LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Hausa is West Africa's most widely spoken language. It has more than fifty million native speakers and about fifteen million non-native speakers. Hausa is mainly spoken in northern Nigeria, the Republic of Niger, northern Cameroon, and Ghana. It is also used as a trade language in West African capital cities, in some parts of Chad and Sudan, and in north and equatorial Africa. There are also significant Hausa-speaking diasporic communities in the Sudan and Saudi Arabia, and new ones are already in the making in the United States and Europe.

Hausa identity is particularly remarkable for its multiethnic and intercultural composition in Hausaland, as well as in its Diaspora. People from various ethnic origins have become Hausa over the years through cultural and linguistic assimilation. Hausa language and culture have been very receptive to influences from other cultures and civilizations.

Hausa language and culture are wonderful examples of Africa's triple heritage, namely the fusion of African, Arab-Islamic, and Euro-Christian traditions. The Hausa writing tradition goes back to the Middle Ages when the *Ajami* (Hausa in Arabic script) literacy was developed through the Arab-Islamic school. Hausa is also written in the Roman alphabet, which is mainly used today to teach the language.

You can frequently hear the Hausa language in international radio broadcasting, such as West African Radio, Voice of America, British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio Moscow, and Radio Beijing.

Hausas have been active in commerce for centuries. The fine leather known as Moroccan leather is tanned by Hausa craftsmen. Hausas are also known for fine embroidery and indigo dyed cloth. There is a strong connection between Hausa and Islam. Hausa-speaking slaves, literate in *Ajami,* organized slave revolts in Brazil in the early 1800s. Hausa music plays a critical role in poetry, ceremonies, and at both religious and secular festivals. Hausa traditional architecture is distinguished by domes of great magnitude built according to a unique technological system of vaults. The historical, religious, economic context in which these arts are created and enjoyed is an important part of Hausa culture as well.

STUDYING HAUSA IN THE U.S.

Below is a list of some universities in the United States that currently offer Hausa. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://african.lss.wisc.edu/nalrc.

Boston University
Columbia University
Indiana University
Michigan State University
Rutgers University
Temple University
University of California at Los Angeles
University of California at San Diego
University of Kansas
University of Pennsylvania
University of Wisconsin-Madison

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

4231 Humanities Building, 455 N. Park Street
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 265-7905 Fax: (608) 265-7904
Email: nalrc@mhub.facstaff.wisc.edu
Web site: http://african.lss.wisc.edu/nalrc

HAUSA

A HAUSA MAN IN TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY HAUSA?

There are many reasons that have attracted and continue to attract students to the study of the Hausa language. These include: 1). Trans-national travel: Knowing Hausa allows students to communicate across several ethnic and national boundaries in West Africa. 2). Research in the language and culture: this research ranges from topics in general linguistics and socio-linguistics to the broader interplay between language, culture and society. These are all afforded by the extremely rich linguistic and intercultural heritage of Hausa. 3). Historical research: There are numerous written chronicles and records of great historical importance that go back for centuries; these documents continue to offer new insights into the history and political development in Hausaland, as well as in the wider Sahelien region. The resurgence of interest in the African Muslims in Antebellum America has made the study of the Hausa written record a critical source of information. It is also significant that Hausa is one of the two sub-Saharan African languages into which the eight volume UNESCO general History of Africa has been translated. 4). Orality, Literacy and Literature Research: Hausa is one of the few African languages that has an extremely rich indigenous literary tradition, interfacing both the oral and the written, that has existed for centuries in Arabic and Latin script. In addition, Hausaland is a dynamic terrain of trans-literary experiences; it is a crossroad between Hausa literature in Arabic, Hausa, English and French. From the nineteenth century Islamic poetry of Nana Asma'u, to the current "rap" compositions heard at Hausa markets, the Hausa language is a rich vehicle for creativity. The aesthetic idiom in the Hausa verbal arts is echoed in the visual and performing arts. Hausa has a vast and varied literature, including oral narrative, poetry, novels, plays. 5). Heritage purposes: Many students in the African Diaspora have turned to the study of the Hausa language as a way of reclaiming an Afro-Islamic identity. 6). Religious research: Hausa is very important for students interested in African expressions, both linguistic and cultural, of indigenous, Islamic and Christian traditions.

Another point of interest for linguistics students is that Hausa has been written in *Ajami,* or Arabic script, since at least the fifteenth century. This traditional *Ajami* script never died out, although it has become greatly overshadowed by Romanized Hausa, or *Boko. Boko* writing began later, with the first European studies of Hausa in the 19th century.

WHO SPEAKS HAUSA?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

The history of Hausaland is also distinguished by the preservation of orally transmitted legends in written form. The most famous of these texts is the *Kano Chronicle,* written in Arabic in the nineteenth century, but containing far older Hausa traditions. The *Chronicle* relates in chronological order the stories of the rulers of Kano, one of several Hausa city-states. Traditions in other sources number Kano as one of the *Hausa bakwai,* the "Hausa seven" cities supposedly founded by the descendants of an exiled Arabian prince named Bayajidda.

The walled towns of the Hausa never coalesced into a large territorial state. This is not to say that the Hausa cities were weak or unimportant. On the contrary, Hausaland played a key role in the history of trade, religion, and politics in the medieval Sudan, and Hausa culture remains to this day one of the enduring legacies of the medieval Sudan. Like Swahili in East Africa, Hausa is spoken today as a *koine,* or common language, throughout many regions of West Africa.

Hausa is the medium of instruction in primary school in northern Nigeria, and is taught at the secondary school and the university level. Hausa is used in the media in northern Nigeria, in radio broadcasts, on television, and in newspapers. There is a thriving industry in the creative Hausa language arts, novels, collections of poetry, plays, video and audiocassettes. Hausa language web sites are also beginning to appear on the Internet.

Though not to be taken literally as evidence of Arabian origins for the Hausa, the legends of the *Hausa bakwai* attest to an early ethnic self-awareness on the part of the Hausa. These legends of the *Hausa bakwai* distinguish the Hausa cities from the banza bakwai, which are primarily to the south. The Hausa identity or "Hausaness" developed hand-in-hand with the growth of cities as centers of commerce and political power. According to one legend of origin, the Hausas are descended from the children of Bayajidda, a hero who came from abroad (some say Baghdad) and liberated the inhabitants of Daura from a snake holding them hostage by not allowing them access to water in the well. The legend suggests an early adoption of Islam by Hausas, and indeed, the majority of Hausas are Muslim.

A traditional Hausa wedding meal in Niger.

The Emir (Sarki) and His Nobles on Parade During Sallah

Hausa students learning to tie head gear.