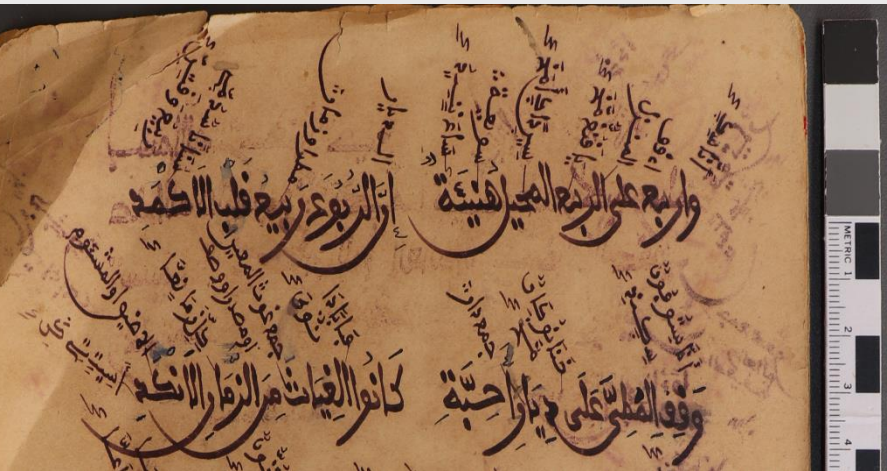


Soninke of the Islamic Manuscripts: A comparative overview of a written register and modern (spoken) Soninke



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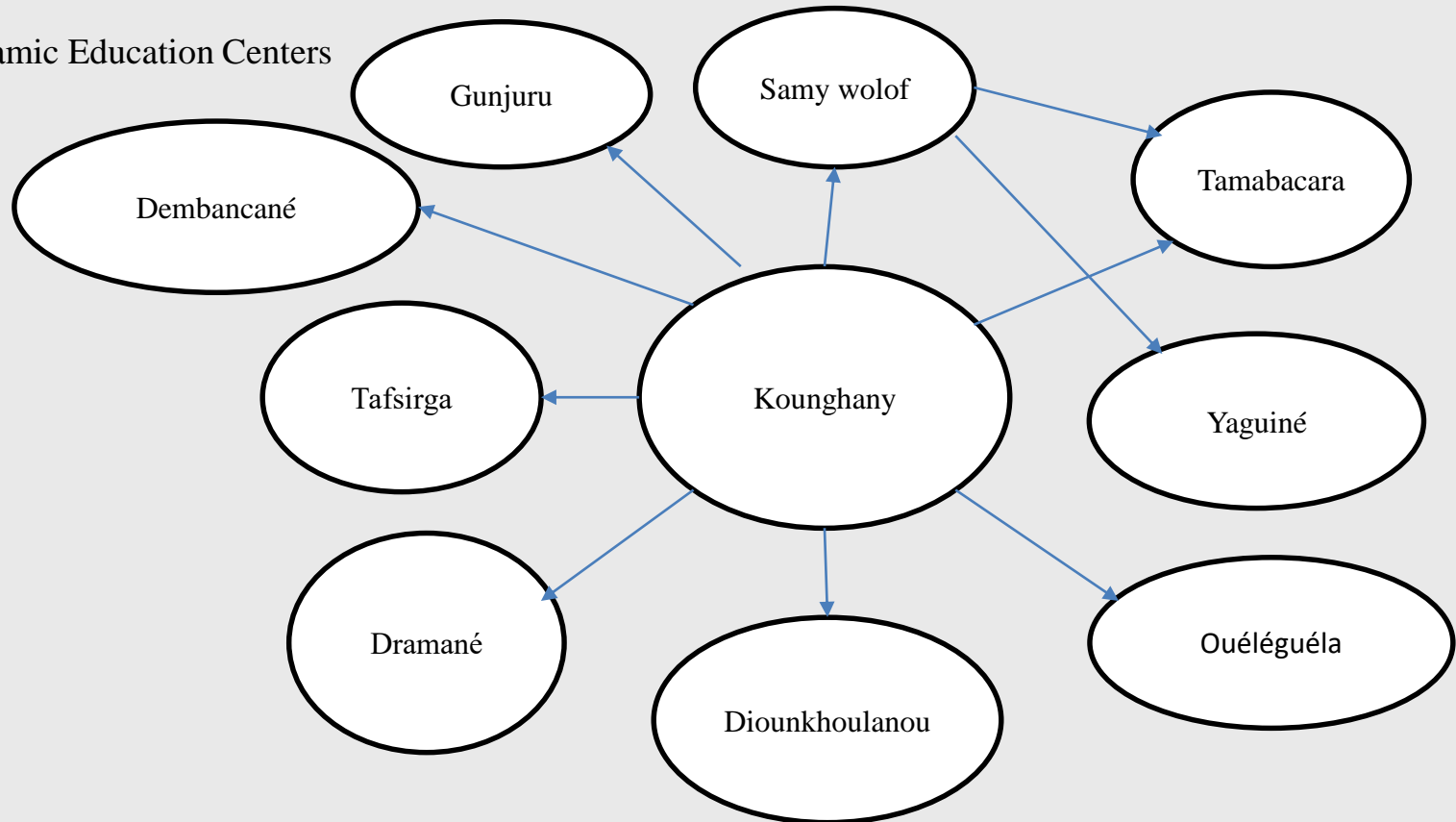
Structure of the presentation

- Introduction
- The soninke dialects
- The written register
- Phonological variation
- Lexical variation
- Borrowings from arabic
- Morphological
- Syntactic
- Conclusion
- References

Map on soninke geographical area



Soninke Islamic Education Centers



I. Introduction

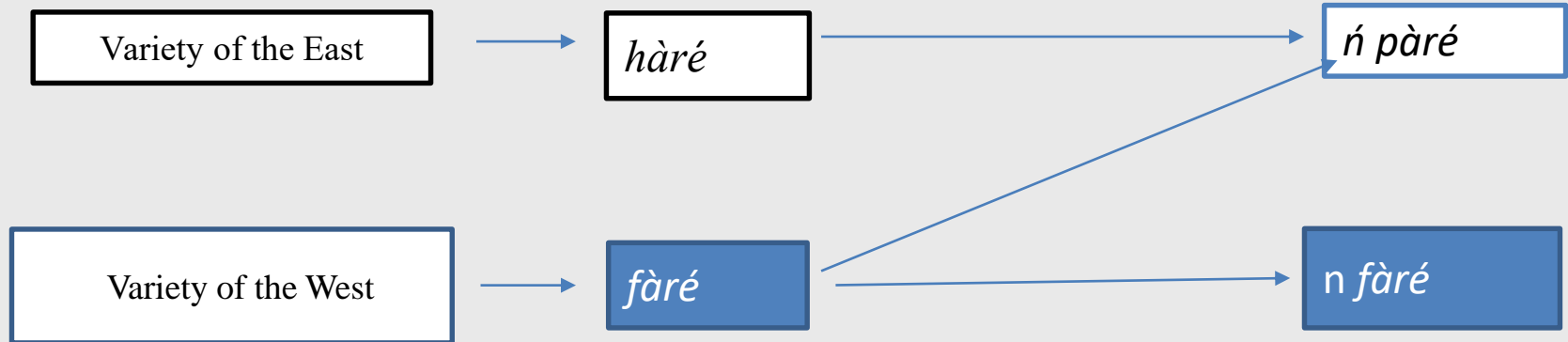
Many Islamic Manuscripts from Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and the Gambia contain annotations in Soninke. This presentation treats the written register in relation to the modern spoken varieties.

The existence of a learned register in Soninke Islamic manuscripts was first advanced by the members of the Old Mande Research Network (Ogorodnikova 2017:129). My own recent fieldwork has tentatively confirmed this register's existence, at least in written form. Here I use *register* to refer to sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups (Wardaugh 2010:48). It is clear that this written variety varies from the Modern Spoken Varieties (MSV)-- Gidimaxa, Gajaaga, Jaahunu and Kaedi--as regards to phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic features.

In what follows, I compare the linguistic features of the written register with the four above mentioned dialects. This presentation will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the written register and the modern oral varieties.

II. The Soninke dialects (Gidimaxa, Gajaaga, Jaahunu and Kaedi); the variety of the East: Jaahunu, Kaedi and the variety of the West: Gidimaxa, Gajaaga

hàre 'donkey'

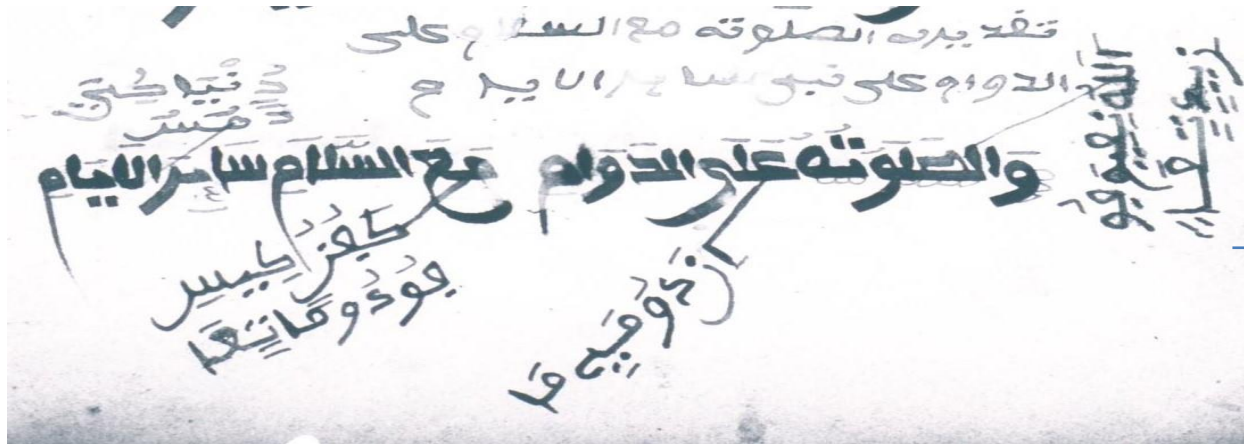
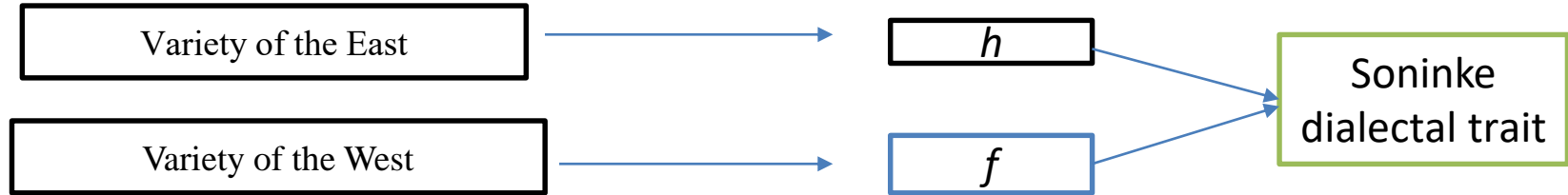


III. The Written Register

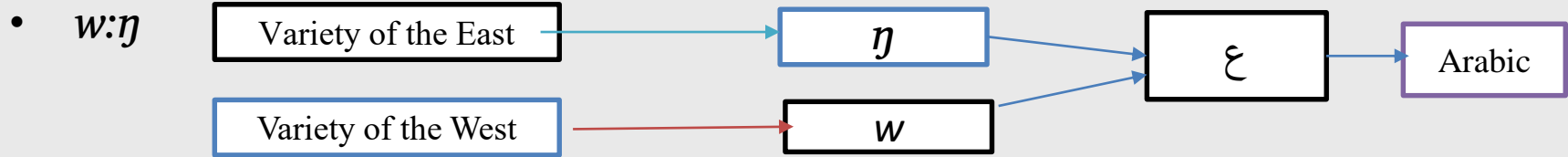
Among the four above mentioned dialects, we have observed that the Soninke Written Register (SWR) seems to be close to the varieties of the West namely Gidimaxa and Gajaaga, generally known for the Soninke traditionally Islamic education centres (my recent fieldworks).

This particular register has some peculiar characteristics as regards to phonology, morphology, lexical and syntactic features. Here, we will try to show in what ways, SWR is close to the varieties mentioned in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax.

IV. Phonological variation between the SWR and the modern varieties



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Surprisingly, we have observed that one of the varieties of the West uses / η / instead of /w/.

وَبَصِيرٍ	arabic
دُو عَرْنَأَي	soninke Ajami (SA)
< duw 'arināya >	graphemic representation (GR)
dò η àr-áanà yá	phonemic representation (PR)
and seer-AG POSTP	interlinear glosses
'and the seer'	translation

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V. Morphological variation

- *Plural marking: nu/ni*

Variety of the East → nu

Variety of the West → ni

وَقَدِمَ الْعَالَمِ	arabic
تِكْفُونُ كِنِ كَاكُمَا	SA
< tikifuw ^{nu} kani ⁿ kāku ⁿ mā >	GR
tégèfó- ^{nu} -n gánnínk-áaxù	PR
creature-PL-D ancient-NM	interlinear glosses
‘ancientness of creatures’	translation

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VI. Syntactic variation

سُبْحَانَهُ	arabic
سِنَاكَ أَنْتَكَ	SA
< si ⁿ nāku ā natu ⁿ ka ⁿ da ⁿ >	GR
sènnáaxù à ná tùnkán dà	constructed as written in Ajami
sènn-áaxù ḡá tùnká-n dà	PR for all the three varieties except for Gajaaga
pure-NM COP ruler-D for	interlinear glosses
S V O	syntactic glosses
‘holiness is for the Lord’	translation

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إِثْنِي			arabic
إِنَّكَ أَكْ حَتَّاجِي يِرْ			SA
< iku ā ⁿ ki ⁿ hatājiyi yiru >			GR
ì kú àn ké	hàtáajìyé-n	ǰérò	constructed as written in Ajami
ì kú dò àn ké	hàtáajìyé-n	ǰérò	for all the four varieties
3PL DEM.PL 2SG DEM	need-D	to.be.equal	morpheme per morpheme glosses
S	O	V	Syntactic glosses
'their need is equal to yours'			translation

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عَدَا	arabic
أَكَانَ كِي مُكُوْدُ	SA
< ā kāna kiy mukuwdu >	GR
à gá kén mòxó yá dī	constructed as written in Ajami
à ná kén mòxó yà dī	for all the four dialects
<u>3sg</u> <u>COP</u> <u>DEM</u> <u>manner</u> <u>FOC</u> <u>POSTP</u>	morpheme per morpheme glosses
S V O	syntactic glosses
'it is in this way'	translation

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v. Lexical

We have observed some lexemes which are particularly used in the various Islamic manuscripts in the context of teaching or learning.

وَإِكْرَاهِ	arabic
دُو كَتَمَيِ	SA
< duw katamayi >	GR
dò xàtámèyé	PR
'and effort'	translation



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عَنْ كُلِّ هَذَا جَلَّ	arabic
مَعَ كُتُبِ بِي سُو مَا	SA
<ma‘a kutu biy suw mā >	GR
màxánkútò bèsú mà	PR
description everyone lord	interlinear glosses
‘Lord of all descriptions’	translation




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VII. Borrowings from Arabic

• we noticed many loan words from Arabic to Soninke throughout the Islamic manuscripts

وَجْهَلٌ	arabic
دُو جَاهِلَاكُ	SA
< duw jāhilāku ⁿ >	GR
dò <i>jāhīl</i> -áaxù	PR
and ignorance-NM	interlinear glosses
‘and ignorance’	translation

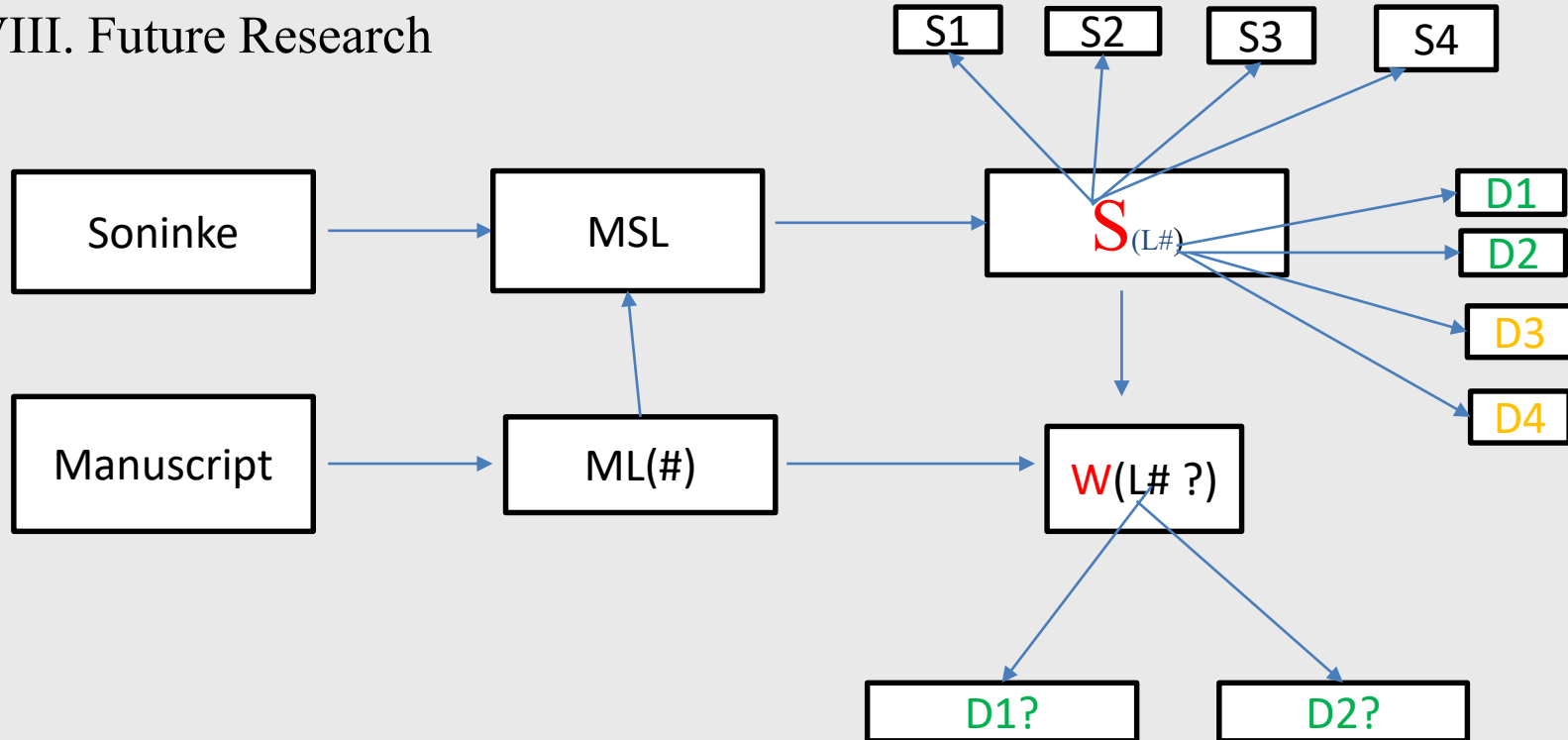


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وَلَازِمٌ	arabic
مَعَا نِي مَكْتُ لَازِمَنْ عَا	SA
<ma‘ā ni makutu lāzimana ‘ā >	GR
mánxà ní màxánkùtó lājímàná ṛà	PR
What COP description necessitate POSTP	interlinear glosses
“Who necessitates the description”	translation

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VIII. Future Research



VII. Conclusion

This presentation compares the SWR with the MSV in order to show which of the four dialects is used in the various Islamic manuscripts as a written form. These known dialects are Gidimaxa, Gajaaga, Jaahunu and Kaedi. It seems clear that the SWR presents features which might be closer to the varieties of the West that includes Gidimaxa and Gajaaga, where there is a systematic use of *f* instead of *h* word-initially. What is yet to be understood is whether it is the variety of Gidimaxa or Gajaaga which is utilised as the written form in soninke Islamic manuscripts.

At the current stage of research, we are not in a good position to take a position. In the future research, we will deepen our analysis with the recordings of each dialect in order to see the possible relation with the written variety for comparison purpose which includes the analysis of their vocalism and consonantism with other isoglosses which can help understand the type of Written Register.

It seems clear to me that in the context of tafsir, scholars use various varieties thus every scholar uses his variety. The variety used in the written form seems to be uniform in general.

However, during our recent fieldtrip research in Mali and Senegal, based on the interviews the majority of the scholars believes empirically that the written variety could be the variety of Gajaaga. This hypothesis will be confronted with the datasets and we will see whether it is to confirm or not. This paper which is far from being exhaustive contributes to a better understanding of soninke written register in the Islamic manuscripts.

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In Gunjuru, during a teaching session with Oustaz Sidiki Sacko.