

KARKO

AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

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***“ONE DOES NOT INHABIT A
COUNTRY; ONE INHABITS A
LANGUAGE”***

- EMIL CIORAN

Language, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is, “the principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing, or gestures.” There are over 8000 languages spoken in the world today however, nearly 3000 languages are endangered. Around every 14 days one language dies. (National Geographic) An endangered language is a language that is likely to become extinct if active efforts are not made to keep it alive.

HOW DOES A LANGUAGE BECOME ENDANGERED?

A language can become endangered as older speakers and members of the local community start to die and can no longer converse with youth, if the language cannot be passed down to the children and carried on through this waterfall effect, then the number of speakers will ultimately begin to decrease leading to the language becoming endangered. There is also the fact that as people start to adopt the main language spoken in their country, the minority languages begin to slowly be phased out, especially in Africa. As lasting colonial languages prevail and offer access to jobs and education, many Africans prefer to utilise these languages over native local languages they may have grown up with.



SO WHAT IS THE KARKO LANGUAGE?

With less than 8000 native-speakers left, Karko belongs to one of the endangered languages in Sudan. Its speakers mainly live in the Karko Hills, which is 20 miles west of Dilling, and they call themselves either Karko or Kakenbi. However, sometimes they are also known as Karme by the Ama. It has been reported that Karko village has around 8000 inhabitants, among them Karko native speakers and Katla people who do understand some of the Karko language.

WHY IS KARKO CONSIDERED ENDANGERED?

As mentioned previously, a language can become endangered as older speakers start to die and can no longer converse with youth. In the case of Karko, it can be observed that there is a declining exposure of Karko to the children in the community. As a consequence, young people are not able to speak Karko or to understand it due to the use of Arabic as well. Therefore, the elders remain with a deeper level of knowledge of Karko and thus, it is likely that future generations will solely speak Arabic. Since Karko is not encouraged to be forwarded to the youth and its native speakers are the elders of the community, Karko will die eventually with its speakers and thus, is an endangered language.

DOMAINS OF THE USE OF KARKO LANGUAGE

The language of Karko is not used by its speakers in every domain. As Arabic serves as the main spoken language in Sudan, children are inclined to learn Arabic first. While being exposed to some of the Karko language at family gatherings, the market and friends in the village, the Karko language is always used with Arabic. Since it is also not spoken on the radio, some children are, therefore, able to understand the language but are not able to speak it. In regards to the adults in the village, Karko speakers also tend to communicate in a mix between Karko and Arabic. Despite being used at funerals, social gatherings and singing traditional songs, it is mainly viewed as a language that is not pure due to the mix with Arabic and thus, is considered as a nonviable language.

THE PHONETICS

Phonetics describes a branch of linguistics that studies how sounds are created and perceived by humans. One of the most important characteristics of the Karko language comes from the traditional area of articulatory phonetics and emphasizes upon grammatical number. Which is the grammatical category of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verb agreement that expresses count distinction (Momma 2008 p. 639).

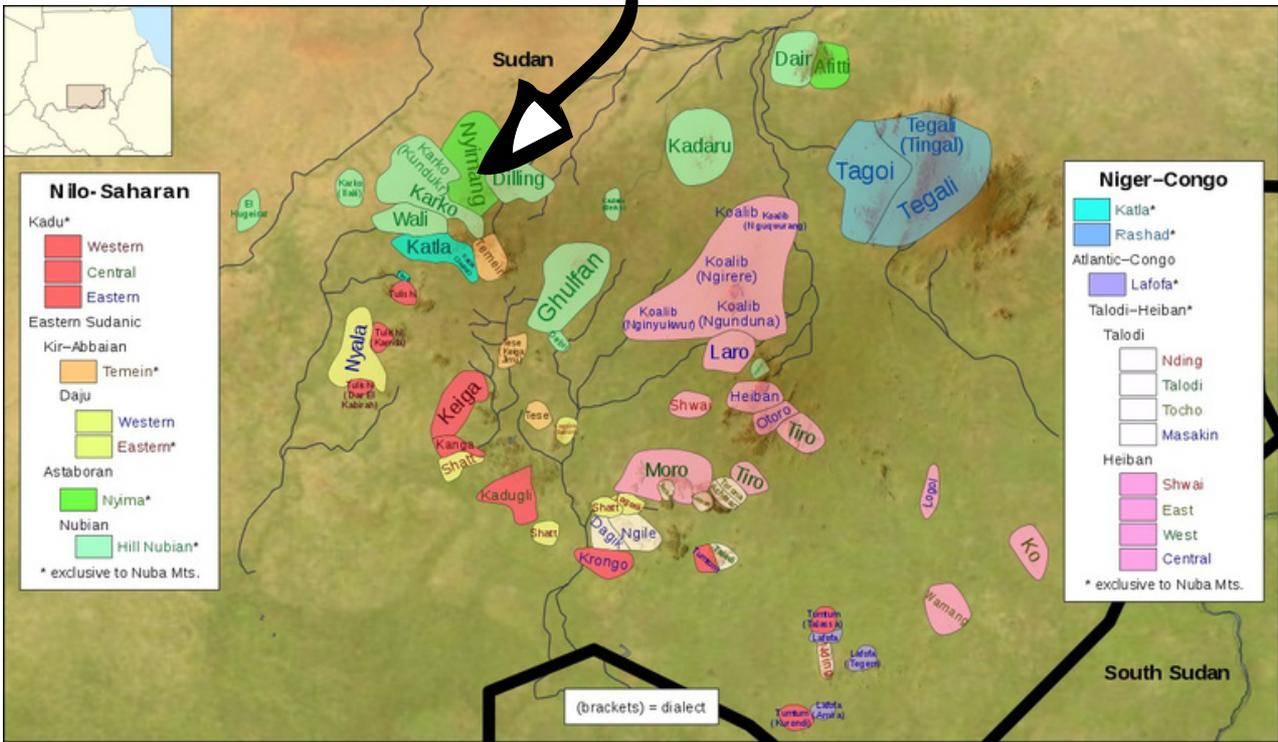
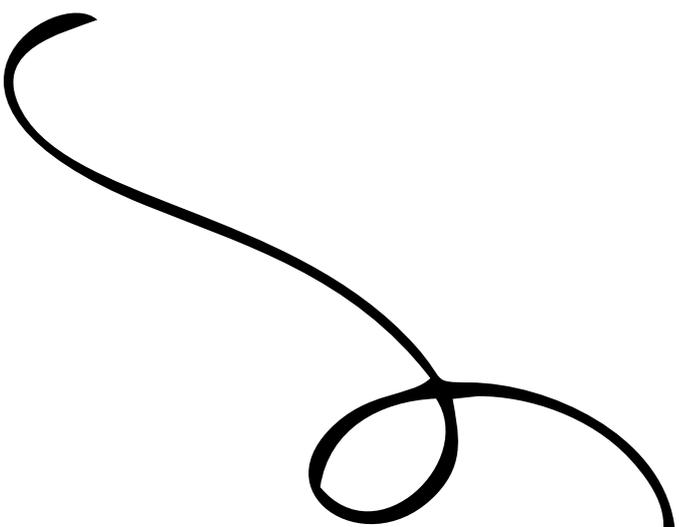
KARKOS GRAMMATICAL NUMBER

In English the distinction can be made by the inflectional ending *-s*: e.g., one bird, two birds. But in Karko the quantity valences can often only be characterized by the tonal contrast and morphophonemic alternation of the root vowel. In addition, Karko is characterized by a tripartite system comprising singulative suffixes, plural suffixes, and a replacement pattern.

THE RELEVANCE OF SOUND

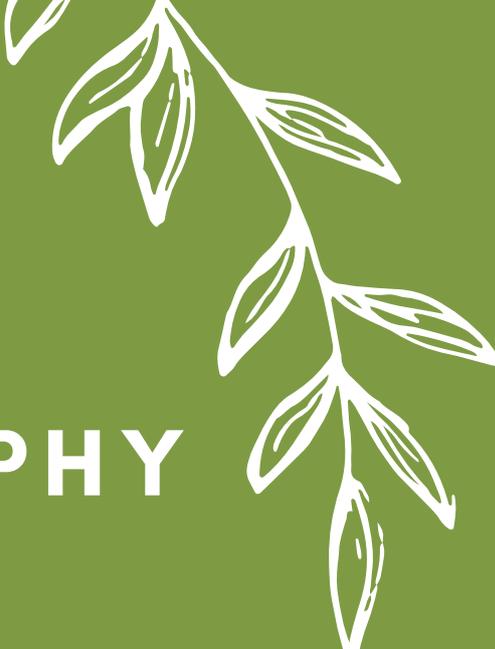
The choice of specific numerical markers is often semantically motivated. This applies in particular to individual markings denoting individual elements. Therefore, the relevance of the sound in Karko is of great importance when marking numbers, which makes the language complex and rich.





LANGUAGES OF SUDAN'S MOUNTAINS





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