

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

Language can be defined in so many ways as there are many scholars in the study of language who have looked into it in different ways. It is a known fact that every human on earth knows at least one language, spoken or signed which has given rise to the need to study and understand these languages. Linguistics, therefore, has been defined as the science of language, including the sounds, words, and grammatical rules. It should be noted that words in languages are finite because they are primarily what make up sentences, but sentences are not finite. It is this creative aspect of human language (i.e. the ability of man to use words to create sentences) that sets it apart from animal language, which is essentially responses to stimuli (Fromkin & Rodman undated). The rules of a language, also called grammar, are learned as one acquires a language. These rules include phonology, the sound system which is our area of emphasis, morphology, the structure of words, syntax, the combination of words into sentences, semantics, the way in which sounds and meanings are related, and the lexicon, or mental dictionary of words.

There are no less than 5,000 languages (probably a few more thousands) in the world right now and linguists have discovered that these languages are more alike than different from each other. There are universal concepts and properties that are shared by all languages and these principles are contained in the Universal Grammar, which forms the basis of all possible human languages. Nigeria is the most complex country in Africa, linguistically, and one of the most complex in the world. Crozier & Blench (1992) comment on this confusion as being basically about status and nomenclature which remains rife with inaccessibility of many minority languages is an obstacle to research. There are about 521 languages in Nigeria today which have been estimated and catalogued. This number includes 510 living languages, two (2) second languages without native speakers and nine (9) extinct languages. In some areas of Nigeria, ethnic groups speak more than one language. The major languages spoken in Nigeria represent three major families of African languages – that is the Niger-Congo languages, Afro-Asiatic and the Nilo-Saharan.

There are 57 languages spoken as first languages in Kaduna State. Gbari and Hausa are major languages; most other languages are small and endangered minority languages, due to the influence of Hausa. The language of study Atsam is a language spoken by the Atsam people of southern Kaduna specifically in Kauru LGA, Kaduna State.

Historical Background

Kaduna State forms a portion of the country's cultural diversity because representatives of the six major ethnic groups in the country are found in the state. Apart from this fact, there are also present over twenty other ethnic minority groups, each with its language and art or religion different from the other.

The works of art and pottery (e.g. the "Nok Terracotta") found in the southern parts of Kaduna State suggest that it is a major cultural centre. Among the major ethnic groups are Kamuku, Gwari, Kadara in the west, Hausa and Kurama to the north and Northeast. "Nerzit" is now used to describe the Jaba, Kaje, Koro, Kamanton, Kataf, Morwa and Chawai (study group) instead of the derogatory term "southern Zaria people". Also, the term "Hausawa" is used to describe the people of Igabi, Ikara, Giwa and Makarti LGAs, which include a large proportion of rural dwellers who are strictly "Maguzawas."

In the north, the Hausa and some immigrants from the southern states practise Islam and majority of the people in the southern LGAs profess Christianity. The major Muslim festivals are the "Salah" celebrations of "Idelfitri" and "Idelkibir", while Christmas, New Year and Easter are observed by the Christians. Two traditional festivals of significance are the "Tukham" and "Afan" in Jaba and Jama'a LGAs respectively. Prominent among the traditional arts, are leather works, pottery and in-dig-pit dyeing with Zaria as the major centre.

1.2.2 Population Structure and Distribution: The 2006 census provisional result puts the population of Kaduna State at 6,066,562. Although majorities live and depend on the rural

areas, about a third of the state's population is located in the two major urban centres of Kaduna and Zaria.

However, except in the northwestern quadrant, the rural population concentration is moderate, reaching a high of over 500 persons per sq. km. in Kaduna/Zaria and the neighbouring villages 350 in Jaba, Igabi and Giwa and 200 in Ikara LGAs. Despite the provisional nature of the census results, observations of movements of young able bodied male labourers in large numbers, from rural villages to towns during the dry season and back to rural agriculture fields during the wet season, suggest a sizeable seasonal labour force migration in the state. This seasonal labour migration has no effect on agricultural labour demands in the rural traditional setting. Indeed, some of these seasonal migrants come to town to learn specific trade or acquire special training and eventually go back to establish in the rural areas as skilled workers (e.g. masons, technicians, tractor drivers, carpenters, motor mechanics, etc). Another major feature of the State's population structure is the near 1:1 male/female ratio, not just for the state as a whole, but even in all the LGAs.

The effects of this may be helpful to the future social and economic development of the rural sector especially in the agro-allied rural industries. The large number of secondary school leavers, polytechnic and university graduates provides a growing skilled labour force for the growing industries in the state.

1.2.3 Urban and Rural Development and Patterns of Human Settlement: The pattern of human settlement throughout the state is tied to the historical, political and socioeconomic forces the area has been subjected to, from the pre-colonial to post colonial period. Prior to the advent of the British occupation, the basic unit of human settlement was the extended family compound.

As compounds grew, the needs for security and defence led to a higher hierarchy of settlements called "Garuruka" (towns). These towns were protected by walls with a titled/administrative head appointed by higher political authority, the "Sarki". This pattern of settlement dominated the Hausawa cultural groups to the north (i.e. Giwa, Igabi, Zaria, Sabon Gari, Kudan, Makarfi and parts of Ikara LGAs).

Higher settlement hierarchy than the rural extended family compounds in other parts of the state was delayed, until the development of social amenities and infrastructure such as motor and rail road, Christian Missionary establishments and recently, produce buyers, markets and administrative reorganizations gave impetus (settlements such as Birnin Gwari, Kuda'a, Kachia, Zango Kataf, Kwoi Sambam Kagoma and Saminaka are good examples). It is the impact of these historical and cultural developments on settlement pattern and probably because of the nature of the rural economy (agrarian) that created the dominance of the two urban centres (i.e. Zaria and Kaduna) in the state.

1.3 Geographical Background of the study area.

The study area is Kauru Local Government Area of Kaduna State of Nigeria. The state is the successor to the old Northern Region of Nigeria, which had its capital at Kaduna. In 1967 this was split up into six states, one of which was the North-Central State, whose name was changed to Kaduna State in 1976. This was further divided in 1987, losing the area now part of Katsina State. Under the governance of Kaduna State is the ancient city of Zaria. Kaduna State is located between longitude 10°31'23" North and 7°26'25" east. And the capital is Kaduna city. Figure 1 shows the location of Kaduna State on the map of Nigeria.

Fig 1 Map of Nigeria showing Kaduna State. (Source: File:Nigeria location map.svg) There are two marked seasons in the State, the Dry windy season and the Rainy (wet) Seasons. The wet season is usually from April through October with great variations as you move northwards. On the average, the state enjoys a rainy season of about five (5) months. There is heavy rainfall in the southern parts of the state like Kafanchan and northern parts like in Zaria with an average rainfall of about 1016mm. Kaduna State extends from the tropical grassland known as Guinea Savannah to the Sudan Savannah in the North. The grassland is a vast region covering the southern part of the state to about Latitude 11°00" North of the equator. The prevailing vegetation of tall grass and big trees are of economic

importance during both the wet and dry seasons.

The state is divided into 23 Local Government Areas. Kauru is one of the 23 Local Government Areas of Kaduna State with its headquarters in Kauru. Kauru Local government has an area of 2,810 km² and a population of 170,008 (2006 census). See Fig 2. (Map of Kaduna state showing senatorial districts)

Fig 2 Map of Kaduna State showing senatorial districts and local Government Areas (Source: www.kadunastate.org.ng)

Latitude, Longitude, and Elevation Kauru local government of Kaduna State is located at 9°52'11N latitude and 7°57'35E longitude and an average elevation of 706 meters.

Timezone

The time zone for Kachia is Africa/Lagos.

1.4 Socio-Cultural Profile:

The following could be observed among the Atsams. The language Atsam is seen as a means of communication in the market and also used for worshipping at the church. The Atsam language is spoken in towns like Pari, Kizachi, Makama, Chawai, Rahama Chawai etc. the speakers of this language that is the Atsam/Chawai are known for the preservation of their culture despite much influence and threat from the western world. For instance, among these people, a child is not allowed to greet an elderly person in the western manner or way.

The Atsam people are known to be hospitable, helpful, industrious and peace loving. When one knocks on the door of an Atsam/Chawai person at any hour of the day, one is assured of a warm welcome. This is why they are usually regarded as the most peace loving people of Kaduna State. Another aspect of their culture is their ability to be able to dance. This has been passed down from generation to generation. They are very good dancers and in fact they are the best in the whole of Kaduna State.

The Atsam people are predominantly farmers i.e. about 80% of the population though there are few who engage in other income generating ventures. Among the crops of cultural importance is the finger Millet popularly known as 'tamba', 'acha' or just millet. Just few of them engage in trading, fishing, craft making and beekeeping which also are income generating ventures for the community. Religion is a vital part of life of the people and to this end; there are two major religions in the chieftdom namely Christianity and Islam. However, some Atsam people are adherents of traditional religion popularly called 'dodo'.

ASPECTS OF PHONOLOGY OF ATSAM LANGUAGE

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