

Towards a Hausa verbal aesthetic: aspects of language about using language

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines the terminology of Hausa metalanguage in verbal art, the discourse about language in verbal art, and the social function of that discourse in Hausa society. The primary sources are the language in oral narratives; the language of bori, the Hausa system of possession-trance; and the language used in the performances of two contemporary Hausa oral poets from Niger. The Hausa trickster Gizo, for example, provides performers with a means to discuss language through the metalinguistic terminology of his own speech: baki biyu 'two mouths,' deceitful speech; romon kunne 'ear broth,' flattering, meaningless speech; tsammin baki 'sour-mouth,' baby-talk, Gizo-talk. An examination of the verses in praise of the bori spirit Mai Dara suggests that the voice of the spirit is powerful, as strong and fearsome as that of the ogre Dodo, of a lion. Seen as metaphorical discourse about language the verses proclaim that language is so powerful that it must be used judiciously. It can have far-reaching effects, it can convey truth, it can convey hypocrisy. Its power can and should sometimes be tempered by rechannelling it, by having a spokesperson intervene. Zabia Hussei and Ali na Maliki, two contemporary oral artists from Niger, create a poetic metalanguage as they create poetry itself. Using images such as the building of fences or farming, they allude to the process of creating oral poetry or song. This paper examines how Hausa artists create a discourse about language within the artistic language of performance.*

1. Metalanguage and metaphor

In *Et Cetera, Et Cetera: Notes of a Word-Watcher* Lewis Thomas says: 'The language keeps talking about itself, cannot seem to have enough of itself. At a guess, I'd say there are more roots for the various ways of using language than for all other human activities together, some of them hidden away inside longer words that seem to be designed for other purposes, most of them standing baldly out in full view. The language, in fact, spends a large part of the time calling attention to what it can accomplish' (1990: 44). Language talking about itself, the language used to talk about language, is metalanguage. Often this takes the form of technical terms used by linguists or literary critics, but all language users have ways of talking about language. Primary among these is classification or

categorization. In English, for example, we speak of 'baby talk,' 'back talk,' 'big talk,' 'double talk,' 'girl talk,' 'pillow talk,' 'small talk,' 'smart talk,' 'sweet talk,' and so on.

In the process of categorization language is often placed in a metaphorical relationship with other systems of classification. This process of metaphor construction is the basis of work such as Lakoff and Johnson's 1980 *Metaphors We Live By* in which they make the forceful claim that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Gibbs (1994) also argues that metaphor is a 'fundamental mental capacity by which people understand themselves and the world through the conceptual mapping of knowledge from one domain onto another' (p. 207). Reddy (1979) has suggested that at least 70% of English metalanguage is constructed around what he calls the conduit metaphor, where ideas are objects which can be put into containers (words), and sent along a conduit (communication). This can be seen in expressions such as

putting ideas into words
getting ideas across
words carrying weight
a loaded remark
 that remark is *impenetrable*

The observation that much of English metalanguage is constructed around the conduit metaphor does not mean that other languages will use the same metaphor. Salmond (1982) analyses cross-cultural conceptions of knowledge and suggests that a common English metaphor is that 'knowledge is a landscape.' This suggests that knowledge is inexhaustible, that there are many pathways which can be travelled again and again, and new ones discovered. Among the Maori, on the other hand, knowledge is 'above all exhaustible and destructible, a scarce resource, conserved within the group, guarded by chosen individuals and never to be squandered' (p. 82). Thus knowledge is spoken of as a cloak, as food for chiefs, as treasure.

In order to examine the metaphors which structure metalanguage, the conceptual system of language, in Hausa, we begin by looking at how a word like 'mouth' is used as a metonym for speech.

baki	'mouth'
baki biyu	'untrustworthy' (two mouths)
baki ya mutu	'words fail' (dead mouth)
cika baki	'bluster' (fill mouth)
ciwon baki	'offensive' (sick mouth)
fi baki	'vocal, loud' (exceed mouth)
ja baki	'shut up' (pull mouth)
jin baki	'quarrelsome' (feel mouth)
kama baki	'keep silent' (seize mouth)
kashe baki	'bribe to keep quiet' (kill mouth)
mugun baki	'indecent, abusive' (evil mouth)
neman baki	'indecent, abusive' (seek mouth)
sa baki	'interfere, intervene, speak' (put mouth)
sayar baki	'custom where bride remains silent until she is paid for speech' (sell/buy mouth)

Much of Hausa metalanguage is constructed around ontological metaphors which provide ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, or ideas as entities or substances. Many of these expressions refer to the senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing. Taste, for example, is at the foundation of the metaphor 'speech is food.'

Taste:	dafi (-n baki)	'conciliatory, flattering' (pleasant, sweet)
	daci (-n baki)	'unpleasant' (bitter)
	danye (-n baki)	'unseemly' (raw)
	gishiri	'flattering lies, something alarming' (salt)
	kwado	'irrelevant' (sauce of ground locust beans or peanuts)
	romon kunne	'pleasing, empty words' (ear broth)
	saleɓar zuma	'empty words, sweet nothings' (dribble honey)
	taliya ba mai	'pointless talk, slander' (pasta without oil)
	(Cf. Achebe 1959: proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten)	
	tsammi (-n baki)	'baby talk, speech impediment' (sour)
Touch:	fayau	'pleasant' (sharp)
	gasa	'abusive' (roast)
	kaifi	'voluble, glib' (sharp)
	nauyi	'slow, clumsy' (heavy)
	sansanya	'pleasant' (cool)
	suka	'slander' (pierce)
Sight:	cambala	'foolish' (sloppy, slushy) (also touch)
	ciko	'unnecessary embellishment' (balance outstanding)
	dushe	'lose voice, become hoarse' (dim)
	karkace	'incorrect' (crooked)
	sarka	'devious, contradictory' (interweave, interlace)
tunjere	'talking by many people at once' (yaws)	
Smell (see also taste):		
wari	'tiresome' (stench)	
Hearing: waƙar madafa	'quarrel with mutual foul speech' (songs of mud floor beaters)	

Hausa metalanguage also has numerous expressions constructed around structural metaphors which involve activities or actions other than speech.

cika (murya)	'loud' (fill)
dabaibaye	'silence' (hobble)
doɓa (baki)	'interrupt' (put mouth deeply into water to drink)
ɗaurin (baki)	'charm to prevent speaking harshly' (tie up)
dibab (baki)	'charm to prevent evil consequences of breaking a vow' (scoop up, dip out)
fadaɗ gwaggo a ƙofa	'vituperative language against an absent person' (aunties fighting in the doorway / ƙofa)
faduwar (magana)	'slip of tongue' (fall)
fitar (da murya)	'raise voice' (take out)
garza	'abusive language' (grind)
hau gora	'abusive language' (float on gourd to cross river)
kafta (magana)	'foolish, unseemly' (dig deep hole for planting)
koli	'lisp' (fling down, discard)

kucin (magana)	'glib' (splice)
shibci (fadi)	'foolish, "Gizo"-talk' (cut)
subul (da baka)	'foolish, "Gizo"-talk' (shoot)
tuntußen (magana)	'foolish, "Gizo"-talk' (stumble)

Finally there is the metalanguage of style. Particular kinds of language are categorized by reference to the stereotypical user of that kind of language. In Hausa this is often denoted by means of the -anci suffix.

algunumanci	'cajolery' (<algunumi 'mischief-maker')
barkwanci	'joking' (<babarkwane 'joker')
batanci	'slander' (<bata 'abuse')
fadanci	'obsequiousness, flattery' (<fada 'palace, court')
Gwaranci/Gwarance	'ignorant, feckless' (<Gwari ethnic group)
hausance	'clearly, frankly' (< Hausa)
karnakanci/karnikanci/karnukanci	'quarrelsomeness' (< kare 'dog,' kare-kare 'scolding')
malamanci	'abstruse' (< malam 'teacher')
shashanci	'gossiping, immorality' (<shashasha 'fool')
shibcin gizo	'foolish' (<Gizo 'trickster')
zaurance	'"Pig Latin"' (<zaura 'foyer')

2. *Ideophones*

Ideophones are among the most magical expressions in African languages. They have been described and analysed by scholars in linguistics, folklore, oral traditions. They are dramatizers; they describe, as Galadanci (1971) says for Hausa 'visual, tactile, auditory, or other sensory experiences' (p. 12). One way of looking at ideophones is as 'sound metaphors.' Each ideophone places the sound of itself in a metaphorical relationship to something else: appearance, smell, colour, movement, sound and so on. Many Hausa metalinguistic terms which refer to the perception of speech, to hearing, are ideophones:

Clear, distinct speech:	falla-falla filla filla gurya gurya wurya wurya
Unintelligible speech:	badabada badam-badam barbara bibita gwale gwale
'Chatter':	cakadidi cincingiri cugudidi kacakaca subadada

3. Proverbs

Many proverbs are constructed around metaphor and are themselves placed in a metaphorical relationship when they are used. Again the word *baki* 'mouth' as a metonym for speech appears in several Hausa proverbs:

Baki shi ke yanka wuya.
It is the mouth that cuts the throat (neck).
Baki mai jayejaye.
The mouth leads (one) into danger.
Bakin mutum kansakalinsa .
A man's mouth is his sword.

Each of these proverbs takes the metonym of the mouth as speech and creates the metaphor: 'speech is a weapon.' These proverbs are concise metalinguistic treatises on the power of language. This is perhaps best summed up in the proverb: *Magana ba iko maganar banza:* 'Speech without power is worthless.' These proverbs establish that power can be volatile. Like a weapon speech can be used to attack, and it can also provide protection. However, it can rebound and wound the user. The importance of listening, of attending to language is also critical: *Da kunne ya ji, da jiki ya tsira:* 'If the ear had heard, the body would have been saved.' Numerous Hausa proverbs address the potential of language for irrevocably altering a situation, for causing an imbalance, for causing trouble.

Abin da baki ya daura hannu ba shi kwancewa .
What the mouth ties up, the hand can't untie.
Magana zarar bunu ce.
Speech is like pulling a straw out of thatch (once it is out, it cannot be put back).
Alkawari cikon (cikwan) magana.
Promises are language debt.

Like any powerful substance whose use has serious consequences, language must not be used frivolously. Several proverbs caution against excessive volubility. It is said of an over-talkative individual that 'potash doesn't have a chance to get moistened in his mouth' (*Kanwa ba ta jiko a bakinsa*). Women are sometimes chided (or feared) for what is perceived to be an over-abundance of speech: *Karfin mata yawan magana,* 'Abundance of speech is the strength of women.' The fact that idle chatter doesn't accomplish anything is addressed in the following proverbs:

Fade-fade ba yi ba ne, an ce za a yi tsarkiya da kunkuru.
Talking is not doing, they said they would make a bowstring out of a tortoise.
Yawan magana ba ta tada sarki in bai tashi ba.
No amount of talking will raise a king if he himself doesn't get up.
Karya fure ta ke yi ba ta 'ya 'ya.
The 'liar shrub' blooms but bears no fruit. (Fine words butter no parsnips).

More dangerously, idle chatter can turn into gossip or even lies, both of which are frowned upon.

Yawan magana yakan kawo karya.
Too much talking brings a lie.

Maras gaskiya ko a ruwa gumi yake.
A liar sweats even in the water.

On the other hand, silence is the theme of several proverbs, touted as appropriate behaviour or endowed with its own communicative impact.

Kurum ma magana ce.
Silence is also language.

Mhm ma ai magana ce.
'Mhmmm' is also language.

Kukan kurciya ma jawabi ne .
Even a dove call contains a message.

Kome dadin kida kurum ya fi shi .
However pleasant the sound of music, silence is better.

Shiru shiru (shuru) ba tsoro ba ne (gudun magana ne) .
Being silent (taciturn) doesn't indicate fear (it is just failure of speech).

Shiru kake ji malam ya ci shurwa (shirwa) .
If it is quiet it is because the malam is eating a kite (bird).

Finally, in what may be the ultimate metalinguistic statement speech is equated with character, with humanity itself.

Bakinsa ba kamar tsuliyarsa ba.
His mouth is not like his anus.
Maganarka daidai da hankalinka.
Your speech is one with your character.

4. *Oral narrative*

Hausa verbal artists are acutely aware of their language and of their ability to create with language. In their process of creation, which converts ordinary language into something extraordinary, they frequently create a discourse about language itself. Hausa metalanguage provides them with a means to discuss language, and in the process they also create metalanguage. The Hausa trickster Gizo, for example, provides performers with a means to discuss language through the metalinguistic terminology of his own speech. When Gizo is a character in a story performers typically give him *tsammin baki* 'sour-mouth, baby-talk, Gizo-talk.' This consists of substituting /y/ for /r/ and /l/, and palatalizing (some) alveolar and velar consonants, a process that changes /s/ to /sh/, /t/ and /k/ to /ch/ and so on. The result has often been described in English as a lisp and bolsters Gizo's characterization as not quite human, not quite adult, the clever deceiver who is sometimes duped. Hunter (1996) has discussed the effect this vocal transformation has of making Gizo eminently recognizable even when he is disguised. Furthermore Gizo's speech is a reinforcement of his actions which are mischievous, naughty, deceitful, taboo. When Gizo tries to convince water spirits that he is one of them he uses *baki biyu* 'two mouths,' deceitful speech; when he tries to convince Hyena that she could be as beautiful as Guinea Hen he employs *romon kunne* 'ear broth,' flattering, meaningless speech. Using Gizo, performers create a model of language which addresses speech as well as behaviour through humour and negative example. Gizo subverts all that is deemed appropriate in the Hausa

philosophy of language: Gizo lies, gossips, chatters. Gizo doesn't speak intelligibly and isn't polite. He doesn't listen but always demands to be heard, indeed, demands to be heard with two sets of ears. The expression *shibcin Gizo* refers to speech which is foolish or nonsensical. Gizo is invoked in the closing formulas of tales as responsible for the 'lies' contained in them. Gizo's actions generally lead to a state of imbalance, of chaos, of ambiguity; and his speech mirrors this undermining of equilibrium. In telling Gizo stories performers are not only demonstrating Gizo's speech but are talking about language itself. Other characters also provide performers with opportunities to comment on language. The Hausa ogre Dodo, like Gizo, is a volatile figure, moving between the fantasy world and the real world. He has a voracious appetite for humans, especially young women, and his voice matches his terrifying behaviour. He is an ambiguous character capable of killing, but equally capable of richly rewarding those who succeed in meeting his demands. Stephens (1981) traces some of his traits to his origins as a pre-Islamic deity, 'the brutish masculine god of thunder (who) threatens human life while helping produce rain to perpetuate it' (p. 218). Dodo's ambiguity serves as a reflex of the ambiguity inherent in language; the dichotomy of his actions is parallel to the multiple interpretations of an utterance. Through the dove, performers can discuss the power of silence. In oral narratives the dove is often a messenger. In one story, a sarki's (emir's) wives murder his newest bride, a girl made of suet, by melting her. In their terror after the fact, they ask various birds to audition for the job of messenger to take their husband the bad news. They reject bird after bird based on their calls, their voices, until they come to the dove. She refuses to demonstrate her voice and her silence wins her the job.

5. *Bori*

In the Hausa *bori* ritual of possession-trance one of the functions of the musicians is to invoke the spirits *iskoki* with special songs. *Bori* singers are particularly aware of the power of language. The goal of a successful *bori* ritual is to induce trance. Besmer (1983) argues that this is facilitated by a number of factors, among them what he calls sensory overload. This may be accomplished by an increase in the number of musical cues, their acoustic strength, and the force of the chanted exclamations. Okpewho (1992) describes *bori* as theatre and as such stresses the importance of communication not only between performers and spirits, but between performers and their audience. He says, 'although by its very nature possession is an unconscious experience, the role playing is often so elaborate and the music and singing so affecting that there is no doubt the cult members have a full sense of their act as both ritual and theatre' (p. 266). When a medium enters possession-trance a variety of behaviours such as a fixed gaze, heavy perspiration and increased flow of saliva are exhibited. The medium often talks and acts like the possessing spirit, sometimes speaking unintelligibly to all but other adepts or musicians who 'translate' the speech for other observers. Thus language has the power to help induce trance and during

trance the medium's speech is an acoustic reinforcement of the power of the spirits.

The language of bori can be heard publicly, but it is the private interpretation of its multiple voices, its multiple messages that constitutes its power. Each spirit has praise epithets which are chanted or sung to musical accompaniment. These epithets suggest aspects of the spirit's appearance and behaviour which are often violent, grotesque, or taboo. Marrow-Drinker makes flutes from young men's ribs; Gwanja eats human flesh though shuns blood (Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 26). Danko the snake is praised as 'meat driver away of meat', 'owner of eyes like copper', 'owner of a tongue slightly split', 'tree stump with eyes'. Uban Dawaki is referred to as 'mouth like a broken piece of calabash', 'shrivelled one', 'short necked', 'stump of maimed arm'. Sometimes the shape of the praise words suggests other images. *Dunƙullale* means a short-necked person, but also invokes *dunƙule* which is to clench the fist, a vivid image of a leper's deformed hand (Besmer 1973). The following verses from a bori ritual praise the spirit Mai Dara:

ayaarayee shaawaa gaa Doodoo	Ayaraye! Wonderment, here is Dodo.
yee aye ayaarayee shaawaa gaa	Ye aye araye! Wonderment, here is
Doodoo	Dodo.
woo Mai Dara zaakiina naawa	Wo! Mai Dara, my lion mine.
woo Mai Dara zaakii na Aali	Wo! Mai Dara; lion, one of Ali.
Sarkin diyaa yaa kaamaa inaa	King of children has captured; where is
Yariiimaa	Yarima?
Ali gaskiyaa	Ali is truth.
Inaa ya kamaa inaa ya niisaa	Where did he capture? Where did he groan
	afar?
Ali gaskiyaa	Ali is truth.
In kiraa da mazaa 'yam mazaa su	I would call on men; children of men
amsaa	should answer.
Ali gaskiya	Ali is truth.
Halinka halin goodiyarka ruurii	Your character, the character of your
	gratitude, angry roaring.
Ali gaskiyaa	Ali is truth. (King 1967: 64-65).

The language of these verses says that the voice of the spirit Mai Dara is powerful, as strong and fearsome as that of the ogre Dodo, of a lion. The metalanguage says much more: language is so powerful that it must be used judiciously. It can have far-reaching effects (groan afar), it can convey truth, it can convey hypocrisy (roaring gratitude). Its power can and should sometimes be tempered by rechannelling it, by having a spokesperson intervene (children should answer).

Bori singers also analyse the power of language as a commodity, as currency. Besmer (1983: 24) says 'as is frequently repeated in the songs of Hausa musicians, generosity is a primary value in the conduct of social relations.' The metaphorical power of language as capital is best exemplified in bori in the spirit 'Dan Galadima who is at once a spendthrift and an inveterate gambler .

rabu da matsiyyaataa sai maasuu arzikii
get away from the poor, none but the rich

mai hana kuukan talauci
he stifles the cries of poverty
(Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 98-99).

koomii kaa baa ni yaa isa
whatever you give me suffices
(Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 105).

jirgii baawam moodi
vehicle slave of gambling
(Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 141; Besmer 1983: 72).

Dan Galadima's verses constitute a metadiscourse on the power of language. Rich language can cure the poverty of spirit; it can soothe, persuade, humour. When it is sincere, a very little suffices to accomplish its goals. But it can be addictive and excessive use leads to linguistic bankruptcy just as excessive confidence can ruin a gambler.

Bori singers draw attention to the communicative power of silence and its value in society. Peek (1994) has looked at silence in the context of cross-world communication, in folklore and in art. He says, 'the representation of occult sounds, voices, and languages cannot be understood as simply ritual but as a means by which the inaudible becomes audible. Thus, the unknown has become knowable through hearing appropriate sounds correctly' (p. 480). One of the proverbs cited earlier appears in a bori verse about the dove :

kuukan kurciiyaa jawaahi nee sai mai hankalii da mai luuraa
the dove's song is a message only for the wise and clairvoyant
(Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 42).

That is, the song is a message, but it can be understood only by those who can interpret it. Part of the song text for Uban Dawaki is not sung in words, but voiced by the lute and interpreted by the chorus: 'as a mortar is accustomed to the pounding, so the mother of man is constantly poked,' a musical euphemism for sexual intercourse. The silence doesn't conceal the taboo message, but rather draws attention to it. The pigeon is another of the pantheon of bori spirits who is also silent, having music but no text (Erlmann and Magagi 1989). Other spirits have song texts but it is their silence or lack of hearing that is characteristic: Kurma, the burly, powerful, deaf judge and Bebe the mute, whose verses are

tanka magana, ga Bebe
ba da baki ba, Beben Gayya
Speak word, here is Bebe
not with the mouth, mute of Gayya (King 1967: 122-3).

One of the epithets combines the two as Bebe Kurman Alkali, Bebe the mute, deaf judge.

Bori verse also calls attention to the silent communication of writing. One of the bori spirits is Malam Alhaji, whose praise epithet is

Alhaji ga karaatuu ga salla
mai alloo da gaskiiyaa baa karya ba
Alhaji, here is reading, here is prayer
owner of slate and honesty, no lies.
(Erlmann and Magagi 1989: 74, King 1966: 112)

He is the only spirit who uses verses from the Qur'an as sacrifices rather than a medicine belt. When Malam Alhaji's medium is in trance he sits writing verses from the Qur'an, reading, praying and manipulating a rosary (Besmer 1983: 82-83). Hausa has been written in *ajami*, Arabic script, since at least the seventeenth century. The script is a powerful entity whether or not literacy is involved. It can be objectified as *rubutun sha*, for example, when verses are washed from a Qur'anic slate and drunk as medicine. House decorations involving Arabic script and/or 'hatumere' (*hatimi*) or magic squares (Prussin 1986) are very popular. Verses in Arabic script empower what Heathcote (1974) refers to as 'charm gowns,' robes to protect warriors which have script inked on the fabric and to which leather charms encasing Qur'anic verses are also attached. Commercial textiles can also be found which incorporate Arabic script into the pattern. These uses of Arabic script constitute a visual metalanguage which parallels, reflects and reinforces Hausa verbal metalanguage.

6. *Contemporary poets*

Zabia Hussei and Ali na Maliki are contemporary oral performers from Niger. Their work was collected by Chaibou Elhadji Oumarou in Niger in 1994-95. Zabia is a female itinerant and freelance singer. She uses her verbal art to advance the cause of Hausa women. Ali na Maliki is a court singer who is not afraid of criticizing anybody in order to see justice prevail. What the two poets have in common is a personal involvement in their artistic creation which leads them to construct a poetic language or metalanguage.

Zabia's poetry is centred around her personal experience; first as a woman and then as an artist. Her major preoccupations are articulated around issues such as *auren dole* 'marriage of necessity' (often translated as arranged marriage) to which she has been subjected through the web of family relationships. Respectful of tradition and the wishes of her parents, especially her imposing father, Zabia agreed to marry a cousin against her will. She promised her father she would never refuse his demands and she even agreed to stop singing. Soon after her marriage her father, in gratitude, told her she could resume her singing. In return she promised she would stay with the man she did not love. She regretted those promises up to the death of her father and that regret shapes much of her poetry. Zabia uses metaphor to conceptualize her experience about marriage and the complexities of family life. In the lines below she manipulates the ambiguity of parallelism and metaphor to cover her disappointment about *auren dole*.

Zamman alwashi cikar rabo shika sawa;
alwashin kara a sha shi da danye
in ya kekashe a dame darni.

Fulfilling a boastful promise can change the course of one's life;
sugary stalks are best when they are fresh
when they are dried up, they are good for fences only.

Zabia creates a parallel between herself and *kara* 'sugary stalks.' The poet implies that just as *kara* is best when fresh, she was at her best as a young

childless girl attracting the attention of suitors. As soon as she has children, the lines suggest, her luck starts to wane and takes on the form of *rabo* 'destiny': it is more difficult to divorce her unloved husband in order to marry the man she loves. *Cikar rabo* here has a double meaning: it is the fulfilment of her promise to her father which results in having children for her husband; and it is the fulfilment of her destiny in becoming a prisoner of promises she made to her father, of her love for her children and of her waning beauty and youth.

The words *kara* 'sugary stalks,' *ƙeƙashe* 'dried up' and *darni* 'fence' are not only metaphors for the waning of Zabia's beauty and youth using images from her natural and cultural world, but also contribute to metadiscourse on the construction and dissemination of poetry. In metaphoric terms, Zabia, once the fresh and coveted *kara* is now dried up and useful only for the construction and strengthening of fences. The freshness of *kara* alludes not only to Zabia's beauty but also to farming and the wetness from irrigation or rain. Dried *kara* is used for *dame darni*, the construction of the fence which delimits the household in Hausa society. It is the most external symbol of a household, fixing a family in one place. As an enclosure *darni* separates as much as it protects. It separates the individual household from the rest of the community without severing a family from its neighbourhood. *Darni* is a natural and cultural connection between a family and its neighbourhood. When Zabia is *ƙeƙashe* 'dried up,' *darni* as an internal symbol tethers her to her conjugal family. Thus *dame darni* metaphorically builds and strengthens connections both inside the family and outside it, in the community at large. This intricate web of connections, of attempts to assert the individuality of a family while maintaining contacts with the neighbourhood at large, is Zabia's metaphor for singing. As a metaphor for singing or poetry, the whole process of building a fence can be considered metadiscourse on the construction of poetic language.

Words and images are the sugary stalks of poetry and song. The process of *dame darni* is the construction of the poetry itself. The sugary stalks are also a metonym for the poet, and as their juice is drunk, the act of drinking can be interpreted as the communication between the audience and the singer. By implication, the drinking activity becomes another metaphor for reading when the songs are put into print. The sugar in the stalks may be an allusion to the sweetness of Zabia's poetry and its capacity to attract listeners.

Zabia's use of the metaphor of building fences for the construction of poetry reverberates with the use of similar images in the Hausa language. The image of forging is used to describe the work of praise singers, *maƙerin baki* 'forgers of the mouth.' This same image has been taken over by modern linguists to refer to morphology or word construction. Ali na Maliki uses yet another image, that of farming. Many of his songs are performed for the non-Muslim Anna, farmers who pride themselves on their productivity. This is celebrated in an annual festival called *dubu* during which the host exhibits the wealth of his produce. The name of the festival comes from the word for a thousand and refers to a farmer's ability to harvest a thousand bundles of grain. In order to be successful a farmer, a *sarkin noma* 'master of farming' must be able to clear a vast amount

of land, to till it, to harvest it. In a song to Sarkin Noma Dan Hwaru, Ali describes him as:

Mai noma kamar gudun doki dan dubu.
 In yana yin noma, kama da guguwa ta taso.
 Waje in ya kama noma, kama da iskan bazara.
 ...
 Kamar kare shi koro zomo.
 When he cultivates he is as fast as a racehorse.
 He is like a whirlwind.
 When he cultivates, he devours weeds like a brush fire.
 ...
 He is as fast as a dog chasing a rabbit.

And since generosity is part of success, the farmer must host a dubu to distribute his bounty. Ali sees this as equivalent to the process of creating poetry. The poet must be a hard worker, must compose a vast amount of poetry, his words must have the strength of a racehorse, the power of a brushfire. And just as a good farmer must be generous, a good poet must connect with his audience and distribute his wealth of words.

7. *Language in Hausa social life*

In discussing attitudes to speech and language among the Limba of Sierra Leone Ruth Finnegan makes the observation that the Limba are self-conscious about their language. By this she means that 'they are aware of the distinctive nature of their own language as contrasted with others' and are greatly interested in the language they speak, intentionally using it for play, comment and analysis, not just for the straight communication of fact or expression of feeling' (1969: 66). This is very much the case among Hausa people as well. From the moment a Hausa child is born, and probably even earlier, the process of communication begins: tracking, smiling, cooing, babbling, talking. Older children, parents, caretakers, even relative strangers participate in the early socialization of the child, in the moulding of the child to be a full member of Hausa society. Language plays an important role in socialization: it is used to instruct, correct, reprimand, it is used for play and affection, and the acquisition of language is a major step in the development of the child. Infants are given amulets and are fed the ink of Qur'anic texts to ensure the timely emergence of speech and eloquence. Children are instructed in linguistic appropriateness: what is polite, what is taboo, the importance of *kunya* 'shame, modesty.' Kirk-Greene (1974) enumerates ten qualities he feels are obligatory in understanding the concept of *mutumin kirki*, the good Hausa man. They are:

<i>gaskiya</i>	'truth'	<i>kunya</i>	'shame, modesty'
<i>amana</i>	'trust'	<i>ladabi</i>	'good manners'
<i>karamci</i>	'generosity'	<i>mutunci</i>	'humanity'
<i>hafuri</i>	'patience'	<i>hikima</i>	'(religious) wisdom'
<i>hankali</i>	'sense, common sense'	<i>adalci</i>	'(religious) scruples'

All of these qualities (as well as their opposites) have reflexes in language as is evident in the examples of phrases, ideophones, metaphors and proverbs we have

examined, as well as in verbal art performances. These are the qualities that build *hali*, character, and they are they qualities that endow a theory of ideal language behaviour. This ideal provides a structure around which verbal artists can operate, sometimes reinforcing it, sometimes undermining it, sometimes rebuilding or recreating it. When Ali na Maliki likens the verbal generosity of poetry to the material generosity of farmers, or when the dove in a folktale or in *bori* confirms the value of silence the artist is making a metalinguistic statement about ideal language behaviour. But the artist can subvert this ideal through Gizo's lack of *kunya*, modesty, in speech; or by comparing the gambling *bori* spirit Dan Galadima's squandering of riches to impoverished language. When Hausa verbal artists take ordinary language and craft it, manipulate it, transform it to create extraordinary language they are functioning not only as artistic creators but as analysts and critics as well. As they create language which is dramatic, aesthetic, emotional, and vigorous they are also creating a metalanguage, a theory of the importance and power of language in Hausa society. The mechanisms which have been discussed here – terminology, giving voice or vision to power, taboo, silence – are all parts of a complex, unified, and overlapping whole. Furniss (1996) champions an approach to Hausa literary theory which focuses on 'the interaction of genres operating within particular social and ideological contexts. Interaction goes beyond 'influence' to encompass circumstances where some genres are at least partly composed out of other genres: a situation which single-genre scholarship has been incapable of addressing. Thus, *karin magana* 'proverbs, proverbial speech,' for example, can be cited in isolation as complete texts; but they can be viewed as the building blocks of numerous larger genres, functioning as key points from which an entire oral or written narrative may be suspended' (p. 1). The study of metalanguage similarly must observe the interplay of language and discourse about language, the echoes and reverberations triggered by a sound or word or idea. Gizo's pronunciation of *sarki* 'emir' as /shaychi/ recalls the term *tsammin baki* 'sour-mouth,' baby-talk, Gizo talk. That expression in turn is part of the metaphor: speech is food. The metaphor is the basis for a proverb on verbosity which asserts that a loquacious person can't moisten potash in his mouth. Hausa verbal artists exploit these connections and interactions, formulating discourse about language which may be embedded in their stories, poetry, films, in the broad range of creative works. The metalanguage created by Hausa verbal artists provides insight into how language is categorized, how to define ideal language behaviour, and most importantly how to conceive a Hausa verbal aesthetic.

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