

## EXPLORING THE SEMIOTICS OF HAUSA AND FULFULDE LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA AND THE INFLUENCE OF ARABIC

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### Abstract

This study explores the semiotics of Hausa and Ffulde 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 a million of speakers. The main aim of this research is to preserve the uniqueness of these languages and how the influence of Arabic has added semiotic relics to them. This is with the twin objectives of promoting inter-cultural dialogues as well as fostering shared ethnolinguistic heritage as a means of enhancing sustainable socio-cultural development of Northern Nigeria of diverse cultures. The data were collected across these languages using unstructured questionnaire and administered to two categories of respondents; eight linguistic scholars in each of the languages under study and eight traditional title holders in the respective traditional institutions in; Kano, Katsina, Taraba and Gombe states, respectively. These were analyzed using qualitative method, describing the linguistic and cultural resonance that culminated to semiotic systems in the two 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, Ffulde, 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:** Arabic, Ffulde, Hausa, Semiotics

### 1.0 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. 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 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 and 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.

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, and their cultures, and symbolic linguistic and 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. In the rich tapestry of Northern Nigerian languages, therefore, there lies a pressing need to harness the power of semiotics for the dual purpose of cultural enrichment and preservation. This is imperative because these languages are not merely a means of communication but are repositories of centuries-old traditions, stories and identities. It is pertinent to state that, if left unharnessed, the languages and, indeed, the identity and cultural heritages of the North in Nigeria are at the risk of being eroded in the face of globalization and new civilization. To fully appreciate the significance of leveraging semiotics for these objectives, thus, it is essential to delve into the unique linguistic landscape of Northern Nigeria, the fundamental concept of semiotics and the potential contexts through which it can be applied. 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.

## **2.0 Conceptual Review**

### **2.1 Concept of Semiotics**

Semiotics, as concept, originated from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Saussure, 1913, 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 & 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).

#### **2.1.1 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 nay 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.

### **2.1.2 Hausa Ethno-linguistic and Cultural Identity**

The origins of the Hausa Land are debated among scholars. One theory suggests the Hausa people migrated from Eastern Africa, possibly Ethiopia, and were linked to the Nubians who moved west toward Lake Chad. Another theory places their origin in Western Sudan, between Lake Chad and the Kwara River. Archaeological evidence and historical accounts identify North-western Nigeria as the early Hausa settlement area, particularly the Hausa Bakwai towns—Daura, Katsina, Kano, Rano, Gobir, Zazzau, and Garun Gabas—with Daura occupied before the arrival of the legendary figure Bayajidda.

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).

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 Bahausha (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.

### **2.1.3 Linguistic Spread of Ffulde Language in Northern Nigeria**

The Fulbe (Fulani) are a major West African ethnic group known for pastoralism. Their migration into Nigeria began around the 16th–17th centuries, driven by environmental factors. Initially nomadic, they became more urbanized by the 19th century, especially during Usman dan

Fodio's 1804 Jihad, which established Fulbe emirates. This led to a division between pastoral (Fulbe na'i) and urban (Fulbe wuro) Fulbe. They expanded southward and eastward into Nigeria and Cameroon, adapting migration patterns to seasonal changes and environmental conditions for effective cattle grazing.

Fulfulde 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 19<sup>th</sup> century. The establishment of the Lamorde of Yola in Adamawa further solidified Fulfulde'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, Fulfulde'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 Fulfulde, 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 Fulfulde, 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.

## 2.2 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 (1938) 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.

### 3.0 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.

## 4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Semiotics of Hausa:

#### 4.1.1 Hausa Dress Codes

##### i. 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.

#### ii. **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.

#### 4.1.2 **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.

#### 4.1.3 **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.

#### 4.1.4 **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).

##### i. **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.

#### ii. **Ngorgu – A show of Bravery**

Ngorgu is a term in Fulbe that is deeply embedded in Fulbe culture of bravery. It encapsulates a set of complex social codes and rituals that affirm manliness and courage within the Fulbe 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.

#### iii. **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.

iv. **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, Fufulde 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," *diwaan* "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.

## Conclusion

The intersection of Arabic with Hausa and Fulfulde presents a rich semiotic landscape shaped by centuries of religious and cultural contacts. This influence, while rooted in the spread of Islam, extends far beyond language and penetrates the symbolic and material dimensions of daily life. Arabic has infused Hausa society with new semiotic codes; both verbal and non-verbal that manifest in clothing, marital traditions, rituals and social conduct. These cultural adoptions are not mere borrowings but are recontextualized within the indigenous Hausa worldview, producing a hybrid identity that is simultaneously African and Islamic.

The study found out that the transformation of Hausa clothing practices exemplifies how semiotic exchange operates in tangible forms. Garments such as *babban riga*, *jalabiya*, *abaya*, *hijab* and even *niqab* function not only as clothing but as communicative signs

signaling religious identity, social status and cultural belonging. They mark the wearers as adherents of Islamic norms while simultaneously embedding these norms within Hausa aesthetics and functionality. These dress forms carry layered meanings. For instance, modesty in Islam, nobility in Hausa tradition and conformity to community standards. The domain of marriage rituals further underscores this synthesis. Islamic marital institutions such as; *nikah*, *walima*, *mahr* (sadaq) and *siiga* have become integral components of Hausa wedding practices. In the same vein, the study discovered that ceremonies such as Eid, Janazah and other arabi/Islamic holidays are not merely religious events but occasions of cultural convergence. These rituals, while based on Arabic-Islamic prescriptions, have evolved in Hausa contexts to include indigenous music, cuisine, greetings and modes of celebration, thus expanding the semiotic field. They blend transnational Islamic identity and local Hausa traditions coalesce, reinforcing group cohesion and symbolic belonging.

However, these elements have been indigenized: Hausa communities infuse these rituals with local interpretations and performative expressions, blending Arabic-Islamic legalism with Hausa social customs. These practices become semiotic expressions of Hausa-Islamic identity, where the Arabic language often serves as the formal or sacred code, while Hausa mediates

cultural continuity.

This research significantly contributes to Nigerian and African semiotic studies by illuminating cultural hybridization, highlighting how Arabic influences are not passively received but actively adapted within Hausa and Fulfulde cultural systems, creating hybrid semiotic codes that reflect both continuity and innovation. The study was, thus, able to expand semiotic inquiry beyond language, as it situates Semiotics in a broader cultural context, emphasizing non-verbal signs such as dress, rituals and practices, thus contributing to a more holistic understanding of meaning-making in Northern Nigerian societies. Finally, the research offers to enhance interdisciplinary dialogue, aimed at intersecting semiotics, cultural anthropology, linguistics and religious studies, all of which are significant in showcasing intercultural engagement with Northern Nigerian identity formations.

In conclusion, this study underscores the dynamic interplay of language, culture and religion, which were mediated through semiotics, in shaping identity and social practice in Hausa and Fulfulde societies. It indulges into a deeper exploration; how external cultural systems like Arabic-Islamic civilization are internalized, reinterpreted and indigenized through sign systems.

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