INVESTIGATION INTO THE LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF THE MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS: CASE STUDY OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES OF BAMAKO

Moulaye KONE

Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (ULSHB)

moulayekone2@gmail.com

&

Balla DIANKA

Institut des Sciences Appliquées, Université des Sciences, des Techniques et des Technologies de Bamako USTTB

balla.dianka@yahoo.fr

&

Aldiouma KODIO

Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (ULSHB)

aldioukodio@yahoo.fr

Abstract : This research explored the multilingual students' linguistic background and how they make use of their linguistic repertoires in the capital city of Bamako.It has also identified the multilingual students' mother tongues and described their choices of language of communication with other people and their community members in the streets of Bamako. A mixed method (qualitative-quantitative) approach was used to collect the data. The two tools (questionnaire and interviews) have given better insight into the subject under investigation. The results revealed 17 indigenous languages as mother tongues of the multilingual students. Both data showed that the majority of the students are able to use two or three languages in their linguistic repertoires. The data also revealed that the most used national language in the multilingual students' repertoire in Bamako is Bamanankan. It is used at 69% by the multilingual students as their daily language of communication with other people and at 63% with their community members in the streets of Bamako.Although the study is based on the Malian students, it intends to show up new directions in multilingualism studies in Mali and in the world. More interestingly and significantly, the study will light up the linguistic background of some Malian students. In other words, it will provide us with data on how students become bi- or multilingual. This research will show up some evidence about the manipulation of multilingual students' linguistic repertoire in an urban setting in Bamako.

*Keywords***:** language use, linguistic repertoire, multilingualism, national language,

Introduction

Mali is located in one of the most linguistically diverse continents in the world. The number of languages varies between 1. 200 to 2. 000 languages (Grimes 2000; Heine & Nurse 2000; Ethnologue 2005). Like many other countries on the continent, Mali also appears to share that linguistic diversity holding several languages. According to estimates by Calvet (1992), Canut & Dumestre (1993), there are roughly 20 languages; while Maho (2001) names twenty-eight (28) languages including French. In addition to these findings, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) counts fifty (50) endigenous languages; *Ethnologue (*2005: 141) counts up to sixty-six (66) languages (SIL 2017).

As the rest of African countries, Mali also is in favour of giving more values to the national languages. However, in Mali there are no clear boundaries between ethnic groups
due to the mixing and assimilation of populations. However, the government has recognized thirteen languages affiliated to the ethnic background : the Bamanankan (Bamanan), Bomu (Bobo), bozo (bozo), Dɔgɔsɔ (dogon), Fulfulde (peul), Hassanya (maure), Mamara (miniyanka), maninkakan (malinke), Soninke (sarakole), songhay (sonrhaï), syenara (sénoufo), Tamasheq (Tuareg) and Xassonke (khassonké) (Konate et al.2010).

So, the study of multilingualism is seen as a means for better understanding of all types of language acquisition and learning, maintenance and attrition" (Aronin, Britta, 2009).
In other words, it involves the study of the language systems in contact, the functions of the languages in society, the groups or communities in contact, and the speech of individuals using more than one language (Clyne, 1998).Also, it is at the same time an individual and a social phenomenon, and is conceived/defined as the ability of an individual to use languages in society (Cenoz, 2013). The term multilingualism is of two types: individual and social multilingualism. In other words, multilingual people are individuals who are proficient in more than one language. In fact, there is always a question of degree ranging from knowledge of a few words to full competency in more than one language (Kowar, 2012; Edward, 1994). While, social multilingualism

involves the coexistence of several languages within the same society (Kowar, Darquenne, Walde, Schenk, & Pénzes, 2012; Deumert, 2011).

Multilingualism is not a recent domain of investigation in social sciences. Thus, the earliest theory and study on language acquisition of multilinguals date back to the eighteen and nineteen centuries. However, what attracted the attention of several people is Ronjat's 1913 description of six types of multilingual acquisition in childhood, following his son, Louis, who grew up speaking both French and German (Romaine, 1995; Deumert, 2011).

Apart from Ronjat's theory, a more appropriate theory for this study is the interactionist/ constructivist theories of Vygotsky in which the sociolinguistic environment of the individual bilingual or multilingual is very important. The sociolinguistic environmental approach of Vygotskyan theory is widely supported by a holistic view of multilingualism and focuses on multilingual language use in social contexts. It takes into account the interaction between multilingual speakers and the communicative context. Being a competent multilingual implies acquiring skills to be accepted as a member of a community of practice. While engaging in language practices, multilingual speakers shape this context. Nowadays, the communicative context is often multimodal and can combine visuals, sound, texts, and other semiotic symbols. A holistic view of multilingualism sees multilingual competence as linked to the social context in which language practices take place (Cenoz, 2013:13).

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism are realities accepted in the daily life of the Malian population shown by the literature above. In particular, the students are more concerned because, most of the time, they do not have a fixed place for their curriculum. Hence, monolinguals among Malian students become even a myth rather than a reality, because the students live in multilingual communities which reinforce them with additional languages at and outside school.

Importantly, after the baccalaureate, the majority of learners are directed to the Capital city of Bamako for their undergraduate studies. As a result, the capital city is the place where students' linguistic repertoire is manipulated. Therefore, the choice in

the use of linguistic repertoire poses problems to the multilingual students in their communication in the street of Bamako.

In view of this, the present study was undertaken to provide insights on the linguistic history of the multilingual students while at the same time attempting to inform the readers about the way the latter use the content of their linguistic repertoire in Bamako. The study aims to achieve the following objectives **(1)** to identify the number of languages forming the students' linguistic repertoire; **(2)** identify the mother tongues of the multilingual students; and **(3)** to determine the main reasons behind the choice for the most spoken national languages by the multilinguals with their peers (community members) in the streets of Bamako.

1. Methodology

The objective of this study is to investigate the linguistic background of the multilingual students of the ULSHB. This objective is achieved by answering the following research questions:

1- What is the number of languages forming the students' linguistic repertoire?

2- What are the mother tongues of the multilingual students of ULSHB?

3- What are the mains reasons behind these choices?

1.1. Design

The researchers have adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which is perhaps the most popular form of mixed methods design in educational research (Creswell, 2012). The researchers have proceeded with a sequential data collection giving priority to the qualitative data. Instead of collecting data at the same time and merging the results, the method consists in first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. For data analysis, the researchers used the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994) which is more appropriate for data triangulation.

The first instrument used in this study was the questionnaire for collecting quantitative data and the second tool used was the interview to gather the qualitative ones. For the purpose of the study the questions designed to the participants were

largely open-ended questions and closed questions in quantitative data collection. The *Semi-structured interview* was the option adopted by the researchers allowing students to answer the researchers' questions freely with no imposed answers during the qualitative data collection.

1.2. Site

Bamako is the capital city of Mali, where several ethno-linguistic groups coexist (skattum, 2010). The Bamanan represent 40.9% of the population, the Soninke 14%, the Fulani 13.6%, the Malinké 9.2%, the Songhays 5.3%, the Dogons 2.5%, the Miniankas 2.3%, the Senoufo 2.1% and others 1.8% (source: District town hall of Bamako 2001) in Cisse (2014).

However, Bamanankan is by far the most spoken language in the city as L1 and L2 (Skattum 2008, Dumestre1998). Bamako is also a pole of university studies. The major universities of the country are located in Bamako; that situation compels the majority of the baccalaureate holders to come to Bamako for university studies. So, the University of Arts and Humanities of Bamako is used for the ground research inquiries. The specific interest in this area is that, the majority of the students come from different regional areas having different linguistic background.

1.3. Population and sampling

The population of this research is the 1016 University students who filled up the survey questions and returned them to the researchers. In normal way, it is neither possible, nor desirable to study the whole population. From the 1016 students the researchers found that 552 students were bi-multilinguals who stand as the research sample.

1.4. Procedure

After the random sampling being used as the method for selecting the 552 sample subjects, then, it was necessary for the researchers to distinguish between those samples that fit in the study and those that did not. The current study concerns

students who speak more than one national language are considered as bi-multilinguals. After the probability sampling, the researchers have done a purposive sampling in the second sequential sampling. This time, during that purposive sampling, the investigators have chosen 59 samples who have been interviewed to collect the qualitative data

1.5. *Data Treatment and Analysis*

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in French then translated into English. However, the researchers have mainly used the *Sphinx* software of quantitative data treatment which is more efficient in this kind of data analysis. On the other side, the qualitative data were treated by the researchers as follows: we first started to listen to the participants' audios then transcribed them in formal French. After that first work done, the transcripts were then translated into English for the analysis. Then, both data have been combined interactively for more reliability and easy understanding of the subject.

2. Results and Discussions

The results describe the multilingual students' linguistic repertoire in Bamako. The exploration begins with (1) the identification of the number of national languages in the multilingual students linguistic repertoire; (2) the mother tongues of multilingual student participants; (3) multilinguals' most spoken languages in the Streets of Bamako in Daily Communication with people (Unknown); (4) multilinguals' most spoken languages in the Streets of Bamako with Community members.

2.1. *Students' Linguistic Repertoire in Bamako*

The findings obtained from the students' survey revealed responses about their linguistic repertoire which are provided in *Table 1*. However, the*Figure1*can be connected with the data in the *Table 1 below*

Figure 1: Graph of students' repertoires.
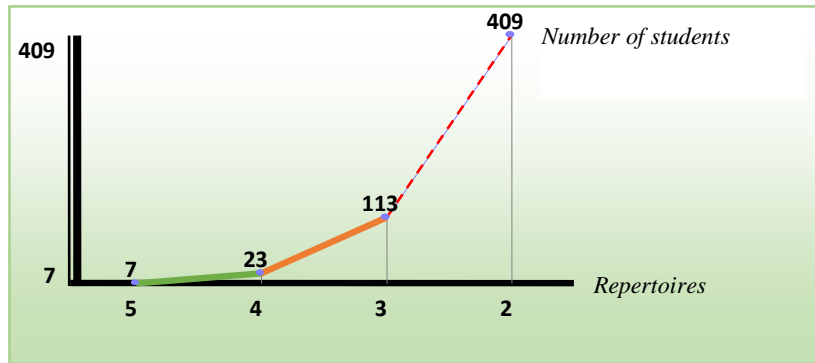
The line chart on the above figure shows that there is a significant difference between frequencies from two (2) to three (3) and four (4) to five (5) at 1-p = 96.128. The results reveal that the majority of the 552 students are able to use two (2) and three (3) languages. The most important number is 409 students (74.1%), who have two (2) languages in their repertoire. This score is followed by that of 113 students (20.5%) who speak three (3) languages. Only 23 students (4.2%) are able to speak four (4) languages. The last score is that of seven (7) students (1.3%) who can speak five (5) languages. These results are congruent with the interviewees' answers. At that level, all the students who have acquired four (4), five (5) and six (6) languages were interviewed, in addition to some other students from the other categories (two (2) and three (3) languages speakers.

Table 1 The Linguistic Repertoire of the Overall Surveyed Students.

Repertoires	Nbr. Of Citation.
5	7 (1.3%)
4	23 (4.2%)
3	113 (20.5%)
2	409 (74.1%)
TOTAL	552 (100%)

2.2. *The Mother Tongue of Multilingual Student Participants*

Individual Language development starts generally by his /her own native language or mother tongue, also often called L1. The results obtained from the surveyed students give a global view of the mother tongue of the multilingual students. *Table 2*presents the students' mother tongues.

Table2: The Mother Tongue of the student Participants

National Languages		Number of Native Speakers	% of Speakers
1	Bamanankan	120	21.50%
2	Fulfulde	49	8.80%
3	Sarakole	37	6.60%
4	Dɔgɔsɔ	70	12.50%
5	Songhay	60	10.70%
6	Bozo	8	1.44%
7	Malinke	44	7.90%
8	Mamara	59	10.60%
9	Bomu	40	7.20%
10	Khasonke	7	1.30%
11	Syenara	43	7.70%
12	Tamasheq	6	1.10%
13	Hassanya	3	0.50%
14	Kakolo	2	0.40%
15	Samogo	9	1.60%
16	Moré (Mossi)	1	0.2%
17	Haoussa	1	0.20%
TOTAL			**100%**

Therefore, nine (9) languages gather the significant scores from the participants in *Table2*. The first three top languages used as mother tongues are: Bamanankan, Dɔgɔsɔ and Songhay. The first score that attracts one's view is the Bamanankan score. That language is the mother tongue of 120 students out of 552 participants, which alone represents 21.50% of the recorded students. The second position is ranked by Dɔgɔsɔ with 12. 50%, representing 70 surveyed students. That is followed by the score of the Songhay language. 10.70% of the surveyed students have Songhay as L1. This number corresponds to 60 participants of the 552 students.

The second top three (3) languages used by the surveyed students as L1 are: Fulfulde and Malinke. The Mamara language ranks after the Songhay language as far as the number of L1 speakers is concerned. It is the L1 of 59 students, representing 10.60% of the total number. The Fulfulde language ranks fifth; it totalizes 8.80% of the surveyed students. That percentage corresponds to the L1 of 49 students. The sixth position is occupied by the Malinke language, a major language mostly spoken in the region of Kayes. It is the L1 of 44 students, rating 7.90% of the total participants.

The last three major languages used as the L1 of the students are: Syenara, Bomu and Soninke. The seventh place is held by one of the most important language spoken in most regional areas of Sikasso, Syenara. That language is used as the tonguemother of 43 surveyed students, representing 7.70% of the total number. The Bomu is the native language of the Bobo ethnic group; the majority is from the region of Segu. As a result, it is used as the L1 of 40 surveyed students, corresponding to 7.20% of the whole population. Similar to Bomu, the Soninke is the native language of Soninke people. An important number of its community lives in the region of Koulikoro; however, the majority settled in the region of Kayes. That language Soninke is the mother tongue of 37 surveyed students, representing 6.60% of the total number. In short, Soninke is the last major language used as the L1 of the multilingual students.

Besides, some national languages are used as the L1 with a very small number of native speakers. From that category, the first three languages: Samogo, Bozo and Khasonke, they also share the same number. Hence, there are native speakers of Samogo, a regional language spoken areally by some small proportions in the very south of the region of Sikasso. It is spoken by nine surveyed students as their mother tongue. They represent 1.60% of the overall participants. Not so far from the Samogo score are the Bozo and Khasonke languages. The former is used by 8 (1.44%) and the latter used by 7 (1.30%) as the students' L1. These two languages do not have similar vocabulary and native speakers. Khasonke is the native language of Khasonke people. They dominantly live in the region of Kayes, neighboured by the Malinke and Soninke ethnic groups. On the other hand, Bozo is the native language of the bozo people. They mostly live in the region of Mopti.

In addition to the above languages, Tamasheq and Hassanya are used as the L1 of a few proportions of the surveyed students. Both languages are the L1 of some ethnic groups, namely, Tuareg and Moorish. These people originate from the Sahel zones. Tamasheq is the mother tongue of six students, representing 1.10% of the 552 speakers. On the other hand, Hassanya is the L1 of three surveyed students, which corresponds to 0.50% of the same total number.

The third group of languages used as mother tongue of the surveyed students is in the same category of less significant scored languages. However, they are the last languages having the smallest scores. Some of them are nearly extinct languages as far as the number of surveyed students' L1s is concerned. These include Kakolo, and Somono languages. The Kakolo language is only used by two students, representing 0.40% of the overall students. It is the native language of the Kakolo ethnic group and very similar to the Soninke language with 99% of intelligibility.

The last two languages of that type are the Haoussa language and Moore languages. Hence, one student pointed Haoussa as his mother tongue, representing 0.20% of the overall participants. As for the Moore language, it is also the L1 of one student. This language is not a national language of Mali, but spoken in the region of Mopti as a transitional language. It is a national language of Burkina Faso. No matter that is, the study is interested in all the languages spoken in Mali that are mentioned by the participants. The Mossi language (Moore) is spoken on the national territory by a few proportions of Malians, enough to deal with it.

2.3. Multilinguals' most Spoken Languages in the Streets of Bamako in Daily Communication with People (Unknown)

To begin with, there is a positive connection between the two findings (questionnaire and interviews). Both results reveal that the majority (47) of the informants have mentioned Bamanankan as the language of communication with people they do not know. Besides, a very few interviewees (10) still use Bamanankan with French or with another national language because they do not yet master Bamanankan.

These informants generally use Bamanankan with unknown people in the streets of Bamako because they find that everyone understands this language which is the most exposed. So, they do not even think long about this issue; they automatically choose Bamanankan. It is also the most spoken language in Mali and cannot be challenged by another language because it has already imposed itself in Bamako. Of course, it is the milieu that imposes Bamanankan language on the speakers. For example, the Dɔgɔsɔ is not spoken everywhere in Bamako, but once in the region of Mopti, Dogon students dare not hesitate to speak Dɔgɔsɔ with strangers.

Similarly, some informants use Bamanankan because they do not have the choice; otherwise they rather like to speak their native languages. Once in Bamako, it is compulsory to speak Bamanankan because it is the country's national language of wider communication. Not everyone understands French, Songhay and Tamasheq languages in the streets of Bamako. Another reason is that, if you do not speak this language in Bamako, it is sometimes impossible to live with people around. Many people speak this language more than French and other national languages. They also state that even the Songhays who are living in Bamako speak more Bamanankan in the streets than the Songhay language.

Hence, they think that if everyone should speak his mother tongue in the capital city of Bamako, it will become nonsense. Bamanankan is the dominant language in Bamako, so everyone should try to understand and use that language once in the district.

Many of them agree that this is the language which is spoken in public transportation, in the market and at the meeting places. So, it is obvious to use it in the streets of Bamako. Not only Bamanankan is spoken in the streets of Bamako by everyone, but it is also by the majority of Malians outside Bamako. The Senufo informant in the group thinks that even in Sikasso city, not everybody understands the Senufo language; so, it is not worth trying to use it in the streets of Bamako;

The remaining 10 informants use French only or often with Bamanankan, because they do not understand Bamanankan well enough or not at all. Moreover, they also speak French or English with some foreigners. Some of them speak both Fulfulde

and Bamanankan in down street of Bamako. Most often, they use Fulfulde with friends at the "whereabouts"[1]. However, if they want to ask something with unknown people, Bamanankan is used.   The others who cannot speak Bamanankan are obliged to use either French or their L1s. This is the case of some informants who would like to communicate in Bamanankan, but they cannot get by. These results are congruent with the overall surveyed students' results in *Table 3*, below.

Table 3: Most Spoken Languages in the Streets of Bamako in Daily Communication**.**

National Languages/ Others	Nbr. Cit. / 552	%
Bamanankan	380	68.84
French	242	43.84
English	17	3.08
Dɔgɔsɔ	1	0.18
Songhay	1	0.18
Bomu	1	0.18
Fulfuldé	1	0.18
Soninke	1	0.18
Bozo	0	-
Xaasingaxanŋo	0	-
Syenara	0	-
Tamasheq	0	-
Arabic/ Hasanya	0	-
Maninkakan	0	-
Mamara	0	-
Samogo	0	-
Kakolo	0	-

Table 3 indicates that 68.84% of the survey respondents have mentioned Bamanankan in the table as their daily language of communication with unknown people in the streets of Bamako. Besides, French is the language of communication in the streets by 43.84%. English unexpectedly holds the third place with 3% of the participants. Therefore, that result might have been affected by the research

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[1]Generally, it is a place where young generations meet and share some cups of tea, also playing cards is another main activity there. It is commonly known in the name of 'Grin'in Mali, so the communicative language in such areas depends on the dominant ethnic group members there.

population, because the questionnaire was distributed to English department's students only.

2.4. *Multilinguals' most Spoken Languages in the Streets of Bamako with Their Community Members in Bamako*

The results from the informants illustrate the use of the informants' native languages with their relatives in the streets in Bamako. Again, the results seem to be similar to the previous ones described just above. Students use their mother tongues with people from the same social origins. Besides, they also use Bamanankan or French. The results reveal that a great number of informants prefer to use Bamanankan with their relatives in downtown of Bamako rather than their mother tongues.

18 out of 57 informants use Bamanankan with their community members in down town of Bamako. They gave some additional reasons for their use of Bamanankan instead of their own native languages. First of all, the Bamanan informants have no problem because they already have Bamanankan as L1. In this context, some Bamanan informants stated that it is necessary for the community members to use Bamanankan because they are from the Bamanan ethnic group and villages where Bamanankan is the only language widely spoken. The results also reveal that some Bobo informants give priority to Bamanankan most of the time, with the community members in the streets, but if they are close friends, they may speak Bomu.

The interview results also show that, not every informant uses Bamanankan with the relatives. There are 15 informants who stated that they use the Songhay language with people from the same ethnic background in the streets of Bamako. Generally, people they talk to in the city centre are already identified as Songhay. They use Bamanankan or French with the others. However, some people like using Songhay language with people from Gao or all the northerners because it brings them closer to their father's land. They find it necessary because they can better express in Songhay than in another language, even though there are sometimes problems of intelligibility

between songhoy of Gao and that from Timbuktu. This often requires them to speak with each other in Bamanankan to facilitate communication. Also, not all Tuareg speak Tamasheq, but generally understand Songhay spoken in Gao.

Moreover, seven (7) informants use the Dɔgɔsɔ language in the streets of Bamako when they see the people from the same native places. This makes them relax and share a good time with the nationals. The Dogon informants testify that they do not all speak the same dialect; consequently, when there is no intelligibility between them, they use Bamanankan. In addition, the use of Dɔgɔsɔ also depends on the type of Dɔgɔsɔ that a person speaks. They argue that the use of Dɔgɔsɔ is for respect to the nationals, especially elderly people; otherwise, with young people, they generally speak French or Bamanankan.

Furthermore, there are five (5) Fulani informants who use Fulfulde with people sharing the same ethnic group with them. All of them speak Fulfulde with the members of their community on the streets in Bamako. They do not hesitate talking with the nationals in Fulfulde when they meet them passing through the city. Sometimes, they start communication in Bamanankan and if no one else is around, then they turn it in Fulfulde.

The next participants who use their L1 to communicate with the relatives in the down town of Bamako are three (3) bozo informants. However, the communication in Bozo depends on the intellectual level of the interlocutor. If it is with an illiterate villager, they use Bozo. It is even easier for them to speak Bozo than Bamanankan. In contrast, if it is with a literate person, they use all the time French or Bamanankan. Therefore, it is not easy tosee a Bozo speaking in Bozo in the streets of Bamako. Sometimes, when they see someone who resembles a Bozo, they talk to him in Bozo; they usually find that these individuals do not understand Bozo language.

One more language used with students' relatives in the streets of Bamako is the Soninke language. They use Bamanankan with unknown people, when they do not know the identity of the interlocutors. Otherwise, in case, they know that he or she is a Soninke, they speak Soninke with him or one of the regional languages of Kayes. Similarly, some Tuareg informants also give priority to Tamasheq. They speak Tamasheq with Tuareg friends or with northerners in general. Otherwise, if the

relatives understand Bamanankan very well, they would talk in that language. The last participant who uses his L1 in the streets with the relatives is a Bobo informant. He uses Bomu with people from Tominian in Bamako. Besides, they urge each other to speak Bomu because it allows them to show their identity, and their belonging to a community in this country. It can be concluded from the interview results that Bamanankan is the most used language between multilingual students and their community members in the streets of Bamako. These interview results are supported by the survey findings in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Most Spoken Languages in the Streets of Bamako with Community members.

National Languages / Others	Nbr. Cit./552	%
Bamanankan	468	63.20%
French	162	21.90%
Dɔgɔsɔ	19	2.60%
Fulfuldé	16	2.20%
Songhay	13	1.80%
Bomu	12	1.60%
Maninkakan	11	1.50%
English	11	1.50%
Soninke	9	1.20%
Syenara	7	0.90%
Mamara	6	0.80%
Xaasongaxanonŋo	4	0.50%
Tamasheq	2	0.30%
Bozo	0	0.00%
Arabic/Hasanya	0	0.00%
Kakolo	0	0.00%
Samogo	0	0.00%

The results of the survey show that Bamanankan is used at 63%. This implies that 468 surveyed students out of 552 use Bamanankan with their community members in the streets of Bamako. French still ranks the second place with 21%. This time, 10 other national languages are used by the students with the community members. The most used is Dɔgɔsɔ with 2.60%, followed by Fulfulde with 2.20% and

Songhay with 1.80%. Bomu comes after with 1.60%, in addition, Maninkakan representing 1.50%, followed by Soninke 1.20%. The next rank is held by Syenara with 0.90% and Mamara by 0.80%, followed by Xaasongaxanŋo, scoring 0.50%. Tamasheq scores 0.30%.

The exception in this table is the missing survey score of the three Bozo students. They mentioned in the interviews that they use the Bozo language with their relatives in Bamako. The bozo informants might have been influenced by the presence of the interviewer, or might have just told lies because such statements are not made on the survey sheets.

Conclusion

In short, this study shed light on the linguistic background of the multilingual students and how they make use of their linguistic repertoires in the capital city of Bamako. We have identified 17 languages from the data, as native languages of the multilingual students. Both data have revealed that Bamanankan, which represents 69%, is the most spoken national language in daily communication of the majority of the multilingual students with unknown people in the streets of Bamako. Bamanankan is also used at 63% by students to communicate with their community members in the streets of Bamako. In addition to Bamanankan which is mostly used by the multilingual students in the streets and French unexpectedly used by21%, some national languages such as Dͻgͻsͻ, Fulfulde, Songhay, Bomu, and Soninke are also occasionally used by their native speakers with their relatives in the streets of Bamako. Similar to other scientific contributions, the goal of this study is to inform the researchers, teachers, students and university stakeholders about the linguistic repertoire use of the multilingual students in the city of Bamako.

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