

JOSEPH GREENBERG ON THE HAMITIC HYPOTHESIS AS A FICTITIOUS DISCOURSE OF IDENTITY: SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SUDANESE PRACTICE OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

To construct a historically informed understanding of the Naivasha language policy in the Sudan, I have situated the linguistic resources of the Sudan within the African social context by surveying one of the most commonly quoted typological models of African languages, Greenberg's (1963) classificatory system of African languages. This paper has two objectives: first to identify the sociopolitical implications of Greenberg's linguistic anthropological contribution for the Sudanese languages.

My attempt to study the social implications of the work of Greenberg for the languages and identities of the Sudan led me to examine the notion of the Hamitic hypothesis. The second related objective of this paper is to examine the concept of the Hamitic hypothesis (Sanders 1969) as a racial statement of identity and the consequences of its deployment in the linguistic classifications of African languages. A critical analysis of the use of the Hamitic hypothesis in linguistic descriptions has provided insights into understanding the ways in which 'indigenous languages' were made to iconise a particular racial affiliation in the Sudan. The analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis has shown that the linguistic anthropology of Greenberg has refused to take ethnic attribution into account in the typology of African languages including the Sudanese languages. I have drawn upon the analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis to show that the postcolonial governmental discourse continues to operate on the basis of ethnic determinism (e.g., the racial version of Arabicisation policy). I end up by reflecting on the following question: To what extent can a critical analysis of the social implications of Greenberg's work on African languages point to the conclusion that what are termed 'indigenous languages' in the Sudan are, in the terms of Joseph (2006: 17), 'political from top to bottom'?

References cited:

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