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Language and identity: Hausa language of youth generation in Northern Nigeria[1]

Tsakure

Wannan maƙala ta yi nazari a kan karin harshen matasa a Arewacin Nijeriya tare da bayanin matakai da hanyoyin da suke bi wajen ƙirƙirar sababbin kalmomi. Sa'an nan maƙalar ta nuna yadda hakan ya samar wa da matasan wani rukuni na musamman da ba su damar gudar da ma'amala da harshe ba tare da wani ya gane abin da suke nufi ba sai 'yan wannan rukuni da kuma waɗanda suke ma'amala da su. Haka kuma an kawo misalan yadda matasan suke amfani da kalmomin a cikin jimila.

1. Introduction

The language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable. One of the functions of language is to identify people as representatives of groups, communities and cultures in relation to others. The concept of identity helps to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture (Deng 1995: 1).

As it is commonly recognized, the term identity is mutually constructed and refers to evolving images of self and other (Katzenstein 1996: 59). Therefore, identity is people's concept of who they

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are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 2). It is worth mentioning, that the identity is subject to the individual interpretation, expressing the will to become a member of a group. Herrigel (1993: 371) states: "By social identity, I mean the desire for group distinction, dignity, and place within historically specific discourses (or frames of understanding) about the character, structure, and boundaries of the policy and the economy."

Identity is closely related to language. Language use constructs identity, as everyone uses accent, dialect, and language variation that reveals speaker's membership in a particular speech community, social class, ethnic and national group. As well, such variations are obvious when the grouping is based on gender, age, or expanding the linguistics focus to include jargons, registers and styles, occupation, club or gang membership, political affiliation, religious confession and so on (Edward 2009: 21).

Several researches have been conducted across the world on identification through language in different areas such as information technology (Constable, Simons 2000), speech recognition (Coulthard 1997), text verification (Giguet 1995), similar languages identification (Ljubesic 2007), criminal identification (Singh 2006), and language identification in web (Martins and Silva 2005). The function of language that identifies people as representatives of groups, communities and cultures has been examined in the context of marking the distinction between "Us" and "Others" (Duszak 2002). In African context, the language is often significantly regarded as a marker of national identity (Simpson 2008). The purpose of this paper is to show how identity is manifested in Hausa, the important ethnic language of Northern Nigeria. The study is devoted to the youth generation speech communities.

The question of Hausa social dialects was raised in some earlier works by exploring language and identity across social and occupational groups (Nasir 2008, Fagge 2002 among others) that examined identification with the professional engagement. Fagge (2004) studied language of fifteen occupational/professional groups, whereas Adamu (2004) and Nasir (2008) concentrated on Hausa films lan-

guage/register. Musa (2002) presented instances of "niggers' language" in Hausa. Most of the previous works focused on the lexicon newly introduced into the language (e.g. Bature 1995). Adamu (2002) in his analysis of neologisms in Hausa through urban space theory distinguishes some Hausa social classes identified in language, such as guys, area boys, *okada* riders, etc. The present attempt aims at investigating a special language code of Hausa that was created by a distinct group identified through the age. This special variety has developed for the purpose of communication in day-to-day activities.

2. Hausa as an ethnic and contact language

Hausa is the name by which the people of the ethnic group call themselves and are understood as such by many other people. Hausa is also the name of the language of the people (Adamu 1974: 1). Hausa is used as language of communication in northern Nigeria and some parts of the southern country; the users either belong to the Hausa ethnic group or use it as a second language. Most of the Fulani people use Hausa as their first language because of the long existing relationship between the two ethnic groups in terms of religion, inter-marriages, and other social activities which lead some of them to lose their first language. A term Hausa-Fulani, which is a newly invented term, has reference to one language community. There are also people who use Hausa as their first language, although they belong to the other ethnic groups. They use their native language as second language because they cannot communicate effectively with it in some areas. In northern Nigeria, the minority languages tend to lose their functional values because of the increasing preference for Hausa, whereas English which is an official medium of communication in the whole country and is increasingly replacing the mother tongues in southern Nigeria (Igboanusi, Peter 2004: 134).

This sociolinguistic situation makes Hausa a language of everyday communication for all domains in northern Nigeria and also a vehicle of some specific domains in the whole country. Some business activities are dominated by the Hausa ethnic group, such as exchange of money, sales of domestic animals, trailers transporta-

tion, sales of second hand cars, etc.

Hausa language is also regarded as language of Muslim community in Nigeria. This identification goes along with some other signs of membership of Hausa community, such as dress.

3. The Hausa youth as a social group

Main purpose of this paper is to investigate specific terms that are used by youth's generation in Kano – and more generally by the youth in the northern Nigeria – in their day-to-day communication. Social identity asserts that group membership creates in-group/self categorization in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of out-group. The examples (minimal groups studied) of Turner (1986) show that the more individuals categorize themselves as group members the more it leads them to display group favoritism. After being categorized as group members, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positive differentiating their in-group from another group on some self valued dimensions.

The young people generation in northern Nigeria is delimited by the age between 18 and 30 years and also by school level that ranges from secondary to high institutions. They meet regularly within their peer groups at schools, resting spots, and in their rooms. Youths normally spend their time in sport clubs, attending social events, etc. Their main interest is to enjoy their time. The main topics of their daily discussions are mutual relationships, love, spots and films. This is also main area of research conducted in Kano through active participation in discussions and observation.

4. Youth generation sub-code in Hausa

The language of the young people distinguishes from the language of other generations through the series of shared practices common to the members of this society. These are mostly words, but also phrases and other grammatical means used in the communication between young people. This code is distinguished by two kinds of features. Firstly, it is a language that absorbs impact of new technologies and new ideas (generated by politics, films, etc.) that bring about changes of the language at all its levels. It is young people

generation that initiates changes in language and evokes modernization of its vocabulary. Secondly, youth's generation sub-code includes terms that function only within this group. The common practice of the language of young people in Hausa is code switching and the parallel existence of the two systems results in borrowings, coinage and semantic extension.

4.1 Borrowings

The permanent contact of different languages in communication (in the area of interest it is contact between Hausa and English) brings about introducing new words into the language. New vocabularies are generated by the group while discussing political issues, presenting new products or making comments on films. The borrowings come mostly from English, although there are also words borrowed from Arabic and from other Nigerian languages. The reason for the use of these words is the lack of their equivalents in Hausa, when they are easily understood as terms of the sources language. Very often the borrowings become Hausanized and function as new words that are gaining acceptance in wider communication. This is the process reflected in the dictionaries. The noun *fim* < Eng. film (pl. *finafinai*) was introduced into Hausa vocabularies quite recently[2], similarly *darakta* < Eng. director. There are also many other words that are still in the process of their integration into the Hausa vocabulary. The role of the Hausa film industry in the areas of work and entertainment makes these words often used and therefore they may be qualified as changed to Hausa, for example:

	English	**Hausa**
1.	artist	atis
2.	action	akshin
3.	cassette	kaset

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[2] *Kamus na harshen Hausa* by Calvin Y. Garba from 1990 does not include such a word into the inventory of items. In *Modern Hausa Dictionary* (Newman, Newman 1977) the word is qualified as an abstract noun 'cinema' without plural form.

4.	DVD	DBD
5.	poster	fasta
6.	role	rol
7.	scene	sin

There are also some words from Arabic introduced to Hausa vocabularies recently. These words are now used very often in daily communication routine, for example:

	Arabic	**Hausa**	**English meaning**
1.	ahlul sunnah	'yan'izala	followers of prophet Muhammad teaching
2.	hafs	hafsi	Qur'an recitation style
3.	sayyid	yasayyadi	leader
4.	shi'at	shi'a	Islamic school of thought
5.	sunnih	'yansunni	followers of prophet Muhammad teaching
6.	ustaz	ustazu	learned person in Islam
7.	warsh	worship	Qur'an recitation style

4.2 Newly coined words

Coinage is a process whereby new words are invented. This is a common practice that the younger generation uses some existing words in Hausa or English to merge them with something else to invent a new word. The words presented below are not recorded in the dictionaries. They were coined by youth, and they are used by them in their day-to-day communication. Examples:

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	Words	Meaning	Source
1.	ajawo	unwise	
2.	bagu	pretending	
3.	bati	next to nothing	
4.	biris	refuse to attend sb.	
5.	bobo	guy who feels big	
6.	caburos	drugs addicts	
7.	cus	old person	
8.	dagu	father	
9.	kilin	to became wise	(Eng. clean)
10.	shakara	womanish attitude	
11.	shanawa	reining	(Eng. shining)

Here are some examples of how these words are used in sentences:
– Musa ya fiya son bati.
('Musa likes (to get) things gratis');
– Bala ajawo ne ba ya son zuwa sinima.
('Musa is unwise as he doesn't want go to cinema');
– Kai! 'Yan caburos sun yi yawa a gurin nan.
('Wow! There are many drug addicts here');
– Ahmed ya auri cus bai sani ba.
('Ahmed marries old lady unknowingly');
– Ta zo birni ta yi kilin.
('She came to the city and became wise').

4.3 The grammatical patterns of newly coined terms

The new terms are regular grammatical forms of verbs and nouns or they are regular grammatical constructions. The individual words gain new meaning in a context, e.g.:

	word	lit. meaning	new meaning	source
1.	cika	to complete	(to be) a beautiful girl	English
2.	fantamawa	–	enjoying your time	Hausa
3.	fasa	to break	to go	Hausa
4.	haɗu	to meet	to lack nothing	Hausa
5.	jamewa	–	meeting	English (jam)
6.	muguwa	wicked (f)	beautiful girl	Hausa
7.	shanawa	–	enjoying your time	English (shining)
8.	shankwana	to turn one side	to get money	Hausa
9.	Zariya	town name	mental	Hausa

Examples in sentences:
– Mati ya sami wata muguwa yau.
('Mati picks up a beautiful girl/lady today.');
– Ina za mu fasa da daddare?
('Where are we going tonight?');
– Inuwa ya shankwana.
('Inuwa got money.').

The new terms are also constructed with reference to regular derivational patterns. Many of them have the form of verbal noun with - *wa* ending, e.g.:

word	lit. mean.	new mean.	source
cinyewa < cinye	eating all	great impress	Hausa
fasowa < faso/fasa	breaking sth.	getting money	Hausa
haɗuwa < haɗu	meeting	becoming a beautiful girl	Hausa

A large amount of new terms has the form of phrases, either nominal or verbal, e.g.:
– Nominal compositions:

word	lit. mean.	new mean.	source
bababar harka	big activity	senior girl	Hausa
ɗan hutu	son of rest	home boy	Hausa
ƙaramin kwaro	small insect	not smart	Hausa
na jaki	belonging to donkey	beating	Hausa
renin hankali	not recognizing sb. intentionally	outsmarting	Hausa

– Verbal phrases

word	lit. meaning	new meaning	source
iya taku	knowing how to walk	deception	Hausa

jan-aji	pulling class	attending class	Hausa
kunto kura	to release hyena	to face challenge	Hausa
share shi	sweep him	forget about him	Hausa

Among derivational strategies that are used to create new words there is prefix *ɗan* (lit. 'son of') added to some stems, as well as other kinds of nominal compositions based on genitive construction. Some ideas are expressed in finite verb forms. As for the phrases that are characteristic of the youth language, it is *ki yarda da ni* 'love me' (lit. 'trust me'). The form of the clause has also the phrase *ba ni da kyau* 'I am wicked' (lit. 'I am dangerous').

4.4. Semantic Extensions of Hausa words (phrases)

Most of the words classified within this category have their stems in the Hausa or English language; they are only extended to suit the group communication. Langacker (1973: 186) explains semantic extension as "a way of obtaining a new term by extending the use of old one". So it is a process of widening the meaning of a word or phrase by expansion of the contexts in which it occurs.

Some areas of communication are extensively enriched with these new terms. The terms can be categorized under sub-categories as follows:
- social status or financial resources
- love and relationship
- film
- social interactions

4.4.1 Social status, financial resources

The conversations within youths' groups reveal great concern about money, that secure enjoyment of their youth time. As a result of this attitude, they produce some terms concerning getting money

or marking a social status, e.g.:

word	original meaning	meaning for youths
1. aji	classroom	status
2. bacci/barci	sleeping	poor man
3. bayani	information	money
4. gada	bridge	money
5. gani	to see	to give money
6. gurgu	cripple	the one who doesn't have a car
7. ƙarfi	energy	money
8. kari	smell, odor	poor
9. kurma	deaf	someone without mobile phone
10. motsi	movement	money
11. shigo gari	enter town	to get money
12. tsari	plan	money
13. 'ya'yan banki	bank children	money

4.4.2 Love and relationship

word	original meaning	meaning for youths
1. ɗan akuya	he-goat	womanizer
2. kwaila	girl	immature
3. mai	oil	girflriend/lady
4. namiji	male	courageous
5. yarinya	girl	girlfriend
6. yauƙi	sliminess	womanish attitude

4.4.3 Film terms

word	original meaning	meaning for youths
1. gyaɗa	groundnut	film
2. dauraya	to clean up	to copy something
3. jarumi	brave	actor

4.	jaruma	brave	actress
5.	mai sanyina	owner of my cold	my lover
6.	mamulashe	toothless	kiss/hug
7.	mazaje	males	actors
8.	sabon yanka	new-cut	newcomer
9.	tashe	reigning	actor/actress in his/her peak
10.	'yar da ake yayi	a girl loved by all	beautiful lady

4.4.4. Social interactions

	word	**original meaning**	**meaning for youths**
1.	baba	father	colleague
2.	ɗan birni	town man	deceiver
3.	ɗan gaye	guy man	fashionable
4.	ɗan Hajiya	Hajiya's son	spoiled child
5.	ɗan hayaniya	noise maker	trouble maker
6.	ɗaga kafa	to rise leg	to stop
7.	ɗan tasha	motor park son	rude
8.	fuska	face	frown
9.	gani-gani	seeing-seeing	looking down at sb.
10.	gyara fakin	to park well	to run
11.	gyara zama	to sit well	to deal with sb.
12.	haka-haka	like this	to deceive
13.	indararo	noise maker	drains
14.	kaya	load	cocaine
15.	kwar	insect	wise
16.	makaho	blind	unwise man
17.	renin hankali	provoke	outsmart
18.	sa kai	to put head	go ahead

19. sa labule	to put curtain	to make secrete
20. share	to sweep	to forget
21. tsami	sourness	unwise
22. tafiya da imani	to go with faith	to be impressed

A number of meaning extensions of the existing Hausa or English words are done through or based on analogy, i.e. they give prominence to one characteristic feature of a given word designate. There are many words whose meanings are extended in the language used by youth social groups through their metaphoric interpretation, while others are metonymically extended, as they describe things indirectly by referring to image that they evoke.

Newly coined words are in fact non Hausa words and they are mostly understood by the members of youth community and other people who try to follow them in the conversation habits.

5. Conclusion

The Hausa youths' language is marked by some special terms and phrases created by the manipulation of existing words in the process of communication. The collected data show that this group creates the language to distinguish its members from the other groups of society. Among the techniques there is metaphor commonly used.

The new terms are coined in spoken language of day-to-day communication. Their semantics reveals main topics of the youth conversation. Main areas of communication are social interaction between youth and contacts between boys and girls. These new words become known to other groups of Hausa users through the youth contacts and their day-to-day activities with other groups outside their domain.

The form of interaction and the topics raised in the communication show the ongoing interest of the youth generation in Nigeria towards the Western model of culture. However, the religious terms of Arabic origin are also introduced into the common language, whereas borrowings are commonly understood and subsequently

adapted into the norm of Hausa, the youths' language is a code accepted only within this group.

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