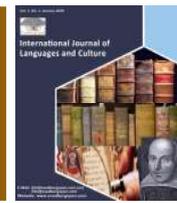




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## Language, Culture and Signs: Arabic Influence on the Semiotics of Hausa and Fulfulde in Northern Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study explores the semiotics of Hausa and Fulfulde languages in Northern Nigeria, and how they derive a lot of linguistic and paralinguistic, as well as cultural behaviors from Arabic language and culture. The research selected these languages because of their prestige as the major languages in Northern Nigeria, each claiming more than millions of speakers. Using data collected across these languages, the research findings revealed that there is a substantial similarity on the semiotics of the selected languages. This is not unconnected with the historical fact that Arabic, as the language of Islam, had had strong influences on the languages through numerous semiotic nuances. Arabic linguistic codes such as loan words, morpho-syntactic and other linguistic and, indeed, paralinguistic behaviors such as dressing code, signs and symbols inherent in the doctrine of Islam, are found profusely in the vocabularies of these languages. By extension, Arabic script, known as Ajami, became the written script with which Hausa, in particular, and to a large extent, Fulfulde, use to communicate their thoughts, long before the advent of Western literacy in Nigeria. These semiotic correlations have, in a substantial way, brought about cultural affinity between these languages which also affected other minority languages in Northern Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Hausa and fulfulde, Arabic influence, Language and culture and Northern Nigeria*

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### 1. Introduction

Communication, naturally, entails not only verbal expressions but also inculcates non-verbal signs and symbols. Some of these communication cues are imbedded in cultural nuances. This, invariably, is what underlies the concept of Semiotics, as a linguistic study. This, perhaps, is why Eco (1976), proposed that every cultural phenomenon may be studied as communication and that Semiotics covers all such phenomena as “it is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign”. This includes words, images, sounds, symbols, artifacts and any object or act that conveys meaning. Communication in Northern Nigeria, like anywhere else, is not restricted to natural language, or articulation of linguistic

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codes only. It also incorporates cultural norms that are realized in non-verbal activities that include symbolic ways of greetings, signs and symbols that convey meaning only the sociocultural group can understand. This has, for time immemorial, served as a type of communicative act and, thus, heritage exercised by individual socio-linguistic, nay socio-cultural groups in Northern Nigeria.

Northern Nigeria, with a population of 111.5 million people, arguably, also boasts of over 280 distinct languages and dialects. This multitude of languages is a testament to the rich sociolinguistic and sociocultural tapestries that have evolved over centuries within this region. The most prominent language families in Northern Nigeria include Afro-asiatic, Nilo-Sahara, each comprising numerous languages with their own unique linguistic features and cultural nuances. Hausa, for instance, belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family. Fulfulde, on the other hand, belongs to the Niger-Congo language family. Both languages draw significant loan words from Arabic language. This is because the origin of the languages is traced to the Arabian roots with a knit connection to the history of Islam over 1000 years ago (Davies, 1956; Ellis, 2002). Hausa, as the most dominant language in the North, has over 73.5 million speakers across the region. This gives it an automatic status of a lingua franca in the region, bridging communication gaps among speakers of different indigenous languages (Ethnologue, 2021). Fulfulde/Fulani has over 22 million speakers across the North, majority of whom domicile in states like; Adamawa, Gombe, Katsina and Taraba, among others. Other languages in Northern Nigeria such as; Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe and Birom each also 5 million speakers (+ or -) across the region.

### **1.1. The Quest**

The quest for semiotics of Northern Nigerian languages was informed by the region's linguistic and cultural diversity. There is a pressing need, therefore, to harness the power of semiotics in the region for the dual purpose of cultural preservation and cohesion. This is imperative because these languages are not merely a means of interpersonal communication but are repositories of centuries-old traditions, stories and identities. One of the major problems that the study seeks to forestall, thus, is erasure of the cultural heritages that are embedded in the linguistic nuances of the languages of the region as a result of modern civilization and cultural incursions by foreign semiotic codes. This study, through a review of related literature, has discovered that most researches carried out are predominantly inclined towards the concept of semiotics from Western perspectives. This approach has inadvertently led to the neglect of indigenous semiotics inherent in the country's diverse linguistic landscape. This oversight is particularly pronounced in Northern Nigeria, where numerous languages thrive, each with its unique set of signs, symbols and cultural connotations. Semiotics in Northern Nigerian languages, therefore, plays a pivotal role as it constitutes a highly diverse communicative systems that are deeply intertwined with cultural values that convey profound meanings (CIA, 1965).

The research, thus, seeks to study, document and preserve the uniqueness of; Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri and their cultures, and symbolic linguistic nay paralinguistic gestures that define the identities of the languages. It also intends to examine how they are influenced by Arabic language. This study is crucial for promoting cultural heritage, preservation of the region's linguistic codes, as well as inter-cultural dialogues aimed at promoting shared linguistic and cultural values that lead to sustainable cultural and socio-economic development of the region. By embarking on semiotic study of these Northern Nigerian languages, the research is aimed to bridge the gap between Western-centric semiotic theories and the indigenous knowledge embedded in these languages. This exploration will not only enrich language and literature in Nigeria but also contribute to a more inclusive global perspective on semiotics. It will showcase the linguistic diversity and cultural richness as invaluable resources for understanding the intricate web of signs and symbols that shape human communication and expression.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Conceptual Review**

#### **2.1.1. Concept of Semiotics**

Semiotics, as concept, originated from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Saussure, 1916; Peirce, 1931-1958). Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, encompassing not only written and spoken language but also non-verbal communication, gestures and visual representations. According to Eco (1976:7), "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign". This, invariably, includes; words, images, sounds, symbols, artifacts and any object or act that can convey meaning. To him, every cultural activity can be interpreted as a form of communication to the members of such a cultural group. Semiotics seeks to uncover the

underlying meanings and cultural contexts associated with these signs, icons and symbols, making it a powerful tool for understanding and interpreting human communication.

In De Saussure's (1913) notion, semiotics is a system of 'signified' and 'signifier' both of which denote an object and what it represents in the real world. De Saussure (cited in Sebeok, 2001) defined signs as entities comprising physical objects such as gestures, letters, postures and more, which function as signifiers. These signifiers point to images or concepts, serving as signified. In his lectures, De Saussure (1915) (cited in Dweich and Muwafaq Al Ghabra, 2020), emphasized that the connection between the signifier and the signified is not entirely arbitrary, as it finds its foundation in societal conventions. He employed the term "semiology" to describe the science of signs. Barthes (1957) identified semiology as the science dedicated to the study of ideas in form, emphasizing that the focus lies in the realm of signification, distinct from the content itself. In Semiotics, the concept of meaning emerges from the interplay between signifier and signified. A signifier may take the form of a visual representation, symbolizing something or providing a graphic depiction of words, letters, or entities outside the text. Conversely, the signified represents the conceptual aspect of the idea, which can be either tangible or imaginative, thus, not confined to the concrete realm.

According to Barthes, semiology delves into the correlation between the signifier and the signified, amalgamating them to create the sign, all within a single cohesive process. Semiotics, therefore, is the study of signs and symbols and their meanings in different cultures and contexts. Semiotics, as a field of study, offers a powerful lens through which we can explore the intricate relationship between language, culture and identity. At its core, semiotics is the study of signs, symbols and their meanings (Atkin, 2006). It encompasses various branches, including linguistics, which focuses on the signs and symbols inherent in language (Maman, 2014). Eco (1976) also argued that a sign encompasses various manifestations, including terms, words, concepts, vocal expressions and a visual representation, all serving the purpose of signifying objects in reality, hence, the central function of a sign is to translate something into another object (Chandler, 2007).

### 2.1.2. *Semiotics of Northern Nigerian Languages*

Northern Nigeria is a region with a rich cultural heritages and histories. Semiotics of Northern Nigeria, in this regard, refers to the study of the signs and symbols that shape communication, the cultures and identities of the diverse ethno-linguistic groups in this region. This is why the research explores an aspect of Semiotics; namely, socio-cultural semiotics aimed at interrogating how words and socio-cultural signs and symbols form systemic meaning which members of a particular society interpret as part of their linguistic may communicative behavior. It, thus, meant to explore how people in Northern Nigeria use signs, symbols and artifacts to create shared understanding and communicate with one other. In this context, Semiotics can be a key to unlocking the deeper layers of cultural significance embedded in these languages. This exploration can lead to a rediscovery and celebration of cultural practices that may have been marginalized or forgotten over time. It can also foster a deeper sense of pride and connection among members of the region.

Semiotics, as a powerful tool for intercultural communication and understanding, enables the mosaic of ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria to decode the semiotic elements of different languages that can facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. It can also foster respect and appreciation for the diversity that characterizes the region, thereby contributing to social harmony and unity. Furthermore, Semiotics can be instrumental in addressing socio-political issues related to language in Northern Nigeria. This is because language often plays a vital role in identity politics. Semiotics can, thus, provide the analytical framework needed to understand the role of every language in Northern Nigeria in shaping identities.

### 2.1.3. *Origins of Hausa*

The Hausa Land, a region with a rich and complex history, has been the subject of various interpretations regarding its origins. Understanding the real Hausa Land, or "Asalin Kasar Hausa", requires examining both historical narratives and scholarly perspectives. There have been many theories on the origins of Hausa lands. One prominent theory suggests that the Hausa people originated from Eastern Africa. According to this view, the early Hausawa, referred to as Nubians by the British, initially settled besides the Red Sea. This hypothesis posits that these early inhabitants migrated westward to the area near the Lake Chad over centuries. Some proponents of this theory believe that the Nubians were originally from Ethiopia (Habasha), and that the term "Hausa" may have been derived from "Habasha" (Abdullahi, 1984). This migration theory is supported by the migration patterns and cultural exchanges observed in the region.

Another theory places the origins of the Hausa people in Western Sudan, a region between the desert and the forested areas surrounding the Atlantic Ocean. This theory argues that the early Hausa people inhabited a land known

as Western Sudan, located between the Lake Chad and the confluence of the Kwara River (Adamu, 1978). In supporting this view, Adamu posited that the Hausa land extended from northeastern Agadez, where the people of Gobir began to dominate what is now Nigeria (Adamu, 2006). Historical narratives and archaeological evidence, however, provided additional insights into the origins of Hausa Land. The earliest known Hausa settlements were in the region now known as North-western Nigeria. Historians often reference the Hausa Bakwai (Seven Hausa communities) as the initial grouping of Hausa clans residing in seven towns: Daura, Katsina, Kano, Rano, Gobir, Zazzau and Garun Gabas (Smith, 1985). Gaya town is also mentioned as a significant settlement in some accounts. It was also narrated that the Hausa people had settled in Daura long before the arrival of Bayajidda, a legendary figure in Hausa history.

#### 2.1.4. Hausa Ethno-linguistic Identity

The Hausa people, or Hausa people are often discussed in terms of their ethnic and linguistic identity. There are continuing debates among scholars on whether or not the Hausawa constitute a single tribe or a collection of related ethnic groups. This phenomenon might have perhaps been the precursor to categorization of the Hausa speech community as Hausa Bakwai and Banza Bakwai—the traditional division of the Hausa people into the seven original Hausa and the seven non-original Hausa. This is one of the most well-known categorizations. Each of these states domiciling the Hausa Bakwai was a significant center of Hausa civilization and had its own distinct identity. The seven original Hausa communities (Daura, Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Zazzau, Rano and Garun Gabas) are considered the heartland of Hausa culture and history, and they played a crucial role in the development of Hausa political and social structures (Smith, 1985).

#### 2.1.5. Hausa Cultural Identity

Central to this research is an exploration of Semiotics (Ishara da alama) and its role in Hausa culture. Semiotics of Hausa language provides a framework for understanding how the Hausa language has influenced and is influenced by neighboring languages. This underscores how Hausa has dominated and interacted with other languages through borrowing and blending of words and how Hausa semiotic systems reflect its cultural values that affect other languages. The concept of a Bahaushe (Hausa person), seen from a semiotic perspective, explains how linguistic and paralinguistic and cultural identities are constructed and communicated. It also includes how semiotic elements within the language, such as symbols, signs and codes contribute to the broader cultural narrative and identity of the Hausa people.

It is to be noted that Hausa culture is a profound embodiment of historical traditions, social structures and cultural values. This socio-cultural identity is reflected in the rich tapestry of; dress codes and ceremonial attire, social bonding and communal eating, among others. We will explain how the roles and functions of these elements serve as semiotic symbols within the cultural framework of Hausa cultural framework. The mode of dress, particularly, plays a crucial role in signifying identity, status and adherence to traditional values of the Hausa people. As would be explained subsequently, the semiotic function of clothing in Hausa culture encompasses several dimensions, including; personal expression, social hierarchy and ceremonial importance.

#### 2.1.6. Origin of Fulfulde

The FulSe, also known as Fulani, are a prominent ethnic group in West Africa, distinguished primarily by their pastoralist lifestyle. The history of the FulSe in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, involving significant social, political and environmental factors that have shaped their migration patterns and settlement strategies over several centuries. The precise period of the FulSe's initial migration into Nigeria remains uncertain. Historical consensus, however, suggests that the FulSe began migrating into northern Nigeria in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Blench, 1994). During this early phase, the FulSe were predominantly nomadic pastoralists who settled along the northern periphery of what is now Nigeria. Their migration was likely influenced by a combination of environmental factors, including the availability of grazing lands (Blench, 1994; Boutrais, 1986).

By the early 19th century, the FulSe had established a significant urban and sedentary class, particularly among religious scholars. This period marked a significant transformation in FulSe society, as their commitment to Islam and the development of a robust military apparatus facilitated the successful launch of the Jihad of Usman dan Fodio in 1804 (Stenning, 1959). This religious and military campaign led to the conquest of the Hausa states and several peripheral kingdoms, profoundly altering the socio-political landscape of northern Nigeria (St. Croix, 1944; Hopen, 1958). The FulSe's expansion during this period highlighted the growing distinction between the pastoralist FulSe (FulSe na'i) and the urban FulSe (FulSe wuro). The former were primarily engaged in pastoral activities, while the latter were involved in administration, scholarship and religious roles within the newly established FulSe emirates (Morrison, 1982).

Following the consolidation of their political power, the FulSe began to expand their pastoral activities into new territories. The establishment of Bida as the capital of the FulSe in the 1850s facilitated the southward movement of FulSe pastoralists into the low-lying pastures along the Niger River (RIM, 1989). Similarly, they extended their presence into the grasslands of the Jos Plateau and the plains around the Emirate of Bauchi (Morrison, 1982). In parallel, the FulSe expanded into Cameroon, gradually colonizing the Adamawa region throughout the 19th century (Boutrais, 1986). By the end of the century, FulSe pastoralists began to move westward into the Mambila and Fali Plateaux, further extending their territorial range (RIM, 1984; Blench, 1984, 1991, 1994). The environmental conditions of northern Nigeria played a crucial role in shaping the FulSe's pastoral strategies. During the dry season, the FulSe exploited pastures in the northern wetlands, such as the Hadeija-Jama'are river basin, and the sub-humid 'Middle Belt'. During the rainy season, they moved their herds northward to avoid diseases transmitted by tsetse flies and other vectors (Blench, 1994).

### 2.1.7. Linguistic Spread of Ffulde Language in Northern Nigeria

Ffulde, also known as Fula or Fulani, serves as a key linguistic bridge across diverse ethnic and regional communities in northern Nigeria. It became a vehicular language following the Jihad of Usman dan Fodio. This consolidated their political and religious authority up to the end of the 19th century. The establishment of the Lamorde of Yola in Adamawa further solidified Ffulde's role as a lingua-franca, bridging communication gap among various ethnic groups and facilitating administrative and commercial interactions (Morrison, 1982). During the colonial period, Ffulde's status as a lingua-franca was actively promoted by both colonial authorities and missionary organizations, utilizing it for educational and religious purposes throughout the Adamawa region. The British colonial administration recognized the utility of Ffulde in administration and communication across diverse linguistic communities Taylor's (1932). Instructional dictionary of Ffulde, along with educational materials, such as readers and primers, underscored the colonial commitment to promoting the language. Colonial officials were encouraged to learn and use Ffulde to enhance their interactions with the local populace (Blench, 1994).

However, this support was not sustained throughout the colonial era. As the colonial period progressed, both the colonial government and missionary bodies gradually shifted their focus away from Ffulde, opting instead to support other languages, especially Hausa, which was equally expanding as a language of commerce and administration (Hopen, 1958). Nevertheless, the rise of Hausa as a dominant language of commerce has gradually impacted Ffulde's status. In urban centers such as Yola, Hausa is increasingly prevalent in business and commercial activities, reflecting a broader trend of Hausa's expansion across Northern Nigeria (St. Croix, 1944). This shift indicates a dynamic linguistic landscape where Ffulde, while still significant, faces competition from Hausa, particularly in economic and administrative contexts. Despite this decline, Ffulde continued to hold linguistic significance in Adamawa and Taraba regions. It remains an important medium of communication, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

### 2.1.8. Origin of Kanuri

The Kanuri language, otherwise known as Barebari, is classified as part of the Nilo-Saharan language family, which is one of the largest language families in Africa. Within this family, Kanuri is considered a member of the Saharan branch, which includes languages spoken across the vast expanse of the Sahara and the Sahel (Heine and Kuteva, 2002). While the precise origin of the Kanuri language still remains a subject of debate, linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that the Kanuri people have occupied the Lake Chad Basin area for many centuries, possibly since the first millennium CE (Murray, 1967). Kanuri nation occupies a prominent position in the cultural and historical landscape of West and Central Africa. This language, spoken predominantly in north-eastern Nigeria, has deep roots that intertwined with the region's historical, political and socio-economic developments. The Kanuri people form a significant ethnic group spread across several countries, including Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan and Libya. This geographical distribution reflects the Kanuri's extensive history, shaped by ancient empires, trans-Saharan trade, the spread of Islam and interactions with diverse cultures.

The Kanuri language is, invariably, an ethnic group whose historical roots can be traced to the Kanem Empire, one of the most powerful and influential empires of pre-colonial Africa. The Kanem Empire, which flourished from around the 9th century until the 14th century, spanned a large part of North-eastern Nigeria (Borno and Yobe), modern-day Chad and parts of Libya and Sudan. It was a hub of commerce, culture and Islamic scholarship (Lange, 2000). The introduction of Islam to the Kanuri people, likely through contact with North African traders and scholars, had a profound impact on the language, leading to the adoption of Arabic loanwords and the use of Arabic script for writing Kanuri (Klein, 2014).

The distribution of the Kanuri language reflects the historical movements of the Kanuri people and the role of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which succeeded the Kanem Empire and controlled vast territories in the North-eastern Nigeria and neighboring regions. The Kanem-Bornu Empire, which existed from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, played a crucial role in spreading the Kanuri language across a wide area, facilitated by its strong military, economic and cultural presence. At its height, the Kanem-Bornu Empire controlled a significant portion of the Saharan trade routes, connecting sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and the Mediterranean world. The empire was a critical center for trans-Saharan commerce, particularly in the trade of salt, gold, ivory and slaves (Isichei, 1983).

## 2.2. Empirical Review

This research has been able to review studies which dwell on semiotics of different languages and cultures, especially of African descent, with a view to finding out the relationship between language and culture of a people. For instance, there is a research carried out by one Abiola Irele entitled “The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora” (2001).

The study adopts a semiotic and comparative literary approach, analyzing the intersections between African literature and diasporic writings. The methodology focuses on textual analysis to uncover the unique ways African imagination operates across varied literatures. Findings from the study reveal that African literature is deeply rooted in both cultural tradition and colonial history. And the diasporic experience extends this narrative into global modernity.

Another study was carried out by one Ato Quayson with the title “Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation” (2007). The study used a critical theory approach grounded in literary semiotics and disability studies, involving close readings of literary texts from African, Western and global literature to explore how disability is represented. It found out that representations of disability often create unease or “nervousness” in literature, as they challenge the coherence of idealized representations of human experiences. The study argues that disability functions as a semiotic device that disrupts familiar narrative structures and forces a rethinking of cultural norms around human value and wholeness.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne also undertook a research entitled “African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Negritude” (2011). Diagne uses semiotic analysis to explore how African art conveys philosophical ideas, drawing on the writings of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Henri Bergson. The study combines literary analysis with philosophical inquiry to investigate the relationship between African art and philosophical thought, particularly within the context of the Negritude movement. Findings from the study shows how African art, through its aesthetic and symbolic elements, becomes a form of philosophical discourse that reflects on existence, identity and history. The work also finds that Senghor’s interpretation of Bergson’s ideas provides a framework for understanding African art as an expression of dynamic and live experience.

## 2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Grand Social Construction (GSC) theory by Berger and Luckman (1966) as its theoretical framework. This theory premised its argument on three models of semiotic analysis. They are; concepts, constructs and proposition. Concepts comprise sign, context and meaning. Sign, according to the duo, is what De Saussure (1916) refers to as ‘signifier’, which can be a physical object, gesture or symbol and ‘signified’, which can be perceived and interpreted in the real world. A sign can manifest in many ways, including sounds, gestures, smell, etc. Context, as the second concept in this category, was echoed by Bowcher (2018) as those aspects of conversation or interaction that provide relevant factors such as the relationship between the speaker/sender/signifier with the recipient, the assumptions they share, etc. which enables the recipient to grasp the intended meaning of what is signified. The third categorization under concepts is meaning. Jordan (2018), in his conceptualization of cognitive semiotics, proposes that “meaning is the relationship between the recipient of sign and their personal experience of the world around them”.

Construct, also referred to as semiosis by Berger and Luckman (1966), is the second model of semiotic description. Construct is the relationship that exists between these three concepts (i.e., sign, context and meaning). Construct is the nucleus of semiotics as it describes the interplay between these concepts; how a sign, represented by object (verbal or non-verbal) can cohere with the contextual factors such as the relationship between the sender and the recipient, and how these bring about understanding of the intended meaning conveyed by the sign, what Morris (1971) refers to as the relationship of signs with the interpreters.

The third and last model of semiotic description, according to the GSC theory, is what the duo of Berger and Luckman refer to as proposition. It presupposes that, when sending the message, the sender should endeavor to incorporate social and cultural contexts. By this, it implies how the sociocultural norms of a people come to play in language understanding. These norms are mostly represented by body gesticulations, such as nodding or shaking of head as some form of responses to an elder's speech by a younger person which portrays a sign of reverence, or sitting on a left leg side when in a palace of an emir or chief in most of the Northern traditional systems, etc. It, invariably, implies that the sign is obligated to utilize the contextual and, indeed, visual cues, for effective understanding of such sign language, as practicable in the culture of the people.

This research adopts the Grand Social Construction theory as its theoretical framework because the theory seems more suitable to account for the semiotic cues in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri most of which were derived or loaned from Arabic language and culture. This would enable the researchers to understand whether or not these intercultural semiotic activities were necessitated by coincidence; of the intermingling of these languages.

### 3. Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative technique. This has been meticulously designed to provide a holistic understanding of the semiotic elements in the selected languages under study. In this regard, the data collection strategy involved conducting in-depth interviews with a carefully curated and diverse group of key informants. These key respondents were selected based on their knowledge of the language and cultural values inherent in the respective languages. They include; community leaders, cultural experts and scholars who possess some knowledge of the languages understudy. Accordingly, open-ended questions were administered to the respondents which enabled the researchers to unveil the deeper cultural significance they hold in the selected languages in Northern Nigeria. The sampling technique was purposive. This was to ensure that our informants serve as popular representation.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1. Semiotics of Hausa: Hausa Dress Codes

#### 4.1.1. Men's Attire

- a. **Riga (Shirt):** Riga is a fundamental garment in Hausa men's attire, characterized by its simplicity and versatility. It is worn daily and serves as a base layer for more elaborate outfits. Riga signifies modesty, cultural adherence and the wearer's alignment with traditional values. Its design is typically straightforward, reflecting a cultural preference for modesty and simplicity. The choice of fabric and color can also communicate subtle social signals, such as status and personal taste. Among such colorful embroidery include garments such as *babbar riga* or *gari*, which is an elaborately designed shirt reserved for significant events such as weddings, religious celebrations and formal occasions. This garment is often more decorated and distinguished from the everyday *riga*. Its role lies in marking the importance of the occasion and the elevated status of the wearer during such events. The advent of Islam added color and splendor to the various shapes and sizes of the Hausa garment (*riga*) which is imitated across different ethno-cultural groups in Northern Nigeria. Its use across different socio-cultural strata demonstrates the garment's role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural identity.
- b. **Wando (Trousers):** Riga is always worn along with a pair of trousers known as *wando*. The semiotic Role of *wando* includes expressing the wearer's adherence to cultural norms and social standing. The semiotic function of *wando* extends to providing a balance between tradition and modernity, reflecting both cultural heritage and contemporary influences. Traditionally, *wando* is associated with respectability and formality. Its use in various settings, from daily wear to formal events, demonstrates the garment's role in bridging everyday life with ceremonial contexts. This embroidery goes with stylish footwear known as *takalmi* and *Hula/Kube/Dankwara/Dara* (Caps) which underscore the importance of appearance and social etiquette in Hausa culture. There is also the *Rawani* (Turban), which is borrowed from Arabs, typically worn by clerics and traditional leaders and holds significant cultural and religious symbolism. The Semiotic importance of *rawani* signifies authority, wisdom and spiritual leadership. Its use by religious and community leaders underscores the wearer's role in guiding and representing the community.

#### 4.1.2. Hausa Women's Attire

The Hausa woman is recognized through wearing of zani or gyauto, 'ya'an kunne (earrings), Sarkar Wuya (Necklaces) and *dan hanci/Barima* (nose ring). Zani or traditional wrapper covers the lower part of a woman's body. Functioning as

a symbol of comfort, modesty and feminine stature. The earrings, or 'ya'yan kunne, are an important accessory in Hausa women's attire. They signify personal adornment that enhances beauty and aesthetic preferences. This is the same with necklaces, or *sarkar wuya*, as it also symbolizes Hausa culture of personal adornment.

Generally, the semiotic roles and functions of Hausa dress codes reveal a deep connection between the attire and cultural identity. Hausa clothing serves not only practical purposes but also functions as a powerful symbol of social status, cultural adherence and historical continuity. Through detailed examination of traditional attire, we gain insight into how the Hausa people use clothing to express and maintain their cultural values amidst historical and social changes. This underscores the significance of dress as a semiotic tool that both reflects and shapes cultural identity in Hausa society.

#### 4.1.3. Food as Social Bonding

**Communal Eating:** The practice of sharing meals is a vital aspect of Hausa culture that serves as a symbol of communal harmony and solidarity. Communal eating practices such as sharing a large pot of *Tuwo* with family or guests, signify the importance of social bonds and collective identity.

This also includes festive periods where special dishes are prepared for festivals and ceremonies such as weddings, naming ceremonies and, with the advent of Islam in Hausa land, Eid celebrations. The preparation and consumption of these dishes reinforce social ties and communal values. Particularly, certain foods are associated with specific rituals and ceremonies such as naming ceremonies and weddings. These ritual foods carry symbolic meanings and serve as markers of significant life events.

#### 4.1.4. Islamic Influence on Hausa Society

Islam plays a critical role in shaping the cultural and social practices of the Hausa people. As a predominant religion in the North, Islam influences various aspects of daily life, including rituals, social interactions and community organization. This is most reflected in religious rituals and ceremonies such as; marriages, burial practices, naming ceremonies, among other semiotic forms of life styles. For instance, Islamic teachings, as explained earlier, heavily influenced Hausa marriage rituals. The *nikah*, or marriage contract, is a fundamental aspect of the marriage ceremony, ensuring that the union is in accordance with Islamic law. The most important rituals in marriage processes include; the payment of *mahr/sadaq* (dowry) and a conjugal exchange of vows, known as *sigar*, between the groom's *wakil* and the bride's *waliy*. Traditional celebrations, such as the henna ceremony and bridal shower, are integrated into the process, all imbued from Arabi/ Islamic culture.

Burial practices among the Hausa people are also guided Islamic etiquettes, emphasizing simplicity and respect for the deceased. The body is buried in a simple grave, and the focus is on performing religious rites such as the *Janazah* prayer. Traditional customs that conflict with Islamic teachings are minimized or adapted to align with religious guidelines. Naming ceremonies, or what is popularly referred to *sunnah* (*suna*), is an important ritual in Hausa culture, conducted in accordance with Islamic teachings. The choice of names reflects Islamic values and often includes names that convey positive attributes or invoke blessings. While traditional elements may be included, they are carefully integrated to ensure they do not conflict with Islamic principles.

#### 4.1.5. Social Roles and Community Structure

Social roles and community structure in Hausa culture are also shaped by semiotics, reflecting values, traditions and religious influences. This is always defined by social hierarchy from *sarki* (what is known as Amir or Emir) to other traditional titles such as *sarking pada* (palace chief), *sarkin dogarai* (chief guard), *sarkin baka* (chief hunter), *sarkin aska* (chief barber), etc., these titles carry semiotic significance. They are not merely administrative positions but symbols of authority, expertise and cultural heritage. The titles also signify the respect and recognition accorded to the occupants of the respective offices. The leaders of various occupational groups often have specific symbols, attires, and rituals associated with their roles. For instance, the leader of hunters may wear traditional clothing and carry symbolic items related to hunting, which signifies their status and expertise within the community.

#### 4.1.6. Social Etiquette

Daily interactions in Hausa communities are also influenced by semiotic factors. They are symbolically represented in the way individuals address and interact with one other, reinforcing social norms and ethical behavior. There are such etiquettes of greetings markedly differentiated by age and social statuses. Some of these conflict with the Arabic greetings

which reflect Islamic ethics and Arab culture. However, because of the strength of Islam, Islamic etiquettes have overshadowed those of Hausa. This does not, however, take away the principles of respect, honesty and mutual support which both cultures share.

## **4.2. Semiotics of Fulfulde Language**

### *4.2.1. Cultural Semiotics of Fulbe Language*

There are numerous cultural semiotic features in Fulbe language. However, this study will restrict the discussion on the following aspects; tribal marks, bravery (Ngorgu), the Stick and Ritual of Flogging, dignity and self-respect (Neddaaku), and shyness (Semtende).

### *4.2.2. Tribal Marks*

Tribal marks are integral to the cultural and social identity of the Fulani people of Northern Nigeria. These marks, created through methods such as burning or engraving in the skin, are more than just physical adornments; they function as a sophisticated semiotic system that conveys a wealth of information about an individual's personal and communal identity, heritage and social status. Tribal marks distinguish individuals from different clans or sub-groups within the Fulbe ethnic group. Each set of marks is unique to a particular clan or tribe, thus serving as a visual representation of one's affiliation. Clans are mostly identified by their unique marks. They include; Fulbe WoDaaBe marks, Fulbe Jahun, Fulbe Borno and Fulbe Mosirde, each holding numerous socio-cultural significance that include:

- a. They signify individual clan's identity and cultural significance;
- b. They are tied to significant life events such as birth, initiation and puberty;
- c. They have spiritual significance—certain patterns are thought to offer protection against malevolent forces or to imbue the wearer with spiritual strength.

It is pertinent, however, to point out that, the practice of tribal marking faces challenges due to the influence of modernization and colonialism. Westernization and changing societal norms have led to a decline in traditional practices, including tribal marking. This shift reflects broader global trends where traditional cultural practices are increasingly overshadowed by modern values. Despite the decline, there are efforts within the Fulbe communities and Cultural organizations to revive and preserve the practice of tribal marking.

### *4.2.3. Ngorgu—A show of Bravery*

Ngorgu is a term in Fulbe that is deeply embedded in FulSe culture of bravery. It encapsulates a set of complex social codes and rituals that affirm manliness and courage within the FulSe community. This cultural practice is often represented through public displays of endurance and pain, such as the sorow (Flogging Contest). Sorow is a ceremony that usually takes place during significant cultural events, such as the end of the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha or during large gatherings at dry season festivals. It is a public test of endurance and bravery that involves young men being flogged in front of their community, usually in a village square. It is one of the most significant and culturally rich practices among the Fulani (Fulbe) people, symbolizing the initiation of young men into adulthood. During the contest of Ngorgu, various ritual incantations and proverbs combine to convey deeper meanings about bravery, social expectations and personal integrity. These linguistic renditions convey great semiotic messages about personal strength and fearlessness, which are crucial for social standing and acceptance. The semiotics of this practice is deeply embedded in Fulbe culture, where each aspect of the ceremony; the setting, the participants, the rituals and the symbols, carries profound meanings that communicate the values and identity of the Fulani people. The timing of these events suggests that the transition to manhood is not just a personal achievement but a communal one, reinforcing the interconnectedness of individual and community identity in Fulbe culture. Ngorgu also plays a role in the transmission of cultural values and norms. The rituals, symbols and proverbs associated with Ngorgu serve as vehicles for imparting moral and educational lessons. Through participation in Ngorgu, individuals learn about the values of bravery, perseverance and social responsibility, ensuring that these values are upheld and sustained in the community.

The stick, in itself, serves various purposes. First, it is used as a companion for personal security and self-defense. It is also used during sorow ceremony by a flogger and the contender. For the contender, the stick functions as a protective tool. It helps manage the impact of the whipping and provides physical support to the participant. This protective function is symbolic of the broader cultural value of preparedness and resilience. By using the stick, the participant can better endure the ritual, symbolizing his readiness to face and overcome adversity.

#### 4.2.4. *Neddaaku-Dignity and Self-Respect*

Neddaaku refers to the quality of having dignity and self-respect. For the Fulbe people, it signifies an individual's adherence to the communal values and cultural standards, rejecting behaviors such as begging or stealing. Neddaaku is the act of upholding moral integrity. It reflects one's commitment to personal honor and portrayal of ethical values by exhibiting acts that reflect honesty and adherence to cultural norms, thus maintaining one's dignity and that of the community. At the heart of Neddaaku is the principle of personal integrity.

#### 4.2.5. *Semtende (Shyness)*

Semtende, at the surface level, semtende can be translated as 'shyness' or 'reservation'. However, this literal translation does not fully capture the depth of its cultural significance. Semtende extends beyond mere shyness to embody a sophisticated attitude that influences behavior in various social contexts. It is deeply embedded in social norms and attitudes. This represents much more than a mere emotional state; it is a complex social phenomenon that embodies respect and a distinct mode of interpersonal conduct. Semtende encompasses a broad spectrum of semiotic functions and roles that are integral to understanding Fulfulde's social structure and cultural identity. It represents an inherent respect and decorum that pervades social interactions and establishes a framework for social conduct. Historically, semtende has been a defining characteristic of Fulbe identity. It reflects a broader cultural ethos that values modesty, restraint, self-discipline and upright attitude. This attitude is reflected in various practices, such as; avoidance of public eating, maintaining a respectful distance from elders and individuals of higher status, squatting while greeting; some clans even remove foot wears before squatting, especially when greeting an in-law, bending of head to the ground as a sign of shyness, etc.

**Gender-Specific Practices:** Semtende also plays a role in defining gender dynamics within Fulbe society. Women avoid eating in the presence of the opposite gender, their husbands, in-laws or even within the family circle. This is adhering to cultural norms that dictate modest behavior and respect for established gender roles. This aspect of semtende highlights the cultural boundaries and expectations surrounding gender behavior.

### 4.3. *Influence of Arabic Semiotics on Hausa and Fulfulde Languages*

The Arabic language, since its incursion into Nigerian languages, particularly Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri, it had had great influence in the languages such that great percentages of the vocabularies of these languages under study are loaned words from Arabic. This led to the argument that these languages have genetic affinity with Semitic languages of Afro-Asiatic language family. More so, it was established that, long before the incursion of the Western colonialists into Northern Nigeria, Arabic language was used as official language of administration, instruction, court proceedings (in the emirate system), as well as Hausa scripts being written using Arabic alphabet known as 'Ajami' (Galanchi, 1971). These socio-cultural and administrative activities being carried out in Arabic language attracted Arabic scholars into the region who teach the indigenous people the Arabic language and themselves becoming teachers and secretaries in emirate establishments.

These activities became part of social life of the people and began to reflect Arabic language and culture in the semiotics of the indigenous languages under study. They were immersed into the Arab culture because, naturally, it is difficult to remove culture from language. By extension, therefore, Arabic linguistic and cultural phenomena were gradually entrenched into the semiotics of these indigenous languages. The influence of Arabic language into the semiotics of Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri plays a significant role into the religious and cultural affinity of the native speakers of these languages in Northern Nigeria. This brings about intercultural exchanges that precipitates regional socio-cultural growth in Nigeria.

#### 4.3.1. *Sources of Arabic Loan Words into the Indigenous Languages*

Arabic loanwords in the selected indigenous languages can be traced to several primary sources such as:

- i. **Islam and Trade:** Many early Arabic loanwords entered Hausa and Kanuri, specifically, through interactions with Islamic missionaries and traders. These terms include fundamental Islamic concepts and trade-related vocabulary found in the Qur'an and Hadith.
- ii. **Literature and Grammar:** In Hausa land, particularly, during both the pre-Jihad and Jihad periods, Arabic words were adopted through Islamic literature and grammar. Pre-Jihad works by Sufi poets and scholars, and Jihad-era poetry written in Ajami, contributed to this borrowing. Terms borrowed during this period include those related to

Islamic theology, praise for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, and legal concepts (e.g., adabii “punishment,” diiwaan “poem”). In this regard, Islamic/Qur’anic schools established throughout Hausa land played a crucial role in introducing Arabic terms. These schools taught Arabic grammar and religious practices, leading to the incorporation of terms such as Allah “God,” “Muslim” and Hajj “Pilgrimage”.

Phonological changes in Hausa words, such as shifts in consonants and the dropping of the definite article indicate their origin from colloquial Arabic. However, there are also evidences that some terms were borrowed directly from classical Arabic, particularly those related to Islamic teachings Hiskett (1965). Hiskett argues that this is evident that the early Hausa community likely encountered Qur’anic and Hadith terms before the large influx of Arabs, indicating that not all earlier borrowed words came from colloquial Arabic. The presence of Islam in Hausa land, even before the large-scale arrival of Arabs, suggests that classical Arabic influences were present early on.

- iii. **Administration, Law and Politics:** The post-Jihad period saw a significant borrowing of Arabic terms related to administration, law and politics as the Fulani established an Islamic governance system. Terms borrowed during this time included administrative and legal vocabulary such as daulah “kingdom,” haraajii “tax” and majalisaa “council.” Words like alkali (judge), karatu (reading), riba (profit), and hakimi (village head) are prime examples of Arabic terms that have been seamlessly integrated into Hausa with some morphological modifications.
- iv. **Modern Writings:** According to Ahmed and Daura (1970), two primary methods have been employed for the incorporation of Arabic words into Hausa. The first method involves adaptation of Arabic terms to fit into the linguistic structure of Hausa. For instance, the term annabi (prophet) is derived from the Arabic annabiyyu, allo (slate) from allauh, etc. This adaptation often involves morphological adjustments (through inflation) to align with the Arabic words with Hausa phonetics and morphology. The second method involves directly adopting Arabic terms in their original form. Examples of such words include addu’a (prayer), Qur’ani (Qur’an) and jarida (newspaper). These terms are used in Hausa with minimal modification, reflecting their Arabic origins.

While Arabic has significantly enriched the Hausa vocabulary, it has also contributed to the decline of some native Hausa terms. Prior to the influx of Arabic, Hausa had its own system for counting, with terms for numbers ranging from 1 to 10,000 and beyond. For example, numbers such as daya (one), biyu (two), uku (three), up to goma (ten) were traditionally used. Though this counting method still maintains its relevance, terms such as; gomiya daya (ten), gomiya biyu (twenty) and dari (hundred) which were commonly used as the native counting terms have been gradually replaced by Arabic-derived equivalents like ashirin (twenty), talatin (thirty), arba’in (forty), etc.

## 5. Conclusion

It is pertinent to stress that the influence of Arabic on Hausa transcends the realm of language to cultural values, impacting various aspects of daily life, including, mode of dressing, food, marriage and rituals. This cultural exchange primarily stems from the spread of Islam, which brought with it numerous Arabic customs and practices. For instance, the influence of Arab culture on Hausa mode of dressing is significant and reflects both Islamic and traditional elements. They include; men’s attire or garments such as babban riga; a long, flowing robe similar to the traditional Arab thobe or dishdasha. Jalabiya is also commonly worn, which is a borrowed attire from traditional Arab. women’s attire includes; hijabs (headscarves) and abaya (full-length robes), which are direct imports from Arab fashion associated with Islamic modesty. The burqa or niqab (face veil) might also be worn by some individual women or in some communities. Marriage; Islamic and Arabic cultural practices have significantly impacted Hausa marriage customs. They include the Islamic marriage contract known as Nikah. This contract is conducted in Arabic/Islamic tradition with Hausa translations often provided. The Hausa people have also adopted the Arab marriage ceremony called Walima which is an important part of Hausa weddings, mirroring the Arab tradition of celebrating the marriage with a communal feast. Other Hausa marriage rituals which are imbibed from Arabic culture are dowry (sadaq) and marriage negotiations (siiga). The concept of dowry, or mahr, in Hausa marriages is influenced by Islamic principles. The amount and form of the dowry are discussed and agreed upon according to Islamic guidelines, often with a blend of traditional Hausa customs. Traditional negotiations are combined with Islamic principles, leading to a unique blend of cultural and religious practices in marriage arrangements. Others are Eid Celebrations, Janazah (funerals), etc.

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