



Analysis of linguistic environment and instructional implications for preschool children in Ouré Cassoni Refugee Camp in Chad

February 2014

Ennedi Region, Chad

Introduction

The Ouré Cassoni camp is located near the Sudanese border in north-eastern Chad in the Ennedi region, and as of June 2012, the camp hosted a population 32,302 refugees. The majority (over 90%) of refugees at the Ouré Cassoni camp are members of the Zaghawa ethnic group, but other ethnic groups at the camp include Fur, Goran, and the Blacksmiths. Over 61% of the Ouré Cassoni camp population is under 18 years old. The camp is located in a remote and arid land where government infrastructures and basic services are extremely weak, the poverty rate is high and water and food are scarce. As such, the community survives with great difficulty; the provision of humanitarian assistance is essential for the refugees' survival in this context. The parents put their hopes for a better future in their children's formal education.

The camp school system is run by the IRC through the management and supervision of three primary schools and 21 pre-schools across the camp and by the community through the management of the secondary school (as well as Parent Committee support to the preschools and primary schools). As of June 2012, the school system served more than 10,034 of the young people in the camp (55% of them girls). The IRC further bolsters the educational safety net for children by engaging parents and camp leaders in activities that emphasize the importance of education.

The enrolment profile for primary school-age students in Ouré Cassoni is not strong. According to UNHCR statistics, 15,323 children age 5-17 resided in Ouré Cassoni as of June 2012. Of those children aged 6 to 13, only 65% of them were enrolled in primary school as at the same period (6,280 out of 9,661). On a positive note, of those enrolled, an average 89.5% of students (6,103) attended classes regularly, and 93% of parents regularly attended monthly Parent Committee meetings throughout the 2011-2012 academic year.

The camp schools follow the Sudanese curriculum and use Sudanese textbooks. The teachers and school directors are refugees themselves and come from the same region and ethnic groups as their students. 51 out of a total of 150 teachers (31 preschool teachers and 119 primary school teachers and principals) were trained as teachers in Sudan and hold Sudanese qualifications. This represents 34%. The language of instruction is Arabic, and English is introduced as a subject in secondary school. School dropout and repetition rates are high, with fewer than 50% of students who start grade 1 completing primary school.

UNHCR coordinates the services provided to refugees in Ouré Cassoni and the other refugee camps in Chad. Because the camp is in Chad, it falls under the authority of the Chadian government. However, the schools have continued to use the Sudanese curriculum and textbooks. The Chadian school system allows for education in both French and Arabic, but the school communities (teachers and families) are not interested in adopting the Chadian curriculum, as they still hope to return to Sudan and students will need Sudanese certificates to access higher education. Chadian Ministry of Education authorities have not been very active in the camp education, with the exception of high-level policy discussions with UNHCR. In April 2013, UNHCR held a workshop to consider to transition to the Chadian curriculum for reasons of sustainability. The transition process is expected to continue until 2015. The process will include adoption of Chadian standards in the camp schools, transformation of the camp schools to

Chadian community schools and then further to public Chadian schools, and turn-over of school management from the camp structures to the Chadian Ministry of Education.

The IRC is working to improve the quality of education in the camp schools by implementing a two-year project to support the teaching of reading and math in the early grades of primary school (grades 1-4). As part of the initiative to improve the quality of education and the learning outcomes, the IRC wanted to explore the possibility of teaching some pre-literacy and beginning literacy skills in the mother tongue of the children in a pilot number of the camp's preschools. Preschool students do not use or understand either English or Arabic (the official languages of instruction in the Sudanese curriculum) at the time they enter preschool. The student is therefore unable to understand classroom instruction or subject matter given in Arabic or English. The preschool student has not been sufficiently taught, or otherwise exposed to, either language. Both are infrequently spoken outside of the classroom (much less so in the preschooler's presence and even more rarely directed to the preschooler) and most parents do not speak either language in the home. Arabic is, nonetheless, the language of instruction in preschool and higher grades with the introduction of English in year five. Because only a minimum amount of mother tongue is used in preschool, student expression, understanding, confidence and participation are minimized, and students do not benefit from a strong start to their education experience.

IRC staff questioned the language of instruction policy and wondered if, at least at the preschool level, teachers could instruct the class in the children's mother tongue, Zaghawa. Camp school officials stated that they would support IRC in conducting a pilot project in which one 30-minute lesson per day would be taught in Zaghawa in a selection of preschools to see if that might boost learning outcomes of these students in the early grades of primary school. As IRC continues to support the camp schools, the progress of the students in the pilot program would be able to be tracked through their early years of primary school. The IRC sought the expertise of SIL (Societe Internationale de Linguistique/The International Linguistics Society, an NGO that promotes the development and use of minority languages around the world) to conduct an assessment of the linguistic landscape of the camp and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of teaching one Zaghawa literacy lesson per day in some preschools as a pilot project. This report is the product of SIL's assessment.

The SIL consultant conducted and recorded interviews with key informants in N'Djamena, Abeche, Amdjarass, and Ouré Cassoni. He also conducted desk research prior and subsequent to his field visit. Additionally, he conducted observations of daily life in Ouré Cassoni, visiting schools, the market, and other public places and events. This paper reflects that research. It begins with an analysis of curriculum policy and practice, followed by an analysis of the language practices in Ouré Cassoni, and finally the availability of language materials and resources. These analyses are followed by his recommendations and suggested next steps. The Annexes provide the resources and persons consulted during the research and a discussion of the three possible scripts that can be used to write Zaghawa.

Analysis of curriculum policy and practice

The researcher found unanimous agreement among Chadian education officials regarding preschool policy, though the Ministry under which preschools fall (Ministry of Social Affairs) was not available for comment. Chadian education officials favored a flexible and sensitive approach towards preschool education in the refugee camps. Officially the policy calls for bilingual (Arabic and French) education, allowing for the use of the 'mother tongue' as a 'transition' bridge to either or both of those languages. Officials at the National Center for Curriculum stated that the purpose of preschool was to awaken the student to himself and to his world and that this was best done in a language well understood by the student. In particular, they were supportive of, and often enthusiastic for, the use of the mother tongue of the Ouré Cassoni camp, Zaghawa, as the first language of instruction and as the first language in which literacy is acquired. The Embassy of Sudan, however, differed, pressing strongly for only Sudanese curriculum and the use of Arabic as the only language of instruction in preschools. Chadian officials responded to this attitude in saying that the refugees were now on Chadian soil and so could benefit from Chadian policy.

Curriculum practice in the camp was found to be pragmatic, taking advantage of whatever curriculum, materials and teachers that could be found, produced or trained. IRC has been able to procure a significant supply of Sudanese textbooks and teachers guides for many subject areas, but procurement of Sudanese and Arabic language materials does continue to pose a challenge. A copy of the official Sudanese curriculum could not be found at any of the schools in Ouré Cassoni. It was reported by school directors that teachers do use the mother tongue as needed, but only as needed, and that the language of instruction in the preschools was Arabic as much as possible. In the higher grades it was reported and confirmed on several occasions that children could, and did, receive corporal punishment for using the mother tongue on school grounds. If a transition to the Chadian curriculum is officially mandated, the policy will be officially changed, favoring the use of the mother tongue while transferring those literacy skills learned more easily in the mother tongue to the official language/s. However, at the time of this report, the schools were still officially following Sudanese policy.

Analysis of language practices in the Ouré Cassoni community

Perhaps the most important observation of language practices in Ouré Cassoni is that preschool students do not use or understand either English or Arabic at the time they enter preschool. The market language is Zaghawa, for the most part. There is also a minority of Fur and Guaron speakers in the camp. In some interactions with humanitarian workers and Chadians, an international or regional language such as French, English, or Arabic might be used, but preschool children would rarely be exposed to those interactions.

It should be noted that this pedagogic obstacle continues to exist beyond preschool. Due to the absence of an effective second language acquisition module for Arabic and English in the following years, the language barrier in the classroom persists. The Ouré Cassoni linguistic environment in and beyond the classroom, as described above, does not naturally produce competency in either Arabic or English. These languages must be intentionally taught by qualified teachers using an effective curriculum if

learning and interaction are to occur. Several school teachers reported that their students are not 'learning' but are only memorizing texts that they do not understand, as this is all that may be required to pass the exams.

Written English and Arabic are seen by preschool students in the limited print environment of Ouré Cassoni. The print environment is mostly limited to the market and the administrative area of camp. Both scripts appear on signs indicating offices, schools, and other institutional buildings. On such signs English is most frequently given a position of prominence, that is, English most often appears in the space above the Arabic equivalent and/or in larger print. Both languages also appear on packaged products bought at the market or distributed by aid organizations, and on vehicles. Arabic is the language of the few religious materials used by adults. Such religious materials are usually not accessible to preschool age children. Two libraries containing Arabic, English and French materials do exist in the camp. These libraries are reportedly well used though it seems that a comfortable reading area is not provided, which is understandable given the climate and limited energy resources of the camp. Arabic remains the essential language of communication for economic, educational, social, and religious interactions outside of the camp; it should be noted that this is not the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) taught in schools, but rather a local vernacular. Arabic is the most commonly used official language of the desired eventual location of refugees. English becomes important for those who pursue advanced education, broader economic opportunities and international social contacts. Strong negative attitudes towards the Arabic language and/or the Arabic script were not expressed by almost any of those interviewed. The Zaghawa are receptive to the use of the Arabic language and the Arabic script in preschool.

In brief, acquisition of the Arabic language and the Arabic script are essential for success in education as well as beyond and so should remain a major emphasis in school. At the same time, the importance of the mother tongue to official language transition approach should be recognized as a much more effective pedagogical tool to that end than is the current practice of immersion in Arabic without sufficient preparation.

Analysis of learning materials and resources

There exist two dialects of Zaghawa, Koba and Wugi, with Wugi being the dialect of Ouré Cassoni. No learning materials are immediately available in any script for preschool in Zaghawa Wugi. The preschool could benefit from adapting some existing materials and expertise present in the neighboring Zaghawa Kobe dialect. This would, however, require an investment of expertise and resources. Preschool materials could be produced in a modified Arabic script, the Chadian national Latin alphabet or the Zaghawa Wugi Erfa alphabet, a traditional alphabet known to few among the Zaghawa. The scope and amount of materials necessary for a successful preschool module would not be extensive or difficult for pedagogy/linguistic advisors working with informed Zaghawa speakers. The pre-literacy module envisaged includes 30 minute sessions given 2-3 times per week over one school year. This would require a teacher's guide, an alphabet chart, alphabet flash cards, 10 stories read by teachers to

students (Big Books or other), 10-20 easy reading stories to be read by students, plus letter and word games.

Teachers at the preschool level are reportedly available, willing to be trained, and motivated to teach in the mother tongue. Their current level of training is said to be minimal. However, if a simple and teacher friendly method were to be chosen, then even the least experienced teacher can typically master the methodology. Using a workshop format, recognized and respected local writers and teachers could be trained to write easy reading texts for preschoolers. Simple and inexpensive desk top publishing technology could be employed to process the texts and make them 'photo ready' or print ready. The skill set required for this production would include local and informed Zaghawa speakers such as those local Zaghawa experts already identified, preschool and other teachers, 'desk top publishing' advisors, linguistic/orthography/pedagogical advisors and advisors in the area of creating and printing in new fonts. Such an effort would require 21 – 28 working days on task with necessary IT support, electrical supply and accommodations. This assumes that the orthographical issues have been finalized. This estimate is based on personal experience in similar environments.

Recommendations:

Language

1. Encourage greater use of the mother tongue in preschools to increase student understanding of classroom instruction as well as subject matter. The pedagogical advantages of benefiting from the language best understood by students in order to better learn a second and third language was quickly recognized by school staff, as was the idea that critical thinking, expression of imagination, uninhibited participation, student/teacher communication and confidence in communication were possible only when teachers and students shared a common, well understood language. The concept of the 'Healing Classroom' seems based on this assumption. School staff help could be enlisted to enlighten parents to this effect. This does not preclude the teaching of oral Arabic in preschool.
2. Introduce a mother tongue literacy module in the preschools. The mother tongue would be both the language of instruction and the language in which first literacy is to be acquired. Educators were very supportive of this idea. Basic literacy concepts such as the existence of a relationship between written symbols and oral sounds could be mastered no matter which script (Arabic or Latin) was chosen. Mastery of such basic concepts would help prepare students for literacy in other languages. Mother tongue literacy should then be continued beyond pre-school.
3. Envisage the delivery of a quality second language acquisition module for oral Arabic in preschool and later years. A quality second language acquisition module should likewise be delivered in later years for English. Literacy skills in any language are of only limited value if students do not understand the language they are reading.

4. Given the likely increase in learning outcomes, including increased student engagement in critical thinking, expression of imagination, and interaction with teachers, the continuation of mother tongue use could be favored in subsequent grades. This is, in fact, considered best practice by UNESCO and many education practitioners. Such a program would require significant investment and may, for that reason, be unattractive. However, when the gains realized in increased learning outcomes, the decrease in drop-out rate and the decrease in grade repeaters is compared to the shortcomings of the present system, an expanded transition program should be more cost effective.

Script

1. Modify and/or add to the Arabic script in order to represent all important Zaghawa linguistic features, including tone and vowel quality where necessary (see Annex 3 for a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of possible scripts – Arabic, Latin, and Erfa). Discussion on which script to use for writing Zaghawa clearly generated the most enthusiastic interactions. Leaders and educators were quick to recognize that Modern Standard Arabic script did not contain enough conventions to represent all important Zaghawa linguistic features. They were favorable to the suggestion of adding or modifying characters in the Arabic script in order to do this. Details pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of each script option are given in Annex III. These modifications and/or additions should be determined in concert with others involved in similar language development using, or potentially using, the same script in other similar languages, such as Massalit.

Materials and resources

1. Materials should be produced for use in the Zaghawa language preschool literacy module. Materials do not presently exist for this language. Motivated local and consultant expertise could produce adequate print ready materials cheaply and within a relatively short amount of time. This would first require the establishment of an acceptable orthography/script. Printing facilities would need to be identified.
2. Preschool teachers should be trained in the chosen literacy method and in the participative techniques that are now possible given the greatly reduced language barrier.
3. Any methodology would call for strong in-service training and teacher support which might include scripted or outlined lessons at least until teachers were capable of delivering and elaborating on the lessons themselves. SIL has had success with this approach in a variety of languages and contexts, including in other parts of Chad with other Chadian minority languages. The approach recommended would also avoid requiring less experienced teachers to create texts or otherwise manipulate the orthography, at least until they were capable and comfortable doing so.

Literacy acquisition method

1. Use a simple literacy method which is transferable to the acquisition of literacy in other languages. The method should have a strong decoding component plus adequate meaning based learning techniques. A simple method, as opposed to a sophisticated method, is recommended due to the present and foreseeable competency level of available preschool teachers. A strong decoding component is recommended because whichever script is chosen to represent Zaghawa can be used in a shallow or transparent manner and so conducive to

capturing all important linguistic features of that language. Mastery of both decoding and meaning based skills will be strategic assets when beginning literacy in Arabic and English. The limited print environment beyond the classroom does not favor methodologies where a strong print environment is crucial.

Program model

1. A program model which focuses on increasing learning outcomes should consider use of the mother tongue as the first language of instruction with a well conceived gradual transfer to the official language/s over a period of several years after preschool. This allows for greater understanding of classroom instruction and subject matter as well as the development of critical thinking, student/teacher communication and imagination use skills. Programs which focus on an early immersion in the official language can overlook the role of the mother tongue in the development of these skills and so stunt the student's development. It appears that the present curriculum model favors such an early discontinuation of mother tongue use.

Next Steps

The following is a brief discussion of possible next steps in the process of developing a pilot module preschool literacy (pre-literacy) module in Ouré Cassoni.

Orthography

Whichever orthography chosen to represent the linguistic features of Zaghawa Wugi will need to be verified by respected local authorities and regularized by orthography experts. This process should coordinate with those developing orthographies for similar languages to ensure maximum cooperation and support between language development organizations.

Materials

Once orthography issues have been satisfactorily processed, then a team can be assembled to create the needed pedagogical materials for the preschool module. This team should include local language experts and technical advisors in the areas of story writing, orthography, pedagogy, 'desk top publishing', and printing. A description of the materials needed can be found in the text of this report.

Teacher training

Local motivated teachers should be chosen to receive training in the literacy methodology and in participative teaching techniques consistent with the 'Healing Classrooms' approach. Teacher trainers should be local persons competent in the methodology chosen and in the 'Healing Classrooms' approach as well as have appropriate teacher training experience.

Local expertise

For sustainability and local capacity building expertise, it would be beneficial for IRC to work with a local partner and with the SIL Chad office to identify and train others in this mother tongue initiative.

ANNEX 1 - In preparation for this consultancy, the following soft copy documents were collected and studied by the consultant:

The Draft Constitutional Text (of Sudan), March 16, 2005

SOUTHERN SUDAN EDUCATION ACT, March 2008

"Sudan to adopt Islamic constitution", Sudan - Article published the Thursday 13 October 2011 - Latest update : Thursday 13 October 2011. This article addressed education language policy.

Literacy, Language, Non-Formal Education and Alternative Learning Opportunities in Southern Sudan, Jacqueline Marshall, September 200

Outline of Sudanese curriculum subjects, Eunice Kua, July 2012

Occasional Papers in the Study of Sudanese Languages, No. 9, Suggestions for Writing Modern Nubian Languages, Asmaa Mohd. Ibrahim Ahmed, 2004,

Phonology & Orthography Sketches of Sudanese Languages

Massalit Language Materials, SIL (Alphabet Chart, Teachers' Guide, Literacy Primer, Orthography Statement, Phonology Statement, Transition Literacy Guide – Massalit to English, Reading Books 1-5)

Zaghawa Language Materials, SIL (Beria Orthography Rules, Camel Orthography, Phonology, Reading Book in 3 scripts

PROVERBS AND IDIOMATIC PHRASES IN ZAGHAWA LANGUAGE . Suleiman Norein Osman, Al-Fashir University, July 2005

Vers un orthographe beria qui est fidèle à ses origines nubiens, méroïtiques et africains, Siddick Adam Issa, Abeche, Chad

Towards a Generative Phonology and Morphology of the Dialects of Beria, A thesis submitted by Andrew Miller Wolfe to the Department of Linguistics in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors, Harvard Univ., 2001

Phonology of Zaghawa Language in Sudan, Dr.Suleiman Norein Osman, 2006

Classes Préscolaire au Guéra, Guide d'Enseignant, FAPLG (La Fédération des Associations pour la Promotion des Langues du Guéra), November 2010

A way forward for education in Chad? Discussions on multilingual education and how a multilingual education programme might be implemented in the Guera region of Chad

MLE Working Paper, Caroline Tyler May 2012

Guidance Notes on Teaching and Learning, INEE, INEE Minimum Standards Case Study: Protecting Adolescents and Young Refugees Through Quality Education in Eastern Chad

TOOLS & TIPS FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT (webinar),
Julia Frazier, IRC and Alison Pflepsen, RTI, 16 February 2012

OCHA, Tchad Bulletin d'Information Humanitaire, Mars 2012

Ethnologue – Chad, SIL

USAID – USG Humanitarian Assistance in Eastern Chad

Personal Email Communications

Larry Burke, SIL – Chad Director

Béat Kuntz, SIL – Chad Asst Director

Patrice Kemgane, IRC - Director of Education, Amdjarass

Eunice Kua, SIL – Chad, Massalit literacy worker

Caroline Taylor, SIL – Chad, Guéra literacy worker,

Amy Krell, SIL – Sudan, Academic Programs Director

Jacqueline Marshall, SIL – MLE specialist

Andrew Wolfe, SIL – Zaghawa linguistics researcher

David Faris, AoG - Chad, Zaghawa language specialist

Websites consulted

<http://www.iactivism.org/learn/>,

<http://www.rescue.org/news/darfur-refugee-teachers-prepare-young-children-future-3691>

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45c226.html>

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09NDJAMENA447.html>

<http://www.enoughproject.org/blogs/sobering-statistics-darfuri-refugee-camps>

<http://www.njdarfur.org/camp.php>

<http://theret.org/en/where-we-work/1/chad>

<http://www.wjr.org.uk/projects/education-for-darfuri-refugees/>

ANNEX II - Offices Visited and Persons Interviewed

N'Djamena

1. National Center for Curriculum - Dewa Goloum (chef de département des Curricula et Appuis Pédagogiques) and Paimi Guelva (chef de division Particuliers et des Problématiques Transversales) These gentlemen mentioned a reunion in July held by the UNHCR which specifically addressed the issue of curriculum for refugees. Dewa Goloum then listed three important outcomes of that reunion. 1) the CNARR can propose curriculum but does not make the final decision to approve. That decision is for the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education. 2) Concerning content, it was consensual that learning should begin in the language of the learner. This falls within Guelva's domain as it constitutes a learning innovation. 3) There will be an attempt to reconcile the décallage between the Chadian school year schedule and that of Sudan.
2. CNARR - Centre Nationale d'Aquieuille des Réfugiés et Rapatriés - Mohamet Salé Saïd, Administrateur Principal CNARR. He was not aware of this IRC initiative. He quickly said that the CNARR did not consider (évoque) the question of language but that they were sensitive and flexible concerning the needs of the refugees and their particular conditions.
3. Assemblies of God Missionary to the Zaghawa - David Faris. Mr Faris and his family have lived among the Zaghawa, the Kobé dialect group, in Chad for ten years learning the language, completing preliminary linguistic studies in the areas of phonetics, phonology, grammar and orthography design. He worked with a team of Zaghawa to produce the Zaghawa Kobé (Beria) dictionary as well as some draft pedagogical materials. He received his linguistic training through SIL. His insights on Zaghawa tone and vowel quality were extremely valuable. He was optimistic that the Arabic script could be modified to represent important Zaghawa linguistic phenomenon and provided contacts with key Zaghawa persons and organizations with expertise in Zaghawa linguistics and sociolinguistics.
4. Direction Nationale d'Éducation Catholique – Directeur. He appreciates the value of literacy in the mother tongue as a bridge to acquiring literacy the official language. He informed me that Catholic Education was not involved in education work among the refugees at this time. A Jesuit initiative in this area is not associated with the DINEC's office.
5. IDEN – Inspection Départementale d'Éducation Nationale - Omar Dugi. He confirms that the preferred approach on the departmental level is a transition from MT to official languages.
6. Sudan Embassy - Chargé de Communication. He was unaware of this IRC initiative and expressed that he did not believe that IRC or other outsiders should be implicating themselves in the affairs of the refugees. With enthusiasm, he instructed me that the only curriculum permitted in the refugee camps is the official curriculum of Sudan and that the only language permitted in the classroom was Arabic.
7. UNHCR – N'Djamena - Alexandra Kaun. She confirmed that a transition approach from the MT to other languages was permitted and favored in Oure Cassoni. Due to the fact that the refugees are present on Chadian soil, they could benefit from Chadian sensitivity even if the Sudanese authorities demanded a strict Sudanese curriculum in Arabic.

8. University of N'Djamena - Professor Kalil Aliu Len – Professor of Languages. As Professor Zacharia Faloud, a renowned Zaghawa linguist, was not available, Professor Kalil was recommended to us. Prof Kalil was very welcoming and interested in the program. He said that Chad had no particular or special curriculum for the refugees in the camps. He added, “because the refugees were now in Chad, the Chadian policy of transition should be applied, that is, 3 years of MT including a transition to the official language beginning in year 4”. He believes that the Chadian national alphabets for Latin and Arabic, if used creatively, contained sufficient characters to represent the Zaghawa language and that the Zaghawa sociolinguistic attitudes would not prohibit the use of either alphabet in preschools. Concerning, technical details, he was confident that SIL could provide the necessary expertise. He further expressed his enthusiasm for this IRC initiative and asked me to consider him at my disposal in case of any need.

Abeche

1. Zaghawa linguist and activist – Siddiq Adam. He is heavily implicated in the development of the ‘Camel Alphabet’, Erfe, in the Kobé dialect of Zaghawa. He was also a main contributor to the production of a dictionary and the collection of stories and poetry in Zaghawa Kobé. He pointed out that the dialect spoken in Ouré Cassoni varies from that of the Kobé and that the alphabet might not transfer between dialects. He is considering a second version of Erfe which would include all dialects. His opinion is that Zaghawa can easily be written with the Chadian national Latin alphabet but that Arabic script can not represent all the essentials of the Zaghawa language.
2. ADES – Action pour le Développement Economique et Sociale. A rendez-vous with ADES was unfortunately missed due to travel exigencies.

Amdjarass

1. UNHCR – Paulette Dadey (Director of UNHCR in Amdjarass) and Patrique (Director of Education). Paulette was very receptive to the proposal that IRC and UNHCR cooperate in all ways. Paulett and Patrique offered to help coordinate encounter meetings with important persons and groups in Ouré Cassoni. A second meeting then followed with Patrique to share with him the preliminary finding that the Kobé dialect materials could not be used immediately as Zaghawa pedagogical materials but that materials for Ouré Cassoni could be produced given appropriate personnel, resources and time.
2. IRC – Patrice Kemgane (Director of Education). Patrice kindly oriented me to the education efforts undertaken by IRC and others at Ouré Cassoni. Together we developed a plan to coordinate the interactions needed to gather information pertinent to the research. He expressed that he favored a Latin script to write Zaghawa as it contained all the conventions necessary and that it would enable students to better acquire literacy in English.
3. IRC- Seynou Sy (Pedagogy Consultant). Sy has worked with the EGRA initiative. He favors the use of the Latin alphabet to write Zaghawa as it contains all the necessary conventions. He also believes that Zaghawa could be written in a modified Arabic script with the addition of characters to represent tone.

Ouré Cassoni

1. Chef de Camp August 23. I explained the pedagogical, linguistic, sociolinguistic, and practical aspects of the research. He responded with enthusiasm to the idea of Zaghawa as the first language of instruction and as the first language in which literacy would be acquired. He felt that the Zaghawa in Ouré Cassoni are reticent towards things Arabic, including script, but that they do and would use it none the less. He confirmed that preschool teachers were available for preschool and that they could easily be trained to teach Zaghawa pre-literacy.
2. Chef de Genre August 23. I explained the pedagogical, linguistic, sociolinguistic, and practical aspects of the research. She responded with enthusiasm to the idea of MT as the first language of instruction and as the first language in which literacy would be acquired.
3. Venue - Zone A August 23 Present: School Directors of Zones A, B, and C, School Inspector, Preschool Coordinator, President of Parent's Committee, Representatives of Preschool Parent's Committee. All present recognized and responded very positively to the pedagogical advantages of Zaghawa as the first language of instruction and as the first language in which literacy would be acquired. They confirmed the presence of linguistic features such as tone and ATR vowel quality not represented in the Arabic script. They also demonstrated the importance of dialect differences between the Wugi and the Kobé, agreeing that pedagogical materials were not immediately transferable between dialects. The school director of Zone A explained that the Wugi have a traditional alphabet, Erfa, that should be considered as a possible script for writing Zaghawa Wugi. Upon seeing the Kobé Erfe traditional script, he and others remarked that there were similarities but also significant differences such that the Kobé script was not known well enough among the Wugi to be used in preschool. They seemed positive that Arabic script could be acceptably adapted to write Zaghawa by adding certain markings and agreed that the community would be open to its use in preschool. It was confirmed that preschool was conducted in Arabic as much as possible and that students could be punished for speaking in their mother tongue. They said they will further discuss this possible MT preschool initiative among themselves and with others and express their reactions to me at the next visit.
4. Venue – Zone C August 25 Present: Representative of the Zone C Chief, three chefs de block, Director of Zone C school. The input from this zone was very similar and concurrent to that of zone A.
5. Venue - Zone B August 27 Present: Zone Chief, 6 teachers from the Zone B school. Input was again similar to that of Zones A and C with the addition of some information pertinent to school teachers. Those teachers who teach the early grades do not favor the use of a Latin script for Zaghawa preschool because they are more familiar with Arabic script. Because these teachers are not responsible for teaching English in the early grades, they often do not master the Latin script and so would need more training if it were to be used in preschool.
6. Venue Zone A August 28 Present: 15 participants from zones A, B and C. The purpose of this meeting was to bring together participants from all zones to express their reactions following further discussion among themselves and with others of the possible preschool initiative. There was unanimous agreement in favor of the MT first preschool initiative and appreciation for the pedagogical benefits it offers. All believed that preschool materials could be made with the help

of pedagogy and orthography experts. The choice of script in which to write Zaghawa Wugi seemed less unanimous and generated further discussion. It was explained to me that one well respected elder had lobbied hard for the use of the traditional Wugi Erfa script and had influenced others in that direction. Upon discussion it was made clear that the Wugi Erfa script had not yet been fully developed and that it was known to less than five individuals who had taken an interest in it over the years. Despite attempts to interest the participants in a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each script option, none who expressed themselves did so in contradiction to the elder. It was the understanding of this assembly that the traditional Erfa script was their choice for a MT first preschool literacy module.

Annex III

Discussion of choice of script

There exist three possible scripts which can represent all the important linguistic features (phonological, grammatical, syntactical) of Zaghawa Wugi. All will require some degree of verification and approval by the appropriate experts, authorities and communities before use. It would be in the best interest of all implicated if orthographical choices could be made in concert with others seeking to represent Zaghawa or other related languages with any of these scripts.

Arabic Script

advantages

- 1) The use of the Arabic script to read and write Zaghawa will prepare students to more easily acquire literacy in Arabic or other languages using the Arabic script. Having more easily mastered the Arabic script through its use in learning to read their own language, the knowledge of Arabic sound to symbol relationships will now transfer directly to Arabic literacy.
- 2) The Arabic script is the script of the most widely used official language in the desired eventual location of the refugees. The earliest introduction of the Arabic script will facilitate student learning, especially as repetition and familiarity are important learning strategies in the present learning environment where other strategies are often ineffective or unused.
- 3) The Arabic script is presently the first script introduced in the Oure Cassoni school system. The curriculum for the primary school presently exists in Arabic and would need to be re-edited to accommodate another script. The use of the Arabic script would serve to minimize non-essential changes to the school system. (Other curriculum changes should none the less be foreseen in order to take advantage of the participative learning opportunities and “Healing Classrooms approach” now available through use of the MT already mastered by both students and teachers.)
- 4) Early grade teachers are already familiar with the Arabic script. These teachers are not presently responsible for teaching other scripts and so might not presently master other scripts. Introducing a script other than Arabic would entail important re-training for early grade teachers. These teachers were in favor of using the Arabic script in early grades.
- 5) Literate parents are much more likely to be literate in the Arabic script than any other script. A common script between parent and students increases the feasibility of positive parent/student interaction on school subjects and other matters involving literacy.
- 6) The Arabic script is common in the limited print environment of Oure Cassoni. This provides for some practical reinforcement of Arabic literacy.

- 7) It is feasible and acceptable to the Ouré Cassoni community to modify and/or add characters to the Arabic script in order to represent all important linguistic features of the Zaghawa Wugi language. Such a modification would require verification and should be done in concert with others who could be influenced by these orthographical decisions, such as the Massalit, Maba, Guera, etc. language development projects.
- 8) End of primary cycle exams emphasize mastery of the Arabic script. Early familiarity with Arabic script increases the chances of success on these exams.
- 9) The Arabic script dominates the religious milieu of the Oure Cassoni camp. Though preschool children rarely have access to written religious materials, their awareness of the use of the Arabic script in this domain reinforces its importance over other scripts.

disadvantages

- 1) The modification or addition of characters to the Arabic script will require either the creation of new 'special characters' or the insertion of characters from other scripts. This is best done under the supervision of an expert. An expert will need to be identified and engaged. I would suggest that an inquiry be made at SIL to determine if they do not already have the needed software or if existing software can be modified.
- 2) Given recent ethno/political events in the region, some negative attitudes towards things Arabic are likely to exist, though I did not encounter this in any significant way during my time there despite intentionally probing in this area. It appears that this disadvantage is negligible.

Latin script

advantages

- 1) The use of the Latin script to read and write Zaghawa will prepare students to acquire literacy in English or other languages using the Latin script. This is the same as logic employed above for the Arabic script.
- 2) The Latin script will also be an important part of the end of primary cycle exams where proficiency in English will be tested as a subject matter.
- 3) The Latin script is seen frequently in the print environment, often in prominence over Arabic script.
- 4) The Chadian national Latin alphabet already contains the characters necessary to represent all important features of the Zaghawa Wugi language. Conventions such as an accent mark or circumflex can be employed to indicate tone or vowel quality where necessary, though not likely both simultaneously.
- 5) English, and so the Latin script, is understood to be important in higher education, economic advancement and social mobility.

disadvantages

- 1) The use of Latin characters for mother tongue literacy would provide only a limited pedagogical advantage when acquiring literacy in English. This is due to the fact that immediate and continual reinforcement of Latin alphabet literacy skills is not available after preschool until the fifth grade when English is introduced as a subject matter. Apart from the print environment or exceptional studies, Latin characters are not seen or taught. It is also likely that the amount of Latin alphabet literacy skills obtained in preschool would not be sufficient to assure independent reading ability for preschool students. This would result in a recession of Latin alphabet reading skills, or at least, a lack of further development of those skills.
- 2) The Latin alphabet is not the more practical alphabet in the desired eventual location of the refugees.
- 3) The use of the Latin alphabet in preschool and following years would require a re-editing of the present Arabic curriculum.
- 4) Teachers in the early grades are often not competent the Latin alphabet and so are not comfortable using it without significant training in this area.
- 5) Parents are not likely to be familiar with the Latin alphabet and so unable to help students in studies or application outside of the classroom.

Erfa (traditional Zaghawa Wugi script)

advantages

- 1) Erfa could provide an important motivation for learning. Erfa is understood to be authentically Zaghawa Wugi because it is a product of their own culture, represents significant aspects of their own culture, and is at least partially recognized by leaders and parents. The use of Erfa would therefore reinforce the ethnic identity and social cohesion of the Zaghawa Wugi people. Given recent events, the Zaghawa could be especially favorable to this opportunity to bolster their self esteem and assert their traditions at this period in time. Though preschool children might not be directly motivated by such concepts themselves, the enthusiasm demonstrated at home and in their community is likely to be infectious.
- 2) The use of Erfa provides a platform for the teaching of basic literacy concepts. One such concept is that there exists a relationship between sounds and symbols and that these symbols can be manipulated to produce units of meaning. This concept is transferable to Latin and Arabic literacy.
- 3) The Erfa script, in its final form, will be able to represent all the important linguistic features of Zaghawa Wugi. However, at present, only individual characters are used to represent clan names and these characters do not function together to form words or higher level grammatical structures.
- 4) The use of Erfa would significantly boost the esteem of a small number of local elders who have worked very hard over many years on the preservation of this script. These well respected elders would then likely lend their considerable support to any eventual preschool or primary school program using Erfa to any extent.

disadvantages

- 1) The sound/symbol relationships of Erfa characters are not transferable to the other scripts. None of the Erfa symbols appear in either Arabic or Latin scripts. This effectively nullifies the pedagogical advantage of prior familiarity with a particular script when acquiring Arabic or Latin literacy.
- 2) Erfa has not yet been stabilized. Many of those who claimed to be most familiar with Erfa could not use it to write simple words or their names, though they did recognize some of the symbols as indicative of the clan names which they represent. Those most familiar with Erfa said that more work needed to be done to collect all the existing symbols and to agree on the codification of those symbols chosen. This would require significant effort and time if all the stakeholders were to be involved. But it would take much less time if a few knowledgeable individuals proposed and lobbied for particular script choices.
- 3) Unless forums for Erfa literacy skill use were to be created, recession of Erfa literacy skills is likely to occur due to lack of immediate and continual reinforcement. Erfa does not currently function in the print environment as a cohesive alphabet. Its print environment is presently limited to the marking of camels (and possibly other possessions) and is only seen when camels from other clans are encountered.

- 4) Erfa is not a factor in the end of primary cycle exams.
- 5) Parents are not familiar with Erfa as a writing system, though they would recognize some of the symbols in isolation as indicative of clan names. Parental participation in the students' studies would therefore be limited.
- 6) Though software does exist to write and print the Erfa special characters, this requires access to particular software (readily available from SIL) and to a computer.
- 7) The use of Erfa at the preschool level would require that the curriculum be re-edited and that teachers be trained in Erfa orthography.
- 8) While the use of Erfa could provide important motivation for learning, I believe that the use of Zaghawa Wugi as the initial oral language of instruction in the preschools will already provide sufficient motivation for the same cultural reasons. The rationale for the use of Erfa for motivational reasons is therefore mitigated.