

Revisiting the Linguistic Situation in the North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study on the linguistic situation in the North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria revisits the languages of the North West with a view to ascertaining them and charting a way forward through proper documentation. A survey was conducted and was adequately described. The outcome shows a sizeable number of living languages in the zone, which must be fully documented for any meaningful planning. Governments and communities must commission further surveys and documentations of the languages.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present study is to revisit the language situation in the North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria (hereafter North-West) with a view to suggesting ways for proper documentation of the living languages found in the zone. The re-visitation is necessary in view of the fact that presently, languages are neglected and some are about to go extinct. The absence of a decisive national language policy in Nigeria is a major contributing factor that allows for the continuous neglect of Nigerian languages.

2. The North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

The present day Nigeria comprises six Geopolitical Zones. The zones are arranged alphabetically as follows: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South and South West. The North West Geopolitical Zone comprises seven States as follows: Jigawa State, Kaduna State, Kano State, Katsina State, Kebbi State, Sokoto State and Zamfara State. The zone is the largest zone in the country in terms of population and landmass.

3. The Languages of the North West Geopolitical Zone

A cursory survey of the languages of the North West reveals that there are over sixty living languages in the zone, and are distributed per State as follows:

	State	Number of Languages
1.	Jigawa	4
2.	Kaduna	41
3.	Kano	3
4.	Katsina	2
5.	Kebbi	18
6.	Sokoto	3
7.	Zamfara	3

It is important to note that a particular language may be found to cut across all the States of the North West or found only in no more than two States. Thus, Hausa and Fulfulde are found in all States, Zarma in two States and C’lela also in two States.

3.1 Languages of Jigawa State

Jigawa State is one of the States of the North West and it has a total number of twenty seven Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Auyo, Birniwa, Babura, Buji, Birnin Kudu, Dutse, Gumel, Gwaram, Gwiwa, Gagarawa, Guri, Garki, Hadejia, Jahun, Kiri Kasamma, Kafin Hausa, Kazaure, Kiyawa, Kaugama, Malam Madori, Maigatari, Roni, Ringim, Sule Tankarkar, Taura, ‘Yankwashi.

There are four languages in Jigawa State. The languages are Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri and Warji. These languages are indigenous to the State and speakers are indigenes of Jigawa State. Hausa and Fulfulde are spoken in all the Local Government Areas. Kanuri is especially found in Birniwa, Guri and Kiri Kasamma Local Government Areas of the State. Warji language (pronounced [wujji]) is found in Birnin Kudu Local Government Area. This Local Government Area shares boundary with Ningi Local Government Area in the neighboring Bauchi State. Lewis (2009) gave an estimated 77,700 speakers of Warji, and most of them are found in Ningi Local Government Area of Bauchi State. Warji is endangered and faces real threat from Hausa which daily engulf the speakers of Warji (Blench 2012).

3.2 Languages of Kaduna State

Kaduna State is the political nerve of the North West, being the former headquarters of Northern Nigerian Regional Government. Amfani (2010) presented a preliminary survey of the languages of Kaduna State. The survey identifies forty one languages in the State, and a good number of them are endangered.

Kaduna State has a total of twenty three Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Birnin Gwari, Chikun, Giwa, Igabi, Ikara, Jaba, Jama’a, Kachia, Kaduna North, Kaduna South, Kagarko, Kagoro, Kaura, Kubau, Kudan, Kujama, Lere, Makarfi, Sabon Gari, Soba, Zangon Kataf, Zaria. Hausa and Fulfulde are spoken in all the

Local Government Areas of the State. (For the list of languages of Kaduna State see section 4.3).

3.3 Languages of Kano State

Kano State is one of the most important commercial centers in Nigeria, and undoubtedly, the most important commercial nerve of the North West. It is also one of the most populous States in Nigeria, the other being Lagos State. Kano State has a total of forty four Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Ajingi, Albasu, Bagwai, bebeji, Bichi, Bunkure, dala, Danbatta, Dawakin Kudu, Dawakin Tofa, Doguwa, Fagge, Gabasawa, Garko, Garun Malam, Gaya, Gezawa, Gwale, Gwarzo, Kobo, Kano Municipal, Karaye, Kibiya, Kiru, Kumbotso, Kunchi, Kura, Madobi, Makoda, Minjibir, Nasarawa, Rano, Rimin Gado, Rogo, Shanono, Sumaila, Takai, Taroni, Tofa, Tsanyawa, Tudun Wada, Ungoggo, Warawa, Wudil. There are three indigenous languages in Kano State.. The languages are Hausa, Fulfulde and Butanci. Hausa and Fulfulde are spoken in all the forty four Local Government Areas of the state, and Butanci is spoken only in Sumaila Local Government Area which shares common boundary with Ningi Local Government Area in Bauchi State. Butanci is spoken by very few people and is near extinction. It is pertinent to note that Hausa is the predominant language in Kano State.

3.4 Languages of Katsina State

Katsina State is another big State in the North West and has a total of thirty three Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Bakori, Batsari, Batagarawa, Baure, Bindawa, Caranci, Dandume, Danja, Daura, Danmusa, Dutsin Ma, Faskari, Funtuwa, Ingawa, Jibiya, Kafur, Katsina, Kankara, kankiya, Kurfi, Kusada, Mai'aduwa, Malumfashi, Mani, Mashi, Matazu, Musawa, Rimi, Sabuwa, Safana, Sandamu, Zango. There are two indigenous languages in the state, namely Hausa and Fulfulde. Both languages are spoken in all the Local Government Areas of the state but majority of the population are native Hausa speakers.

3.5 Languages of Kebbi State

Kebbi State is characterized by having a number of ethnic communities and therefore a sizeable number of languages. Kebbi State has about eighteen languages which are spread in twenty one Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Aliero, Arewa Dandi, Argungu, Augie, Bagudo, Birnin Kebbi, Bunza, Dandi, Fakkai, Gwandu, Jega, Kalgo, Koko-Besse, Maiyama, Ngaski, Sakaba, Shanga, Suru, Wasagu-Danko, Yawuri, Zuru. Hausa and Fulfulde are the two languages spoken in all the Local Government Areas of the state. Other languages are confined to few Local Government Areas. The seventeen languages of Kebbi State are as follows: Acipanci, Agaushi, Akimba, Ashingini, C'lela, Dendi, Fulfulde, Gwamhi-wuri, Hausa, Hun-saare, Kag (Fakkanci), Kamuku, Laru, Lopa, Reshe, Sarko, Shanga, Zarma.

3.6 Languages of Sokoto State

Sokoto State is an important state in the North West being the seat of the Sokoto Caliphate. Sokoto State has a total of twenty three Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Binji, Bodinga, Dange-Shuni, Gada, Goronyo, Gudu, Gwadabawa, Illela, Isa, Kware, Kebbe, Raba, Sabon Birni, Shagari, Silame, Sokoto North, Sokoto South, Tambuwal, Tangaza, Tureta, Wamakko, Wurno, Yabo. There are three indigenous languages in Sokoto State. The languages are Hausa, Fulfulde and Zarma. Hausa and Fulfulde are spoken in all the Local Government Areas of the State. Zarma is mainly spoken in Kware Local Government Area and Sokoto North Local Government Area.

3.7 Languages of Zamfara State

Zamfara State is an important state in the North West and it is best known for extensive agriculture. The state has the least number of Local Government Areas in the North West zone. It has a total of fourteen Local Government Areas. The Local Government Areas are the following: Anka, Bakura, Birnin Magaji, Bukkuyum, Bungudu, Gummi, Gusau, Kaura Namoda, Maradun, Maru, Shinkafi, Talata Mafara, Tsafe, Zurmi. There are four indigenous languages in the state: Hausa, Fulfulde, C'lela and Kag (Fakkanci). Hausa and Fulfulde are spoken in all the Local Government Areas of the state. C'lela has speakers in Bukkuyum and Maru Local Government Areas. Kag (Fakkanci) is spoken in Anka Local Government Area (Muhammed 2010).

It is important to note that Bukkuyum, Anka and Maru Local Government Areas share common boundary with Kebbi State, and in particular the C'lela and Fakkanci speaking areas of Kebbi State. Boundary demarcation and adjustment pushed some C'lela and Fakkanci speakers into Zamfara State, and therefore the people and their languages became indigenous to Zamfara State.

4. Genetic Classification of the Languages of the North West Geopolitical Zone

All languages in the North West Geopolitical Zone fall within three major language families, namely: Afro-asiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo.

4.1 Afro-Asiatic

Hausa (in all States), Gwandara (Kaduna State) and Warji (Jigawa State) are the only three languages in the North West that belong to the Afro-Asiatic phylum. All three also belong to the Chadic sub group of the Afro-asiatic phylum.

4.2 Nilo-Saharan

The languages in the North West Geopolitical Zone that belong to the Nilo-Saharan family are the following:

- (i) Dendi (Kebbi State)

- (ii) Kanuri (Jigawa State)
- (iii) Zarma (Kebbi and Sokoto States).

Kanuri is classified as Nilo-Saharan, Saharan, Western. Dendi and Zarma are classified as Nilo-Saharan, Songhai, Southern.

4.3 Niger-Congo

The bulk of the languages in the North West geopolitical belong to the Niger-Congo family. Fulfulde is found in all the seven states of the North West. It is a Niger-Congo language and is classified as follows: Fulfulde: Niger-Congo, Atlantic Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian. Other Niger-Congo languages in the North West are as follows:

Kaduna State: Bina, Dungu, Gbiri-Niragu (Gurre-Kahuga), Kaivi, Kiballo (Vono), Kinuku, Kitima, Kono, Kurama, Maia, Piti, Ruma, Sheni, Surubu, Atsam, Begbere-Ejar, Doko, Idon, Ike-Gora-Ankwa, Ikulu, Kamantan, Kuturmi, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Nkwak, Ayu, Idun, Jju, Kagoma, Kanufi-Kaningdon-Nindem, Katab, Nandu-Tari, Ninzo, Numana-Nundu-Gwantu-Numba, Yeskwa, Ham/Hyam, Cori, Shamang, Zhire.

Kebbi State: Acipanci, Agaushi, Akimba, Ashingini, C'lela, Gwamhi-wuri, Hunsaare, Kag (Fakkanci), Kamuku, Laru, Lopa, Nwanci, Reshe, Shanga, Sarko.

Zamfara State: C'lela and Kag (Fakkanci)

5. Documenting the Languages of the North West Geopolitical Zone

We have shown in the preceding sections the languages found in the seven States of the North West Geopolitical Zone. The languages are indeed living languages with sizable number of speakers. However, further survey is needed for all the languages to ascertain their vitality and to document them properly. It is the duty of governments to commission surveys and documentation of these languages. The absence of a purposeful policy for languages in Nigeria is a serious obstacle to language survey and documentation. In the interim, departments of languages and linguistics in tertiary institutions, and government agencies such as the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) should conduct preliminary surveys of these languages with the sole aim of documenting them. Communities that use these languages as their own native languages, should support such survey and documentation projects. It is quite revealing that a good and comprehensive survey of Nigerian languages and their dialects in each of the six Geopolitical Zones will surely provide authentic statistical information about the languages. Such statistical information is very essential and a prerequisite for any meaningful planning in the country.

6. Conclusion

The present situational survey of languages in the North West Geopolitical Zone gives an accurate picture of language situation in the North West. Similar situational survey is necessary in all the Geopolitical Zones in the country. Accurate statistical figures on languages and dialects in all the six Geopolitical Zones will be a good starting point for any meaningful planning for the advancement of Nigerian languages.

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