

HAUSA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW¹

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The Romanization of the Hausa language, which has been written in Arabic script since pre-colonial times, as well as the origin of Hausa language examinations for Northern Nigerian civil servants, have long been questions of interest to Nigerians. Much unsubstantiated speculation has been published, and many assumptions have also circulated among ordinary Nigerians. For example, in the July 1984 (Shawwal 1404) issue of *Afkar* magazine, Ahmad Hallirio Arfani attributed the Romanization of Hausa to a missionary and colonial conspiracy intended to undermine Islamic civilization and ultimately destroy Islam.² This article, however, assumed that British colonialism had had a 'civilizing mission' along the lines of French colonial policy, without bothering to document such a policy. It also assumes a greater degree of coordination and cooperation between missionaries and colonial administrators than was generally the case. Among ordinary Nigerians it is common to assume that Hausa language examinations, as well as the fluency and literacy in Hausa that they tested, were imposed by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, when he became Premier of the Northern Region of Nigeria, as part of a

1 Much of the research for this article has been published in my book *Spurious Arabic: Hausa and Colonial Nigeria*, Madison: University of Wisconsin African Studies Center 2000. It is here expanded to present a new theory of the causes of Romanization and other material of relevance.

2 'Hausa: Missionizing the Script', 66-7.

policy to impose Hausa language and culture on minority ethno-linguistic groups in Northern Nigeria. This article will examine colonial documentation in an attempt to determine the true causes of these policies.

*Background: the origins of written Hausa*³

Writing individual words of Hausa Ajami,⁴ or Hausa in Arabic script, would have begun as early as the first Arabic books composed in, or even written about, Hausaland, since Hausa proper names and titles were, of course, Hausa and not Arabic (e.g. ‘Rumfa’ in ‘Muḥammad Rumfa’). Nevertheless, no documentary evidence of any complete works, poetry or prose, written in Hausa Ajami prior to the seventeenth century has yet been found anywhere.

The earliest Hausa Ajami manuscript with any kind of reliable date is *Riwayar Annabi Musa* by the Kano scholar ʿAbd Allāh Suka, who lived during the seventeenth century. This manuscript may be seen in the collection of the Jos Museum.⁵ It does not, however, have an absolute date, only a general time when its author flourished. A pair of

3 This section is derived largely from the research of the late Dr. Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, who was, until his tragic, untimely and accidental death, probably the world’s leading specialist on the Hausa language. His history of Hausa literature, *Hausa a Rubuce: Tarihin Rubuce Rubuce Cikin Hausa* (Zaria 1988) is by far the best work on the subject. Unfortunately, this work is still untranslated into English or any other language, and is therefore unavailable except to those who can read Hausa. For another study of Ajami, see ‘The Various Uses of Ajami Writing among Muslims in Nigeria: Hausa and Yoruba as a case study’, B.A. (Hons.) thesis (Arabic) University of Ilorin, July 1989.

4 *Ajami* technically refers to Arabic script used to write any non-Arabic language, in this case Hausa. The word *ajami* is derived from the Arabic word *ʿajam*, which means Persian, or any non-Arab. This word *ʿajam* has many of the same connotations as the word barbarian.

5 Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce*, 31.

well-known scholars from Katsina, Dan Marina and Dan Masani, started composing Arabic and Ajami poetry at about the same time, or not long after.⁶ Gradually an increasing number of Hausa manuscripts were written. This Ajami literature slowly grew in volume through the eighteenth century, expanding in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth.⁷ Ajami book publishing today has become greatly surpassed by Romanized Hausa, or *boko*, publishing.⁸

Ajami writing not only grew in quantity, it also developed in quality. As written Hausa literature began to grow through the early production of manuscripts, new Arabic script characters were created in order to express Hausa phonemes which had no Arabic equivalents although the characters used sometimes differed from region to region, there being no standard orthography. The dating of manuscripts also improved, especially from the eighteenth century on, as a result of the use of the *ramzī* system of writing exact yearly dates directly on manuscripts themselves. In this system, numbers were written as Arabic letters, rather as Roman letters are used as numerals in western societies. The system was different, however, in that the order of the characters did not matter, so that they could be used to form words, sometimes even nonsense words, that could be incorporated directly into a poem.

No matter what their religious or linguistic affiliation, nearly every person in Nigeria sees and uses Hausa Ajami in his or her daily life. Every Nigerian currency bill, of whatever denomination, has its denomination printed on the face in Hausa Ajami. Hausa is the only language, and Ajami is the only script, other than English to be on the bills.

6 Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce*, 36.

7 Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce*, 13, 31-71.

8 For a bibliography of published books in Ajami, see Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce*, 236-9. The term *boko* for Romanized Hausa derives from the English word 'book'.

The first Hausa language examinations

When Frederick Lugard assumed control of the Royal Niger Company's African territories on 1 January 1900, few of his soldiers, much less the other inhabitants, understood English. Queen Victoria's proclamation of the Protectorate was read to the troops in Hausa and Nupe.⁹

Lugard discovered that Hausa was already widely known among many speakers of various small languages in the area, and was commonly used as a lingua franca. In other words it was in general use even between peoples with other mother tongues to communicate with speakers of other small languages, probably a result of the extensive Hausa trade diaspora throughout west Africa, and particularly in the areas just south of Hausaland proper, one of the most linguistically diverse areas of Africa, itself one of the most linguistically diverse continents of the world. This 'middle belt' area of Nigeria is inhabited by speakers of literally hundreds of small languages, all of whom had long been in intimate contact, conflict and commerce with their more numerous Hausa neighbours to the north. It was among such groups, with their martial traditions, that Lugard was most anxious to recruit:

I consider it an important matter to maintain a balance not merely of races but of Mohammedans and pagans in the corps. Indeed, though I have a great respect for the Mohammedan religion ... I do not consider it politic to enlist too great a number of Mohammedans as soldiers ... It is a religion which renders Africans liable to wild bursts of religious frenzy, in which those who are normally indifferent to religion are carried away by the visionary dreams of enthusiasts. Our recent experience has taught us that the pagan Gwaris, Kedaras, and other tribes yield to none in bravery. They all speak Hausa, and I hope to enlist many as soon as we get into touch with them at the new headquarters. It is, in fact, my desire to make

9 Margery Perham, *Lugard: the Years of Authority, 1898-1905*, London 1960, 92.

the West African Frontier Force, as far as possible, a Hausa-speaking pagan force, and I am convinced that it will thus be a far more reliable source of military strength.¹⁰

Although Lugard chose to recruit his troops from groups other than Hausa-speaking Muslims, he never seems to have seriously considered teaching them English or using English as a language of administration. This is easy enough to explain. Lugard was a military man, who had a military understanding of language's utility. Language was a code. Lugard's officers needed to understand the enemy's code while denying the enemy the ability to understand their own. This military consideration dictated the use of Hausa as the language of conquest and administration, as well as the refusal of the British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria, which was from the start a form of alien military rule, to allow the teaching of English in colonial schools.

If Hausa was going to be the language of the military and administration, then in order to supervise this same military and administration, British officers would have to learn Hausa. Formal inquiries were soon made of officers to see if any of them wished to take a Hausa examination. Most responses consisted of a blunt 'No'. The Secretary of the Northern Provinces was officially informed on 6 January 1902 and again on 11 February that there were no officers who wished to be so examined.¹¹

A few officers did ask for more information. One in particular, Captain C.W. Moloney, expressed some interest and even asked for a specimen examination and other particulars. However, he refused to be examined in Hausa Ajami, which he actually said had been invented by mis-

10 Lugard, *Northern Nigeria Annual Reports*, 346, 1900-1901, 23. I am indebted to Dr Murray Last, University College, London, for the full text of this quotation.

11 6 January 1902 from J.H. Brass to Secretary, Northern Provinces (hereafter SNP), and 11 February note in file SNP7-43.42/1902 Language gratuities.

sionaries and was all but unknown to Muslim African scholars.¹²

Moloney's reluctance to learn Hausa resulted in his death. He died on 3 October 1902 during fighting which broke out at the palace in Zaria. The cause of this skirmish was a misunderstanding created by Moloney's interpreter. Moloney was unaware of the nature of this misunderstanding, due to his deficiency in understanding Hausa.¹³ When another officer with 'intimate knowledge of Hausa' discovered and revealed these circumstances, and subsequently discovered that other 'native officials' had been blackmailing Africans into providing slaves (mostly young women) by claiming that the resident needed them, or by threatening to make false reports to the administration, the authorities' casual attitude towards language examinations rapidly became more serious. 'This matter is of transcendent importance', wrote Lugard in his report to London. 'The absence of honest native interpreters is the curse of the

- 12 27 January 1902 from C.W. Moloney, SNP7-43.42/1902. The fact that some missionaries were patronizing Ajami to the extent that Moloney accused them of inventing it should put the lie to those who accuse missionaries of being united against the administration's use of Ajami. By the same token, Moloney's disastrous ignorance of Hausa makes clear that his testimony about the extent of the use of Ajami among African Muslim scholars is not to be trusted. The man could not speak the Hausa language, much less write it in any script, and his testimony about the extent of its use among Africans is worthless, however reliable he may have been in recording the attitudes of missionaries who spoke English, his own mother tongue.
- 13 The circumstances surrounding Captain Moloney's death are still controversial, largely due to contradictory eyewitness accounts. The Magaji himself may not actually have personally killed Captain Moloney, but that Moloney's death was caused by misrepresentations and lies made his interpreter, Audu Timtim, is not in question. Detailed accounts are found in R.A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906*, London 1971, 264-7; D.J.M. Muffett, *Concerning Brave Captains*, London 1964, Chapter 5, 62-8, and Richard H. Dugate, *The Conquest of Northern Nigeria*, London 1985, 169-71.

country and renders administration very difficult. The only remedy is for Residents to learn Hausa.’¹⁴

The 30 September *Northern Nigeria Gazette* of that year carried an official notice regarding Hausa language examinations.¹⁵ Every Political Officer was ordered to pass a Lower Standard Examination by the beginning of his second yearly tour and a Higher Standard by the beginning of his third tour, unless he was authorized to take another language instead. Promotion would depend largely on language ability. Besides these penalties, a system of positive incentives was created in the form of gratuities. African administrative staff who knew English would also be eligible for gratuities, on a separate and unequal scale.

Officers frequently complained about the exams. One complained about the difficulty of learning Hausa in his post and insisted that Kanuri would have been better.¹⁶ The administration in Kaduna ordered him to resume his study of Hausa.¹⁷ The colonial state imposed the Hausa language as a lingua franca through these Hausa language examinations in such areas of Northern Nigeria as Bornu, Adamawa and the Tiv country where it had not been so used previously.

Romanized Hausa

Unlike the indigenous appearance of Hausa Ajami, it was the first European studies of Hausa that began Romanized

14 *Northern Nigeria Annual Report*, 409, 1902, 105.

15 *The Northern Nigeria Gazette*, 30 September 1902, 130-1; see also SNP7-43.42/1902; although dated a few days before the murder of Captain Moloney, there is of course no guarantee that it was actually printed on that actual date, only that it is the issue of 30 September. While the move for language examinations certainly began before the death of Captain Moloney, it certainly became much more serious after it came to be seen as literally a matter of life and death.

16 26 June 1911 from G. Seccombe in SNP7-2674/1911 Hausa Exam of Officers, withholding of increments for failure.

17 *Ibid.*, 17 October 1911 from Chief Assistant Secretary.

Hausa, or *boko*. *Boko*, like Ajami, began to use special symbols to adapt itself to the phonemes of Hausa. Anglican missionaries from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1848 adopted a modified Roman alphabet for use with Hausa. It used subscript dots to signify implosive or ejective consonants.¹⁸ The CMS taught *boko* at its school in Lokoja from the foundation of the school in 1865.¹⁹ The German linguist, Dr. Schon, who first wrote Romanized Hausa in about 1860 and other European scholars also began to write Hausa in various forms of Roman script.²⁰

Even before the conquest of Sokoto, Brigadier Lugard requested on 2 August 1902 that the missionary Dr W.R.S. Miller translate proclamations into Hausa for administrative use.²¹ Miller not only wanted but expected English and Roman letters to replace Arabic and Ajami.²² He was also of the opinion that the proclamations concerning liquor and trees could be translated only into Arabic, not Hausa. Therefore he supplied the administration with translations of only the sections ‘that can be thought by a Hausa’.²³

Who, if not educated Hausa scholars, was supposed to understand the Arabic versions Miller did not say. It is likely that Miller’s own Hausa was more at fault than the language

18 Edgar A. Gregersen, ‘Successes and Failures in the Modernization of Hausa Spelling’, Chapter 15 in Joshua A. Fishman (ed.), *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems*, The Hague 1977, 423.

19 Sonia S. Graham, *Government and Mission Education in Northern Nigeria: 1900-1919*, Ibadan 1966, 22-5.

20 Musa Moda, ‘The Progress of Literacy in Hausa’, Chapter 8 in J.A. Akinpelu, J.T. Okedara & M.A. Omowela (eds.), *Language and Adult Education (essays in memory of S. H. O. Tomori)*, Ibadan 1980.

21 Lugard to Miller 1902/08/02 in SNP7-2594/1907 Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents with regard to the transliterations of.

22 Letter from Miller 16 September [1902?] in SNP7-43.42/1902, Language Gratuities.

23 Miller to Lugard 12 October 1902 in SNP7-2594/1907, Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

itself. Although after many decades Miller would become a great authority on Hausa, he was still at the beginning of his long residence in Northern Nigeria. Still, we should keep in mind that the language of law and administration in the Sokoto Caliphate was Arabic. The idea of translating proclamations into written Hausa would have been new and strange to African Muslim scholars as well as to Miller. Hausa was used primarily for poetry in those days, as Middle English had been when French was the administrative language of England. As late as the 1950s Arabic was the only language most Islamic Shari'ah court judges could read or write, and they tended to 'think legally in it'.²⁴ Hausa would need to acquire a more developed vocabulary, including loanwords from both English and Arabic, before it could be adequately used as a language of administration in Northern Nigeria.

Shortly thereafter Lugard gave the first intimation that he intended to replace Ajami with *boko*. The Secretary to High Commissioner Lugard revealed on 29 October 1902 that the new administration intended to use Romanized Hausa for administrative correspondence with Africans rather than Arabic, or Arabic script Hausa. This was in reply to the concerns of a resident who was worried that the future, compulsory language examinations might include a section of Ajami. Arabic, as the former administrative language, would continue to be important for the colonial administration, to the extent that the resident was requested to learn it additionally, as a secondary language.²⁵ Because he knew that he still needed to use Arabic, at least at the commencement of colonial administration, Lugard wrote to Professor H.A. Salmore of King's College, University of London on 2 November 1902 asking him to translate some

24 *Report of the Native Courts (Northern Provinces) Commission of Inquiry*, Lagos 1952, 162.

25 29 October 1902 from the Secretary to Resident, Muri in SNP7-43.42/1902.

proclamations into Arabic for a fee.²⁶

Lugard committed his administration firmly to his announced intention of ‘substituting the Roman for the Arabic character and of using Hausa instead of Arabic’ as the language of administration, but recognized that for the time being he did not have the resources or control to impose it.²⁷ His policy of requiring Hausa language examinations for all colonial officers, and of encouraging fluency in as many languages as possible (especially Hausa) among them, caused some of them to object that also requiring a knowledge of Ajami would be too great a burden on top of their regular administrative duties.²⁸ Despite Lugard’s insistence, and the strong opinions of many of his British subordinates, there were many among both missionaries and administrative officers who continued to champion the cause of Ajami as an administrative medium.²⁹

During this period of debate over administrative language and script, there was at least one missionary who misrepresented either the nature of Ajami or his own ability in Arabic. J.D. Macintyre of the C.M.S. mission in Lokoja asserted that Ajami was not really Arabic writing. He enclosed a specimen of ‘Algemie’ with ‘pure Arabic writing underneath’.³⁰ This writing was actually not even Hausa,

26 From Secretary (on board S.W. ‘Empire’ on the Niger) to Burdon in London in SNP7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

27 9 June 1903 from Lugard in England to Robinson, in SNP 7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

28 7 October 1902 from Cargill, Resident Muri in SNP7-43.42/1902 Language gratuities.

29 13 June 1903 from Resident H.D. Larrimore, Hausa Scholar, Christ’s College, Cambridge to Lugard; 15 June 1903 from Robinson to Lugard; SNP7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

30 9 March 1904 from J.D. Macintyre, C. M. S. Mission, Lokoja to Lugard, in SNP7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

but the beginning of the Qur^oān, the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (minus the opening formula) in Arabic, with the letters written in west African style (e.g. with the dot underneath the letter *fā*^o instead of above). The ‘pure Arabic writing’ underneath was the exact same passage from the Qur^oān with the letters written in Middle Eastern Style.

Macintyre asserted in another letter that he had studied Arabic for three years in Egypt and boasted ‘a certain amount of proficiency in it’. He insisted not only that Africans knew little Arabic, but that real Arabs could not read their letters. Only those persons who were entirely ignorant of Arabic claimed it had been the Sokoto Caliphate’s administrative language. Macintyre neglected to speculate on what language the Sokoto Caliphate had actually used for administrative purposes. He also did not mention, and may not have realized, that the Cairo dialect of Arabic is rather unusual in many ways and is arguably a different language, not only from the classical Arabic which scholars in the Sokoto Caliphate learned, but from other dialects of modern Arabic.

Lugard was himself so ignorant of even the Arabic alphabet that he did not realize that Macintyre’s ‘Algemie’ was almost identical to the ‘pure Arabic writing’ directly under it, with only a few dots difference. Lugard asserted that he preferred ‘national’ development using Roman character Hausa to ‘Arabic Mohammanan progress’ using ‘Algemie, - (a spurious Arabic)’. Lugard further claimed that Arabic letters were not appropriate for Hausa, and that it was therefore ‘absurd to introduce Algemie, a third system of writing’. *Boko* would also be better for Africans who wanted jobs with British firms, and colonial officers would need to learn only one ‘language’ (not two) if Hausa were written in the Roman alphabet. He admitted his real objective bluntly: ‘I hope that, in course of time, this [policy] may result in the formation of a class of people who can read and write Hausa in the Roman character, though unable to speak English’. For this reason he wanted missionary schools not to teach

English, but only Romanized Hausa.³¹

Because the only schools in the Sokoto Caliphate taught Arabic, as a side effect of which many people became literate in Ajami, a new educational system would have to be created if Africans were to learn *boko* instead. According to Lugard's own information, at the beginning of colonial rule there were about 250,000 pupils in about 25,000 Qur'ānic schools and no telling how many literate graduates. As a result of Lugard's decision to Romanize Hausa all such pupils and graduates would have to be reeducated before they could obtain employment with the colonial administration.³²

At Lugard's suggestion, in 1904 missionaries started a school at Bida in which they taught previously literate Islamic scholars in Roman script Hausa and Nupe for one shilling per month. Lugard reported to his superiors in London that:

Some progress has been made, both in the teaching of English and of the substitution of the Roman character for the vernacular manuscript. I look on this experiment with great interest, and I am personally anxious to introduce the Roman instead of the Arabic characters for the writing of Hausa, as being more adapted to express its sounds and readable by every political officer.³³

He obviously based his assertions about the effectiveness of Roman letters in expressing Hausa phonemes neither on his own phonetic analysis of, or even ability to speak, Hausa³⁴ nor on any ability to read or write Arabic script. His objec-

31 16 March 1904 from Lugard in Zungeru to J.D. Macintyre SNP7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

32 Lord Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda 1913-1918* (3rd edn.), London 1970.

33 Annual Report, Northern Nigeria number 476, 1903, 332-3.

34 'Lugard, though he realized with increasing certainty the importance of such studies for his staff, never built this intimate bridge between himself and the people he ruled', Perham, *Lugard*, II, 472.

tive of having officers easily read Hausa correspondence was sincere, even if his publicly expressed wish to have Africans taught English was not.

Lugard's disingenuousness in regard to western education for Africans is not fully appreciated, even by most Nigerians. For example, Adekunle Adeniran thought Lugard more willing than Hans Vischer to spread English among Africans, at least of the upper class.³⁵ Lugard's biographer Margery Perham also felt that Lugard wanted English taught to Africans in Northern Nigeria. But Perham based her biography of Lugard³⁶ entirely on documents and records available in Europe, especially Britain. She did not find the evidence, in the Northern Nigerian archives in Kaduna, that Lugard pursued one educational and language policy in Nigeria while advocating another in dispatches to London. If Lugard perhaps later accepted the teaching of English in Northern Nigerian schools toward the end of his final tenure as governor, as has been argued, it was only in desperation, as there otherwise seemed no other way to remove Southern Nigerians from the administration of Northern Nigeria.³⁷

Lugard's campaign against the Arabic script went to strange lengths even as regards the writing of Arabic itself in Arabic script. At one point he actually wrote to the Sudan administration in Khartoum to ask if anyone there had been able to publish Arabic books in Roman letters! There is no record of a response from Sudan in the Northern Nigerian archives.³⁸ How Lugard could have assumed himself to be an expert on orthography, or why he thought the Roman

35 'Personalities and Policies in the Establishment of English in Northern Nigeria during the British Colonial Administration, 1900-1943', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, ix, 2, 1978, 105-26.

36 Perham, *Lugard*.

37 Perham, *Lugard*, II, 507.

38 6 August 1905 from Lugard in England to Principal, Khartoum College SNP7-2594/1907: Hausa Language—Conclusions arrived at by Residents w/regard to transliterations of.

alphabet, so inadequate for even the writing of English, or perhaps any language other than Latin itself, was the best medium for writing any language, especially one that he himself did not know, is a mystery which may never be solved.

It would be simple, but unjust, to picture Lugard as an incompetent who could not understand the issues or even distinguish between a language and the script used to write it. Brigadier Lugard was not a linguist sent out with the latest recording devices and training in comparative phonology to decide the most appropriate method for the transcription of African languages. Nor was he a pedagogue dispatched with slates, chalk and textbooks on a civilizing mission to bring western enlightenment, science and their benefits to the benighted inhabitants of Darkest Africa. He was an experienced military commander who was given maxim guns and seven pound cannons and appointed to bring the people of a territory under British rule. Maybe he was not a celebrated military genius of the likes of Napoleon, Hannibal, or Chaka Zulu, but he was very competent in his profession and he certainly accomplished his task effectively. He understood the importance of languages in intelligence work the way any competent military officer would. He therefore wanted to make certain that his men would understand Africans, while he did not want Africans to be able to understand what his British officers were saying in English. One cannot criticize him for doing his job well, whatever one may think of that job.

Lugard's mistake was ignoring his own weaknesses and insisting on making decisions on matters outside his own area of competence. Lugard's lack of expertise in the field of education is not denied even by his greatest admirers. Margery Perham wrote dryly of him that, 'In the field of education the Colonial Office assumed that Lugard, the soldier-explorer, would recognize his own incompetence.

They fervently hoped that he would. They were wrong.’³⁹ Lugard’s forceful Romanization of Hausa is an illustration of the American saying ‘There are three ways to do anything: the right way, the wrong way, and the army way’.⁴⁰ Ironically it contrasts with the American occupation of Japan, when General MacArthur did not himself meddle in details of proposed educational and orthographic changes, and the Japanese themselves were able to explain why Romanization would be inappropriate for their language.⁴¹ Lugard’s example also reveals how much colonial administration was a form of military government, and the extent to which independent Nigeria, in which unelected military rulers have exercised power far more than have elected governments, continues to follow colonial precedent in policy formation. Facts, logical arguments and discussion have only as much place in such a regime as the unelected ruler, whether military officer or colonial official, allows.

Robinson and Burdon had facts and logical arguments on their side. They were right about the advantages of using Ajami. Not only would the trouble and expense of creating a new educational system have been made unnecessary, but printing government documents in Arabic script would have little more difficulty than in Roman script. Arabic newspapers and books had commonly been printed in Egypt before this time. Even the Catholic Church printed Arabic literature at its Imprimerie Catholique in Beirut. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh had also published Arabic essays in Paris in their journal *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqā*. Both of these scholars had already died by 1906.⁴² Ajami requires special letters unique to Hausa, but

39 Perham, *Lugard*, II, 489.

40 ‘Saying: There are three ways of doing it: the right way, the wrong way, and the army way’, Ashton Applewhite, William R. Evans III & Andrew Frothingham, *And I Quote*, New York 1992, 277.

41 Gary Tsuchimochi, *Education Reform in Postwar Japan: The 1946 U.S. Education Mission*, Tokyo 1993.

42 J.A. Haywood, ‘Arabic Literature’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1970,

so does *boko*.

Macintyre was obviously wrong. There are some good arguments in support of *boko*. For example, the Roman alphabet, created for Latin, has (like Latin) five vowels, as does Hausa. The Arabic alphabet has only three vowels, and although the writing of one of the extra phonemes has been done in Ajami, distinguishing /o/ from /u/ is still a problem. Macintyre did not address such issues, however. He seems to have been unaware of them. He was obviously lying, either about Ajami and Arabic or about his own facility in them. He was simply exploiting the ignorance of Lugard for his own ends.

Lugard tried to use Macintyre's arguments, although he seems not to have understood them, but he was hardly influenced by anyone's advice. As far as the writing of Hausa was concerned, Lugard's mind was already made up, and it was not about to be confused by facts. Lugard's way was the army way: bureaucratic, not necessarily efficient, and totally unswayed by logic or argument. Brigadier Lugard had given an order. It would be obeyed.

Lugard's refusal to consider advice, or even to understand his actions and their consequences for his administration, demonstrate something important about the nature of even the most benevolent colonial administration: its irresponsibility and lack of accountability, in which it far exceeds even local dictatorships. A colonial administration, almost by definition, is not responsible to its subjects. Their influence on it is at best indirect. They are not usually even consulted about its policies. Riot and revolt are often their only methods of feedback on important issues, especially from the lower classes not in direct contact with officialdom. Colonial governments did not need to be very responsible to

II, 186-7. For a study of the impact of print media on Islamic civilization, see Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies*, xxviii, 1, February 1993, 229-51.

the metropolitan governments either. While they are ultimately under that government's supervision, and also dependent on its support, communication between the two governments was tenuous and delayed during the era of colonialism in Africa. When Lugard was in charge it was impossible to pick up a telephone in Zungeru or Kaduna and call London for approval or advice. The Colonial Office trusted Lugard to do the right thing. That he did the right thing at all is the surprise, not that he sometimes made decisions about affairs beyond his competency, and left his successors with the consequences. Those successors fared far less well than Lugard, as we shall see below.

The role of missionaries and administrators in this process was certainly far more complex than is often admitted. Neither were united in their opinions, but neither had much influence on Lugard's foregone decision. The roles of two of them do need clarification, however, since the claim has been made that 'Some of the early developers of Romanization for Hausa include, as one might expect, missionaries such as Charles Henry Robinson, and administrative officers such as Alder Burdon'.⁴³ While some missionaries and administrative officers favoured Romanization, their numbers included neither Burdon nor Robinson. Robinson waxed almost poetic in defending the Hausas continued of their traditional Ajami script, if a bit inaccurate about other African peoples.

One of the most characteristic marks by which a civilized nation is distinguished from an uncivilized one is the possession of a written language and literature. Apart from the Hausas there is no race north of the equator, nor indeed in all Africa, outside Egypt and Abyssinia, which has reduced its language to writing, or made any attempt at the production of a literature.⁴⁴

43 Gregersen, 'Successes and Failures', 423.

44 Charles Henry Robinson, *Nigeria, Our Latest Protectorate*, London 1900, reprint 1969, 179.

It was not Robinson but another missionary, Dr Walter Miller, who championed Romanization of Hausa. He even claimed to have personally convinced Lugard to use the Roman script,⁴⁵ but this is not convincing. Lugard was perfectly willing to ignore Miller's advice on other matters, even when it was just as firmly given.⁴⁶ Miller's own account of his influence on Lugard, at Jebba in 1900, could just as easily be interpreted as showing that Lugard had already made up his mind, not that Miller was so influential. 'I thought I could see indications even then that the Governor was with me, but would wait'. It is obvious from the archives that even years later Lugard had little real idea what Miller had been talking about. It is, of course, possible for persons to defer to the judgement of those whom they consider better informed, even if they do not understand their arguments, but that would have been very unlike Lugard. There are likely to be other reasons why he insisted on the adoption of Roman, not Arabic letters for the writing of Hausa in the Northern Nigerian colonial administration.

The fact is often forgotten or neglected that the 'European' conquest of Africa involved Europeans mostly as officers and was carried out by African troops. This was especially the case in west and central Africa where the disease environment gave the region its nickname 'the white man's grave'. Lugard's troops were recruited from the regions of Nigeria known today as the 'middle belt' and were often already in conflict with forces of the Sokoto Caliphate, which in fact drew many of its slaves from the region, partly through its own military campaigns and partly through a network of trade, tribute and treaty relations with the various states and stateless societies of the area. Lugard's easy conquest of the Caliphate was a result of his ability to

45 W.R.S. Miller, *Reflections of a Pioneer*, 1936, 37, quoted in Perham, *Lugard*, II, 499.

46 For example on the question of allowing missionaries to operate in the emirates, see Perham, *Lugard*, II, 505-6.

unite and organize these various groups, most of which had been hostile to each other as much as to the Caliphate. Of course subsequent colonial policy maintained the colonial dominance through a policy of divide and rule, thus ensuring that many persons in every Nigerian group would reach independence convinced that the colonialists had favoured their enemies, and that the proper goal of independence was to rectify this situation. Nevertheless, the conquest and early colonial administration clearly rested on military support from the small minority groups of the Nigerian Middle Belt, whose martial traditions and disproportionate presence in the military are stereotypes even today.

It is very likely to have been just such troops who influenced Lugard to prefer Hausa in Roman script. I do not mean that Lugard spoke directly to them. His Hausa was almost certainly inadequate for discussion of the complexities of orthography with people who were largely illiterate themselves. Neither Lugard nor his African soldiers would have even understood all the issues involved. What the soldiers did understand is that they did not like Islam. The anti-Islamic attitudes of many in this area are obvious, and while many Nigerian Muslims blame missionaries for causing such attitudes, missionaries merely exploited already existing preconceptions. Those missionaries with more generous attitudes towards Islam were less successful among these minority groups. These peoples had been in contact with Islam and Islamic civilization for centuries, but had not converted. They had been in conflict with Islam for many centuries, and those among them who most readily joined Lugard's army were those least likely to support the Caliphate which Lugard was set to conquer. They all spoke Hausa, as Lugard affirmed, but they were not interested in learning the Arabic script. Hausa in Roman script would become the language of this Middle Belt army, and therefore the language of Northern Nigerian administration. Hausa was in fact imposed not on the Middle Belt, where it had already been a *lingua franca*, but from the Middle Belt, on

Bornu and Adamawa where Kanuri and Fulfulde had been the local languages.

Romanized education

As Miller set up his *boko* school in Zaria, in close contact with the Middle Belt minority area then known as ‘southern Zaria’ and now referred to as ‘southern Kaduna’, other opponents of Ajami also strengthened their hands. Hans Vischer was appointed by the government to take responsibility for Northern Nigerian education on 1 July 1908. A recently naturalized Briton born in Basle in Switzerland, he disliked Africans who dressed in European clothing or who had higher education. He thought Latin and Greek irrelevant for Africans, although these languages were necessary for university admission in the United Kingdom at that time. He supported manual vocational education instead of liberal arts for blacks, much as did his American contemporary Booker T. Washington. He also distrusted Southern Nigerians in general.⁴⁷ Those familiar with the classical tradition of the liberal arts in western thought (the term ‘liberal’ in liberal arts comes from the word ‘liber’ meaning ‘free’) will recognize immediately that Dr. Vischer meant to give Africans an education fit only for slaves, and that he had no intention of training them to ever be able to

47 C.O. Taiwo, *Henry Carr: An African Contribution to Education*, Ibadan 1975. Vischer’s policies were also similar to those of Lord Cromer in Egypt, which was instituted in reaction to the allegedly too literary and impractical education given in British India. Cromer was also against the teaching of English in the lower grades of school, largely because he thought English contributed to the growth of nationalism. For the same reason he advocated a purely vocational education for colonial subjects, and not the teaching of speculative reason or the liberal arts; P.K. Tibenderana, *Sokoto Province under British Rule, 1903-1939: A Study in Institutional Adaptation and Culturalization of a Colonial Society in Northern Nigeria*, Zaria, 1988, 183.

take over their government as free citizens. Thus he agreed with Lugard, who once stated his own opinions about western educated Africans with characteristic bluntness: 'I am not in sympathy with him. His loud and arrogant conceit are distasteful to me, the lack of natural dignity and courtesy antagonize me.'⁴⁸

Vischer advocated the use of Roman letters for the following reasons: (1) the use of Ajami would mean the government would be spreading Islam, (2) there was still no standard orthography, (3) learning the Roman alphabet would be faster, (4) to print Arabic with vowels would be very expensive, (5) few colonial political officers could write Ajami, (6) while there were some letters found in the Arabic but not the Roman alphabet, the opposite was also true, and (7) it was a 'fallacy' that the Arabic alphabet had been modified by Hausa scholars, in fact all the new letters were also found in North Africa, except for two (unspecified) ones, which Vischer admitted were 'peculiar to the Soudan' but which he also claimed were found in the Qur^{ān} and Arabic books. Finally Vischer insisted that it was impractical to try to standardize Ajami, so he recommended teaching both officials and chiefs' sons the Roman alphabet. He insisted that he had no desire to discourage either Arabic or Ajami, admitting that he lacked the power to do so anyway.⁴⁹

Vischer's arguments are certainly better than Macintyre's, but still a bit misleading. There is nothing magically Islamic about the Arabic script. Millions of Christians and others in the Middle East use it every day. *Boko* orthography had no more been standardized at this time than Ajami, and the standardization of Ajami would not necessarily have been more impractical than that of *boko*. Which script Africans could learn faster was a matter for

48 Personal letter to his wife quoted in Perham, *Lugard*, II, 389-90.

49 SNP-4864/1908 Roman and Arabic Characters: Which Should be Encouraged by the Government for the Writing of Hausa.

empirical observation, a still untried experiment. Finally, while Vischer's remark about the modified Arabic letters used in Ajami is vague and confusing, he completely ignored the possibility that west African scholars could have influenced anyone north of the Sahara. In fact Berber writing in Arabic script uses different modifications from those used by Hausa, and the Sudanic script of west Africa seems to have developed independently of the Maghribi script of north Africa.⁵⁰

Vischer's real purpose was not so much to replace Islamic civilization (Miller's avowed purpose) or even to educate Africans in the most effective manner, but rather to perpetuate British colonial imperialism by obviating the use of either Arabic or English as languages of administration. In fact the colonial administration was more opposed to instruction in English than they were to instruction in Arabic, since Arabic schools were too deeply entrenched in the culture of Northern Nigeria to be eliminated or even curbed. In Arabic or English Africans could read anti-colonial nationalist propaganda from Egypt, the United States and elsewhere. Vischer opposed the use of Arabic even in the Sudan, where it was the first language of millions, and objected to the teaching of English in schools in Egypt and the Gold Coast (now Ghana). He wanted to train only enough clerks to avoid the introduction of clerks from Southern Nigeria, who might bring with them nationalist ideas.⁵¹ Thus his ideas fitted well with those of Lugard.⁵² Both of these colonialists seem to have considered African nationalism and anti-colonialism not as logical responses to alien rule, but rather as infectious mental illnesses carried on a vector of English and Arabic publications. Only by isolating the population from the

50 N. Van den Boogert, 'Some Notes on the Maghribi Script', *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4, 1989, 30-43.

51 Tibenderana, *op. cit.*, 189-202.

52 Tibenderana, *op. cit.*, 202-8.

vector of this disease could infection with nationalist ideas be prevented, just as only by isolating the population from the mosquito vector could the spread of malaria be effectively prevented. If English language education and Arabic publications, and even classical liberal arts on the western model, could be kept out, Africans would be indefinitely happy with their colonial status, carried out in accordance with the dual mandate and indirect rule.

Vischer struggled along setting up his *boko* school system. In his 1912 report (submitted 5 April 1913) he stated that he had established a total of six schools: two elementary, one primary (the next four years after elementary), and one secondary school in Nassarawa in Kano, with provincial elementary schools in Sokoto and Katsina. A total of 258 pupils were studying *boko* and preindustrial crafts (which they could have learned more easily through a traditional apprenticeship elsewhere), rather than English and the industrial crafts Africans would have preferred to learn. Vischer indeed claimed that he had to restrain his staff from going too far, which revealed that his educational policy was not limited by an defective intelligence on the part of Africans in general or Northern Nigerians in particular, but rather his own goal of limiting educational and thus economic and industrial development in Northern Nigeria. It never seems to have crossed his mind that someday factories might open in Kano, or that Africans would need to know how to repair motorcars. Nor did he seem to have given any thought to the idea that his borrowed ideas on 'Negro education' were inappropriate in his environment. His schools were simply not competitive with traditional Qur^ānic schools and craft apprenticeship programs, even though the colonial administration supported them and provided administrative employment for Africans literate in Romanized Hausa.

In Vischer's report on education mentioned above he also noted the existence of over 10,000 Qur^ānic schools in Kano city alone. These schools could have been developed

into the basis for a modern educational system, if only Lugard had been willing to accept Arabic script for the writing of Hausa. These traditional schools were relatively inexpensive and had a low pupil to teacher ratio. Instruction lasted two years, after which students could go on studying other books. Vischer estimated that there were more than 100,000 pupils (approximately 75,000 in Kano city alone) studying in these schools. This number far exceeded even the 604 students in twenty-nine missionary schools. Governor Lugard's main concern was that he did 'not wish any instructors from Southern Nigeria'.⁵³

In the meantime Robinson had been forced to reluctantly abandon his support for the continued use of Ajami for writing Hausa. In the 1913 edition of his standard Hausa dictionary Hausa words were printed for the first time in Roman characters only. This was done, according to Robinson, in order to make it possible to issue a larger dictionary at the same price as previous editions. But even in the very last edition of his dictionary Robinson objected to Vischer's newly standardized *boko* orthography and claimed that he had used it only on the direct orders of the Northern Nigerian government, 'as it does not appear to me to be at all perfect'.⁵⁴

At the same time, the government could hardly abolish Ajami, or even reduce its importance very much. It was considered important for officers to know. In order to pass the Higher Standard Hausa exam officers were required to be able to read Ajami, although not necessarily to write it.⁵⁵ Mr P.G. Harris failed a two-day Higher Standard Hausa

53 SNP7-7294/1912 Education and Schools Report—Annual 1912.

54 Charles Henry Robinson, *Dictionary of the Hausa Language*, 2 vols., Cambridge 1925, preface to the 3rd edn., Easter 1913, xiv-xv & preface to the 4th edn., x.

55 General Order 38—Language Examinations, Revision of: 28, February 1922 draft of G.O. 38 and memo by Assistant Secretary, Native Affairs in SNP/9-1004-1922.

examination which included Ajami to English translation.⁵⁶ Written passages in Ajami were read by Islamic scholars as an integral part of the oral test even at the Lower Standard level.⁵⁷ All through the 1920s Vischer's schools were still not turning out enough graduates literate in *boko* to satisfy the administration's requirements. A later critique of the language exams noted that an essay test was important, and wanted to include Ajami.⁵⁸

Postwar language policy developments

As the colonial administration language of Northern Nigeria, one of the few African languages used by any colonial regime as an official language, Hausa was set to be the official language after independence. However, the language policy of Northern Nigeria continued to diversify after World War II. Various Nigerian provinces were given newspapers published in local dialects, rather than the official government standard Hausa dialect.⁵⁹ In addition, a separate Northern Regional Literature Agency (NORLA) was set up outside of Gaskiya to prepare books in Hausa and other northern languages. It was later closed by politicians of the independence period.⁶⁰ The first House of the Northern Nigerian parliament, the House of Chiefs, used both English and Hausa as languages of debate when it was set up in

56 Mr P.G. Harris—Hausa Exam Higher Standard, 23 June 1921, in SNP9/1-2775/1921.

57 Captain G. Sambidge—Hausa exam lower standard: 23 December 1921 from A.C. Francis, Resident Bornu to Secretary, Northern Provinces SNP9/1-2153/1921.

58 6 July 1923 from Arnett in SNP9-2783/1923 Hausa Exams (Higher and Lower Standard).

59 For details cf. I.Y. Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce*, especially 97-102.

60 Abubakar Imam, 'Mukaddama: Haihuwar Boko a Rubutun Hausa', in *Karatu da Rubutu a Harshen Hausa: Jagorar Kaidojin Rubutun Hausa (A Guide to Hausa Orthography)*, Zaria 1979, vi-viii ('*Daga bisani, da 'yan siyasa suka kawo karfi, suka gane wuji-wuji-ina-gabas din da ake yi, sai suka sa aka rufe ofishin dungum*').

1948, as did the later House of Assembly. All bills and prepared statements were translated in advance, and debates were simultaneously translated into whichever language they had not originally been given in. The most common language of debate was Hausa but some members of minority language groups preferred to listen to and make official statements in English.⁶¹

This did not mean that the regional government neglected other languages. There were ten languages used by the Nigerian Broadcasting Network in 1959, including Hausa and southern Nigerian languages, as well as various other northern languages.⁶²

Emirate courts kept records in Hausa, as well as in Arabic and sometimes English. These records were usually summarized in Arabic, with a verbatim transcript of proceedings in Hausa. As time went on, courts in non-Muslim areas tended to take down more and more notes of evidence in the local vernacular, and less often in Hausa. The need to determine the actual words used and the many different languages in parts of Northern Nigeria sometimes caused problems. Thus the government was more concerned with language policy for courts in the 1950s.⁶³ This led Frederick Parsons to be appointed to translate the laws of Northern Nigeria into Hausa. This translation was published in 1962.⁶⁴ Arabic was of course still very important in Islamic Shari^c courts, not only because Islamic laws and legal texts were written in Arabic but also because of the requirement for judges to be qualified in Arabic. At the beginning of the 1950s a commission of inquiry agreed that original Native Administration court records should be kept in a local

61 7 August 1991 interview with Husaini Hayat, Managing Director, Northern Nigeria Publishing Company and former Lugard Hall interpreter.

62 Ronald Baxter, *Giant in the Sun*, London 1959, 58.

63 Report of the Native Courts (Northern Nigeria) Commission of Inquiry, Lagos 1952.

64 F.W. Parsons, *Hanyar Tafiyad da Hukuncin Lafiya*, Kaduna 1962.

vernacular, or in Hausa if there was yet no standard orthography for that vernacular. Sokoto and Zaria were still using Ajami for official documents even at this late date, but the regional government in Kaduna still wanted to promote *boko*. The levels of western education gradually increased, so English also become more used.⁶⁵

Independent Nigerian language policy

Language policy, especially at the federal level, has always been one of the most controversial aspects of policy in Nigeria. One major cause of the breakup of the strong regional governments of Nigeria's first republic into several states in the second republic was the desire of linguistic minority groups for their own states. The Constitution of Second Republic stated that, '51. The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor.' It further stated that, '91. The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve.'⁶⁶ Dr. Bashir Ikara proposed this constitutional recognition of the three indigenous languages which had been the official and dominant languages of the original three regions of independent Nigeria to the 1978 Constituent Assembly. The members of the Assembly 'overwhelmingly rejected [this proposal] in favour of English'. It was later included in the final version of the constitution by General Olusegun Obasanjo, then military dictator of Nigeria.⁶⁷ Thus the major

65 Report of the Native Courts (Northern Provinces) Commission of Inquiry, Lagos 1952.

66 *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, Lagos 1979, 31 & 41.

67 Bashir Ikara, 'Minority Languages and Lingua Francas in Nigeria',

three indigenous languages continued to be recognized at the federal level, imposed now by the Nigerian military, while states were left to decide their own language policy autonomously.

Hausa continued to spread throughout the twentieth century. The use of Hausa as a means of colonial administration helped it spread to areas such as Adamawa, Bornu, and the Tiv country where it was little used in precolonial times. However, we should also remember that it was Hausa's widespread use as a lingua franca in the Nigerian middle belt that led originally to the colonial government's choice of Hausa as an administrative language. This official use of Hausa helped to continue its spread as a first language among peoples who had previously used it as a lingua franca.

Mari Idris Muhammad Awal studied the Yankam people of the southern Jos Plateau in the 1980s and discovered that young Yankam people could not speak their parents' first language. 'Hausa has gradually taken the place of Yankam as a medium of communication'. Everyone studied in his random sample spoke Hausa. As English became the predominant second language, Hausa became the first language. The survey found no one who could speak only Yankam, nor anyone who spoke both Yankam and English. No-one under thirty spoke Yankam at all. The author concluded that 'in the near future Hausa would probably become the sole indigenous language of the community'. He concluded that the cause was partly religious, since Hausa was considered a more Islamic language than Yankam, but also political, since Hausa was used as the language of administration, as well as in the courts.⁶⁸

Keynote address to the opening session of the 7th Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria, 13 October 1986 (Published as University of Maiduguri Public Lecture Series 1, Maiduguri 1987), 24-5.

68 Mari Idris Muhammad Awal, 'Language Domination in Nigeria: the

Even the creation of new states and local governments in Northern Nigeria could not stop the spread of Hausa, both as a first language and as a lingua franca in the post-independence era. Urbanization, increased travel and better communication made Hausa and Pidgin, as well as Ibo and Yoruba, better known by and more useful to more and more Nigerians, regardless of government language policy.⁶⁹

Whether any of these languages will ever become the sole official language of Nigeria is a question for the future, not for history. It is more importantly a question for Nigerians to decide, not outsiders. There are many obstacles in the way of African languages, however. Colonial borders cut across linguistic areas. Most colonial language policies did not develop African languages. More importantly, the attitudes of Africans, even in Nigeria, where some development (at least of Hausa) did take place, not only toward English but also toward African languages, both their own and those of others, influence independent African language policies.⁷⁰

Much has been written about the independent Nigerian language policy, not only in academia but in the popular Nigerian press. Many of those who have written on the subject have neither researched nor considered its historical background. Nor have all framers of language policy always considered this background, for example the original purpose of Hausa language examinations for civil servants. To take but one instance among many, Ayo Bamgbose wrote in the *Daily Times* of 25 April 1972 complaining that the Military Governor of Sokoto State had ‘simply announced

case of Hausa vs. Yankam’, B.A. thesis (English), University of Sokoto, June 1984, 7, 15, 19 & 22-6.

69 Conrad Max Benedict Brann, ‘Democratization of Language Use in Public Domains in Nigeria’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, xxxiv, 4, 1993, 639-56.

70 R.G. Mukama, ‘Why the African National Languages Can Never Break Through’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Tokyo), xliii, 1992, 45-62.

... the reintroduction of the Hausa colloquial examination for civil servants'.⁷¹

The overwhelming importance of English at the dawn of the twenty-first century also seems ineluctable. English is no longer just one colonial language from overseas, but the future world language. Its importance in Africa, including Nigeria, will increase, even if any more African languages, such as Hausa, ever become official languages.

71 Ayo Bamgbose, *Journal of West African Languages*, xvi, 1, 1986, 9.