

Korandje: Between Linguistic Areas

Lameen Souag explores language change and linguistic history, especially in northern Africa. His fieldwork focuses mainly on Korandje (Songhay, Algeria) and Siwi (Berber, Egypt), two endangered languages whose long isolation from their nearest relatives has helped induce multiple layers of exceptionally intense contact effects.

About 800 years ago, some Songhay speakers moved across 1500 km of desert to the small oasis of Tabelbala in modern-day Algeria and thereby created a new language: Korandje. They left the multilingual Sahel and entered a very different linguistic ecology—a ‘spread zone’—dominated first by various Berber languages and then by Arabic. The resulting typological changes affected everything from phonology to morphology to syntax to lexical structure, and continue to this day as speakers increasingly shift toward Arabic. The earliest written attestation of Korandje dates to 1908, but comparative data