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A studies on comparative linguistics: Comparing Hausa and Gera sounds in northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper compared the sounds of Hausa and Gera, who both belong to the Chadic family. Hausa has 31 consonants while Gera has 37. There are 23 consonants shared by both Hausa and Gera.

There are 14 Gera consonants not existing in Hausa and there are 9 Hausa consonants not existing among the Gera sounds. Hausa has 5 long and short vowels while Gera have 3 long and 2 short vowels, and an additional vowel, the schwa. Hausa has 2 diphthongs while Gera has 8.

Keywords: Comparative linguistics, sounds, Hausa and Gera

Introduction

Both Hausa and Gera belong to the 140 Chadic Languages spoken predominantly in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroun and Chad. Both languages belong to the West Chadic branch of the Chadic Language, which also belongs to the Afro-Asiatic Language Family, Greenberg (1966) [2].

Both Hausa and Gera belong to the several groups of Chadic Speaking Languages of Northern Cameroon, which several modern genetic studies of the groups in the northern Cameroon region have observed high frequencies of the Y-Chromosomes Haplogroup R1B in these populations (specifically, of R1b's R-V88 variant) This paternal marker is common in parts of West Eurasia, but otherwise rare in Africa. Cruciani *et al.* (2010) [3] thus propose that the Proto-Chadic speakers during the mid-Holocene (-7,000 years ago) migrated from the Levant to the Central Sahara, and from there settled in the Lake Chad Basin.

The sounds of language

It is regularly said that languages vary by sound or melody. Only when one instigates determinedly the procedure of learning a foreign language, does one notice that the language in question possesses sounds far removed from those in one's own, and not even produced in the same manner. Sometimes, there are also sounds, which sound similar, yet prove to be different by a minute, but essential, detail. Those sounds cannot simply be replaced by sounds one knows from their own language. Such a replacement could change the meaning of a word or phrase, or even cause the sentence to become incomprehensible. Correct articulation can prove to be of great difficulty and may require arduous and repetitive practice. Several different sounds may sound the same to a non-native speaker, and at the same time, deceptively similar to a sound from their own mother tongue. Although awareness of such phenomena increases with every new foreign language learnt, only a few realise just how much variety of sound exists in the languages of the world

The syllable structure of both Hausa and Gera

Here the syllable structure of both Hausa and Gera will be presented in order to determine if that of the Hausa has affected that of Gera due to the endangerment. In Hausa there are three types of syllable structure. One important thing in the arrangement of the Hausa syllable is that no consonant clusters occur within a syllable. The three are:

CV (light) e.g. - Zo (come)

CVV (VV can be two vowels or a diphthong), e.g. – DAU (take)

CVC (heavy) e.g. – Yar (throw)

Unlike that of the Hausa, the syllable structure of the Gera allows the inclusion of consonant

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cluster. The Gera has 4 types of Syllable Structure:
 CV (light) – Ka (with)
 CVV (which also includes long vowels or a diphthong) – Loo-mi (birth)
 CVC (Heavy) – Kir-fa (fish)
 CCV (Heavy) –Nwa-ki (touch)

In Gera language, all consonants can come at the beginning of a word, but only 3 can come at the end, and they are:
 [b] gab (inside)

[m] beshim (six)
 [r] bar (ten)

The consonants of Gera and Hausa

Standard Hausa and Gera have slightly different numbers of phonemic consonants: 31 and 37 respectively. Below are the consonant charts of the two languages concerned:

The Hausa consonant chart

Table 1: Consonant chart of Hausa

	Labial	Dental-alveola	Palatal	Palato-velar	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal	
Plosive	B	t d		ky gy	k g	kw gw	?	?y
Glottalised Plosive	ɓ	d̥		Ky	ƙ	Kw	H	
Fricative	f	s z	ʃ					
Glottalised Fricative		tʃ						
Affricate			c dz					
Nasal	M	N						
Vibrant		R						
Flap		r						
Lateral		L						
Approximant	W							
			Y					

Adopted from Abu Manga (1999) [1]: Hausa In The Sudan: Process of Adaptation in to Arabic.

The Gera consonant chart

Table 2: The Gera consonant chart labial dental-alveola palatal palate-velar labio-velar glottal

Plosive	b		t d			ty	k g		?
Glottalised Plosive	ɓ		d̥			d̥y by ty		dw tw gw	
Prenasalised Plosive	mb		md ɲd ɲg			mby ngy			
Labialised plosive								kw gw	
Nasalised-labialised Plosive								ɲgw	
Fricative		f	s z	ʃ					h
Labialised Fricative			sw zw	ʃw					
Affricate				c dz					
Nasalised Affricate				ɲj					
Nasal	m		N				ɲ		
Labialised Nasal	mw								
Vibrant			R						
Flap									
Lateral			L						
Labialised Lateral			rw						
Approximant	W				Y				

Adopted from Garba (2019): Endangered Language In Nigeria: A Case Study of Gera

As can be seen from the above charts, 23 consonants are found to be shared by both Hausa and Gera, these are: b ɓ f m w t d d̥ s z n r l sh c dz y k g kw gw and h: There are 14 consonants in Gera which do not exist in Hausa: mb, mw, md, dw, tw, sw, zw, rw, sh, shw ɲj ngw, mby, ngy, ty by d̥y nd, whereas the Hausa chart includes 9 consonants not existing in Gera: ts r y gy ƙ ky ky kw And ?y.

The 23 sounds shared by both Hausa and Gera

Gera	Hausa
/b/ bana (house)	biri (monkey)
[c] ca (brother)	cire (remove)
[d] dusha (horse)	dabba (animal)
[f] fishi (sun)	fushi (anger)

[g] gowa (pumpkin)	gawa (corpse)
[h] husha (knife)	hujja (proof)
[j] jitina (food)	jiki (body)
[k] kirsa (rashes)	kuraje (rashes)
[l] lunga (straw)	langa (bucket)
[m] misini (beer)	marai (evening)
[n] nimini (mine)	nama (meat)
[r] rewi (fear)	rana (sun)
/s/ Soyi (witch)	suya (fry)
/ʃ/ shaha (goat)	shanya (dry)
/t/ tunku (sheep)	talaka (poor)
/w/wusi (fire)	wuta (fire)
/y/ yali (small)	yaro (boy)
/z/ zura (laugh)	zuri'a (lineage)

2 Implosives

/b/ biliwi (bird) bangare (section)
/d/ dishi (animal hide) daci (bitter)

2 Labialised velars

/gw/ gwalfa (authority) gwaji (test)
/kw/ kwada (calabash) kwarya (calabash)

The Hausa 10 sounds that do not exist in Gera are**4 Ejectives**

/k/ karya (falsehood)
/ky/ Kyalli (shine)
/kw/ kwakwalwa (brain)
/s/ tsaro (security)

1 Flap

/r/ makyar'kyata (shaking)
2 Palato velars (palatals)
/ky/ kyau (beauty)
/gy/ gyara (repair)

2 Glottal

/ʔ/ 'abinci (food)
/ʔy/ 'ya'ya (children)

The sounds existing in Gera but missing in Hausa are**3 Prenasalised-stops**

/mb/ mbarmi (human being)
/nd/ ndoma (blood)
/ng/ ngora (donkey)
2 labialised plosives
/dw/ dwanbu (front)
/tw/ twani (plant)

2 Palatalised plosives

/ty/ tyalsha (jump)
/by/ byalmi (baboon)

1 prenasalised affricate

/nj/ njoni (yesterday)

1 Labialised nasal: [nw] nwanda (mother)**1 Labialised lateral: [rw] rwafi (to split)****3 Labialised fricatives**

[sw] swaka (talking)
[shw] shwanda (bile)
[zw] zwati (hit)

1 Pre-nasalised labio-velar

[ngw] ngwali (throw)
Ngwaimi (leaves)

2. Prenasalised-palato stops

/mby/ mbyara (guest)
/ngy/ ngylsha (calf)

At the first glance one can hardly draw any conclusion about the genetic relationship between Hausa and Gera from the above series of consonants. Phonemes are, however, the least considered by historical linguists in establishing genetic relations between languages, (Abu Manga 1999) [1]. This is because unlike lexical items and grammatical

elements, sounds are limited in number and are more liable to internal changes and shift. For example, Hausa is said to have witnessed five stages of sound change/shift, (cf. Gregersen 1967). Therefore, the shared consonantal phonemes consisting more than 55% of the total number of phonemic consonants in each of the 2 languages - though by themselves they may not signify anything- is still quite enough for a historical linguist not to disregard the possibility of them being genetically related.

The vowels of both Gera and Hausa

The Phoneme vowel systems of modern Hausa and Gera display similarities in some aspects and differences in others. Below are the phoneme vowel charts of the two languages:

The Gera vowel chart

I	u/uu
e/eee	o/oo

The Hausa vowel chart

i/ii	u/u
e/ee	o/oo

aa/aa

Hausa has, in addition, two diphthongs

ai/ Rai (life)
/au/ Yau (today)

In Gera however, there are about 8 diphthongs

/ai/ Ngaimi (cat)
/ei/ Ndei (go)
/oi/ Koi (locust beans)
/ui/ Ndui (come)
/iu/ Diumi (guinea fowl)
/eu/ Zeura (Worm)
/au/Yausa (Partridge)
/ou/ Bouya (Why)

As can be seen from the above charts, the two vowel systems have displayed significantly distinguished signs of similarity. Vowels, however, are of a minor value in historical linguistics. In Semitic Languages they are "...functionally and semantically secondary to consonants" (Jungraythmayr 1988:64 in Abu Manga 1999) [1].

Gera comprises of six vowels, three of these doubles as short and long: u/uu e/ee and o/oo;

/ee/ Teera (Stick)
/oo/ Loomi (birth)
/aa/ Laawi (child)

With three short ones: ə i and a, whereas Hausa has five short vowels and corresponding long vowels (diphthongs): i/ii, e/ee, a/aa, o/oo, and u/uu:

/a/ Tafi (go)
/aa/ Taafii (clap)
/i/ Rini (dyeing)
/ii/ jiima (skinning)

/o/ zo (come)
/oo/ sookoo (idiot)

/e/ jefa (throw)
/e/ leeka (peep)

/u/ buga (beat)
/uu/ nuuna (show)

Conclusion

According to Abu Manga (1999) ^[1], the present phoneme vowel system of Hausa and Gera seems to be an outcome of a long process of development. For although a definite proto-Chadic vowel system has not been reconstructed, Newman (1977:11 in Abu Manga, 1999) ^[1] believes that it had comprised “at most four phonemic vowels: /i/ə/a/u/ and possibly only two /ə/ and /e/”.

Most significantly to our purpose is the existence in Hausa (and maybe in proto-Chadic) of all the five out of six short vowels: u, o, e, a, and the three long ones, and I: /uu/, /oo/ and /ee/. This is in addition to the fact that vowel length in both languages plays an important role phonological or distinctive role.

To conclude this, the sound systems of Gera and Hausa do not present the exact precise and particular similarities but have exhibited enough of which solid conclusions about the genetic relationship between the two languages can be drawn.

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