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The Hausa Language in the Blue Nile Area

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The Hausa language spoken in the Blue Nile Province of the Sudan has generally received less Arabic influence than its Hausaland counterpart, although the former is surrounded by numerically and culturally superior Arabs. Also its numeral system which does not utilize Arabic loans is to be noted.

INTRODUCTION

It has been a well-known fact that sizable Hausa communities exist in the Democratic Republic of the Sudan¹⁾, especially in the Blue Nile Province. This area is on an ancient pilgrimage route from Hausaland to the port of Suakin on the Red Sea and thence to Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. It is said that these communities originated when some Hausa pilgrims failed to return to Hausaland and settled there. As for their language, I had had two hypotheses before undertaking field research in the area in the August of 1976. These were:

1) As the Hausa communities are completely surrounded by culturally more prestigious Arabs, their Hausa language would be heavily influenced by Arabic. For example, the percentage of Arabic loan words would be higher in the Sudan than in Hausaland, and some morphological or syntactical borrowing from Arabic could be traced;

2) As a vast distance separates these Hausa communities from the Hausa motherland, their language would develop in its own way; and would retain some old grammatical features which were lost in Hausaland, or would have some innovations which have occurred independently.

1. BACKGROUND

Virtually every important town in the northern Sudan has a Hausa community of variable size, whose members engage in itinerant trading or unskilled manual work. But for the purpose of examining the hypotheses stated in the Introduction, I chose a

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1) For example, [ABRAHAM 1962: 3], [ROBINSON 1959: 1], [HASSOUN 1952] gives general information on Westerners including Hausa people in the Sudan.

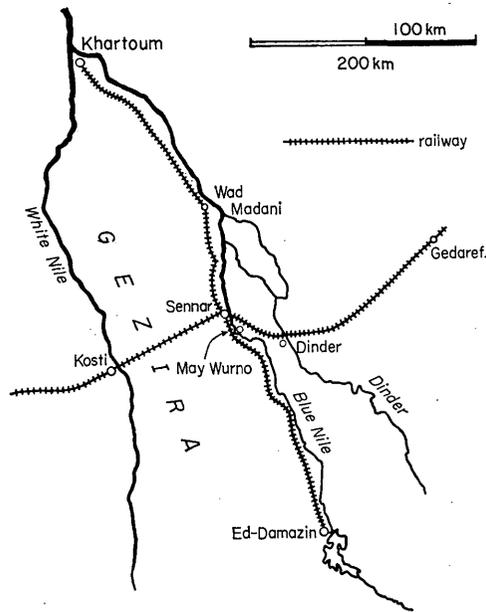


Figure 1. The Blue Nile Area

rural sedentary Hausa area where the dominant economical activity is the farming of various crops, the most important among them *Sorghum vulgare* (Hausa /daawà/, Sudan Hausa /zurrà/). The location of the area is a flat savannahland enclosed by the Blue Nile, Dinder river and the Ethiopian border (see map); its nominal headquarters being May Wurno²⁾, 12 Km south of Sennar on the Sennar - Ed-Damazin railway.

The precise history of the Hausa communities in this area has yet to be investigated. But according to the information collected from some twenty heads of households in and around Dinder town, the oldest ancestor who migrated from Hausaland arrived only two generations back. If we assume the case of the Dinder community to be typical of this area, it is unlikely that any of the Hausa communities were firmly established before more than a hundred years ago.

And since then, there has been close and continuous contact with Hausaland. A stream of pilgrim kept coming from Hausaland overland and some chose not to return, though the number has decreased since the introduction of pilgrimage charter flights from Kano directly to Jeddah in the 1960s. And with the progress of the Gezira Scheme since the 1920s and an increased production of long-fiber cotton, numbers of Hausa migrant labourers came to the Sudan for picking cotton. Most of

2) Muhammadu Attahiru, the Sultan of Sokkoto, who had been resisting against invading Britons, died at the battle of Burmi in 1903. One of his sons survived the battle, fled eastwards to Gezira, and founded a town. He, Muhammadu Bello mai Wurno, gave his name to the town. (personal communication; Ibrahim Mukoshi, the grandson of Bello mai Wurno)

them returned eventually while some have stayed on. But on the other hand, contact from the opposite direction has been brought closer with the development of air traffic. Some prosperous Sudan Hausas visit their relatives in Hausaland, and many traders even fly regularly to Nigeria taking skins of game animals to sell there and bringing back various Nigerian commodities such as palm oil and Kola-nuts which are highly valued in the Sudan.

2. THE PEOPLE AND THE LANGUAGE

Hausas in the Sudan call themselves /tåkaarà/ or /tåkùruurù/ (sing.), /tåkaarii/ or /takuruuruwaa/ (pl.), and their language /takaarancii/. These forms are obviously derived from Arabic /takruur/ (sing.), /takaarii/ (pl.) denoting, specifically, the Tukulors in Senegal, and generally, the people of West African origin. Arabs call them /fellaata/, a very obscure term applied to people who are considered to have some relation to Fulanis. Some government officials use a neutral and more exact term /hawsaawii/.

3. SETTING

The actual field work was carried out in Dinder town on the Sennar-Kassala railway. Most Hausa inhabitants except a few newcomers from Hausaland are bilingual in Hausa and Sudan Arabic. Very few are literate in either language. Altogether five informants were interviewed. All of them were male and /'dan K'asaa/ 'born in the land'. Hausa and Arabic were used for the interviews.

4. DESCRIPTION OF SUDAN HAUSA

1) Phonology

(1) DISTINCTION OF /R/ (RETROFLEX FLAP) AND /r/ (ALVEOLAR TRILL).

All Hausa dialects in Hausaland have the phonemic distinction of two 'r' phonemes. In the Sudan too, this distinction is being kept intact generally, but two informants used a clear trill "r" for the position where either phonemes were expected. This could be considered as being due to Arabization, because both informants were relatively young (approximately 16 to 18 years), and seemed more comfortable speaking in Arabic than in Hausa.

(2) ARABIC ELEGANT PHONEMES

Peculiar Arabic phonemes are modified, and incorporated into the Hausa sound system. (henceforward Ar means Arabic; T for Takaranci, the Sudan Hausa; H for Standard Hausa)

Ar. /çarabiyya/ 'automobile'

T. /'àràbiiyà/

Ar. /gaṭaar/ 'train'

T. /gâtâr/

Ar. /zurrà/ 'guinea corn'	T. /zurrà/ or /zùrraà/
Ar. /mantàga/ 'border area'	T. /màntakà/
Ar. /maḥàllii/ 'local train'	T. /màhàllii/
Ar. /maxaṭṭa/ 'station'	T. /màhàttà/

The above examples are Arabic loan words which have no equivalents in the Hausaland dialects. But sometimes elegant phonemes, especially /gh/ and /x/ (uvular fricatives), are reproduced.

T. /ghaaboobii/ 'forests'	from A. /ghaaba/
T. /xaatim/ 'ring'	from A. /xaatim/

Many Hausa in the Sudan are completely bilingual, and when they speak Arabic, they produce these Arabic phonemes correctly without Hausa phonemical interpretation.

2) Morphology

(1) BROKEN PLURALS

Certain types of plural formations are preferred in the Sudan. Like the Hausaland dialects, /-ooCii/ formation is most common, but otherwise, the /-unà/ or /-inà/ formation also appears quite frequently where the Hausaland dialects have other forms.

'teeth'	T. /hak'ooRunà/	H. /hak'òoRaa/
'breast'	T. /noonunà/	H. /noonàayee/
'arms'	T. /damc'unà/	H. /damàas'aa/
'fig-trees'	T. /'bawRunà/	H. /'bawRàayee/
'spears'	T. /maašinà/	H. /maasuu/
'shoes'	T. /taakalmunà/	H. /taakalmà/
'wars'	T. /yaak'unà/	H. /yaak'ook'ii/

3) Syntax

(1) GENDER SYSTEM

In the Sudan Hausa, the grammatical gender and agreement system is virtually the same as the Hausaland dialects except for southern Hausa including the Zaria dialect. The fact that most of the first generation migrants to the Sudan were from the Kano-Sokoto Close Settled Zone partially explains it.

(2) CONTINUAL TENSE MARKER /iyà/

Present continual tense of the third person singular is expressed by /iyà/, while the Hausaland dialects have /yanàa~yinàa~šinàa/ form.³⁾

T. /iyà ciḥ àbincii/	'he is eating food'
H. /yanàa ciḥ àbincii/	
T. /iyà dà kèekee/	'he has a bicycle'
H. /yanàa dà kèekee/	

Negative form is common to the Hausaland dialects.

- T. H. /baa yàa cìh àbincii/ 'he is not eating food'
 T. H. /baà šì dà kèekee/ 'he does not have a bicycle'

4) Lexicon

(1) SYSTEM OF NUMERATION

The most striking lexical feature of the Sudan Hausa is the numerals. In counting numbers above 20 up to 99, Arabic loans are not used but Hausa formation has replaced them.

'20'	T. /goomà biyuu/ (ten two)	H. /àšìrin/
'30'	T. /goomà ukù/ (ten three)	H. /tàlàatin/
'40'	T. /goomà hu'duu/ (ten four)	H. /àrbà'in/
⋮	⋮	⋮
'90'	T. /goomà tarà/	H. /càsà'in/
'99'	T. /goomà tarà dà tarà/	H. /càsà'in dà tarà/

This numeration is an interesting phenomenon because this kind of numeral formation is virtually unknown in Hausaland except some exceptions.⁴⁾

3) According to [ZIMA 1969: 202–203], Dogondoutchi dialect has a similar form.

- shiyàa tàhiyà 'he is travelling'
 baa shì tàhiyà 'he is not travelling'

Also some Gwandara dialects have this YA form instead of NA of standard Hausa. (Gwandara itself can be considered a distant dialect of Hausa)

Gwandara Karshi dialect, [MATSUSHITA 1972: 52]

- /iyà cí m̀bò 'cí/ 'he is eating food'
 /iyà ù kyèkye/ 'he has a bicycle'

4) One of the earliest Hausaists [SCHÖN 1862: 124], wrote: '...besides the decades from 20 to 90, according to the system of the Arabs, there occurs a form which is probably the ancient idiomatic Hausa (thought not known to all who speak the Hausa language), which forms the cardinals from 20 to 90 by what may be regarded as a plural form of goma, 'ten,' and the units up to 9; as,

10	<i>goma</i>	60	<i>gomia šidda</i>
20	<i>gomia biú</i>	70	<i>gomia bokoi</i>
30	<i>gomia uku</i>	'

[ROBINSON 1899: 74]: '...*gomia* a plural form of *goma* is sometimes used to express the decades above ten; thus *gomia biu* would twenty, *gomia uku* thirty. This was probably the original Hausa method of counting large numbers before they borrowed Arabic numerals.' Also see [MISCHLICH 1911: 28]. [KOELLE 1854: 15] did not mention of this *gomia* form. [BARGER 1934: 482] described *gomia* as a Katsina dialect form.

A Gwandara dialect (Nimbria dialect) still retains this numeral formation today in a duodecimal context [MATSUSHITA 1974: 151–153].

<i>gùme bi</i>	20	(decimal 24)
<i>gùme úgú</i>	30	(decimal 36)
<i>gùme furu</i>	40	(decimal 48)
<i>gùme gwóm</i>	T0	(decimal 120)
<i>gùme kwáda</i>	E0	(decimal 132)

All other Gwandara have Arabic form for 20 to 99.

Arabic loans had long been established firmly in Hausa and when the Hausa communities were first formed in the beginning of 20th century, its members were definitely using Arabic loan forms for counting. Although they were surrounded by Arabic, they developed new numeral formation by analogy without using Arabic numerals. Despite the fact that, since then new immigrants have been flowing in from Hausaland incessantly, this innovation has been firmly settled in the Sudan Hausa. An informant explained the reason for this numeral system saying, "we have to keep secret talks among ourselves in front of Arab merchants in the market. If we speak out words such as 'ashirin', they will understand our price immediately and our trade will perish".

Though this explanation is a bit too naive, it is likely that the numeral innovation was developed in an effort to establish a distinct Hausa ethnic identity in the surrounding Arab environment.

(2) MONETARY UNITS

It is a common custom in the Sudan to call 10 piastres (100 milimes) a Riyal, and 5 piastres (50 milimes) a Shilling. But Hausas in the Sudan translate those units into popular West African monetary units such as /dalà/, /sulè/, /fañ/, /kobò/, /tàngaa/ and /jàkaa/.

T. /tàngaa/	'half piastre'	
T. /kobò/	'one piastre'	Ar. /girš/
T. /sulè/	'five piastre'	Ar. /šiling/
T. /fañ/	'one pound'	Ar. /jinee/
T. /dalà/	'ten piastre'	Ar. /riyaal/
T. /jàkaa/	'hundred pound'	

(3) ENGLISH LOAN WORDS

Some English loan words which are found in Hausaland have been replaced by the equivalent Sudan Arabic form.

T. /màhattà/	'station'	H. /tašà/
T. /àràbiiyà/ or /sàyyaarà/		'automobile'
		H. /mootà/
T. /tiskàrà/	'ticket'	H. /tikiti/

This replacement is quite noticeable, especially, in the field of transport and of administrative terminology.

(4) ARABIC LOANS IN BASIC VOCABULARY

Among the noun items of the Jungraithmayr-Günther Word List, the following are Arabic loan words in Sudan Hausa whereas the Hausaland equivalent has Hausa forms.

T. /zurrà/ or /zùrràa/	'guinea corn'	H. /daawà/
T. /gaabà/ or /ghaabà/	'forest'	H. /kuRmi/

T. /haatim/ or /xaatim/ 'ring'	H. /zoobè/
T. /ammù/ or /ammi/ 'father's brother'	H. /bàabaa/

On the contrary, the numbers from 20 to 99, as we have seen in 4.-4)-(1), have the Hausa form in the Sudan, while Arabic numbers are exclusively used in Hausaland. Therefore, it is possible to say that Sudan Hausa is less influenced by Arabic language than its Hausaland counterpart, as far as the percentage of loans in the basic lexical items are concerned!

5. CONCLUSION

The two hypotheses set up in the introduction have been proved to be unfounded. In their place, the following statements could be confirmed.

1) The Sudan Hausa received Arabic influence on phonological, syntactical and lexical domains to the same or even lesser degree than the Hausaland dialects.

2) The archaism of Sudan Hausa, too, remained negligible. Even in the case of the marker /iyà/ (4.-3)-(2)), some Hausaists report that it exists in Eastern Hausa.⁵⁾

The reason for these conclusions could be attributed to several extralinguistic phenomenon surrounding the Hausa communities in the Sudan.

1. A close and continual contact between the Sudan and Hausaland.
2. A Hausaland-oriented attitude dominant among the members of the communities.
3. The necessity for establishing a distinct ethnic identity in the surroundings of numerically overwhelming Arabs.

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