

## A History of the Hausa Language

With more than sixty million speakers across Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Ghana, Hausa is one of the most widely spoken African languages. It is known for its rich phonology and complex morphological and verbal systems. Written by the world's leading expert on Hausa, this ground-breaking book is a synthesis of his life's work, and provides a lucid and comprehensive history of the language. It describes Hausa as it existed in former times and sets out subsequent changes in phonology, including tonology, morphology, grammar, and lexicon. It also contains a large loanword inventory, which highlights the history of Hausa's interaction with other languages and peoples. It offers new insights not only on Hausa in the past, but also on the Hausa language as spoken today. The book is an invaluable resource for specialists in Hausa, Chadic, Afroasiatic, and other African languages as well as for general historical linguists and typologists.

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# A History of the Hausa Language

*Reconstruction and Pathways to the Present*

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Paul Newman



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## Preface

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Hausa has by far the largest number of speakers in West Africa and along with Swahili is one of the most important and most widely spoken languages in all of sub-Saharan Africa. As such, it has been the object of extensive linguistic study since publication of the seminal works of James Frederick Schön more than a century and a half ago (1843, 1862). The *Comprehensive Bibliography of Chadic and Hausa Linguistics* (Newman, 2018) contains over 1,800 books and articles on Hausa linguistics, which are almost entirely synchronic descriptive works. We still lack systematic and in-depth investigations into the language's past that could complement and enrich the descriptive grammars and dictionaries. The aim of this volume, which was inspired by the classic *History of the English Language* (Baugh and Cable, 1993), is to open a new window into the nature of Hausa by illuminating its fascinating and complex linguistic history. My objective throughout has been to provide synchronic syntheses from a diachronic perspective, explain evolutionary pathways, and offer fresh and insightful observations, interpretations, and hypotheses, ideally in a readable and accessible fashion. The goal has been on illuminating historical facts and processes about the language as such without getting bogged down in arcane arguments about alternative analyses and without spending needless time explaining and justifying discovery procedures.

Although motivated and influenced by the Baugh and Cable masterwork, my task has been totally different – and in many ways, considerably more difficult. This is because I did not have a wealth of written sources from earlier historical periods to draw on. Hausa is now a written language, but this is a relatively recent development and the time depth of its written texts is shallow – with rare exceptions, a century at most. In investigating the history of Hausa, we lack a Chaucer or Shakespeare, much less a Samuel Johnson or Benjamin Franklin, whose creative works could provide direct evidence of the language in the past. The challenge has therefore been to create a picture of what Hausa must have looked like at an earlier period, and the changes it subsequently underwent, by drawing on comparative evidence from related languages and teasing out what one can by means of internal reconstruction and dialect variation. In some cases, the historical assertions are speculative – and when so, I say so – and in



others, questions are left unanswered. Nevertheless, much of what I have been able to present without the benefit of early sources strikes me as solid and capable of serving as a foundation for further research if and when some courageous Hausaist in the future decides to expand on this study.

Let me use this opportunity here to acknowledge my intellectual indebtedness to an outstanding scholar, who in his lifetime never received the recognition that he deserved, namely Claude Gouffé (1926–2013). Much of what I learned about Hausa came from careful reading of his meticulous descriptive studies, each one a model of accuracy and intellectual integrity. I seldom cite him in his book since his work was rigidly descriptive and factual and mine here is historical and occasionally speculative. The reason is that my focus has been on the forest, and Gouffé often could not see the forest for the trees. But how can anyone not appreciate the skill and knowledge of an expert who knows every individual tree by name, so to speak, what their morphological properties are, and how they fit into the ecological environment? So, although it is not obvious by reading this book, Gouffé's Hausa scholarship contributed significantly to its foundation. I therefore regard the present work as a tribute to him. I am not sure what Gouffé's reaction to it would have been if he had still been alive, though we can be sure he would have pencilled in corrections and emendations on almost every page. The measure for him would have been whether he had learned anything or not, and hopefully the answer would have been 'yes'.

Finally, I cannot close without expressing, with deep sadness, my appreciation and admiration for Russell Schuh (1941–2016), a lifelong friend and colleague, who in a sense was my alter ego during my professional career as an Africanist linguist. He was a distinguished scholar with an amazingly broad command of the Chadic language family, evidenced in his posthumous *A Chadic Cornucopia* (Schuh, 2017). He also knew Hausa backwards and forwards. Our analytical strengths and specialized knowledge often overlapped – we always operated on the same wavelength – but when they did not, they complemented one another, thereby intellectually enriching both of us in the process. Had we been able to prepare this as a jointly-authored volume, it would unquestionably have been a better book. But it is what it is, and I feel confident that he would have welcomed it approvingly and would have detected his invisible hand in it.

## Transcription and Symbols

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*Transcription.* Hausa citations are transcribed primarily in accordance with current Standard Hausa orthography. This is based on the English alphabet with five additional letters and a few special pronunciation conventions. The five new symbols are the three ‘hooked’ letters **ḥ**, **ḍ**, **ḳ**, which represent glottalized consonants, the apostrophe ’, which is used for the glottal stop phoneme, and ’y, which represents the glottalized semivowel. Most of the other letters have ordinary English values. The exceptions are **c**, which always and only represents the [ch] sound as in English ‘church’, and the digraph **ts**, which represents a glottalized ejective, varying in pronunciation between [tsʰ] and [sʰ] depending on dialect.

For scholarly transcription purposes, I have made a few additions to the standard orthography. I have adopted the symbol **ř** to indicate the rolled R, which contrasts with the flap R [r], written simply as **r**, a distinctive contrast not represented in standard orthography. (The upper case R serves as a cover symbol for the two Rs when either or both is referred to.) Small capital **N** represents a nasal archiphoneme that surfaces as nondistinctive **m** or **n** (or even phonetic [ŋ]) depending on the context, for example **dánbúu** ‘type of food’ = [dám búu], **tándúu** ‘small leather container’ = [tándúu], **cân** ‘there’ = [cân].

Although ignored in standard orthography, vowel length is an extremely important and pervasive feature of Hausa phonology and morphology. I indicate length by use of double letters, for example **aa** (= **ā** in some previous scholarly works, including my own). I also consistently mark tone throughout by means of accents: H(igh) **á**, L(ow) **à**, F(alling) **â**, the tone only being marked on the first vowel of a long vowel or diphthong, for example **áa**, **àu**, **âi**. The normal practice in Hausa studies is to leave High tone unmarked; I, however, have opted to mark High explicitly since the usual system is potentially confusing for readers who work on a non-tone language or on languages with a different tone-marking convention. In addition, it is far from ideal when discussing tone rules or regular patterns involving High tone. For example, in illustrating a tone change such as LH goes to H, **nàawá** → **náu** ‘mine’ is obviously preferable to **nàawa** → **nau**; similarly, in pointing out that

a particular class of abstract nouns have all High tone, a transcription **kaífii** ‘sharpness’ is clearer than **kaifii**. Present-day Hausa does not have R(ising) tone, but that tone does come up when discussing historical tonal phenomena. When needed, it is indicated **ǎ**. Superscript tone indications after a closed parenthesis marker indicate a tone pattern that is assigned to the entire word going from right to left, e.g. **ɗaakunaa**<sup>HL</sup> has surface tones **ɗáakúnàa** ‘rooms’ and **almaajirai**<sup>LH</sup> is **ǎlmàajírái** ‘pupils’. Finally, tone marks are omitted in situations where one wants to transcribe morphemes without tone specification, for example the feminine suffixes **-iyaa** and **-uwaa**, which are either H-H or L-H depending on the preceding tone, or the ‘Stabilizer’ **nee**, whose tone is intrinsically polar and thus can surface as either H or L, or the third person pronoun **ta** ‘she, her’, whose tone varies (H, L, or F) depending on syntactic function and collocational factors.

Vowel length and tone are usually not indicated on starred forms reflecting earlier stages of the language unless that is an essential feature of the discussion. This is because we often do not know enough about the history of tone and vowel length to mark these features on the presumed earlier forms. Thus, although in some specific instances, for example **\*kúusùm** ‘rat’, from which **kúusúu** is derived, we can postulate the tone and vowel length of the reconstructed form with some confidence, more often than not we do not know these, and as a practical operating procedure we shall therefore leave those items unmarked.

*Symbols.* The asterisk \* indicates a presumed, postulated, or reconstructed earlier form, for example **ɓáunáa** ‘buffalo’ < **\*ɓakna** (cf. the extant plural **ɓákàanéé**), **mái** ‘oil’ < **\*mar** (cf. Proto-Chadic **\*mar**, a form widely attested in identifiable cognates elsewhere in Chadic.) In the case of historically early changes, both the original sources and various intermediate outputs may be reconstructable. In such cases \* marks the presumed older form and double \*\* is used for intermediate forms, for example **\*sifka** > **\*\*shifka** > **\*\*shiuka** > **shúukàa** ‘to sow’. With most historical changes, we cannot say exactly when they occurred and in this study there is no attempt to put dates on events. Nevertheless, as shown in the **\*sifka** > **shúukàa** example, with some developments there is a clear feeding or bleeding order in relation to other changes so that we can at least indicate their age relative to one another, for example **\*P** > **\*\*w** and then **\*\*iw** > **\*\*iu** and then **\*\*iu** > **uu**; or **\*s** > **sh** / \_\_\_ front vowel and then **\*i** > **u**, resulting in a sequence **/shu/**. In the later case, if **\*i** > **u** had happened first, there would have been no conditioning environment to trigger the palatalization of **s** to **sh**. It should be pointed out here that some historical rules are ‘persistent’, meaning that they applied at some time in the past and continue to apply in the present. Examples include **s** > **sh** / \_\_\_ front vowel, and **r** > **ř** (the rolled R) / \_\_\_ n. In such cases, I often omit the asterisk on the earlier

form unless I am focusing specifically on the change with reference to a process that was completed in the past, at least in part.

Because the asterisk \* has already been adopted for the purpose of denoting reconstructed ‘starred forms’ it is not available to mark ungrammatical or non-occurring forms, as is commonly done in general linguistic works. For the ungrammaticality function I have adopted superscript <sup>x</sup>, for example ‘The plural of **túdùu** ‘hill’ is **tùddái** with geminate /**dd**/, not <sup>x</sup>**tùddái**.’

The > symbol indicates ‘historically changed into’, for example \***kadam** > **kádaa** ‘crocodile’. The notation (>) with parentheses indicates ‘sometimes or optionally went to’. The < symbol indicates ‘came from’. When needed, the notation </= serves as a shorthand way of indicating ‘came from an earlier form that still exists in the language in some other dialect’, for example SH **záunàa** ‘sit’ </= **zámnàa** (still extant in WH). The single arrow → indicates phonological changes at the synchronic or very shallow historical level. The double arrow ⇒ is used for morphological rules, for example **táasàa** ‘plate’ + **-oCi** ‘*pl*’ (the C being a copy of the preceding consonant) ⇒ // **táasóosii** // → /**táasóoshii**/ ‘plates’.

For synchronically underlying forms, or forms that one can consider more or less as such, I make use of double slant lines, for example // **tafoo** // ‘come’, which appears on the surface as /**tahoo**/, the **h** being a pseudo-allophone of /**f**/.<sup>1</sup> Representations at the phonetic level make use of the linguistically standard square brackets, for example ‘/ts/ tends to be pronounced [s]’. Parentheses are used for elements that are optional or exist in free variation, for example the first person indirect object pronoun is transcribed as **mín(i)** to show that it is realized either as **míni** or as **mín**.<sup>2</sup>

In representing grammatical formatives, upper case C indicates a copy of the preceding (or occasionally following) consonant, for example **táagàa** ‘window’ + **-oCi** ‘*pl*’ ⇒ **táagóogii** ‘windows’. Upper case G is used to indicate the first part of a geminate, for example CVG- ‘*plurac.*’ + **túnàa** ‘remind’ ⇒ **túttúnáa** ‘remind many or repeatedly’.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, I use the term ‘pseudo-allophone’ for elements that function as if they were straightforward allophones, but which because of various historical and internal factors sometimes contrast and do not have the status of allophones as narrowly defined in post-Bloomfieldian terms.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, only the final **i** vowel should be in parentheses and not its Low tone since that is stable and remains whether the vowel is there or not.

## Abbreviations

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<i>adv</i>	adverb
alt.	alternative
ANSQ	Abstract Noun of Sensory Quality
Ar.	Arabic
DASQ	Derived Adjective of Sensory Quality
d.o.	direct object
DVSQ	Derived Verb of Sensory Quality
Eng.	English
ex.	example
F	Falling tone
<i>f</i>	feminine (gender)
<i>fem.</i>	feminine
Fut <sub>1</sub>	Future
Fut <sub>2</sub>	Second Future (Potential)
gr	grade
H	High tone
<i>id</i>	ideophone
i.o.	indirect object
KL	Klingenheben's Law
L	Low tone
Lacore	Law of Codas in Reduplication
lit.	literally
LTR	Low Tone Raising
<i>m</i>	masculine (gender)
neg	negative
OH	Old Hausa
orig.	originally <i>or</i> the original
PC	Proto-Chadic
<i>pio</i>	pre-indirect object (verb form)
<i>pl</i>	plural
<i>plurac.</i>	pluractional
psn	person
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## List of Abbreviations

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R	Rising tone
redup.	reduplication
<i>sg</i>	singular
SH	Standard Hausa
s.o.	someone
sth	something
TAM	Tense–Aspect–Mood
<i>TAMm</i>	TAM marker
usu.	usually
vs	versus
WH	Western Hausa (dialects)
<i>wsp</i>	weak subject pronoun