

# Songs: Language Choice and Verbal Art

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While describing language documentation methodology in Africa, Lüpke (2010: 67) notes that documenting the performance of verbal art often requires more than just a speaker and necessitates the documentation of the situational context. Childs et al. (2014: 169) advocate for documentation of the comprehensive language repertoire of a community in its sociolinguistic context rather than documenting use of a single speech variety within a multilingual reality. This presentation looks at the performance of poetic form by women in the ut-Ma□in language community in a variety of settings.

Paterson (2019: 8-9) lays out seven related speech varieties —ut-Fer, ut-Kag, ut-Ma□Ku□ur, ut-Ma□Jiir, ut-Ma□R□or, us-Us, and ut-Zuksun— under the cover term ut-Ma□in. In addition to the ut-Ma□in varieties, C'Lela and ut-Hun, neighboring languages, and the lingua franca, Hausa, are used in a range of social functions; English is the language of federal government and education; Arabic is used to express a social identity with macro-Islamic culture. However, each ut-Ma□in speaker's grasp of these various speech varieties differs.

Within recordings made while conducting language documentation fieldwork among ut-Ma□in speakers, many songs were not sung in ut-Ma□in. Rather, C'Lela, Hausa, and Arabic were used depending on the social context. In one case, a song within a folk narrative by an ut-Fer storyteller (Mama Iliya et al. 2013) was not intelligible to two ut-Ma□R□or speakers who were transcribing the story. My consultants clearly expressed that the challenge for translation was because “This is not our language”.

This presentation highlights the relationships between ut-Ma□in and C'Lela cultural contexts in which only some ut-Ma□in women embrace non-ut-Ma□in verbal art. Through analysis of recorded songs, discussion around the songs at the time of collection, discussion with other ut-Ma□in speakers elsewhere, and supplemental video conference interviews, I present hypotheses about the sociolinguistic dynamics that drive the use of particular languages in songs that may prove applicable to other multilingual environments.

## References

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