Za:r

(Dictionary, Grammar, Texts)

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IFRA, Ibadan
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Foreword

This first publication on Za:r is part of a work that first started in 1991 in Azare and has now taken the shape of a lifelong enterprise. The general purpose of describing the Za:r language is to help put on the linguistic map a language spoken by about 150,000 speakers in the South of Bauchi State, Nigeria, and mainly in the Bogoro Local Government Area. Although Chadic languages are beginning to be relatively well documented, little was known about the 30 or so « Saya » languages among which Za:r is the largest. Filling the gap with a description as exhaustive as possible will improve the understanding of the evolution of Chadic languages, help reconstruct the history of their speakers and place « Saya » languages in the typology of human languages. And last but not least, it is a well-known fact that the best way to give children access to education is to teach them through the medium of their mother tongue. This implies reading and writing in their own language, which in turn implies equipping the language with its own orthography and written grammar.

The present work is primarily aimed at Za:r speakers. All of them are bilingual, using Za:r locally and Hausa regionally. English is a prerequisite in the Nigerian system of education. Through the use of Za:r, English and Hausa in the dictionary and collection of texts, this book is meant to develop the readers’ competence in the three languages and will help Za:r children become more familiar with English.

Finally, we have chosen to use the local (Bauchi) Hausa for the translation of the collection of texts, and document a non-standard variety of the language.
This linguistic research on Za:r and South-Bauchi West Chadic languages was first undertaken in 1991 under the auspices of IFRA in Ibadan, Nigeria, a research institute funded by the French Government. Then, LLACAN in Villejuif (UMR 8135 : CNRS, Inalco and the University of Paris 7) took over from 1992 up to now, financing regular field trips to continue the research. Finally, Dr Pescheux, director of IFRA, Ibadan (Nigeria) accepted to finance the publication of the book.

I would like to give my thanks to all those who have helped in one way or other, in the preparation of this work, starting with Dr. Rudolf Leger, from Frankfurt University, who first put me in contact with the Za:rs. The people who answered my questions at various times in those 15 years are too numerous to name all. I will just mention my main language assistants: Eski, Sunday and Gaba, Iliya, Ali and the late Haruna. Sunday was an extremely helpful and patient assistant at the beginning of the work at IFRA in Ibadan. Gaba took over in 1998 and became an essential part of the transcription and analysis process.

Then, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Sunday’s family who make me feel so much at home in their house where they so generously offer me their hospitality: Regina, Nakom and their children. Thanks to Sunday’s parents, Dariya and Martha. Thanks to Sama’ila, Sarkin Tudun Wada and all the inhabitants of the village. And thanks finally to those whose friendship helps me enjoy so much my stay with them and makes me look forward to seeing them again and again: Sunday and Gaba, Tokari, Ali, Justin, etc. etc. etc.
References


Symbols and Abbreviations

§ chapter
1 1st person
2 2nd person
3 3rd person
adv adverb
aor aorist
AP adjectival phrase
aux auxiliary
cf see
conc concomitant
cm centimeter
cond conditional
conj conjunction
cont continuous
cop copula
ctf counterfactual
dat dative
dect deictic
det determinant
do direct object
E English
e.g. for example
excl exclamation
F falling tone
Fr French
fut future
gen generic
GL genitive link
H High tone
Ha Hausa
id ideophone
imm immediate
ind independant
interj interjection
iprf imperfective
L Low Tone
lit literal translation
loc locution
M Middle tone
n noun

NP noun phrase
n.v verbal noun
num numeral
on onomatopoeia
p, Pl plural
PPrt predicative particle
prf perfective
prm Previous Reference
Pro pronoun
punct punctiliar
quest question word
R Rising Tone
rec recent
ref reflexive
rel relative
sbj subject
sbjv subjunctive
sp type of
TAM person, tense, aspect
v verb
v.i intransitive verb
v.imp impersonal verb
v.ref reflexive verb
v.t transitive verb
v.ti v.t and v.i
v.x irregular verb
VN verbal noun
VP verbal phrase
Y Yoruba
Introduction

The Za:rs live in the South of Bauchi State (Nigeria), in the Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro local government areas. In the absence of a population census, a rough estimate would put their population at 150 000.

The names derived from root "Saya" (i.e. Básáyè: (pl. Sáyá:wá:) for the speakers, and Sáyíncì: for the language) are the names used by the Hausas. The speakers call themselves Za:r (pl. ZàrsÈ) meaning 'human being', and call their language vík Za:r (lit. 'the mouth of men'). As they consider the term "Saya" derogatory, we use the term Za:r to refer both to the people and the language.

According to their oral tradition, the Za:rs originate from the lake Chad area. They started migrating South-West about four hundred years ago, because of the deterioration of farming conditions, or because of the multiplication of slave hunting that developed in Hausa and Borno kingdoms. After stopping in Duguri, they moved again South-East. Shimizu (78 : 10) states that:

"The homeland of the speakers of the southern Bauchi group of Chadic was around the three hills Tala, Kir and Buli hills, which are located just to the south of the Bauchi township."

They moved again further South to take refuge in the hills on the East side of the plateau area. A large part moved down to their present location in the plain at the foot of those hills when the area was pacified under British colonisation.

The Za:r “village” is a dispersed habitat where they live in the typical compound of the Nigerian savannah. The compound (dÈn, pl. dŒnsÈ) is made of mud huts (ví:n, pl. ví:nsÈ) with grass roofs arranged in a circle and linked with walls that preserve the intimit of the inhabitants. Formerly, the Za:rs only had a religious chief, but they have recently adopted the Hausa chieftaincy system.

According to [Newman 90], Za:r (which he calls Saya) belongs to the the West-B3 group of Chadic languages, with some doubts arising from the properties it shares with Angas.

Four dialects can be distinguished within Za:r, named after the main villages or towns where they are spoken: “ogoro (formerly called the Lusa dialect), Gambar Lere, Marti and Kal. The Kal dialect is very close to what is generally called the Sigidi or Gu:s language (cf. Caron 2001), to the extent that Gu:s might be called a dialect of Za:r.
Most Zà:B people of the younger generation are bilingual Hausa-Zà:B. They are schooled through the medium of Hausa in primary school, before learning English. The Zà:B are Christians, and use a Hausa translation of the Bible. The older generation are not very confident in Hausa, whereas the younger educated elite, who often hold positions in the administration, police and education, switch between Zà:B, Hausa and English.

Writing

We have chosen to use a spelling that preserves the phonetic value of allophones and tonal realization, and is thus closer to the actual pronunciation of the language than the phonological system.

Tones are marked with accents: H with an acute accent: ́; L with a grave accent: ̀; M is left unmarked: a. In the alphabetical order, digraphs are not treated as a unit.

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