

# LEARNING BY HEART IN QUR'ANIC AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN CAMEROON

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*Leslie C. Moore*

**Abstract:** In both Qur'anic and public schools in Maroua, Cameroon, the development of competence in a second language is fundamental, and rote learning is the primary mode of teaching and learning in both types of schooling. Through the lens of language socialization theory, I have examined rote learning as it is practiced in Maroua schools and reframed it as a tradition of learning and teaching I call 'guided repetition'. In this article I discuss similarities and differences in how and why guided repetition is done, linking interactional patterns with the second-language competencies and the ways of being that children are expected or hoped to develop through Qur'anic and public schooling. While the use of guided repetition in both types of schooling is rooted in very similar goals for and ideologies of second-language acquisition, it is accomplished in culturally distinct ways to socialize novices into 'traditional' and 'modern' subjectivities.

**Keywords:** Cameroon, discipline, education, guided repetition, language, memorization, Qur'an

In Qur'anic school and public schools in northern Cameroon, most instructional time is spent on the teaching and learning of second-language texts. Children spend nearly all of their time at Qur'anic school learning verses of the Qur'an in Arabic, while at public school they may spend as much as one-third of each school day learning French dialogues. In both settings, novices are guided by experts as they memorize a text and master its vocal and embodied rendering, often with little or no comprehension of the memorized material. Commonly called rote learning, such practice has for centuries been part of the educational experience of children around the world.



Rote learning is foundational to the traditional pedagogies associated with many religious movements. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism all place “a strong emphasis on verbatim oral mastery of a body of essential written teachings and ritual” (Wagner 1983a: 112). In many communities, learners do not understand the language of the texts they memorize, nor are they expected to. Jews memorize Hebrew texts (Drazin 1940), Catholics (pre-Vatican II) memorize Latin texts (Nash 1968), Muslims memorize Arabic texts (Bray 1986), and Hindus and Buddhists memorize Sanskrit texts (Dreyfus 2003). The memorization and recitation of sacred texts are valued as acts of piety, discipline, and cultural preservation, whether or not the individual grasps their literal meaning. Common to all of these traditional pedagogies is the ideology that the achievement of verbatim oral mastery of sacred texts through rote learning is an appropriate and effective way to instill religious orthodoxy and good moral character.

Built on the foundations of religious education, secular schooling around the world also entails rote learning (Wagner 1983b). Repetition and memorization figure prominently in descriptions of East Asian educational practice and the learning styles of Asian students (Biggs 1996; Ho 1994; Li 2005; On 1996; Schneider et al. 1994). Western education has also emphasized memorization. For centuries, the recitation and memorization of Greek and Latin texts constituted a large part of curricula in European schools (Carruthers 1992; Cubberley 1922; Nash 1968). Until the late 1800s, European and North American pedagogical practice stressed textbook memorization and strict discipline, with the former believed to be an important mechanism for instilling and maintaining the latter (Ariès 1965; Cubberley 1922). The recent Classical (Christian) Education movement advocates a “return to basics” such as rote memorization for elementary school-aged children in order to foster discipline and conservative values (e.g., Bluedorn and Bluedorn 2000; Wilson 1991, 2003).

Rote learning fell out of favor in the West with the advance of the progressive education movement, which stressed learning through doing and methods that encouraged experimentation and independent thinking by learners (Hori 1996). Rote learning is now widely believed—but not proven—to have a negative influence on children’s cognitive abilities, fostering the development of memory skills at the expense of so-called higher cognitive skills such as logical and creative thinking (Wagner 1983b). Dismissed by most Western educators and researchers, rote learning has received very little analytic attention despite its global prevalence and persistence. Notable exceptions are studies by cultural psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981a, 1981b) and Daniel Wagner (1983a, 1983b, 1993), who have investigated the cognitive effects of rote learning in Liberia and Morocco (respectively).

I have examined rote learning from a language socialization perspective. Exploring the structures and meanings of this way of apprenticing novices into language and other domains of cultural competence, I have reframed rote learning as a tradition of learning and teaching that I call ‘guided repetition’ (Moore 2004; Rogoff et al. 2006). Guided repetition involves modeling by an expert and imitation by a novice, followed by rehearsal and performance by the novice. In

communities around the globe, guided repetition is used to teach and learn a wide range of skills, including music, athletics, and crafts. One of the most common uses of guided repetition is in the teaching of texts (oral or written).

In both Qur'anic and public schools in Maroua, Cameroon, the development of competence in a second language is fundamental to all other learning. Guided repetition is used to teach and learn not only second-language knowledge and skills, but also preferred ways of being in the social worlds in which these languages are privileged. In this article, I discuss some of these similarities and differences in how and why guided repetition is done in the two educational contexts. I link interactional patterns with the ways of speaking, acting, and feeling that children are expected or hoped to develop through Qur'anic and public schooling. In addition to showing that guided repetition is accomplished in culturally distinct ways to socialize novices into 'traditional' and 'modern' subjectivities, I discuss how its use in both types of schooling is rooted in very similar goals for and ideologies of second-language acquisition.

A central concern of most language socialization research is the development of locally intelligible subjectivities, or ways of being in the social world (Garrett 2006; Kulick and Schieffelin 2004). Guided by more expert interlocutors as they engage in culturally valued activities, novices come to view specific behaviors, perceptions, and affective stances as appropriate to particular goals, settings, and identities (Ochs 1988; Wertsch and Hickman 1987). Through their participation in language-centered activities, Fulbe children learn not only how to use Fulfulde, Arabic, and French in socio-culturally appropriate ways, but also how to think, feel, and behave as Fulbe, Muslims, and Cameroonians.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Study**

This article is based on a longitudinal study of the apprenticeship of seven Fulbe children in their first year of public school into three language practices in the primary socializing institutions of their community: the recitation of verses of the Qur'an in Arabic at Qur'anic school and at home, the enactment of dialogues in French at public school, and the telling of folktales in Fulfulde (the children's native language) at home. The study (2000–2001) built upon my previous work in the region as a researcher (1996 and 1999) and as a Peace Corps volunteer (1992–1994).

In the study, I employed a language socialization approach as my central theoretical and methodological orientation. The primary claims of language socialization theory are that the process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent member of a community, and that the process of becoming a competent member is realized to a large extent through language (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Recurrent communicative interactions between novice and expert members are examined in order to understand how these communicative practices shape novices' development of cultural and linguistic competence. The four core methodological features of this approach are (1) an ethnographic and holistic

perspective; (2) longitudinal research design; (3) collection and analysis of a substantial corpus of audio or video recorded naturalistic discourse; and (4) attention to micro and macro levels of analysis and to linkages between them (Garrett 2006).

Over the course of one public school year, I video recorded seven focal children at monthly intervals as they participated in the three focal practices (90 hours). Video recordings were transcribed and analyzed using the tools of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). I complemented micro-analysis of these recordings with interviews and video playback sessions with family members, teachers, and education officials. I also collected locally available documents related to education (textbooks, teachers' guides and training texts, booklets on Islam). In order to contextualize observed and reported micro-practices and ideologies within the political economy of communicative practices and the broader social and cultural context, I spent many hours observing in the homes and schools of the focal children, drew upon my previous experience in the region, and consulted the extensive anthropological, linguistic, and educational research on the Fulbe and the region.

As I reviewed video recordings and transcripts, I created collections of what looked like the same phenomenon, using Word and FileMaker Pro software to organize data. I used Excel to calculate (relative) frequencies of specific phenomena in each activity setting (Erickson 1992). After grouping sequences that seemed to be instantiations of the same phenomenon, I sought to identify the features that made me judge them as similar, and this process led to refinement of my categories. In reviewing my research journal and transcripts of interviews and playback sessions, I also created collections of participants' comments on the focal activities, the languages, and the institutions in which they were embedded. I used the same method with the educational materials that I brought back from the field. The process of creating collections and refining my categories enabled me to identify patterns in linguistic and pedagogical practices, as well as the ideologies that informed them.

## **Two Schooling Traditions**

Qur'anic school and public school in Maroua are two very different educational institutions, each with its own long and distinct tradition of linguistic and pedagogical practice. Qur'anic schools were established in northern Cameroon by the Fulbe after their jihad of the early nineteenth century, and a century later, the German colonial administration opened the first Western school in the region (Tourneux and Iyébi-Mandjek 1994). Both schooling traditions comprise elementary and secondary or complementary cycles; in this article I am concerned with the elementary cycles.

The elementary cycle of Qur'anic schooling is dedicated primarily to the reading, writing, reciting, and partial memorization of the Qur'an. A student may take anywhere from three years to a lifetime to complete this cycle (Santerre 1973). While the target texts are in Arabic, Fulfulde is the language of

instruction. Comprehension of the lexico-semantic content of the Qur'an is not a goal for the first several years of instruction. Thus, the *mallum* (teacher; pl. *mallum'en*) does not translate or explain the meaning of the Qur'anic texts that the student is learning to recite, read, and/or memorize; in most cases, the *mallum* does not know the meanings him- or herself (Hamadou Adama and Aboubakary Moodibo Amadou 1998). The primary lesson objective is the faithful—that is, verbatim, fluent, and reverent—recitation of the text by the novice without assistance from the *mallum*. Correct recitation of the sounds of the Qur'an constitutes understanding of the first layer of meaning. Subsequent layers of explanation and commentary are reserved for the learner who has already achieved mnemonic mastery of the entire Qur'an.

Qur'anic school is believed by participants to provide Fulbe children with *une formation totale* (a complete training or socialization) (Hamadou Adama and Aboubakary Moodibo Amadou 1998; Santerre 1973). Many *mallum'en* provide instruction in the basic tenets of Islam (e.g., monotheism, Mohammed's status as the final prophet), and some supervise children's daily prayers. However, Qur'anic school is not only about studying the Qur'an, learning to pray, or learning the basic tenets of the faith. It is also about learning how to be a Fulbe and a Muslim, identities that are considered by Fulbe to be nearly one and the same. Instilling discipline, respect, and self-control is described as one of the primary goals of Qur'anic school throughout the Muslim world (Bray 1986; Musa Ahmed 1996; Sanneh 1975). According to Tourneux and Iyébi-Mandjek (1994: 99), Qur'anic schools in Maroua have as their principal objective not the teaching of knowledge, but the inculcation of the values of Muslim society: faith in God, respect for authority and hierarchy, the primacy of the spiritual over the temporal.

The elementary cycle of public school is organized into six grade levels. Cameroon and other Francophone African nations share the same basic structure of cycles, examinations, and diplomas, which is derived from the French system (Capelle 1990). The overarching goal of the early grades is for the child to grow accustomed to the school's environment, school activities, and the French language. Most instructional time is spent on learning to speak, read, and write French. Over the course of the elementary cycle, students are expected to develop a basic level of generative competence in French; that is, they should be able to understand French utterances and express themselves in French. Teachers try to convey the lexico-semantic content of the French used in class by means of gesture, mime, pictures, realia, and (less frequently) translation in local language. The curriculum includes other subjects, such as mathematics, hygiene, civics, and national culture (Ministère Nationale de l'Éducation 1998). Because French is both the target language and the language of instruction, lessons in any subject amount to and are conducted in much the same way as French-language lessons.

Like Qur'anic schooling, public schooling is intended to promote and guide children's cognitive, social, and moral development. The child is expected to develop an objective understanding of the world, an individual self-concept, and a Cameroonian identity (Ministère Nationale de l'Éducation 1998; UNICEF

1993). In both colonial and post-colonial times, public education has sought explicitly to promote supra-ethnic identity or consciousness and to change mentalities from 'traditional' or 'tribal' viewpoints, which were regarded as impediments to social and economic progress, to more 'modern' outlooks and conceptions of the world that favor development. The following excerpt from a 1923 report to the United Nations stresses the role of the education system within *la mission civilatrice*: "It is [school] again that can inculcate in [African children] the taste of social progress and the concern for hygiene: by means [of school], in conclusion, will it be possible to establish between the mandated power [France] and the indigenous person a community of ideas and sentiments" (cited in Atangana 1996).<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have argued that the explicit goal of changing mentalities of both colonial and post-colonial educational systems veils other goals: to train the population for acceptance of and participation in the market economy and the authority of the state apparatus (e.g., Atangana 1996; Martin 1978, 1982).

In the Muslim-dominated parts of the north, rates of participation in public schooling and yields are very low in comparison with other regions of Cameroon (Iyébi-Mandjek 2000), but Fulbe and Muslim participation has increased since the mid-1980s. After Cameroon's Fulbe president was succeeded in 1982 by a Christian southerner, the Fulbe suddenly found themselves largely excluded from the state power structure (Azarya 1978; Iyébi-Mandjek and Seignobos 2000; Seignobos 2000). Fulbe authorities began to encourage rather than discourage participation in public schooling (Santerre 1982a, 1982b; Tourneux and Iyébi-Mandjek 1994), and today many Fulbe and other Muslim children participate in both types of schooling.<sup>3</sup>

Such 'double schooling' (*la double scolarité*) is considered problematic by both public and Islamic educators, as well as by parents. Many public educators and researchers argue that Qur'anic schooling interferes with students' social, cognitive, and linguistic development by teaching children a passive, non-analytic learning style and an ethnocentric and superstitious world-view (Santerre 1982a; Tourneux and Iyébi-Mandjek 1994). Public schooling is believed by many Muslims to interfere with the social, moral, and spiritual development of their children. Time spent in public school is time not spent in Qur'anic study and in learning tasks and responsibilities from one's father or mother. Moreover, parents are concerned that their children do not learn much of any use at school, and that much of what they *do* learn—*nasaaraaji* (things of the whites)—is counter to the norms of Islam and Fulbe culture.

In northern Cameroon (as elsewhere in Africa), there is a growing movement of 'modernization' of Islamic education, including such innovations as collective instruction, instruction in non-religious subjects, and teaching Arabic both in and out of the context of the Qur'an using techniques that resemble those used to teach French in the public schools. Scholars who have returned from Islamic study in the Arab states have opened *madrassas* and private Islamic primary schools in Maroua, and these have been increasing in number and enrollment (Ibrahim Joël Mamat 2000). In interviews, Fulbe expressed ambivalence about or even opposition to these innovations. While they valued

generative competence in Arabic, they articulated concern that treating Arabic “just like any other language” and teaching it to young children who had not yet memorized the Qur’an effectively desacralized it and the Qur’an and undermined the main goal of Qur’anic school: instilling respect for the word of God and traditional knowledge, values, and social order. The vast majority of Maroua Fulbe send their children to traditional Qur’anic schools rather than ‘reformed’ ones, and those children who are enrolled in Islamic primary schools also attend traditional Qur’anic schools (ibid.).

Public education has also experienced ‘modernization’ in recent years. In 1997, Cameroon’s Ministry of Education introduced “the new pedagogical approach” (*la nouvelle approche pédagogique*, or NAP) (Ministère Nationale de l’Education 1998). Reformers criticize the transmission models that have dominated Cameroonian education in the past, claiming that practices such as rote learning inhibit the development of creative and critical thinking, skills that are necessary for the individual’s—and the nation’s—successful participation in the modern world (Macaire 1993; Ministère Nationale de l’Education 1998). NAP is a more constructivist approach, with the teacher acting less as the source of all information and more as a guide for the student, who formulates her or his own observations and opinions through student-centered activities. While I heard several new teachers (i.e., trained since 1997) speak passionately about NAP, I never observed its implementation. Maroua teachers considered NAP inappropriate for the early grades (and the rest of the elementary cycle, according to some) because children are not believed to have sufficient knowledge or classroom competence to take so much responsibility for their own learning.

## Guided Repetition

While Qur’anic and public schooling have distinct histories, orientations, and goals, in practice they have much in common. In both settings, the development of competence in a non-native language is fundamental to all other learning. Arabic and French knowledge and skills are taught and learned primarily through the rote learning of texts: verses of the Qur’an at Qur’anic school, dialogues in French at public school. Language-centered activities in both settings have the primary lesson objective of verbatim memorization and error-free performance of a text, and this objective is achieved by children repeating and memorizing second-language speech that has been modeled by the teacher. In the evaluation and correction of children’s renderings, experts in both traditions attend to pronunciation, sequencing, volume, and embodiment.

Moreover, the core language-centered activities of the two schooling traditions share the same basic sequential structure. I have identified four phases in guided repetition activities—modeling, imitation, rehearsal, and performance—each of which entails particular objectives, rights, and obligations for both expert and novice. The expert supervises the novice in each phase and may provide assistance, evaluation, and/or correction as the novice attempts to master the new skill.

In both types of schooling, the perceived appropriateness of guided repetition is rooted in a shared ideology of child development and learning. Parents, *mallum'en*, and public school teachers all described children in middle childhood as excellent and eager imitators and memorizers. Learning through imitation, repetition, and memorization was believed to be well suited to a child between six and puberty, for his or her memory was still clear of distractions and highly impressionable. Parents and *mallum'en* spoke of the “virgin memory” (*taaskaare wuule*) of children of this age, while teachers referred to their minds as *tabulae rasae*. Skills and knowledge (or bad habits and incorrect understandings) acquired in this period are believed to be more likely to take root and endure than those introduced at a later age. Thus, according to Qur'anic and public educators, guided repetition was the right approach at the right time.

## Dimensions of Difference

While guided repetition is the tradition for socializing Fulbe children into both Qur'anic recitation and French oral expression, it is achieved in different ways and for different reasons, shaped by the goals and values of participants in the activities and the institutions of which they are a part. Significant differences emerge when we compare distinct interactional patterns in the two activities, and these patterns may be linked to the very different ways of speaking, acting, and feeling that children are expected to learn through Qur'anic and public schooling. As a result of my research, I discuss four dimensions of difference—authority to teach, motivation to learn, treatment of the text, and pace and progress—that illustrate how guided repetition was accomplished in dissimilar ways to socialize novices into different ways of being in the social world.

### *Authority to Teach*

In both Qur'anic and public school, the teacher was the primary modeler and, in the immediate environment, the highest authority on how a text should be rendered. Children assisted the teacher in both settings, but in different ways. These differences in how and how much authority was allocated to children are related to beliefs about learning and the goals of the activity.

In Qur'anic school, some of the older children who were more advanced in their studies served as deputy *mallum'en*. These more competent students were designated by the *mallum*, and such ‘appointments’ were quite stable. Deputy *mallum'en* had the authority to model a new Qur'anic text, to supervise children as they rehearsed, to administer punishment for misconduct or lack of effort, and to correct children's recitation errors. Deputy *mallum'en* performed these duties in the absence of the *mallum* or when he was occupied with other students or tasks.

In the public school classroom, any student was a potential modeler. While the teacher often relied on a few students he knew to be more capable, any child who volunteered to model was likely to be given the opportunity to do



so. Moreover, children were asked to assess the renderings of other children and to identify and correct errors, collectively and individually (cf. Merritt 1998). The teacher allocated the authority to model, assess, and correct on a turn-by-turn basis. The identity of expert was thus more fluid and more evenly distributed among children than in the Qur'anic school setting. However, children were always closely supervised and directed by the teacher, such that their authority was limited and immediately contingent upon the teacher's nomination and support.

Public educators believed that children are more interested in other children than they are in the teacher. Having peers provide modeling, assessment, and correction was considered good pedagogical practice because peer talk was assumed to be more interesting and thus more salient and more memorable for children. Teachers' practices of distributing authority were also informed by an ideology of equality and equal access. The focal teacher told me several times that all children are potentially good students and competent speakers of French, and that it is up to the teacher to bring that out of each and every child by giving multiple opportunities to play different roles, including that of French-language expert.

Within the apprenticeship model that characterizes Qur'anic schooling, the relationship between *mallum* and student is of great importance, while relationships among students are of lesser significance. *Mallum'en* and parents emphasized the importance of obtaining religious knowledge through an accomplished mediator, and they objected to peer teaching for several reasons. For one, it could not readily be monitored and controlled, which had serious implications for the accurate transmission of Qur'anic knowledge. Moreover, much of a *mallum's* authority comes from revealing the Qur'an to the student. In the traditionally theocratic Fulbe society, religious knowledge and the authority to impart it are guarded closely (Eisemon 1988; Riesman and Szanton 1992). Sacred knowledge and the authority it bestows are the result of years of devout study; they do not shift day by day or turn by turn.

### *Motivation to Learn*

*Mallum'en* and public school teachers used a wide range of strategies to motivate children to learn, including praise, competition, insults, shaming, threats, and corporal punishment. While praise and competition were used in both school contexts, they were enacted far more frequently and were much more elaborated in public school, while corporal punishment was viewed more positively in Qur'anic school. Praise was used extensively in the classroom and in all phases of the lesson. The focal teacher was often exuberant in his praise and/or involved the whole class in the positive assessment of a child's rendering. Public educators held praise to be a major and appropriate motivator for children. Publicly praising a child who had done well was believed to motivate the child to continue or even increase her or his efforts, while it also motivated other children to make a greater effort so that they, too, might be praised. A few educators said that positive assessment of a child's efforts to

speak French also served to reinforce the child's pleasure in speaking French and thus encouraged an emergent Francophone identity.

Competition was also deemed an appropriate motivational force, and teachers explicitly encouraged children to do as well as or better than another child (or table or row of students). They were nonplussed when I asked if such strategies might promote individual recognition and competition, thereby preparing children for the ranking and selection practices of public schooling (cf. Rogoff et al. 2003). Competitive participation structures were believed to be motivating because they created both rivalry and *esprit de corps* and in so doing made the interaction playful, turning the lesson into a game. (Indeed, I consistently observed children smiling and laughing during such sequences.) Piagetian theories of child development have strongly influenced public-school pedagogy and curriculum (e.g., Champion 1974; UNICEF 1993), and practitioners and pedagogical materials emphasized the importance of play in children's learning, particularly in the early grades. Public educators spoke of the importance of play and praise in young children's learning in terms of making children happy, relaxed, interested, and more likely to practice school skills outside of the classroom. Several teachers recounted overhearing children act out French dialogues during recess, and they cited this as evidence of the role-play activity's value.

In Qur'anic school, *mallum'en* used play, praise, and competition far less often, less overtly, and with some ambivalence. Two of the six focal *mallum'en* sometimes had students sing songs at the end of sessions. This practice was identified by several participants as a recent borrowing from public schools that was intended to make Qur'anic school more fun; I was told that both the origin and motivation of the practice rendered it questionable. As for praise, the few explicit positive assessments I observed in Qur'anic schools were subdued, one-on-one, and reserved for successful completion of the performance phase. A *mallum* might shame a child by asking why he or she did not work as hard as another, but I never heard a *mallum* challenge a child to do as well or better than a peer. Qur'anic school was where children learned humility before God and before superiors in the social hierarchy, and neither praise nor competition were suited to this socialization goal. Moreover, as one *mallum* pointed out, one recites the Qur'an to show respect and love for God, not to be admired by or to surpass others (cf. Hamadou Adama and Aboubakary Moodibo Amadou 1998).

In my observations, corporal punishment was used with equal frequency in both Qur'anic and public schools, and teachers in both institutions believed that such methods were sometimes necessary. But while public school teachers expressed concern that corporal punishment could alienate children from school and its language, *mallum'en* and parents spoke much more positively of its use in the Qur'anic context. Failure to progress due to a perceived lack of effort was punishable, as was any sign of disrespect for the Qur'an, the teacher, or more advanced students. This strict discipline was considered essential in order for the student to (1) learn to respect the Qur'an, the word of God; (2) put sufficient effort and focus into study of the Qur'an; and (3) learn his place with respect to the *mallum'en*, his superior in both age and religious knowledge. Moreover, several participants informed me, any part of your body hit by the *mallum* would

not burn in hell (cf. Bray 1986; Brenner 2001; Eickelman 1978). Parents explicitly identified the *mallum* as the person who makes up for parental indulgence by applying a sterner discipline than they are able to administer (cf. Regis 2003; Santerre 1973), and many wealthy families who could readily have afforded private Qur'anic instruction sent their children to Qur'anic schools so that they would learn not only the sacred text, but also discipline and deference.

### *Treatment of the Text*

The texts taught and learned in the two focal activities had profoundly different meanings and functions for participants. French dialogues are tools constructed by pedagogues for instructional purposes. These scripted conversations are meant to be manipulated, played with, and transformed by teacher and learner in order to foster awareness of, productive competence in, and comfort with second-language forms and norms for communication. In sharp contrast, the Qur'an is believed by the participants to be of divine origin, an immutable and inimitable text that must be preserved and transmitted absolutely faithfully. As Mommersteeg (1991) notes, children in Qur'anic school are not taught how to read a text; they are taught how to recite 'The Text'. These differences in significance, status, and the feelings that the text should evoke were visible in practices of error treatment in the two school settings.

In French-language lessons, a teacher may use a wide range of strategies to deal with an incorrect rendering by a child. He may reject it baldly, make fun of the rendering, reprimand or punish the child, remodel part or all of the utterance with or without emphasis on the trouble source, and/or request another rendering by the child or her or his peer(s). Imitation of children's errors by the teacher, particularly in juxtaposition with a correct rendering (as in "not X, but Y" constructions), was common classroom practice. Such practices were believed to help children notice the gap between their speech and the teacher's and thus promote the development of generative competence in French. Imitations were often done in a playful manner, with the (usually successful) aim of making children laugh, loosen up, and pay attention.

*Mallum'en* used many of the same error-treatment strategies as public school teachers, but there was a very strong preference for one in particular. Even when the child misspoke only a single phoneme or syllable, *mallum'en* usually responded by remodeling the whole verse without any emphasis on the trouble source. The lesson objective was not that the child should acquire specific Arabic phonemes or lexical items, but that the child should be capable of reciting a sacred text faithfully and fluidly. In light of this, the practice of remodeling whole verses without any prosodic change to mark the trouble source makes perfect sense.

Another significant difference between Qur'anic and public-school error-treatment practices was that *mallum'en* never imitated a child's recitation error. Other children sometimes did this, but only when the *mallum* was absent, for he would have punished such behavior severely. Qur'anic texts are sacred, believed to be the word of God and, as such, immutable truth. Thus, any text had to be transmitted

intact and could not be manipulated even for pedagogical purposes (cf. Eisemon 1988). Errors in its recitation were to be rigorously corrected and eliminated, but repetition of errors by the *mallum* to this end was unthinkable. Such practice imitation was considered appropriate and effective for teaching French and Fulfulde texts. Fulbe adults had no qualms about imitating children's errors during the teaching and telling of folktales, and they used many of the same imitative and contrastive strategies as public school teachers. In the Qur'anic school context, however, these strategies would have been blasphemous.

### *Pace and Progress*

In both school settings, the expert is expected to guide the child through her or his introduction to, practice, and mastery of each new text, while the novice should stay focused and on task, working actively toward mastery. However, there were significant differences across these two cultural contexts with respect to who determined the pace of the novice's progress.

To a great extent, the children set the pace at which they moved through the phases of Qur'anic lessons. Instruction was largely individualized, so the *mallum* could accommodate each child by adjusting his instruction to the child's level and rate of learning. A child was not expected to perform her or his text for the *mallum* until she or he had achieved a high degree of mastery, and in most cases, the child was the one to decide when this was so. To push children beyond their self-perceived and displayed level of readiness was dangerous, for it might cause incomplete or incorrect learning of the Qur'an and weaken the desire to learn. A common objection to collective teaching of Qur'an recitation—a relatively recent innovation in *madrassas* and Franco-Arabic schools (public and private)—was that it did not assure mastery of each text by every child before introducing the next text. The result was that less-gifted children were being put at risk by not being provided with a secure foundation of religious knowledge and by being exposed to knowledge that was beyond them. Mastery of and attachment to the sacred texts was what mattered, not rapid progression through the curriculum. Swift progress was not particularly valued and was, in fact, somewhat suspect; several adult participants asserted that if you had learned a text quickly, you probably had not learned it deeply.

In accordance with the hierarchical conceptualization of knowledge that characterizes traditional Islamic education in Africa, the Qur'an's many layers of meaning are "revealed gradually as an individual progresses through successive stages of learning" (Brenner 2001: 19). The acquisition of Qur'anic knowledge is seen as a progressively transformative process, with mastery of a particular type of knowledge being the essential basis for a subsequent stage of learning and personal transformation (ibid.: 18). Correct recitation of the sounds of the Qur'an constitutes understanding of the first layer of meaning. To explain to a child the literal meaning of the sacred text before he or she had mastered its recitation was believed by *mallum'en* and parents to be inappropriate, pointless, and perilous.

In the public-school classroom, the teacher orchestrated all official classroom interaction, allocating nearly every turn at talk taken by a student, assigning

turns even to those children who did not want them. He was motivated in large part by a desire to be fair; that is, he and other public educators believed that a teacher was morally obliged to give every child the opportunity to speak and be corrected and thus to learn, whether or not the child wanted to. But instruction was collective, and the teacher had to cover a fixed amount of material in a limited amount of time, so he could not accommodate each child by providing instruction at the child's own level and pace. It was considered regrettable and potentially problematic for a child to learn a dialogue incompletely or incorrectly, but the timetable of the institution took precedence over the needs of individual children.

### **Same Structure, Different Subjects**

Many times I have been asked how I could compare two activities that are so different. In Qur'anic school, the child is socialized into recitation of a sacred text, the faithful reproduction of which is the goal of instruction. French-language lessons, on the other hand, revolve around the animated performance of a mundane conversation, a carefully selected and scripted subset of linguistic forms intended to project the child into generative competence in French. Yet I found that participants in both schooling traditions used the same structure—guided repetition—to socialize children into the second language and its associated ways of doing, being, and feeling. Moreover, they shared the goals of making the text part of the child and the child part of the text, and their use of guided repetition was grounded in very similar ideologies of second-language acquisition.

Socialization into Qur'anic recitation is intended to teach the child to respect God's word and those knowledgeable therein (cf. Mommersteeg 1991), and the disciplinary regime of Qur'anic school is believed by participants "to fuse the Holy Word into the very being of the child" (Brenner 2001: 19). Qur'anic schooling is also intended to teach children to "love the sound of the Qur'an," as several participants put it. A deep and enduring emotional response to God's word, even without comprehension of the lexico-semantic content, was considered a key component of Muslim faith. Although discourse around the socialization of affect was less elaborated in public schooling, role plays were argued to be an integral part of French-language socialization, in part because they were meant to be fun and thus likely to teach children to enjoy speaking French. Moreover, the dialogues provided models of preferred affective responses to particular social situations (e.g., the first day of school, a fight on the playground, the celebration of Youth Day, a friend's prompting to drink water from the river).

In addition to making the text part of the child, both activities were intended to make the child part of the text. Qur'anic and public school teachers expressed the belief that in learning Qur'anic verses and French dialogues, the child was fused with the communities of practice for which the texts had significance. In Qur'anic school, the child became a Muslim in part through her or his apprenticeship into the faithful reproduction of the sacred text that forms "the core of all Islamic worship and devotional activity" (Renard 1998: 72). Learning to recite

the same texts in the same way as one's co-religionists was an important part of making the child a member of the Muslim community, locally and globally, as well as past, present, and future. In public school, children were encouraged to assume the educated, Francophone, and Cameroonian identities of characters in the dialogues. Guided by the teacher, children adopted the speech and other behaviors of these characters and learned to act in specific communicative situations according to a script that had been crafted to teach not only specific linguistic forms, but also preferred ways of perceiving, acting, and being in the world.

Within both educational traditions, second-language socialization entailed two intertwined processes: the formation of linguistic habits and the transformation of heart and mind. Novices needed to form correct habits from the beginning, and this goal was believed to be best achieved by memorizing high-quality linguistic material under the guidance of an expert. Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldun and Rosenthal 1958: 342) describes language as a "habit located in the tongue" and developed through repetition and memorization of linguistic material. The best linguistic material, the "highest form of speech" is found in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, and this kind of speech has the power to lift the nature of those whose "souls were brought up on [it]" (ibid.). Similar ideologies have informed French-language instruction in Africa since colonial times. Students memorized texts that were carefully constructed (recitations, dialogues) or selected (passages from works in the French literary canon) in order to develop good linguistic and intellectual habits. An African became 'civilized' (*évolué*) in part through learning French, that is, by acquiring the habits of rational speech and thought (*la clarté française* [French clarity]; see Dauzat 1949) modeled in the texts. These two ideologies—one concerning the process of second-language acquisition, the other its intellectual and moral effects—underlie the practice of guided repetition in both Qur'anic and public schools.

Within the two schooling traditions, different intellectual and moral outcomes were desired; thus, guided repetition was accomplished in culturally specific ways. Qur'anic schooling was meant to socialize children into reproductive competence in Arabic and traditional Fulbe and Muslim values of self-control, respect for religious authority and hierarchy, and submission to the word of God. The practice of guided repetition in the Qur'anic context emphasized strict discipline, reverent renderings of the text, and deference to teacher and text. Public schooling sought to create citizens of a democratic state, individuals who spoke and thought in French and embraced a Cameroonian identity as opposed to an ethnic one. Guided repetition as practiced in the classroom was more playful, with liberal manipulation of the text, attention to its propositional content, and greater fluidity in the roles of expert and novice.

In Qur'anic and public schools in Maroua, Fulbe children are socialized through guided repetition into the use of Arabic and French in the context of activities that are considered fundamental and meaningful by their communities. Across these two educational contexts, the guided-repetition structure is enacted in different ways, for the languages, texts, institutional settings, and identities involved are rooted in socially, culturally, and historically distinct traditions. The highly structured and repetitive nature of language-socialization

routines in both settings helps the child develop the linguistic and cultural competencies that are needed to participate in the social worlds in which Arabic and French are privileged. Thus, despite the fact that most of the speech in the early years of Qur'anic and public schools is in languages that are not comprehended, children learn to speak, act, and respond to those languages and to co-participants in ways that are locally intelligible and preferred in their Fulbe, Muslim, and Cameroonian communities.

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Leslie C. Moore is Assistant Professor of Language, Literacy, and Culture in the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University. Her research program has focused on first- and second-language use and socialization in multilingual communities in Cameroon, where she has worked since 1992. She recently authored "Changes in Folktale Socialization in a Fulbe Community" (2006) and co-authored "Children's Development of Cultural Repertoires through Participation in Everyday Routines and Practices" (2006).

## Notes

1. The Fulbe (also known as Fulani, Peul, Toucouleur) are an ethnic group found across West and Central Africa. After their jihad in the nineteenth century, the Fulbe established emirates, settled, and enslaved local populations in what is now northern Cameroon. Since that time, the Fulbe have been the socio-economically dominant group in the region.
2. In French, the text reads: "C'est elle encore qui peut leur inculquer le gout du progress social et le souci de l'hygiène: par son intermédiaire, enfin, pourra s'établir entre la puissance mandataire et l'indigène une communauté d'idées et de sentiments."
3. There have been no surveys to provide exact numbers on Fulbe participation in public school, in Maroua or elsewhere in Cameroon, and it is not possible to determine this simply by looking at enrollment lists. All Fulbe participants in my study asserted that Fulbe were participating more and more in public schooling, as did officials in the schools and in the provincial and division offices of the Ministry of Education. In a survey of 140 Muslim parents in Maroua, Tourneux and Iyebi-Mandjek (1994) found that 100 percent sent their children (boys and girls) to Qur'anic school, 84 percent sent their boys to primary school, and 67 percent sent their girls to primary school.

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