrilous, though this is not limited to Hausa, for we also find it in other languages, such as Fulfulde, Kanuri, Mandinka and Wolof (Baldi 2009: 150).

The second most prominent language for the diffusion of Islam was Fulfulde. Apart from the high number of noun loans, the verbs are very few, but it is an idiom belonging to a different linguistic stock. Fulfulde was very influential in spreading Arabic loan words, sometimes via other languages: AR *qubba* (Wehr 1966:737b) ‘cupola ; kubba (esp., of a saint)’ > Fulfulde *hubbāre*, pl. *kubbāje* ‘tomb, sanctuary, shrine’ > Hausa *hubbārè* ‘tomb of a religious leader’, where Fulfulde felt the Arabic word as a plural and constructed the singular according to its own class system.

Fulfulde spread Arabic loan words mainly in:

Dogon: FU *moodibbo* ‘Muslim ; marabou’ (< AR *mu’addib* (Wehr 1966:10a) ‘educator’ > *módibò* ‘marabou’;

Lamé: FU *jība* ‘pocket’ (< AR *jaib* (Wehr 1966:150b) ‘pocket’) > *dzībà*;

Masa: FU *paatuuru* ‘cat’ (< AR *batū* (JdP 258a) ‘cat’) > *pàtùrú*;

Mofu-Gudur: FU *amma* ‘but’ (< AR *ammā* (Wehr 1966:26a) ‘but’) > *amá*;

Munjuk: FU *sirla*, *sarla* ‘trousers’ (< AR *sirwāl* (Wehr 1966:408b) ‘trousers, pants’) > *sirlà*;

Tupuri: FU *tūbu* ‘repentance’ (< AR *tauba* (Wehr 1966:98b) ‘repentance’) > *tuba* ‘forgiveness’.

The various Fulfulde dialects sometimes had a special impact in transmitting the Arabic loan words: one of these examples is given by *wallifa* v. ‘to compose’ (< AR *allifa* II (Wehr 1966:23a) ‘to compose’) > HA *wàllafǎ* v. ‘to compose (book)’. In Hausa, the passage of the loan via Fulfulde explains the Arab /ʔ/ > Hausa /w/, which otherwise is very rare, but common to Fulfulde’s Western dialects (Baldi 1991:85).

Another case of the interference of Fulfulde dialects is given, again with Hausa, by *mangariba* ‘sunset’ (< AR *mağrib* (Wehr 1966:669a) ‘place or time of sunset’) > HA *màngàrībǎ* ‘time between sunset’, because AR /ğ³/ > FU /g⁴/ or /ᵑg⁵/.

Kanuri is another important language for Islam in West Africa, as I have remarked in a previous article (Baldi 2011:45-55), where I focus on some aspects of loan words. Kanuri used some prefixes no longer in use in the language, so we can date, more or less, when the Arabic loan word arrived in the language. Here I give one example of a couple of prefixes (*k+* and *n+*):

³ It is a voiced velar, see Bateson (1967:4).

⁴ It is a plosive velar, see Arnott (1977:240).

⁵ It is a prenasalised velar, see Arnott (1977:240).

Kanuri *kənásar*⁶ (Cyffer & Hutchison 1990:91b) ‘victory’ < AR *naṣr* (Wehr 1966: 970a);

Kanuri *ngádar*⁷ (Cyffer & Hutchison 1990:133a) ‘calumny, slander’ < AR *ḡadr* (Wehr 1966:666a) ‘perfidy, breach of faith, betrayal, treason, treachery’.

There are also cases where the transposition of the act of doing something becomes in the borrower languages the person doing the action: *adān* ‘call to prayer’ becomes in Kanuri *ladān* ‘muezzin’ and it will pass with this meaning into other languages. A similar case arises for *ḥajjām*⁸ ‘suckers setter’ that will pass, but only into Kanuri via Songhay, as *wanzām* with the meaning of ‘barber profession’.

From a linguistic point of view, the presence of so many Arabic loan words in the languages spoken in West Africa indicates some general common features. First, the loan words dealt not only with the new religious sphere, which was attractive for its simplicity and collocation in a written book, the Quran, but also all human activities. For example, the word *sūq* (Wehr 1966:443a) ‘market’, which is present in more than nineteen languages (Baldi 2008:263, no. 1402), is here cited with just a few examples: Bambara *sugu*, Hausa (via Kanuri) *kāsuwā*, Kanuri *kasúwu*, Kotoko (via Kanuri) *gásə̀gbí*, Munjuk (via Kanuri) *kàskú*, Pero (via Hausa) *kásúwà*, Tubu (via Kanuri) *kasúgu*.

If we consider the loan words related to trade, the number becomes very high: *bai^ʿa* (Wehr 1966:86b) ‘agreement, arrangement; business, transaction; sale’, which gives Hausa *biyā* v. ‘payer’ and Kanuri *bíya* ‘payment’ and *ləwáyà* ‘market business’; *raḵṣa* v. (Wehr 1966:332a) ‘to be cheap’ giving Dangaleat ‘bon marché’, Hausa *rùhusà* ‘cheapness’ and *àr̀àhā* ‘cheapness’, Migama *ràkís* adj. ‘bon marché’, Songhay *yaraasu*, *yeraasu* ‘être facile’; *wa-lā bai^ʿa* (Wehr 1966:852a) ‘there is no sale’ > Hausa *wàlā bai^ʿù* adv. / n. ‘cheap, gratis’; *habaṭa* v. (Wehr 1966:1016b) ‘to descend; to fall down; to slump (prices)’ and *būti* / *būtín* adj. (JdP 286a) ‘bon marché, peu cher’ > Dangaleat *búùti* ‘pas cher, bon marché’ and Migama *búùti* ‘pas cher’.

From a grammatical point of view, we note that, of course, the majority of loan words were nouns, but in some languages, for example Hausa and Mubi, the verb loan words were quite relevant, certainly because Chadic languages were close to a Semitic language like Arabic. In Mubi (Baldi & Jungrauthmayr 2008:25-37) we note that the verb loan words surpass the noun ones. This is due to the special situation of Mubi speakers, most of whom are bilingual Mubi-Arabic speakers.

This does not mean that only anthropological data has influenced the languages dealt with, but also the donor language is studied from the perspectives of what

⁶ For other examples of *k-* prefix in internal Kanuri formation, see Greenberg (1960:210-211).

⁷ On the *n* prefixation, see Hutchison (1981:81-82).

⁸ “Il rase la tête (cheveux et barbe), pose aussi des ventouses faites de petites cornes d’animal, etc. Cf. touareg *wa-aḥažžam*” (C. Gouffé, *c.p.*).

is transferred to the recipient. So, for example, Kanuri has been influenced by Arabic loan words for centuries, whereas all the minority languages in the wider Mega-Chad area and even in West Africa have received Arabic loan words rather late. This gives us a kind of chronology whereby the *linguae francae* – simply because of their great numbers of speakers - cannot be neglected. An example is Hausa, which because of its strong influence on other languages, might be heavily responsible for that transmission. Another fact that cannot be ignored is the Fulfulde. Through their historical migrations in the whole Savanna belt of West Africa, they have been considered as carriers of Islam and thus have infiltrated the various ethnic groups in many respects regarding loan words. Therefore, this paper may provide a concise overview of the work done so far on West African languages.

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