



Language Maintenance in Business Interactions: An Appraisal of the Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic-Speaking Communities in Moundou

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic communities from northern and southern Chad have interacted through trade for decades, and each has had to find its own way of holding onto a mother tongue while doing business across ethnic lines. This article looks at how that balancing act plays out among Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic speakers in Moundou, the economic capital of southern Chad. Drawing on Fishman's (1991) graded intergenerational disruption scale, we examine how traders, entrepreneurs, and customers choose and switch between Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic in markets, transport, and informal trading spaces. The study is qualitative, built on interviews and participant observation, and asks how language choice connects to ethnic identity, economic opportunity, and social integration.

Ngambaye still dominates within the Ngambaye community itself, where it functions as a marker of cultural identity and solidarity. Chadian Arabic, meanwhile, has become the working lingua franca of the marketplace, the language that lets traders reach across ethnic lines and build wider business networks. Most speakers move fluidly between the two, adjusting to a customer's background, the type of transaction, and the setting (Thomason, 2001); this code-switching keeps commercial relationships running smoothly without forcing anyone to give up their own language.

Business in Moundou, then, sustains Ngambaye even as it feeds the growing reach of Chadian Arabic. Neither language is pushing the other out; they occupy complementary roles that mirror the city's multilingual makeup and the practical strategies its residents have worked out for themselves. We argue that this coexistence rests on a strong sense of community identity, on transmission across generations, and on the simple fact that multilingual competence continues to pay off in everyday trade.

Keywords: language maintenance, Chad, code-switching, business interaction, Ngambaye, Chadian Arabic, multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

Language does more than carry information from one speaker to another; it marks who people are. In any multilingual setting, speakers are constantly choosing which language to use, and those choices depend on who they're talking to, what the occasion calls for, and what they're talking about. Over time, the choices add up to something larger: they decide whether a language is maintained or gradually gives way to another. This matters especially where languages share the same social space and compete for the same everyday functions. Markets, shops, and trading centers are exactly this kind of space, places where people of different linguistic backgrounds cross paths daily, which makes them a useful window onto how languages get maintained, negotiated, and passed down.

Chad is among the most linguistically diverse countries on the continent, home to more than a hundred indigenous languages alongside its official languages and lingua francas. French and Modern Standard Arabic



hold official status, but in practice Chadian Arabic is what most people reach for across much of the country when they need to communicate outside their own ethnic group.

Indigenous languages such as Ngambaye still carry real weight within their own communities, doing the work of cultural transmission, social cohesion, and identity. But Chadian Arabic's spread through trade, transport, administration, and city life raises a fair question: how well are indigenous languages holding up in everyday use? Ngambaye, one of the most widely spoken languages in southern Chad, belongs to the Central Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan family and is the mother tongue of the Ngambaye people. It remains central to family life, ceremony, and local commerce even as urbanization advances, though contact with Chadian Arabic has become harder to avoid, particularly in the markets where doing business means constantly crossing ethnic lines.

Business interactions make for a particularly telling case because they fuse economic stakes with social ones. Traders pick languages to get understood, to build trust, to negotiate well, to keep a relationship going, not simply out of habit. In a mixed market, a vendor might switch between Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic several times in a morning depending on who walks up to the stall, sliding between code-switching, code-mixing, and sticking to one language when it suits. Chadian Arabic opens the door to customers outside one's own group; Ngambaye keeps something else intact, a sense of belonging among people who share it.

Language maintenance, in the sense used here, means a community keeps using its language despite social, political, or economic pressure to switch to another. What makes maintenance succeed is rarely one thing: transmission across generations, community attitudes, prestige, institutional backing, how concentrated the speaker population is, and, importantly, whether the language actually gets used across different parts of daily life. The economic domain, and marketplaces above all, is one of the more volatile of these; heavy reliance on a dominant lingua franca can tip things toward shift, while sustained use of an indigenous language in trade can do the opposite.

Sociolinguistic research has shown fairly consistently that multilingual speakers don't pick languages at random. Choices track identity, power, efficiency, and cultural value. Studies of multilingual African societies describe local languages sitting alongside regional lingua francas, each carrying its own communicative load. Even so, few studies have looked closely at how business interactions specifically feed the maintenance of indigenous languages in Chad, and almost none have focused on Ngambaye speakers. That is the gap this article tries to close.

The study examines how traders and customers choose between languages, what sociolinguistic factors shape those choices, and how far commercial exchange helps keep Ngambaye alive alongside the wider use of Chadian Arabic. By looking at both real interactions and speakers' own attitudes toward language use, it aims to show how a multilingual business environment can serve communication and identity at the same time, rather than trading one off against the other.

Beyond its immediate setting, the study speaks to the broader sociolinguistics of multilingual African contexts, and it may be of some use to language policy makers, educators, and community leaders who care about keeping Chad's linguistic diversity alive as the country's economy and society keep changing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fishman (1991) grounds language maintenance in domain vitality: a language survives where it keeps doing real work, in the family, in schools, in religion, in commerce, in government. Once a language stops pulling its weight in those domains, speakers tend to drift toward whichever one offers more social, political, or economic payoff, and that drift is what shift looks like from the inside.

Business is one of the domains where this plays out most visibly, precisely because it throws together speakers who don't share a first language. In multilingual societies, what gets spoken across a market stall is never just about being understood; it also signals identity, solidarity, prestige, and opportunity. Studies of African



marketplaces tend to find the same broad pattern: local languages hold their ground next to regional lingua francas through bilingualism and code-switching, rather than being swept aside entirely.

Chad's Multilingual Landscape

Chad counts more than 130 indigenous languages across the Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo families, with French and Arabic as official languages and Chadian Arabic serving as the country's de facto lingua franca. Ngambaye, one of the largest Sara languages and spoken mainly in the south, functions both as a marker of identity within its own community and as a regional language of wider communication in parts of southern Chad.

Roberts (1999) treats multilingualism as a basic fact of Chadian life, with speakers moving between languages as the situation demands. In N'Djamena, code-switching among French, Chadian Arabic, and indigenous languages is routine, which points less to rigid separation between languages and more to a functional division of labor between them.

Chadian Arabic as a Language of Commerce

Moussa and Ouassang (2023) looked at how Chadian Arabic operates in N'Djamena and found that contact in the capital has produced dialectal convergence, with a local, shared form of the language taking on a national-identity role while also underpinning everyday and formal economic exchange. They also found that most Chadians rate Chadian Arabic as the most correct and prestigious of the country's languages. That prestige matters here: it helps explain why Chadian Arabic wins out in Moundou's commercial choices even among Ngambaye speakers who report strong attachment to their mother tongue, since prestige and sheer usefulness can pull language choice in a direction that has nothing to do with identity attachment. French remains the language of administration and formal schooling, but for interpersonal exchange, formal or informal, Chadian Arabic has become the default.

This unifying role extends past N'Djamena. Wherever it takes hold, Chadian Arabic tends to draw in speakers from different ethnic backgrounds and, in doing so, promotes further contact and code-switching between them. Studies of Chadian business communication, including comparative work on telecommunications companies, point the same way: language choice in commercial settings tracks what customers need and understand, not official policy, with employees moving between French, Arabic, and local languages depending on who's in front of them. Multilingual competence, in short, functions as a working professional asset.

Ngambaye and Language Maintenance

Ngambaye has drawn far less attention than Chadian Arabic once the conversation moves outside the family and the community. What descriptive literature there is places Moundou as its linguistic and cultural center, classifying it within the Nilo-Saharan, Chari-Nile, Central Sudanic family and describing it as the most widely spoken of the Sara languages, itself a trade language among speakers of related dialects. That last point complicates any tidy story of “dominant lingua franca versus endangered local language”: Ngambaye is not a marginal vernacular clinging on defensively, but a regional trade language with its own standing, which fits the confidence with which participants in this study describe using it.

Urbanization and mobility haven't dislodged Ngambaye's ethnolinguistic weight; it still stands for cultural identity, social solidarity, and traditional knowledge. What has changed is the amount of Chadian Arabic and French around it, especially in employment and commerce, which raises the question this study is built around: does business interaction help keep Ngambaye alive, or does it quietly push speakers toward the more widely understood alternatives?

Language Choice in Business Interactions

The pattern of strategic, function-based code choice found here lines up with other work on multilingual



African markets. Connell (2009), studying a small but highly multilingual Cameroonian market, offers one of the closer parallels, examining the constraints on language choice in a setting structurally similar to Moundou's. Chishiba and Mvula (2022) studied the COMESA market in Lusaka and found traders leaning on local lingua francas such as Nyanja and Bemba, keeping English mainly for foreign customers, and mixing languages or falling back on gesture when communication broke down. That pattern of mixing rather than settling on one code is close to what shows up in Moundou, where Ngambaye, Chadian Arabic, and French get combined rather than used in isolation.

Research on informal language policy is a useful lens here too, since it helps make sense of how patterned, almost self-organizing participants' choices in Moundou turn out to be. Several factors feed into that pattern: mutual intelligibility, accommodation to the customer, power relations, and simple efficiency. Accommodation Theory captures part of it: speakers adjust their language to close social distance and keep communication moving, and in a mixed market that often means switching to match the customer while holding onto one's own ethnic language for members of the same community. Chadian research more broadly backs this up, showing that commercial interactions rarely settle on a single code; multilingual speakers combine Chadian Arabic, French, and indigenous languages as needed, a strategy that is as much about relationship-building as it is about being understood.

Language Maintenance Through Economic Domains

Fishman's domain theory holds that a minority language's survival hinges on its continued use across the institutions that matter to a community. Much of the attention in Chadian multilingualism research has gone to the home, the school, and religious life; the economic domain has had comparatively little. Yet commerce offers speakers repeated, low-stakes chances to use an indigenous language in a socially meaningful way. When trader and customer share a linguistic background, using the shared language tends to build trust and loyalty, and with it, maintenance. Where backgrounds differ, Chadian Arabic tends to win out simply because it reaches further. Seen this way, Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic coexisting in commerce looks less like one replacing the other and more like functional multilingualism doing what it does.

Research Gap

Chad's multilingual landscape, the rise of Chadian Arabic, and multilingual practice in professional settings have all been documented before. What hasn't been examined closely is language maintenance among Ngambaye speakers specifically within business interactions; most existing work sits in language policy, education, or general urban multilingualism, leaving commerce comparatively unexplored. Few studies ask how Ngambaye-speaking traders and customers actually negotiate language choice with Chadian Arabic speakers, or how those everyday negotiations feed into maintaining indigenous linguistic identity against the steady spread of Chadian Arabic. Markets are exactly the kind of recurring, high-frequency space where this negotiation happens, which makes the gap worth closing.

Conceptual Framework

This study leans mainly on Fishman's domain theory and language maintenance theory, which together explain how language use shifts across social domains and how sustained use keeps a language vital. Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2007) rounds this out by accounting for the moment-to-moment choices speakers make mid-interaction. Together, these three frameworks give a workable basis for reading how Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic speakers maintain, adapt, or switch languages while doing business.

The broader aim is to show how language choice in commerce sustains Ngambaye even as it reflects Chadian Arabic's expanding communicative reach in Chad today. Two further frameworks guide the analysis: Fishman's reversing language shift model, which treats intergenerational transmission as the backbone of maintenance, and Spolsky's language policy model, which looks at how practices, beliefs, and management interact.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to capture both the extent of language maintenance and the attitudes underlying it among Ngambaye traders in Moundou. The study was conducted in Moundou central market and street sales points, a commercial hub in southern Chad where Ngambaye speakers regularly interact with Chadian Arabic, the dominant lingua franca of the local market economy. The target population consisted of Ngambaye-speaking participants active in commercial settings: shop owners, market vendors, wholesalers, and customers. A total of 150 participants took part in the study. In terms of age, 25 were between 20–29, 78 between 30–39, and 47 between 40–49. The sample was predominantly male (125 men, 25 women), reflecting the composition of the commercial spaces observed. Regarding education, 34 participants had no formal schooling, 67 had primary-level education, and 49 had secondary-level education. Occupationally, the sample included 21 shop owners, 83 market vendors, 35 wholesalers, and 11 customers.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, supplemented by direct observation. The questionnaire covered five areas: demographic background, language use in commercial interactions, language maintenance practices, factors influencing language choice, and challenges and suggestions. A set of Likert-scale items measured participants' attitudes toward using Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic in business contexts, while direct observation was used to cross-check reported language use against actual practice during transactions. The questionnaire was administered on-site at participants' places of business, allowing data to be gathered in their natural setting, and observations were carried out during the same field visits to record which languages were actually used in exchanges. Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify dominant patterns in language choice and attitudes, while open-ended responses; particularly on perceived reasons for language shift and participant suggestions, were analyzed thematically to identify recurring categories.

RESULTS

Data were collected through a questionnaire and observation covering participants' demographic background, language use in business, language maintenance, the factors shaping language choice, and the challenges and suggestions participants raised. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the sample.

Table 1 Demographic Features of Participants (N = 150)

Variable	Catégorie/Category	N	%
Age	20–29	25	16.6
	30–39	88	58.7
	40–49	47	31.3
Genre / Gender	Homme / Male	125	83.3
	Femme / Female	25	16.6
Education level	No formal instruction	34	22.6
	Primary	67	44.6
	Secondary	49	32.6
Profession	Store owner/Boutique	21	14
	Market seller/Vendeur	83	55.3
	Wholesaler/Grossiste	35	23.3
	Client/Client	11	7.3
Total		150	100

The sample skewed toward the middle of the age range: 58.7% of participants were between 30 and 39, 31.3% between 40 and 49, and only 16.6% between 20 and 29. That weighting toward middle-aged adults is useful for a maintenance study, since this group sits between older, largely monolingual speakers and younger, more French- or multilingual-leaning generations.

Men made up 83.3% of the sample against 16.6% women, an imbalance that most likely reflects where the data was collected: markets and trading posts in this region are dominated by male vendors and wholesalers.

On education, 44.6% of participants had only primary schooling, 32.6% secondary, and 22.6% none at all. That relatively low level of formal education is worth keeping in mind when reading the attitude data later, since schooling tends to track with exposure to, and attitudes toward, official or lingua-franca languages like French. Occupationally, market vendors made up over half the sample (55.3%), followed by wholesalers (23.3%), shop owners (14.0%), and customers (7.3%), which places the sample squarely inside the informal trade sector, a setting built around frequent, functional multilingual contact.

Table 2 Language Choice When Serving Customers (N = 150)

Language(s) used	N	%
Ngambaye only	30	20
Arabe tchadien only	10	6.7
Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic	47	31.3
Ngambaye, Chadian Arabic and French	63	42
TOTAL	150	100

Asked which language(s) they use to serve customers, participants leaned heavily toward mixing rather than sticking to one. The largest group (42.0%) reported switching among all three available languages, Ngambaye, Chadian Arabic, and French, depending on the interaction, and a further 31.3% reported alternating specifically between Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic. Together these two multilingual categories cover 73.3% of the sample, which makes flexible, audience-adjusted code choice the norm in Moundou's markets rather than the exception.

Exclusive use of one language was comparatively rare: 20.0% reported using only Ngambaye and just 6.7% only Chadian Arabic. That low figure for Chadian Arabic alone is worth pausing on, since it is the region's lingua franca; vendors evidently don't lean on it in isolation but pair it with Ngambaye or French depending on who they're serving. This default pattern of switching, rather than fixed monolingual use, fits what the language-contact literature usually describes as a functionally distributed multilingual repertoire, where each language is kept for particular people or particular needs rather than one language pushing the others out. It's also a pattern worth setting against the attitude data further down, since using several languages in practice doesn't necessarily line up with how strongly people report feeling loyal to Ngambaye as a heritage language.

Table 3 Language Use Frequency in Business Interactions (N = 150)

Languages	N	%
Chadian Arabic	72	48.0
Ngambaye	61	40.7
French	17	11.3
Total	150	100

Chadian Arabic came out as the most frequently used language overall (48.0%), with Ngambaye close behind (40.7%) and French trailing well back at 11.3%. Between them, Chadian Arabic and Ngambaye account for



nearly 90% of reported frequent use, which underlines just how central both languages are to daily commercial life in Moundou.

This adds a useful layer to the language-choice data above. Table 2 showed that most vendors habitually mix languages; Table 3 shows that when a single language does dominate a given interaction, Chadian Arabic edges out Ngambaye slightly. That fits its role as a regional lingua franca, which likely gives it the advantage with customers of mixed or unknown linguistic background, while Ngambaye probably sees more frequent use with customers already known, or assumed, to share that identity.

French's marginal share (11.3%) suggests that despite its official status, it plays a limited role in Moundou's everyday spoken commerce, a pattern that echoes what's been reported for informal trade elsewhere in West and Central Africa. The low figure likely also tracks the education profile in Table 1: French proficiency in Chad is closely tied to years of formal schooling, and a large share of this sample had little of it. Taken together, this pattern, Chadian Arabic and Ngambaye jointly running the oral commercial exchange while French stays largely on the sidelines, supports the idea that Moundou's multilingual market ecology is actively sustaining Ngambaye rather than crowding it out.

Table 4 Attitudes Toward Language Use in Business (N = 150)

N°	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	I prefer using my mother tongue in business transactions	0	75	0	38	37	150
2	Speaking Ngambaye helps in preserving cultural identity	0	25	25	0	100	150
3	Speaking Chadian Arabic is important for successful business	0	0	0	48	102	150
4	Clients appreciate to be served in their preferred language	0	0	0	150	0	150
5	French replaces local languages in business communication	0	0	0	150	0	150
6	Local languages use reinforces confidence among buyers and sellers	0	0	0	25	125	150
7	Encourage youth to use local languages in business	0	0	25	100	25	150
8	Local languages should be continuously used in market places	0	0	26	74	50	150

Table 4 sets out attitudinal responses across eight statements touching on language, identity, and business practice. Opinion on Statement 1, preferring the mother tongue in transactions, was split roughly down the middle: half disagreed while the rest agreed or strongly agreed. That even split suggests mother-tongue preference isn't a value everyone holds equally in a transactional setting, likely because serving a linguistically mixed customer base tempers whatever affective preference a trader might otherwise have.

Statement 2 told a different story: two-thirds of participants strongly agreed that speaking Ngambaye helps preserve cultural identity, with the rest split evenly between disagreement and neutrality. Whatever ambivalence shows up around practical preference, then, the symbolic value attached to Ngambaye is held broadly and strongly.

Statement 3 drew unanimous endorsement: every participant agreed or strongly agreed that Chadian Arabic matters for business success, with no disagreement at all, which reflects just how settled the perception of its economic value is. Statements 4 and 5 were both unanimous as well: participants agreed across the board that



customers appreciate being served in their preferred language, and, just as unanimously, that French is not replacing local languages in business.

Statement 6 showed near-total agreement that local languages build trust between buyers and sellers (83.3% strongly agree, 16.7% agree, no disagreement). Statement 7 found strong support for encouraging young people to use local languages in business (66.7% agree, 16.7% strongly agree, the rest neutral, none opposed), and Statement 8 showed similarly broad support for continued use of local languages in markets (49.3% agree, 33.3% strongly agree, 17.3% neutral, no disagreement).

One result deserves closer attention: the unanimous agreement with Statement 5, that French isn't replacing local languages, sits next to frequency data showing French used in only 11.3% of interactions, well behind both Chadian Arabic and Ngambaye. That isn't really a contradiction; the two items are measuring different things. Statement 5 captures a perceived trend, while the frequency data captures current, everyday practice, and there are a few ways to read the gap between them. One is that respondents may sense French encroaching, in education, administration, media, youth aspiration, without French having actually displaced local languages in the spoken marketplace itself; attitudes often anticipate change before behavior does. Another is that French's advance may be happening in adjacent domains, signage, formal invoicing, dealings with younger or more educated customers, rather than in the face-to-face vending interactions this study focuses on. A third possibility is that the very fact respondents perceive French as encroaching, combined with their strong identity attachment to Ngambaye, points to a kind of linguistic vigilance that itself drives active maintenance rather than passive drift; communities that sense a threat to a heritage language often mobilize more consciously around it. Read this way, Statement 5 doesn't undercut the maintenance argument so much as sharpen it: maintenance appears to be happening despite, and partly because of, an acknowledged pressure from French.

Table 5 Factors Influencing Language Choice

Factors	N	%
Client's language	77	51.3
Sales / profit	0	0
Social status	43	28.7
Cultural identity	30	20.0
Total	150	100

Accommodating the customer's language was the clear leading factor (51.3%), consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory: traders adjust their language to whoever they're speaking with as a pragmatic move rather than out of a fixed preference. Profit or sale volume received no responses at all, which suggests participants don't experience language choice as directly tied to economic gain; it reads instead as socially and relationally motivated. Social status (28.7%) and cultural identity (20.0%) together account for roughly half the remaining responses, which means language choice still carries symbolic weight, prestige and belonging, alongside pure accommodation.

On perceived change in language use over the past decade, opinion was close to even: 52.7% said yes, 47.3% said no. Those who reported change pointed to Ngambaye speakers making more effort to speak Chadian Arabic, which hints at a gradual accommodation pressure specific to the business domain. This doesn't contradict the maintenance argument developed here, but it does complicate it a little: Ngambaye appears to hold its ground in-group and as an identity marker, in line with the earlier attitude data on identity and trust, while accommodation toward Chadian Arabic keeps increasing as a business necessity. Functional bilingualism, in other words, rather than a straightforward story of maintenance or shift.

Asked about the challenges of using Ngambaye in business, 65.3% said it "excites customers," generating goodwill and rapport, while 35.3% reported no challenges at all. Very few framed Ngambaye as a liability;



most treat it as an asset that draws customers in, which supports the maintenance argument directly, since using the language builds solidarity rather than getting in the way.

Asked which language dominates business today, 77.3% named Chadian Arabic and 22.7% named Ngambaye, and every participant who elaborated pointed to Chadian Arabic's role as Chad's lingua franca as the reason. On what would encourage continued Ngambaye use, 52.7% pointed to individual or community-level choice, simply continuing to speak it, while 47.3% called for more deliberate language management around Chadian Arabic's dominance.

Put together, participants readily accept that Chadian Arabic dominates structurally, as an externally imposed, functional necessity, without treating Ngambaye as a burden to use; most credit its survival to individual and community effort rather than policy. That points toward a diglossic complementarity: Chadian Arabic as the economic lingua franca, Ngambaye persisting through affective and identity-based motivations at the interpersonal level, which is the kind of nuanced maintenance-under-pressure picture this study set out to document.

CONCLUSION

Language maintenance among Ngambaye speakers in Moundou's markets is neither stubborn resistance nor quiet assimilation; it looks more like an ongoing, strategic negotiation between linguistic identity and economic pragmatism. Chadian Arabic has clearly settled into the role of dominant marketplace lingua franca, but Ngambaye speakers haven't abandoned their mother tongue in response. Most simply run a flexible multilingual repertoire, drawing on Ngambaye, Chadian Arabic, and French depending on who they're talking to, what the transaction is, and what feels socially at stake.

This negotiation involves three tensions. The first is practical versus symbolic: most participants favor Chadian Arabic because it's useful for business, but even more of them say Ngambaye matters for their cultural identity and for building trust with clients. So people value both languages for different reasons, rather than seeing them as competing.

The second is generational: participants were almost evenly split on whether things have changed over the last ten years. Those who said yes pointed to Ngambaye speakers using more Chadian Arabic, suggesting a slow shift driven by market pressure.

The third tension changes the picture. Participants agreed far more strongly that French threatens both local languages than they did about Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic being rivals. This suggests the real long-term concern isn't competition between Ngambaye and Chadian Arabic, but the growing presence of French.

The near-unanimous sense that customers appreciate being served in their own language, paired with strong support for continued local-language use in markets and for encouraging younger speakers to use Ngambaye, points to a real reservoir of goodwill that deliberate maintenance efforts could build on. But attitudes don't guarantee behavior on their own: Chadian Arabic's higher day-to-day frequency, despite favorable attitudes toward Ngambaye, is a familiar gap between what people say and what they do, one well documented in other language-contact settings.

These results reach beyond Moundou's markets. They suggest that in economically uneven multilingual settings, maintenance owes less to resisting a dominant lingua franca than to languages settling into complementary functional roles, one carrying identity and trust, the other carrying commercial reach. Future work could track language choice across generations over time, extend the comparison to other Chadian market towns, and look more closely at French's part as a third force shaping this bilingual balance. Any policy or community effort aimed at supporting Ngambaye's vitality would probably do better building on its existing ties to trust and identity in commercial life than trying to displace Chadian Arabic's established role as a trade language.



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