Are Arabic and Hausa Cognate Languages?

BY

Abraham Sunday Unubi[1*,] Sadiya Yusuf[2]

[1]Department of English and Literary Studies, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Nigeria
[2]Department of Hausa, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Nigeria

Abstract

This article is primed to investigate with a view to establishing whether Arabic and Hausa are cognates or not. Since languages are said to be living or alive, the concept of identicalness is a possible phenomenon as applicable to other living creatures. The researchers adopted secondary method in collecting the data for this study. This data comprised diagrams of the linguistic family trees and samples of lexical items taken from the two languages under study, and analysed. The lexical items are 25 in number, which we tabulated, tone-marked and glossed accordingly for purposes of clarity and correctness in articulation on the part of the readership both locally and internationally. The analysis paved the way for the investigators to ably pin down and clearly pinpoint cases of cognacy or cognateness appropriately as the case may be, which made them to arrive at a conclusion. The researchers chose the genetic hypothesis propounded by Hale in 2007, as a theoretical background for this study. From the analysis of the linguistic family trees of both languages as well as the lexical items, the findings of the study suggested that both languages are actually cognates. A few of these lexical items include: Arabic=sab'i:nHausa=sàbà'in='seventy';Arabic=huku:mahHausa=hùkuumàa='government' ; Arabic= jamhu:riyyah - Hausa=jamhuuriyàa='republic', etc.

Keywords: Arabic, Hausa, philology, cognacy, genetic hypothesis

1. INTRODUCTION

Cognateness is a natural usual occurrence in humans and other living beings globally. As it is to living or other social organisms, so it is to languages. This is because language is a living being, and anything that has life definitely originates from a parent or parents, and this is applicable to living organisms with sexual or asexual reproduction. It is obvious that in this study, the researchers are saddled with the responsibility of considering the subject matter from different angles possible so as to reach a conclusion whether or not Arabic and Hausa hail from the same source, or are cognates to each other. Undoubtedly, a historical/comparative linguistic or philological study of this kind is very crucial to linguists or language specialists and students as well as language enthusiasts in their lifetime journey of scientific study or description of language. The reason is that adequate knowledge of cognacy of two or more languages has the potential to trigger quest for additional information about how such languages behave phonologically,

morphologically, syntactically, pragmatically, sociolinguistically, stylistically, etc.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

As the old saying goes, there cannot be smoke without fire. Any research considered as academic or scholarly must either seek to solve a problem or fill a yawning knowledge gap that has been created over time. Without falling into the trap of understatement or overstatement, it is pertinent to mention here that majority of the existing researches on Arabic and Hausa has been concentrated on loanwords between the two languages, some of which are outlined as follows: (i) "Arabic loanwords in Hausa" (Greenberg, 1947 – online version 2015); (ii) "Arabic loanwords in Hausa" (Yelwa, 1992); (iii) "Vowel Epenthesis in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa" (Alqahtani and Musa, 2015); (iv) "Semantic Change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa" (Danzaki, 2015); (v) "Two Essays on Arabic

Page | 942

Loan-words in Hausa" (Goerner, Salman and Armitage, 1966); (vi) "Dictionary of Arabic Loanwords in the Languages of East and Central Africa" (Baldi, 2021); (vii) "On Semantics of Arabic Loanwords in Hausa" (Baldi, 1989); (viii) "Some Additional Remarks on Arabic Loanwords in Hausa" (Baldi, 1991); (ix) "Function Words of Arabic Origin in Hausa" (Zając, 2019); (x) "Provenance of Arabic Loan-words in Hausa: A Phonological and Semantic Study" (El-shazly, 1987); and so on and so forth. From the foregoing, it is very obvious that investigations into determining whether Arabic and Hausa are cognate languages are not common. Indeed, this is what has prompted or stimulated the researchers to embark on this taxing but worthwhile study.

3. Review of Related Literature

To be reviewed here are important concepts or keywords that constitute the topic of this study. The researchers discusse each of them in each of the paragraphs as outlined below:

Arabic is a name derived from the word *Arab*, which is said to have originated from a Syriac pun, Abraham. According to this account, Abraham addresses Ishmael and calls him *uʿrub*, from Syriac *ʿrob*, meaning mingle. One other account says the name originates from Al Hirah (fourth-to-seventh-century Mesopotamia) in the north, while yet another says it originates from the south of Arabia, from Himyar (110 BC to AD 525). According to Webb (2016), history reports it's first apparent *Arab* or *Arabic* in annals of the Iraqi-based Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-612 BCE). The Assyrians pushed their frontiers towards southwestern deserts where they encountered nomadic camel-herding peoples whom their administrators labelled with names such as *Arba-a*, *Aribi*, *Urbi,* etc. These names sound to us like *Arabic*, and thus purportedly depict the earliest generations of 'the Arab people'. Whatever it is, the fact remains that Arabic is one of the ancient and major languages of the world. Arabic is the only surviving member of the Ancient North Arabian dialect group attested in pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions dating back to the 4th century. Arabic is written with the Arabic alphabet, which is an abjad script and is written from right to left. Furthermore, Al-Huri (2015) declares that Arabic is a member of Semitic languages which include a number of languages in the Middle East and North Africa. It is originally generated from Afro-Asiatic languages which includes besides Arabic different languages such as Hebrew, Ethiopian, and others. The first emergence of Arabic as a world language goes back to the seventh century CE. In a similar fashion, Bishop (1998), while tracing the root of the Arabic language, observes that it descends from a language known in the literature as Proto-Semitic. This relationship places Arabic firmly in the Afro-Asiatic group of world languages. Furthermore, Bishop (1998:1) says that Ruhlen's (1987) taxonomy in his *Guide to the World's Languages* helps to elucidate Arabic's ancestry within this large group of languages. Specifically, Arabic is part of the Semitic subgroup of Afro-Asiatic languages.

Unubi and Yusuf (2017:415) quoted Ochonu (2008) as saying that the name *Hausa* (also known as Hausawa and Kasar Hausa) denotes the language, people, and land of the Hausa respectively, which are actually fairly recent coinages. The modern usage probably originates from the writings of Othman bin Fodio, leader of the Fulani Jihad, who before and during the Jihad, homogenized the Hausa-speaking but autonomous peoples. Hausa is not just a language; it is a category that has become synonymous, and now correlates, rightly or wrongly, with certain ways of acting, expressing oneself, making a living, and worshipping God. Hausa now carries with it a constellation of cultural, economic, and political connotations. As a language of trade and social contact in West Africa, and as the language of an ethnic group known as Hausa, it has now assumed a cosmopolitan position. The presence of people who speak Hausa as a second language throughout much of West Africa, and the role of the Hausa language as a lingua franca in much of northern Nigeria, speak to the utilitarian importance of a language whose intertwinement with trade and itinerant Islamic practices dates back to a remote Nigerian antiquity. In addition, Kraft and Kirk-Green (1994) as cited in Unubi and Yusuf (2017:416) declare that Hausa is classified by J. H. Greenberg as a member of the Chadic group of the Afroasiatic family of languages. It is, therefore, more closely related genetically to Arabic, Hebrew, Berber, and other members of the Afroasiatic family than are most of the rest of the languages of sub-Saharan Africa. According to Jaggar (2011), Hausa, with perhaps as many as 40 million first-language speakers (within the Afroasiatic/Afrasian phylum only Arabic has more), is by far the largest of the 130 or more languages which constitute the Chadic family. Hausa covers most of the northern and western extent of the family, across northern Nigeria and into southern Niger. Chadic languages also extend into northern Cameroon and western and south-central parts of the Chad Republic, and hitherto unknown languages are still occasionally discovered. This area is one of the most linguistically complex in Africa and is the location of languages belonging to three of the four great phyla as postulated by Greenberg (1963) – Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Hausa), Niger Kordofanian (e.g., Fulani), and Nilo-Saharan (e.g., Kanuri).

Turner (2000) reports that in the nineteenth century, the term *philology* comprised three distinct modes of research: (1) textual philology (including classical and biblical studies, 'oriental' literatures such as those in Sanskrit and Arabic, and medieval and modern European writings); (2) theories of the origin and nature of language; and (3) comparative study of the structures and historical evolution of languages and of language families. The researchers here adopt 2 and 3 in their attempt to define philology because historical origin and nature as well as historical evolution of families of the two languages are exceedingly important in reaching a conclusion in this current study. This is because Turner (2000) further states, "All philologists believed history to be the key to unlocking the different mysteries they sought to solve. Only by understanding the historical origins of texts, of different languages, or of language itself could a scholar adequately explain the object of study". In a different development, Crystal (2008) observes that philology is a traditional word for the study of language history, being conducted by comparative philologists since the 19th century till date. This obviously means that philology, comparative linguistics, and historical linguistics are intrinsically intertwined. The position of Kaufman (1990) as cited in Joseph and Janda (2003) buttresses the researchers' claim above:

"The central job of comparative-historical linguistics is the identification of groups of genetically related languages…". In view of this, Crystal (2008) states that the concern of comparative linguistics in the 19th century was exclusively historical because scholars were investigating family of languages, that of historical linguistics studies the development of language and languages over time, adding that the data of study are identical to that of comparative philology. In spite of the varied views of scholars concerning this term, philology is defined simply as a study of the structure, historical development, and family relationship of a language or languages.

Cognate is a term in linguistics that means a language or a linguistic form which is historically obtained from similar origin or source as another form or language (Crystal, 2008). Similarly, according to Longman (2005) as cited in Stamenov (2009:1), cognates are lexemes in one language that have the same origin as a word in another language. Furthermore, Kondrak (2000) states that cognates, in historical linguistics, are words in related languages that have developed from the same ancestor words, exemplifying French *lait* and Spanish *leche* as cognates because both of them come from the Latin *lacte*. He added that the identification of cognates is a component of two principal tasks of in the field of historical linguistics: to establish the relatedness of languages and to reconstruct the histories of language families. And incidentally, this is what the current study is poised to achieve, that is, to establish the relatedness of Arabic and Hausa to know whether they are cognates or not. In a similar fashion, Dimmendaal (2011) opines that cognates are lexical items with identical or similar shape and meaning, identified in particular through a comparison of basic vocabulary and that they are conveniently ordered in such a way that their equivalents for words become clearly obvious. This actually is more often than not the case in languages that possess such similar linguistic data that are considered as cognates.

4. Research Methodology

In this research, the investigators utilized secondary sources as a method in collecting, presenting, and analysing data for this study. The data actually comprised diagrams of the linguistic genetic family tree of as well as samples of lexical items taken from the two languages under consideration and analysed. The researchers tabulated these lexical items, tone-marked those of Hausa, numbered, and glossed them accordingly for both languages for purposes of clarity and correctness in articulation on the part of the readership both locally and internationally. The analysis paved the way for the investigators to ably pin down and clearly pinpoint cases of cognacy or cognateness appropriately as the case may be, which made them to arrive at a conclusion. The researchers chose the genetic hypothesis propounded by Hale in 2007, as a theoretical background for this study, which is discussed below.

4.1 Theoretical background

This research is built on the foundation of genetic hypothesis as put forward by Hale in 2007. According to Hale (2007:226), the genetic hypothesis is intended to offer reason for observed similarities in the output of different languages. Note here that the term *genetic* in this context is not obtained from *gene* but from the verbal base of *genesis* which is *origin*. The hypothesis claims that the languages under study should share at least a subset of their features because they have acquired these features through inheritance from a common ancestor. In consonance with Hale's submission, the genetic hypothesis has the following claims: (i) Grammar$_1$ and Gramma$_2$ (which represent languages) have some similarities; (ii) the similarities are too numerous and too systematic to be due to chance; (iii) the similarities align in a manner that they are inconsistent with known borrowing pattern, and (iv) reasons can be advanced for the similarities by supposing that Grammar G$_1$ and Gramma$_2$ are truly *descendants* of a common ancestor.

As we have seen here, indubitably, the theory above appropriately matches the objective or goal of the current study. On one hand, this study is meant to find out the genetic family relationship between the two languages in question by presenting or placing their linguistic family trees one after another with a view to establishing whether they have a common ancestor, or they originated from a common source. While on the other, it aims to harvest and present in a tabular form, as many as it can, possibly, lexical items from these two languages that are similar both morphologically and semantically. All these are intended to make the researchers reach valid conclusion regarding cognacy of Arabic to Hausa languages.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

To be presented as data under this section, are the linguistic family tree diagrams of the two languages and lexical items from both languages that have semantic and morphological similarities. In particular, the lexical items are tabulated, numbered accordingly, and analyzed while the linguistic family tree diagrams are proximately placed side by side to each other, and also analyzed. Outlined below is our first data along with the analysis:

Figure 1: The Arabic language genetically placed in the Proto-Semitic family of languages (https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/examining-the-origins-of-arabic-interactive-1.184175)
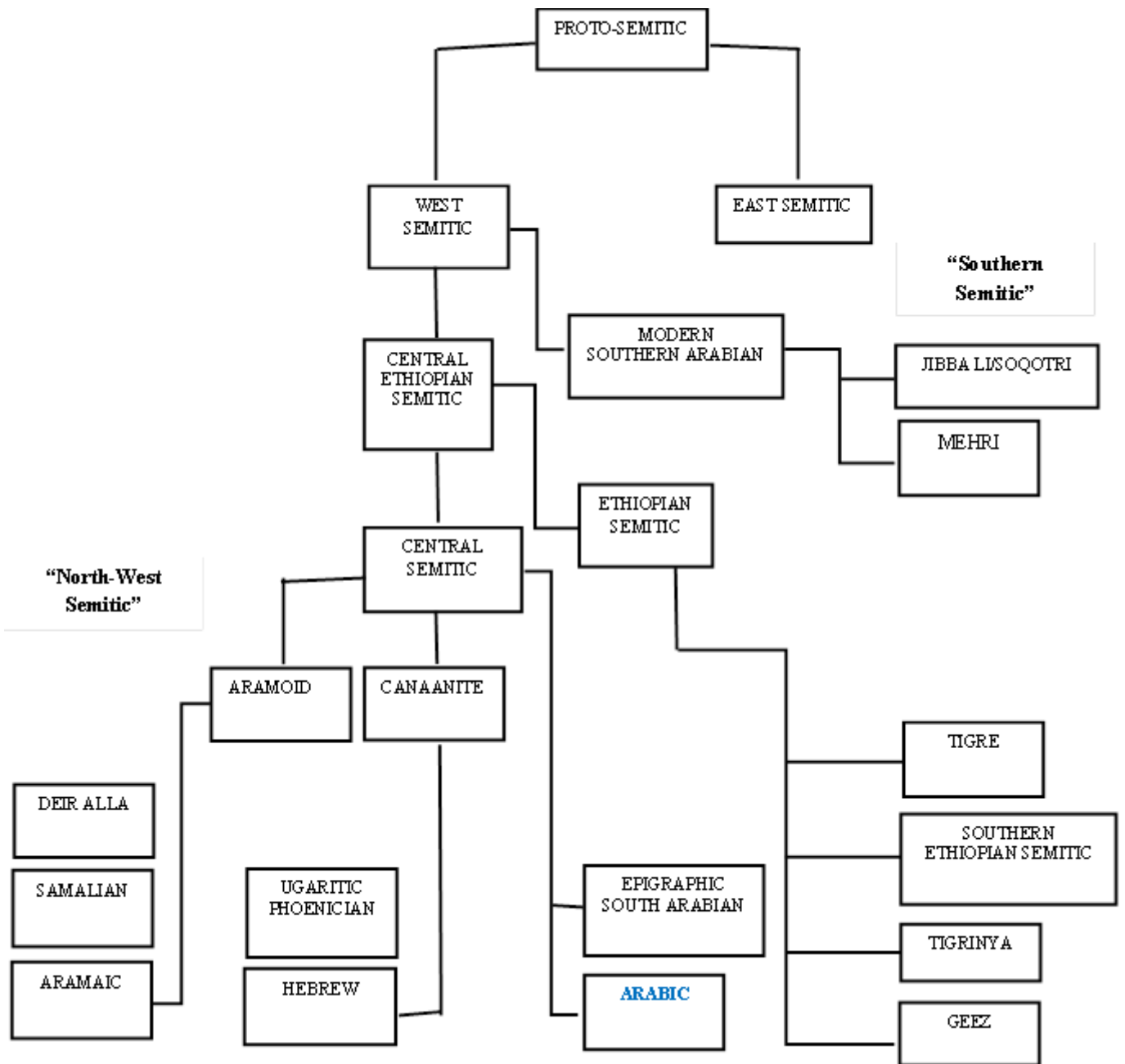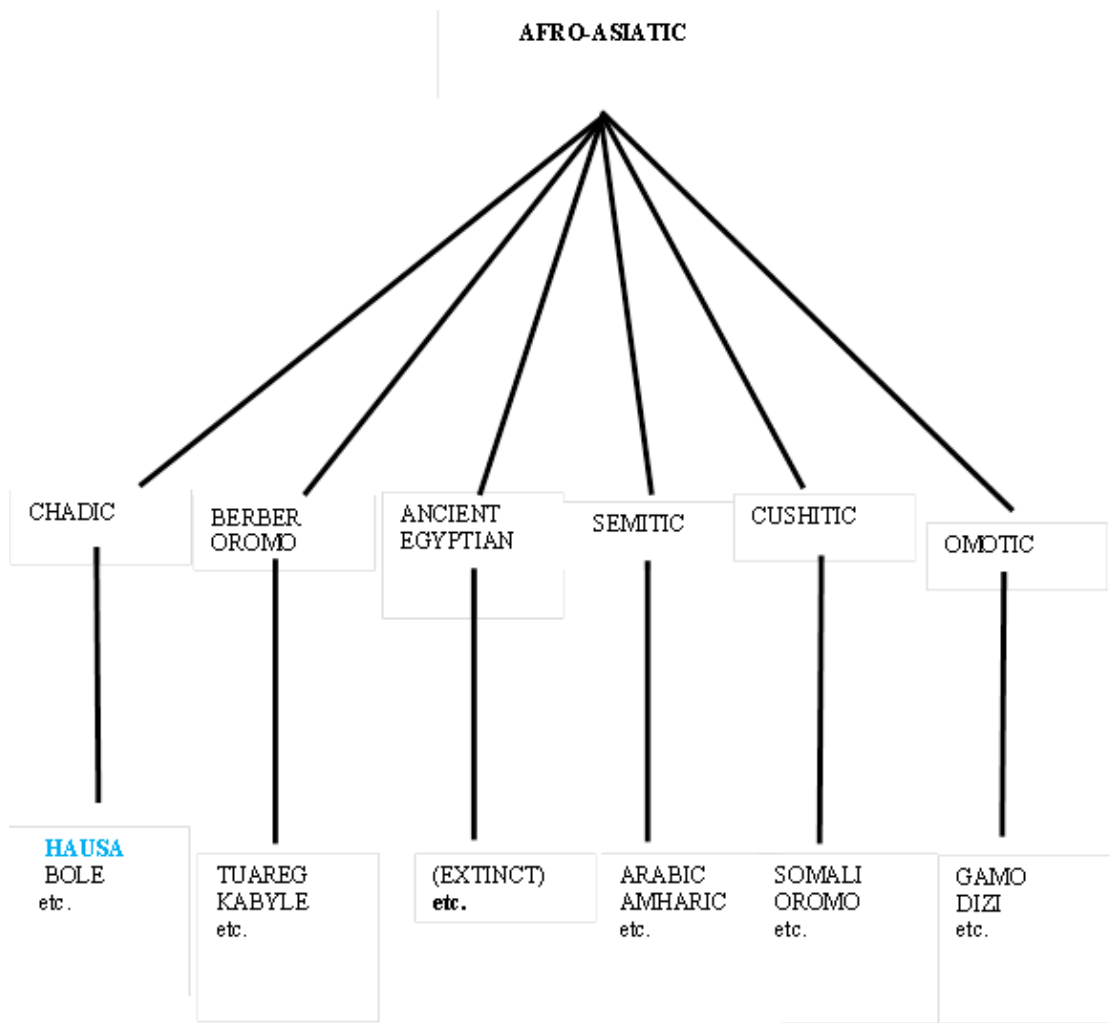
Figure 2: The Hausa language genetically placed in the Afro-Asiatic family of languages
(https://www.google.com/afroasiatic+hausa+family)

A closer look at the tree diagrams of the two language families presented, one can clearly see the following: (i) from the Hausa family tree, Hausa is the direct daughter of the Chadic group of languages, which has Afro-Asiatic as the parent language; (ii) while a second look at the same family tree shows that Arabic originates from the Semitic group of languages, which also has Afro-Asiatic as the parent language; and (iii) from the Arabic family tree, Arabic is the immediate daughter of the Central Semitic group of languages, whose direct parent is the Central Ethiopian group of languages, who in turn has the West Semitic group of languages as the grandparent, that now has the Proto-Semitic as the great grandparent. From both family trees, we can validly comment here that the two languages are cognates because both of them genetically originate from a common source, and are therefore descendants of a common ancestor. This, indeed, is one of the good and cogent reasons advanced by Hale (2007) in determining cognateness or cognacy between languages (please refer to 4.1 for detailed information).

The second part of the data for this research is made up of lexical items from both languages that are morphologically and semantically similar, as provided by Greenberg (2015) and Yelwa (1992), which are outlined below:

S/No.	Arabic lexical item	Hausa lexical item	Gloss
1.	Sab'i:n	sàbà'in	'seventy'
2.	Huku:mah	hùkuumàa	'government'
3.	Jamhu:riyyah	jamhuuriyàa	'republic'
4.	Hala:l	hàlâl	'lawful'

5.	Allah	Allàh	'God'
6.	Hara:m	hàrâm	'unlawful'
7.	Bai'ah	bai'àa	'pay homage'
8.	Sitti:n	sìttin	'sixty'
9.	Ḥatta:	hàttaa	'even'
10.	ʔallafa	wallàfaa	'compose/publish a book/paper/poem
11.	Jibril:	Jìbìrîn/Jìbriilù	'Angel Gabriel'
12.	kaashif	kaashìf	'abundant grace'
13.	Awliyaa-Allah	auliyaa-ÀIIah	'friends of God'
14.	Naasi	naasìi	'forgetfulness'
15.	Bu'si	buu'sì	'misfortune/evil'
16.	Ya'si	ya'asìi	'despair'
17.	Kursiiyì	kursiyyù	'chair or seat'
18.	Na:su:t	naasuutìi	'stage of material existence'
19.	Ahad	Ahadùn	'the (only) One'
20.	Halaka	hállaká	'perish'
21.	Ḥayḍa	háyla	'menstruation'
22.	Maġrib	magaríba	'dust'
23.	Wazi:r	wázíri	'vizier'
24.	Dali:l	dàlíílì	'reason or cause'
25.	Mi:za:n	mízáni	'weight or balance'

Once again, any individual who examines this second part of our data critically would notice that the lexical items from both Arabic and Hausa are clearly similar morphologically and semantically. And this is in line with the genetic hypothesis adopted as the framework for this study, which Hale (2007) proposed. According to this hypothesis, languages under study for cognateness must, at least, share a subset of their features (e.g. lexical items) that have been acquired through inheritance from a common ancestor such

that Grammar G₁ and Gramma₂ (e.g. Arabic and Hausa) have some similarities, and that the similarities are too numerous and too systematic to be due to chance. Consequently, we can again, reliably and undoubtedly submit that Arabic and Hausa are cognate languages.

6. Concluding Remarks

Indubitably, we can confidently depend on the data presented and analyzed (the two family tree diagrams and the lexical items from both languages) in this study to say yes, Arabic and Hausa are cognate languages. It is true that there are slight differences between the two languages that one can easily pinpoint. For instance, while Arabic is written from right to left, Hausa is written from left to right. In addition, both languages are written differently orthographically, that is, their sound systems are not the same. However, these differences are insubstantial enough to leave anyone in doubt of the fact that both of them are cognate languages. As a matter of reality, a parent may have two children that one is right-handed while the other is left-handed, or while one is dark in complexion the other is fair in complexion. Are these differences enough reasons for anyone to argue or doubt that both of them do not belong to the same parent?

Furthermore, apart from the foregoing, Hausa and Arabic languages have met all the conditions required for them to be regarded as cognates, according to the genetic hypothesis as advocated by Hale (2007) which we adopted as the framework for this research. Such conditions include: (i) both of them must be reasonably similar; (ii) such similarities should be too numerous and too systematic to be due to chance; (iii) the similarities must align in a manner that they are inconsistent with known borrowing pattern, and (iv) explanations can be proffered for their similarities by supposing that Grammar₁ (=language₁) and Gramma₂ (=language₂) (like Arabic and Hausa) are truly *descendants* of a common ancestor. From the data presented and the analysis offered so far in this study, we hereby conclude that Arabic and Hausa are cognate languages.

References

1. Al-Huri, I. (2015). Arabic language: Historic and sociolinguistic characteristics. *English Literature and Language Review*, 1(4), 28-36.
2. Alqahtani, M., & Musa, R. (2015). Vowel Epenthesis in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 7(2), 62-80.
3. Baldi, S. (2021). *Dictionary of Arabic Loanwords in the Languages of East and Central Africa*. Handbook of Oriental Studies. https://books.google.com.ng/books?id.
4. Baldi, S. (1989). *On Semantics of Arabic Loanwords in Hausa*. https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.62.16bal.
5. Baldi, S. (1991). *Some Additional Remarks on Arabic Loanwords in Hausa*. http://opar.unior.it/834/1/Annali_1991_51_(f1)_Note_e_discussioni_S.Baldi.pdf,
6. Bishop, B. (1998). A history of the Arabic language. *Linguistics*. Retrieved from:

http://linguistics.byu.edu/classes/Ling450ch/reports/arabic.html.

7. Crystal, D. (2008). *Dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (4th ed.). Blackwell Publishing.

8. Danzaki, M. A. (2015) Semantic Change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa. *E-Journal of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization*, 2, 126-136.

9. Dimmendaal, G. J. (2011). *Historical linguistics and the comparative study of African languages*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

10. Dixon, R. M. W. (2010). *Basic linguistic theory.* Oxford University Press.

11. E-shazly, M. H. A. S. (1987) *Provenance of Arabic Loan-words in Hausa: A Phonological and Semantic Study*. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, United Kingdom.

12. Greenberg, J. H. (2015). *Arabic loanwords in Hausa*. WORD, 3:1-2. Taylor & Francis Group. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00437956.1947.11659308?.

13. Goerner, M., Salman, Y., & Armitage, B. P. (1966) *Two Essays on Arabic Loan-Words in*

14. *Hausa*. Department of Languages Occasional Paper 7. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

15. Hale, M. (2007). *Historical linguistics: theory and method*. Blackwell Publishing.

16. Jaggar, P. J. (2011). *The role of comparative/historical linguistics in reconstructing the past: What borrowed and inherited words tell us about early history of Hausa*. Retrieved from: http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/11138/3/JAGGAR_HAUSA_SAINS-FINAL.pdf/html.

17. Joseph, B. D. & Janda, R. D. (2003). *The handbook of historical linguistics* (eds.). Blackwell Publishing.

18. Kondrak, G. (2000). *Identifying cognates by phonetic and semantic similarity*. Retrieved from: https://aclanthology.org/N01-1014.pdf.

19. Stamenov, M. I. (2009). *Cognates in language, in the mind, and in a prompting dictionary for translation*. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255728787. Turner,

20. Unubi, S. A. & Yusuf, S. (2017). Fundamental linguistic information on English, Igala, and Hausa languages. *World Wide Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development,* 3 (12), 409-419.

21. Webb, P. (2016). *The origin of Arabs: Middle Eastern ethnicity and myth-making*. Edinburgh University Press, 34-39.

22. Yelwa, L. D. (1992). Arabic loan words in Hausa. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 20(3), 101-131.

23. Zając, P. (2019). Function Words of Arabic Origin in Hausa. doi10.1163/24685631-12340070. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333422609.