


Rialland, Annie (1979). Une langue à tons en terrasses: Le gulmancema. Thèse de doctorat de 3e cycle, université Paris V.


If multilingualism has been and is today a characteristic of cities, nowhere else but in the new cities of the world are the status and usage of languages in such dynamic flux. African cities therefore present themselves with urgency to historically oriented linguists who are concerned with the rise of dominant or standard languages: for example, Bangui for Sango, Kinshasa for Lingala, and Nairobi (among others) for Swahili. This book is therefore a precious contribution to a literature that is still too poor in quantity. (In establishing a bibliography on language in African cities, one might begin by resurrecting the studies by Epstein [1959] and Richardson [1961]).

The city of Ziguinchor in the lower part of Senegal was well chosen because of its relatively small size (in 1988, excluding foreigners, 117,937 inhabitants) and recent urbanization, not to speak of an interesting variety of competing languages (Wolof, Serer, Fulani, Diola, Manding, and others) including some from neighboring Guinea Bissau. And it is far enough away from Dakar to make the role of Wolof less predictable than it might have been. Add to these factors the fact that the author had access to quite a bit of historical and demographic information about the city, and one has almost a perfect context for the research project. One might regret that Juillard, on her own admission, acquired only a passive comprehension of Wolof and Portuguese Creole in the pursuit of her research (101, fn 2) — restricted therefore to the use of French — but we cannot pass judgment without knowing the facts of the history of her project.

The book is sociolinguistic in one of its senses only. Rather than focussing on the nature of a single language by analyzing patterns of use of linguistic variables in a variationist manner (although some variables are important to her [242]), Juillard describes what languages are found in the city, who uses them, and in what places and contexts. There are also micro- and macrocosmic
analyses. Her method, like that of some other French linguists working in Africa, should be understood, if only because it is different, not inferior, to what has characterized similar research on, for example, creoles, by mostly North American linguists.

The research was undertaken between 1987 and 1991, but was preceded by field work in 1985 (124). (Unfortunately, no precise chronology or information on duration of residence is provided.) Data on the use of languages were obtained by means of questionnaires, participant observation, and interviews — in which she or her assistants elicited information (88–89). One might therefore characterize her methodology to a large extent as anthropological. Apart from the fact that she had as her loci of language use the markets, various quartiers of the city, and foyers of different kinds, the sample, as the author admits (303), was not statistical in a rigorous sense. Nevertheless, the 699 school children who filled out questionnaires in the classroom were rather well-matched ethnolinguistically with their numbers in the city itself (148). Adding her own work on languages used in the markets to that undertaken previously — by herself and others — she obtained observations from multilingual assistants (one of whom spoke nine languages) of 250 exchanges in four markets in 1987 (125). Figures for other kinds of data-gathering encounters and hours of tape-recordings would have been appreciated.

The whole work is well organized thematically, and so are the chapters and sections within the chapters. They begin with questions to be answered and conclude with summaries of and observations (some of them quite subtle) on what had been learned. One is therefore struck by the intelligence of the book’s design and the author’s success in making comprehensible and convincing a great variety of data. I commend her also for not claiming to know more than she is entitled to know about some matters (e.g., 273, fn 4).

What I miss in this work, however, is a global summing up. I finished the book without having a vibrant picture of what is going on in Ziguinchor. In addition, the findings are not sufficiently related to those of other researchers. Since, for example, variationist research is concerned exclusively with modern industrial — and mostly western — states (see Chambers 1995; Samarin 1997), we would like to know if and to what extent her findings confirm what has been learned in this subfield of sociolinguistics. The book reveals what every Africanist would expect: that an African city cannot be nicely and neatly sampled by neighborhoods with respect to socio-economic class (or their equivalents) as cities in the industrialized west can. In fact, Ziguinchor demonstrates great variability with respect to language use in certain quartiers — even in certain ones where one ethnolinguistic group is dominant. Obtaining a rigorous sample of the population is therefore problematic, as I myself came to see in Bangui. Furthermore, although she quotes William Labov about females being in the lead of language change (277), she does not relate what she has learned on this topic, not even to point out that her work seems to support
the variationist claim — at least with respect to language spread (as my research on Sango in Bangui does not [Samarin 1995]). In fact, of the variationist
to specific languages, and nowhere is information subclassified. For example, for
environnement (sociolinguistique) all we get is a list of fifty-one different pages.
Here, then, is something of what can be indexed about females in a manner that
would have been more helpful:
conformism of, 278
Diola, 195, 219, 259, 265, 277
friendship groups, 229, 259
in inter-relations, 200
mothers speaking Wolof, 226
produce sellers in markets, 121, 124
relations with males, 263–264
using Portuguese Creole, 215
using Wolof outside quartiers, 238
What I would have liked to have seen in the book, moreover, is a thematic
focus — if not what North Americans call a theoretical one. And I would have
been more captivated — passionné, that is to say — by a book on the spread of
Wolof as the lingua franca of Ziguinchor, as elsewhere in Senegal, and its
acquisition as primary or first language. But that is no criticism of the book as
it now is.
This book is valuable to me as an Africanist, but also as a pidginist-creolist.
And I would recommend it to my colleagues in the latter community. Because
of their linguistic preoccupations (serial verbs, tense-aspect-and-mood, etc.), they
have not concerned themselves sufficiently with the urbanization (or with the
urban aspects of the creolization) of pidgins; Jourdan’s work on Solomon
Islands pidgin (not cited in Juillard’s) is an exemplary exception (Jourdan 1985,

For others the book’s value might be seen in the following list of keywords,
additional to what can be gleaned from the above: attitudes, code switching,
ethnicity, identities, koinéization, language mixing, language shift, marked vs.
unmarked usage, methodology, national language, prestige, religion.

This is a book, in the final analysis, for all Africanists, not merely Africanist
linguists. Social change is reflected in language use. This is the inescapable
conclusion from a work such as Juillard’s.