The Expansion of a Language to the Function of Vehicular Language in Niger: the Case of Hausa[*]

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ABSTRACT

Since the appearance of humanity on Earth people have worked to transform their natural environment in order to satisfy increasing daily needs. These efforts led to verbal communication by means of articulated language. There is no society without this means of communication, and there is no language without a society.

The world's languages follow a natural law. Some gain ground and spread more easily than others, crossing national boundaries or states, whereas others regress or stagnate and sometimes disappear. Languages that spread most often do so along a geographically determined axis. Indeed, even if roads, trails, rivers and mountains are not primarily responsible for the expansion of a language, they certainly determine the direction of the language's expansion to the function of a vehicular language.

Today it is clear that Hausa has emerged in different regions of Niger either as a first or second dominant lingua franca. This situation is the result of both exogenous and endogenous factors. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that enabled the Hausa language to spread throughout Niger as a vehicular language.

Keywords: language, expansion, Hausa, factor, vehicular, Niger.

1-Introduction

The origins of human language have been the subject of many controversies, but all communication on this sensitive point concerning the history of mankind or about the creation of a universal language has been declared futile by the second section of the articles of the linguistic Society in Paris. However, the importance of language in human life is well-established as natural languages are the means of communication through which people express their ideas and their thoughts, in other words how they communicate. There is, therefore, a close relationship between language and thought and between language and society; this is because there can be no society without a means of communication between the members of that society who use that language. Equally there can be no language without society. Out of this reciprocity appears the eminently important role which language plays in relations between humans and states.

Defining language as a system of relationships where the components are sounds and words has no value outside the relations of comparative equivalence that unite them. The first structuralists knowingly concealed the study of the social aspect

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of language in favour of exclusively structural study. However, language is, above all a social product in the sense that the individual acquires it from outside and the individual can neither create nor modify it because it is created externally. Language is defined by Saussure as 'a collective treasure placed through the practice of speech in subjects who belong to the same community, a grammatical system existing virtually in each brain, or more precisely in the brains of a collection of individuals as language is not complete in each individual and only exists perfectly in the mass'[1]. For the Linguistic Circle of Prague (1929-1938), language is considered a functional system, as language, produced by human activity, is a means of expression whose goal is the realisation of spoken intentions for self-expression and communication. It is also seen as the spirit of a nation or people. That led Calvet[2] to say: 'the history of language is inseparable from the history of the people who speak it. And if there is a history of languages, it is a chapter in the history of societies or rather the geographical aspect of this history of peoples'. Language is also a powerful factor in national unity even if, in our times, it has become a force for integration and socio-economic and political domination.

The absence of equivalence between state and language frontiers show to what extent certain languages spread more easily than others. They follow geographically well-established directions or axes (mountains, roads, rivers, trails) influenced by factors that are economic, political, urban, etc. It is a natural law, and the mother tongues in Niger follow this rule, as 'in vivo' some spread more easily, while others regress or stagnate, and sometimes approach disappearance through lack of dynamism and vitality.

The sociolinguistic situation of Niger is characterised by weak linguistic heterogeneity: Ten languages have acquired the status of national languages. These are Hausa, Songhay-Zarma, Tamasheq, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Tubu, Arabic, Gulmancema, Buduma and Tasawaq. One single official language, French, the language of the colonial power, was imposed by force in the name of an ideology that asserted the superiority of that language. This situation can be called diglossic, in Fishman's sense, as it is characterised by the domains of use of the official language (formal domains) and the domains of use of the national languages (informal domains).

The linguistic situation of Niger is less complex than that of many Francophone African countries where several hundred national languages can be counted. In fact, political power weighs heavily on Africa, giving the status of national languages to certain languages, whilst refusing it to others, sometimes involving arbitrary choices. The emergence of vehicular languages or 'lingua franca' just about everywhere on the continent therefore constitutes a solution to the problems of plurilingualism born out of babelisation (an allusion to the Tower of Babel from Judeo Christian thought) as it leads to mutual comprehension between people of different ethnicities and linguistic communities. The vehicular function which broadens communication to the greatest number of locutors allows the language to acquire many locutors. This is characterised by an increasingly important of the linguistic community of that language. What is understood by the Hausa linguistic community is

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[1] Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Cours de linguistique générale', Payot, 1964 Paris.
[2] Louis-Jean Calvet, 'La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques', Payot, 1987 Paris, p. 10.

the total number of people who share that language. The question which is being asked today, though, is what are the factors which allow in reality a language to spread and acquire a certain dynamism and a certain vitality? Calvet[3] put forward a certain number of factors for the expansion of vehicular languages in the world. The factors which have contributed to the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language in Niger should be studied.

2- Presentation of Hausa
2-1 General Characteristics

According to Bara Souley[4]:

'Hausa is one of the hundred and forty five languages of the Chad group of languages in the Afro Asian family. At the level of dialect of the team this language can be divided into two groups of dialects:

those of the East spoken in Kano,Zaria, Bauci,Maiduguri and Daura in Nigeria; in Damagaram and Agadez in Niger,

those of the West spoken in Zamfara and Kebbi in Nigeria; in Tahoua, Doutchi and Fillingué in Niger, in Katshina, Sokoto and Gobir between Nigeria and Niger.

It is in Nigeria that this language gained its status as a standard language and an official language in certain states (English being reserved for International relations). This standardisation is based on the dialect of Kano'.

Hausa is a language with very marked tones (high and low). According to D.T. Niane[5]: 'the number of speakers of this language is estimated at more than 50 million, spread between Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, etc. This makes Hausa the second most important language numerically in Africa after Swahili'.

Hausa is one of the ten national languages of Niger. It is spoken by more than 53% of the population according to the most recent census in 1988. The language recently gained a new orthography following a workshop organised by the Ministry of National education on the harmonisation of orthography of the national languages (1999). The language possesses similarly its own lexicon and its own grammar. The language has also borrowed from Arabic and English.

Although a number of papers and publications on this language exist (memoirs, theses, articles, etc), it has not been standardised in Niger due to the absence of any real functioning linguistic policy related to action on language (phonological morphosyntactic and lexical description) or related to action on languages (the choice of the dialect variety to standardise). Nevertheless, the language possesses a certain autonomy and vitality in social practice (in vivo). It is also used in the education system at primary level as the medium of education (in experimental schools) and as a subject of education (bilingual education).

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[3] Louis-Jean Calvet, 'Les langues véhiculaires', 1981 Paris, puf, pp. 42-50.

[4] Bara Souley, 'Etude contrastive du traitement des entrées dans deux dictionnaires bilingues hausa: le modern hausa english dictonary et le dictionnaire élémentaire hausa-français; cas de deux parties majeures du discours, noms et verbes, mémoire de maîtrise, faculté du langage et de la communication', Université Lumière, 1991 Lyon II.

[5] D.T Niane, 'Histoire générale de l'Afrique du XIIème et XVIème siècle', UNESCO, T4, 1995.

In Niger, the corpus of Hausa is highly advanced although its status is weak (what is meant by corpus is the number of people who speak the language). In his thesis devoted to the linguistic study of Niger, Abdou Djibo Moumouni[6] said of the language: 'Hausa is the main vehicular language dominant in Niger. It is the first vehicular language in Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua and Agadezand the second in Niamey, Tillabéry, Dosso and Diffa'. The dialects of Hausa in Niger are the Hausa of Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua, Agadez, Diffa, Tillabéry and Niamey, without counting sub-regional varieties which are dominated by these dialects.

2-2 The Orthography of Hausa

The orthography of Hausa, modified and completed, has been determined by decree O212/MEN/SP/CNRE of 19 October 1999.

2-2-1 The Alphabet:

a, b, b, c, d, d, e, f, fy, g, gw, gy, h, i, j, k, kw, ky, Kw, Ky, l, m ,n; o, (p), r, s, sh, t, ts, u, w, y, Y, z.

a)   Vowels

Monophthongs

  Lower case: i, e, a, o, u

  Upper case: I, E, A, O, U

Diphthongs

Lower case: ai, au

Upper case: AI, AU

b)   Consonants:

  Monographs:

  Lower case: ', b, b, c, d, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, (p), r, s, t, w, y, y, z

  Upper case: ', B, B, C, D, D, F, G, H, J, K, K, L, M, N, (P), R, S, T, W, Y, Y, Z

  Digraphs:

  Lower case:fy, gw, gy, kw, ky, Kw, Ky, sh, ts,

  Upper case: Fy, Gw, Gy, Kw, Ky, Kw, Ky, Sh, Ts

2-2-2 Orthography

  a)   use of consonants:

  -capital letters: in writing all sentences must start with a capital letter, e.g. Tsaya ku tafi tare

  -proper names of people and places must be written with a capital letter, e.g. Fatsuma, Musa, Damagaram.

  -Only the first letter is capitalised when diphthongs and digraphs are transcribed e.g. Auta, Gwamma, Tsaya nan har su Kare.

  b)   The following rules apply to the choice between m or n:

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[6] Abdou Djibo Moumouni, 'Etude sociolinguistique du Niger: éléments d'approche d'une future politique linguistique pour le Niger, thèse de Doctorat(NR), Université Rene Descartes, 1994 Paris V.

in the median position of the word 'm' should be written if the consonant which follows is b, p, f, or m, e.g.:

tambaya not tanbaya

Jimbiri not jinbiri

Tumfafiya not tunfafiye

gammonot ganno

'm' is written when morphological variations establish its etymological character.

2-3 Grammatical Structure:

The basic structure of Hausa in Niger is subject-verb-object.

E.g. Ali ya zo gida = Ali came home

e.g. Na ci tuwo = I ate the dish

the language also accepts the structure object-subject-verb.

E.g. Ragon da Ali ya saye = the sheep that Ali bought

e.g. tuwon da na ci = the dish that I ate

3- Factors in the Expansion of Hausa in Niger

This study is the result of research carried out into the dynamic of languages in Niger and a sociolinguistic study of Niger carried out in different markets of the communes of eight regions in Niger (Niamey, Dosso, Maradi, Zinder, Diffa, Tahoua and Tillabéry). The study found that Hausa is the first vehicular language in Zinder, Maradi, Tahoua and Agadez, and the second vehicular language in Niamey, Diffa and Dosso. Factors that favour the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language in just about all of Niger are considered below.

For a better understanding of the factors in the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language in Niger, the term vehicular language or 'lingua franca' should be defined. A vehicular language is a language used for mutual comprehension between individuals from different linguistic communities, or at least between individuals with different mother tongues. The first vehicular languages were pidgins used most often in commercial relations in Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries. For all vehicular languages there exist factors which allow their expansion and continuation. This is the case of Fulfulde in North Cameroon, Sango in central Africa, Kikongo in Congo, Bambara in Mali, Wolof in Senegal and countless others, whose economic and political factors have been investigated by specific researchers. The factors in the expansion of Hausa in Niger need to be identified, as it is evident that certain factors such as the linguistic and geographic factors do not permit one language to become more vehicular than others and to be favoured in its expansion. In fact, by far the most important factor apart is the geographic vector. That is what led Louis-Jean Calvet[7] to state: 'the geographic vector is never the initial cause of the expansion of a specific language, however the nature of this expansion, its direction, is affected: a language which occupies an area will do so following natural roots and by avoiding obstacles'.

As for the linguistic factor, scientifically speaking, no vehicular languages exist where the only criterion of vehicularity is the simplicity of the syntactic structure, in

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[7] Louis-Jean Calvet, 'Les langues véhiculaires', 1981 Paris, puf.

spite of claims to the contrary. M. de la Fosse[8] explains the vehicularity of Manding compared to the non-vehicular status of Fulfulde by the fact that Fulfulde is a language of classes, whilst Swahili, which is another language of classes, has a vehicular growth with an area of influence which covers several African countries in the centre and the East. For the case of Songhay, J. Rouch, quoted by Maurice Houis[9], says the vehicularity of Songhay in the Songhay regions of Niger is due to the ease with which people could learn it, but this is a subjective view as all languages are easy to learn and use for native speakers. There are no easy or difficult languages where syntactic structure is the origin of its vehicularity and expansion or where difficulty would be an obstacle.

For certain vehicular languages quoted above, the same factors for expansion and vehicularity can be found: political and urban factors for Fulfulde in North Cameroon; economic, political and urban for Sangoin central Africa, for Kikongo in Congo and Swahili in central and eastern Africa. In reality, the factors for the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language in Niger are economic, urban, political and religious.

3-1 Economic Factors

Economic factors have played a very important role in the expansion of Hausa. The history of the Hawsa people shows us that they practised three sorts of commerce:

-ciniki: commerce in agricultural products or small-scale artisanal products, carried out essentially by the producers themselves.

-fatauci: wholesale commerce in the hands of professional merchants who were involved in the market over long distances.

-an intermediary position occupied by the Dan Koli who went from one market to another buying and selling products at a low price or by retailing products imported by the professional merchants.

Within this general division, there were also other specialists, such as producers of meat, butchers, grain producers etc. Thus certain towns of the Hawsa country such as Katsina and Kano became major crossroads in the Hausa economy and even throughout all of central Sudan. This led the Hawsa to become excellent entrepreneurs, even though every Hawsa is first and foremost a cultivator and agriculture is at the heart of economic life in the country.

In Niger, the Hausa language, vehicular in the east of the country, converged towards the West, the North and the South to gain prominence either as the first dominant vehicular language (Tahoua, Agadez, Zinder) or else as the second dominant vehicular language (Diffa, Tillabéry, Dosso et Niamey) for economic reasons (commerce). In this respect, one can compare the expansion of Hausa to that of Munukutuba and Lingala in Congo (Brazzaville). This expansion occurred along the length of the national highway (RN1) following well determined geographical axes (East-West, East-North, East-South) and following trails to the interior to towns and villages in Niger for economic and other reasons.

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[8] M. de la Fosse, 'Haut Sénégal Niger', 1912 Paris, T2, p. 47.
[9] M. Houis, anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique noire, 1979 Paris, Puf, p. 17.

The expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language is not limited uniquely to Niger and Nigeria, it extends as far as Cameroon, Chad, central Africa, Sudan, Ghana etc, and makes Hausa numerically the second most important language after Swahili. This led Guy Nicolas, quoted by D.T. Niane[10] to say: 'speaking the same language, observing the same customs, sharing the same political institutions, the Hawsa people form one of the most important ethnic groups in Africa'.

In reality, it cannot be claimed that economic factors were uniquely responsible for the expansion of Hausa in Niger as shown by J. D. Fage in M. Houis[11]: 'there has never been, in reality, a homogeneous Hawsa people, but a vast community whose members have a language in common and a lifestyle where commercial activity and practice of Islam are principal traits'. However, Hawsa are above all farmers, and agriculture is at the heart of economic activity in the Hawsa lands as mentioned above.

3-2 Urban Factors

Urban factors also played a very appreciable role in the vehicularity of Hausa and this occurred in two phases:

• The first phase related to immigration described by D. T. Niane:[12] 'naturally this ethnic group greatly benefited from great waves of immigration coming from the north (the Sahel) and from the East (the Bornou), and later some peoples (Wangarawa , Jula and Fulani) came from the West (the Empires of Mali and Songhay) and established themselves in the Hawsa country'.

• The second phase also involved immigration, as according to D. T. Niane[13]: 'the history of the Hausa country was not only marked by the great movement of immigration which strengthened the vehicular status of the language in different towns, there was also large-scale emigration towards the South and the West'. This migration, although appearing previously according to historians, favoured the diffusion of Hausa in the interior of the African continent.

It is estimated that there are around 50 million Hausa speakers spread across Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, central Africa, Zaire, the Congo etc. In Niger, urban factors contributed to the vehicularity of Hausa in Niamey (the capital) and in other towns through immigration.

Finally, just as in Niamey, Agadez, Diffa, Tillabéry, Dosso, Zinder and Tahoua, urban factors also contributed to economic factors in the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language because, according to Yennifer Yanco[14]: '10% of the population of Niamey are Hawsa and 67% of Songhay-Zarma speakers also speak Hausa'.

Nowadays these percentages are clearly an underestimate as the Hawsa people represent more than 35% of the population of Niamey and 53% of the total population of Niger speak Hausa, according to the most recent population census in 2012. This makes Hausa the second dominant vehicular language in Niamey.

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[10] D.T Niane (1995), 'Histoire générale de l'Afrique du XIIème et XVIème siècle', UNESCO, T4.

[11] M. Houis (1979), anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique noire, Paris, Puf, p. 134.

[12] D.T Niane (1995), 'Histoire générale de l'Afrique du XIIème et XVIème siècle', UNESCO, T4, p. 295.

[13] D.T Niane (1995), 'Histoire générale de l'Afrique du XIIème et XVIème siècle', UNESCO, T4, p. 317.

[14] Yanco Yennifer, 'Language contact and bilingualism among Zarma and Hausa of Niamey', 1983, Indiana University.

3-3 Political Factors

As in the case of Swahili, British colonial policy, and then independence, favoured the expansion of Hausa whilst adding a quasi-official status to the vehicular status it had already acquired. This colonial policy enabled the language to become the norm, as Hausa has an old written tradition, Ajami.

According to M. Houis[15]: 'this written normalisation was undertaken as early as 1932 by the translation bureau in Zaria, which later became the North Région Literature Agency'. Also according to Houis[16]: 'British colonisation and then independence are the two modern political moments which placed the language on an irreversible path to expansion, to normalisation, to prestige and to efficacity'.

In Niger, since the call by UNESCO in 1971 for African states to take charge of the development of their own people, Hausa and four other national languages (Kanuri, Songhay-Zarma, Fulfulde, Tamasheq) have been provided with a written form. The orthography of Hausa was modified and completed by decree 0212/MEN/SP/CNRE du 19/10/1999. Then in 1973, experimentation in languages began with the first experimental schools in Hausa and in the four other national languages mentioned above.

Law number 98-12 of 1 June 1998, focusing on the education system of Niger, states in article 21, line 2: 'French is the language of education and the national languages are the first subjects in education'. A later decree bringing bilingual education to Niger (French-Hausa; French-Songhay-Zarma) reinforced the vehicular status of Hausa that already existed.

In September 2013, following a workshop organised by the Ministry, a document was adopted making literacy a national policy for Niger by the Ministry of National Education, literacy and the promotion of national languages. All these texts relate to the promotion of national languages in Niger.

Consequently, as an official language, Hausa is used as a working language in the justice system and in working sessions of the Assembly, as well as in translations of debates.

Finally, in informal domains (radio and television), the two most widely used languages in debates and in other broadcasts are Hausa and Songhay-Zarma, with Hausa featuring slightly more. In addition, time allocated to broadcasts in the two languages are greater than those dedicated to other national languages. This reinforces their already gained status as vehicular languages.

3-4 Religious Factors

Religious factors have also contributed to the expansion of Hausa as a vehicular language in Niger and in many African countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Benin through sermons organised by different Islamic associations of these countries.

Furthermore, the great majority of sermons and other Islamic broadcasts on television and on public and private radio are in Hausa and Songhay-Zarma. This reinforces the vehicular nature of Hausa that already exists in various localities in Niger.

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[15] M. Houis, anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique noire, 1979 Paris, Puf, p. 139-140.
[16] M. Houis, anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique noire, 1979 Paris, Puf, p. 143.

Finally, all Koranic schools in Niger use Hausa as a medium of education which favours its expansion all over the country. There are also flourishing religious communities which have favoured the expansion of Hausa in Niger.

Conclusion

Hausa in Niger, which is a dialect of standard Hausa from Nigeria, has become the first dominant vehicular language of Niger in social practice thanks to a combination of economic, urban, political and religious factors. This language, which was formerly the dominant vehicular in the East, has expanded its vehicular function in the northern and north-western regions (Tahoua, Agadez) as the first vehicular language overtaking the indigenous language Tamasheq. As the second vehicular language in Western regions (Niamey, Dosso and Tillabéry) and in the far East of Niger (Diffa) following natural routes (tracks and roads) thanks to commerce, education, politics and religion.

Today, Hausa possesses a sociocultural dynamic which means it would be able to unify all the country linguistically and to play the role of a truly national language in the scientific sense of the term. For that to happen, it has to acquire the status of official language and to play that role alongside French, with regard to its corpus in the administration (by corpus is meant the percentage of people who use that language in the administration consciously or unconsciously).

Setting on one side any chauvinism or linguistic subjectivity, politicians must face up to reality by giving Hausa the status of the official language so that the overwhelming majority of the population can participate in the process of national development, taking into account the importance of the Hausa linguistic community in Niger as has been stated by Abdou Moumouni, quoted by Issa Siddo[17]: 'no real development can occur without the conscious and effective participation of all for development objectives. All the evidence indicates the role of languages and national cultures'.

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[17] Issa Siddo, 'Problèmes linguistiques et sociolinguistiques de l'enseignement du français et de l'utilisation des langues dans le système d'éducation moderne, thèse de3ème cycle', 1980 Paris III.

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