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Structural, socio-pragmatic, and cultural aspects of teaching African languages in Poland

Abstract

The 60th anniversary of the African Studies program was celebrated at the University of Warsaw in the academic year 2022/23. This is equivalent to 60 years of experience in teaching African languages to Polish students. Since every anniversary encourages reflection, we take this opportunity to summarize the challenges we faced in this endeavour. Teaching foreign languages is not only about presenting new words and structures; it is even more about other cultures, people's lives, and beliefs. Teaching and learning languages of such distant cultures as we encounter in Africa is quite a challenge to both the teachers and students found in the European context. In the article, we focus on two African languages; Hausa and Swahili, taught at the Chair of African Languages and Cultures, University of Warsaw. We aim to discuss chosen grammatical and cultural differences that pose problems during the teaching of these languages to Polish students.

Keywords: African languages, conceptualization, language pedagogy, language teaching challenges, language structure

Introduction

African languages were introduced into the curriculum of the University of Warsaw long before the current Chair of African Languages and Cultures was created. There were researchers who conducted studies in Ethiopian languages such as Ge'ez and Amharic in the Department of Semitic Studies (part of the Institute of Oriental Studies) founded by Prof. Stefan Strelcyn. From the very beginning, Strelcyn sought to introduce a broader scope of African languages at the University of Warsaw. However, due to staff shortages, this was not possible before the second half of the 1950s. Then, Nina Pilszczikowa, a specialist in the Hausa language and African linguistics, joined the crew, followed by a Swahili lecturer, Rajmund Ohly. In the academic year 1962/1963, a new program of African studies was introduced, and the Amharic language was joined by Hausa and Swahili which were now on offer.[2] Therefore, in the academic year 2022/2023, the 60th anniversary of the African Studies programme at the University of Warsaw was celebrated.

Eventually, the Department of African and Semitic Studies was founded in 1969. Until then, African studies functioned within the framework of oriental philology, then cultural studies, and since 2005, within the discipline of oriental studies. At the beginning, the program and the scientific background of African studies were focused on linguistic research. Over time, the profile broadened and included research on history, literature, cultural, and social issues. Currently, students can pursue their studies at undergraduate (bachelor) and graduate (master) levels, including doctoral studies. The educational offer of three African languages is sustained and students are taught Amharic, Hausa, and Swahili up to master level.

The teaching of languages from such diverse cultures as African and European poses many challenges for both teachers and students. Taking advantage of many years of experience, in this article, the aim is to present chosen aspects of language teaching that we encounter on a daily basis. These aspects obviously refer to language structure, since both Hausa and Swahili represent different morphological types than Polish, but even more so, the cultural differences that influence the language use. The problems related to standardization, or the lack of it, and the shortage of teaching materials, are also discussed. It should be emphasized that the article is more of a general and informative nature and is addressed to non-specialists.

Motivation for teaching African languages beyond Africa

Recent years have witnessed a turn in the language policy of many African countries. Change comes slowly but it can be observed that European languages are losing their prominence in favor of native vernacular languages. New languages are introduced into constitutions and the education systems. The advantage of teaching in native languages is

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[2]   Ewa Wołk-Sore, 'Among manuscripts and men of Ethiopia. Stefan Strelcyn's quest for African studies', in: *African Studies, forging new perspectives and directions*, eds. Nina Pawlak, Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł, and Izabela Will, Warszawa 2016, p. 84.

increasingly noticed and recent events related to the COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the need for securing communication in local languages which provide access to all citizens regardless of their education. Already in 1996, South Africa's constitution recognised 11 official languages, which was unusual on a global scale, while in Kenya, Swahili was introduced as the official language, alongside English, in 2010, and Zimbabwe gave that status to 16 languages in the constitution of 2013. At the same time, state citizens are becoming increasingly aware of their language rights, available language choices, and a need to establish their language-based identities.

Probably the most prominent vernacular of the [African] continent is the Swahili language with more than 200 million speakers scattered around the world.[3] Swahili is spoken as a lingua franca across the vast region of eastern and central Africa, while its native speakers are mainly found along the coast. It is recognised as both the national and official language of several East African countries and is used extensively in media and education. Undoubtedly, its most important formal role is to be the official language of the African Union and, as the only African vernacular, it acts besides English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic, as the working language of the Union that associates 55 member states representing countries on the African continent. It confirms the importance of the language and its thriving role as a cross-border communication tool.

Unsurprisingly it is also the official language, together with English and French, of the East African Community (EAC), an alliance of seven partner states comprising Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Furthermore, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted Swahili as its official language in 2019. Together with English, French, and Portuguese, Swahili unites nine South African member states, thus officially widening the area of its spread.

Recently, in 2021, 7 July was proclaimed by UNESCO as the World Kiswahili Language Day, which further confirmed the importance of the language on the world language map. The resolution recognises "the role the Kiswahili language plays in promoting cultural diversity, creating awareness, and fostering dialogue among civilizations".[4] It highlights the need to promote multilingualism, which is a core value of the United Nations. Swahili is the first African language that was added to the list of officially recognised languages.

In West Africa, the most important vernacular language is Hausa. It is spoken, according to different sources, by 50 to 150 million people.[5] It is recognised as a national language in Nigeria and Niger and it has the status of a minority language in Benin. There are several broadcast media stations that spread news and feature programmes in Hausa. The West African companies advertise their products in Hausa. One of the most important industries that help spread the Hausa language is the film industry, known as Kanywood. Hausa movies produced in northern Nigeria, mainly in Kano, are highly

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[3] 'UNESCO Resolution 41 C/61', Viewed 22 September 2022, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379702>.

[4] Ibidem.

[5] A.S. Muhammad, Muktar M. Aliyu and I. Zimit Sani, 'Towards the Development of Hausa Language Corpus', *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 10 (2019), pp. 1598–1604.

popular and watched in many West African countries as well as in the Hausa diaspora. Another corporation that has a huge impact on the public recognition of the Hausa language is Arewa 24, a TV station offering various entertainment programmes in Hausa. Apart from being broadcast in West and North Africa, it is also broadcast in India and Saudi Arabia, where Hausa communities live.

Problems related to language structure

All the students of the Chair of African Languages and Cultures have experience of learning foreign languages in primary and secondary school. However, they have usually studied European languages such as English, French, or German as well, which have a similar structure to the Polish language. For example, the list of the most frequently used verbs in European languages includes the basic verbs 'be' and 'have' that also play a modal function.[6] One of the first challenges students face when learning Hausa and Swahili is the fact that there are no equivalents of these verbs.[7] Instead, several verbless constructions are used to convey the meanings typically expressed by those verbs, i.e., possession, location, identification, or presentation.[8] Students acquire the equivalent of 'have', that is, the possessive construction, quite well after getting over the shock of the fact that the verb 'have' does not exist in a language.

The situation is quite different when it comes to the equivalence of expressions based on the verb 'be'. Most students are not conscious of the fact that in Polish, the verb *być* 'to be' has various meanings and each of these meanings is represented by a different construction in Hausa and Swahili. It is illustrated in the following examples 1, 2, and 3, where the concept of existence (ex. 1), presentation (ex. 2), and location (ex. 3) is expressed by the use of a copula (possessive, locative or existential) or the imperfective aspect.

	Hausa	Swahili	
1.	**Akwai** doki	**Kuna** farasi	'there **is** a horse'
	COP[9] horse	CL17-with horse	
2.	Binta malama **ce**	Binta **ni** mwalimu	'Binta **is** a teacher'
	Binta teacher.F COP.SG.F	Binta COP teacher	
3.	Waya **ta-na** kan tebur	Simu **iko** meza-ni	'the mobile **is** on the table'
	phone.F 3SG.F-IPFV on table	phone CL9-LOC.CL17 table -LOC	

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[6] Åke Viberg, 'Basic Verbs in Second Language Acquisition', *Revue française de linguistique appliquée* 7 (2002), p. 64.

[7] One may find equivalents of the verb 'to be' in African languages, but their use and function are usually very restricted. For example, the verb *kasance* in Hausa is sometimes translated as 'to be, to become', but it is rather used in fixed expressions like *ya kasance…* 'it happened that…' or in marked clauses like *abin nan ya kasance nasa* 'this thing is his' (lit. became his); the unmarked expression would be: *abin nan nasa ne*.

[8] Nina Pawlak, *Języki afrykańskie*, Warszawa 2010, p. 212.

[9] The general principles of interlinear glossing follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules, a widely accepted standard in contemporary linguistics.

Associating all these concepts with a single verb is so strong in the students' minds that even when they acquire the theory and are familiar with the constructions illustrated in 1–3, they ignore what they have learnt and show a tendency to unify the constructions where the verb 'be' occurs in their mother tongue. Therefore, they choose one of the grammatical structures shown in 1–3 to express all concepts associated with the verb 'to be'. The problem continues to appear even at the more advanced stages of learning the language.

In the case of Swahili, example 3 represents an additional challenge associated with the language structure; the suffix *-ni* in *meza**ni*** 'on the table' is a locative bound morpheme that represents a preposition. It is a marker of location for common nouns and represents a meaning 'on'. Furthermore, the locative suffix may denote the meaning of 'in' or 'at', depending on the context. Unlike in English and Polish, the preposition is implied in the meaning of a noun and in the translation it has to be represented by a preposition that comes before the noun. To make things even more complicated, there is an identical suffix of the same shape *-ni* used to express the plural form of imperative verbs, so *Simama!* 'stand up!' changes in the plural to *Simameni!* 'you (plural) stand up!'.

Another challenge connected with the language structure is the lack of equivalence between word classes in European and African languages. Many African languages do not have a category of adjectives or adverbs, or even if there exists a class of adjectives in a given language, the class is very small[10]. The quality or state that is usually associated with an adjective is often expressed by a noun. In Hausa, a noun expressing the concept of beauty and goodness: *kyau* has to be preceded by a light verb *yi* 'do' (4a), a particle *mai* 'having or being characterised by' (4b), or a possessive construction (ex. 4c) in order to express the quality.

4a.   Binta ta yi kyau
      Binta 3SG.PRF do beauty

4b.   Binta mai kyau ce
      Binta PRT.being.characterized.by beauty COP.SG.F

4c.   Binta tana da kyau
      Binta 3SG.F-IPFV with beauty
      'Binta is beautiful'

Such grammatical constructions are quite difficult to understand for the students, who usually treat nouns expressing quality as adjectives and tend to form ungrammatical constructions such as *Binta kyau ce [Binta beauty COP.SG.F]. A comparative construction, which in many European languages is based on comparative and superlative adjectives, is even more difficult to learn because it requires acquiring a totally different schema. In many African languages, the so-called Exceed Comparatives are used[11], i.e., the constructions

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[10] William Everett Welmers, *African language structures*, Los Angeles–London 1973, p. 250.
[11] Leon Stassen, *Comparison and Universal Grammar*, Oxford 1985, pp. 159–182.

based on the verb 'surpass', 'exceed', or a similar, which takes the comparee (e.g., *Peter* in the clause: *Peter is bigger than Paul*) as its subject while having a base of comparison as its object.[12] Therefore, in order to describe a person who is more beautiful than another, one says: 'one person surpasses the other in beauty', as in ex. 5 from Hausa.

5.   Maryam ta fi Halima hankali
     Maryam 3SG.PRF surpass Halima good.sense
     'Maryam is more resaonable than Halima'

Issues related to culture and conceptualisation

Everyday communication in African languages is heavily based on formulaic language,[13] i.e., multiword linguistic units such as idioms, sayings, and proverbs.[14] In many situations, in order to exchange a greeting, give one's best wishes, share good news or express one's emotions, it is necessary to look for a proper formula.[15] Many of those formulas reflect cultural values and beliefs. For example, the Hausa language, but also other West African languages spoken in areas inhabited by the Muslim majority, has plenty of expressions (usually Arabic loanwords) invoking Allah. Although they contain a theonym, their use is not limited to religious discourse. They function in all forms of conversation, both spoken and written, and are used by all the speakers of the language irrespective of their religion.[16] For example, a standard expression informing that someone has had a baby is: *Allah ya ƙaddara shi da haihuwa* (lit. Allah ordained that [the child] had been delivered to him), while a common expression of disbelief is *Allah?* 'Oh, really?/You are kidding!' (lit. God). These so-called Allah expressions show a strong belief in the omnipotence of God and destiny. It is not possible to refer to any action planned in the future without adding the expression *insha allah* (the expression of hope for a desired outcome) or some of its contextual equivalents *Allah ya sa* 'may God make it so', *Allah ya kai mu gobe* 'may God carry us to tomorrow', *Allah ya taimaka* 'may God help us', *Allah ya kiyaye* 'may God take care [of us]'. Such phrases are also common in Swahili since native speakers of the language are mainly Muslims. So, in East Africa one can also hear sayings as already mentioned; *insha allah* or its Swahili equivalent *Mungu akipenda*. It is also common among Muslims to greet each other with the Arabic phrase *As-salamu alaikum*.

[12]   Yvonne Treis, 'Comparative Constructions: An Introduction', *Linguistic Discovery* 16/1 (2018), pp. I–XXVI.

[13]   Nina Pawlak, 'Hausa phraseologisms as a structural property of language and cultural value', *Language in Africa* 2/1 (2021), pp. 91–120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.37892/2686-8946-2021-2-1-91-120>.

[14]   Patryk Zając, 'Słowa-klucze kultury w przysłowiach hausa', *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* 1–2 (2018), pp. 155–181.

[15]   Beata Wójtowicz, 'Cultural norms of greetings in the African context', *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 69/6 (2021), pp. 171–187. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rh21696-10>.

[16]   Nina Pawlak, 'Allah expressions as a manifestation of common cultural area in West Africa', in: *West African languages. Linguistic theory and communication*, eds. Nina Pawlak and Izabela Will, Warszawa 2020, p. 288.

Another important value, apart from the belief in God, is building proper social relationships by showing a positive attitude, avoiding conflicts and complaints, putting the needs of a social group before one's own or setting up a family to become a proper member of a society. All these values are reflected in greetings. The right answer to a question about our physical or emotional state should be positive no matter how we feel. For example, an answer to a Hausa morning greeting *ina kwana?* 'good morning' (lit. how sleep) would be *lafiya* 'good, fine', while the right answer to another greeting *ina gajiya* 'how is [your] tiredness' would be *ba gajiya* '[I am] not tired at all'. Even if one is terribly tired or ill, one does not change the answers in the greeting formulas. In Swahili, there are a fixed number of answers to a greeting that one may choose from, like *nzuri*, *njema*, or *salama*, every one of them meaning 'good, well'. There are also some fixed expressions to questions relating to family planning. When one is asked whether she or he is married, the expected negative answer is *bado* meaning '(not) yet' in Swahili. The high value of marriage and having a family in Swahili society implies that a situation where someone may not want to get married is neither expected nor accepted.

Students often find it difficult to accept some of these formulas due to the fact that they are too "conservative", or too "religious". They look for equivalents or try to change the expression to something that is consistent with their beliefs, forgetting the fact that such a change entails misunderstanding. They also find it difficult to repeat the same formula; instead, they prefer to change to something more original, something expressing an individual approach towards the situation. Again, such an attitude goes against the collective approach characteristic to many African cultures, where communal spirit is appreciated and shown, among others, by repeating hackneyed expressions and adapting to social norms rather than exposing individualistic behaviour.[17]

The challenges of learning African languages are not limited to cultural values or conceptualization patterns that stand out from those characteristic of Western Culture. Also, the acquisition of common nouns denoting everyday objects often requires immersion in the culture of a given region of Africa. The Hausa noun *buta* 'kettle' can serve as an example; this noun occurs in one of the first lessons of a language course.[18] The appearance, as well as English translation of *buta* 'pot, kettle', in addition to the cultural background of the students, results in their association of the object with a teapot or a watering can. Despite the visual similarity to a teapot, the function of *buta* is totally different. It is a plastic jug used by most Muslims living in Western Africa to make a ritual ablution performed before each of the five obligatory daily prayers. It is also used to wash intimate parts of the body after using the toilet. Its common use makes it omnipresent in West Africa, especially in mosques, shops, workshops, houses, or public

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[17] Izabela Will, 'Cultural aspects of nonverbal code in Hausa', in: *Codes and Rituals of Emotions in Asian and African Cultures*, ed. Nina Pawlak, Warszawa 2009, pp. 252–265.

[18] Abdullahi Bature and Russell G. Schuh, *Hausar Baka – "Gani Ya Kori Ji"*, Windsor (California) 1998; Ronayne J. Cowan and Russell G. Schuh, *Spoken Hausa*, Ithaca (New York) 1976.

toilets.[19] Therefore, it is connected with two important domains of human life – religion, which is a part of social behaviour, on the one hand, and cleaning, which is a part of daily life, on the other. In order to explain the function and use of the *buta*, it is necessary to know the background information concerning these two domains.

The necessity of taking cultural norms into account applies also to the terms that seem to be universal rather than culturally sensitive. One of these is the Hausa word *iyali* 'family'. Once the students get the Polish translation of the word, which is 'rodzina', they automatically adapt the conceptualization schema associated with the Polish term and apply it to Hausa society. The term 'rodzina' consists of parents (a mother and a father), children, grandparents, but also relatives.[20] Each member of the family understood in such a way (no matter whether it is a child or a parent) can say that he or she has a family. In Hausa, however, the term *iyali* refers to a nuclear family consisting of parents and children, but not necessarily grandparents or relatives.[21] Moreover, only a mother or a father can say that she or he has a family (*iyali*). Children, unless they set up their own family, cannot say so; they are part of the family, but they do not have a family. Therefore, the term *iyali* has a more hierarchical structure – it is headed by the man who is called *mai gida* (lit. possessing the house) and his dependents: the wife who is also important, but less important than the man, and the children. The best illustration of the term is a popular Hausa saying: *tuwo na iyali, nama na mai gida* 'staple food for the dependents, meat for the head of household', which refers to the hierarchy (the best part of the meal goes to the man) as well as the family structure (the parents form a family, while children are their dependents).

In many African languages, as in Swahili, there are special names for relatives that mark their closeness and show respect towards each other. The general terms relating to parents, like *mama* 'mother' and *baba* 'father', are also used to define parent's siblings. Depending on their age compared to their parents, they will be called *mama mdogo* 'the younger mother' or *mama mkubwa* 'the older mother' and appropriately towards the father's brothers, *baba mdogo* and *baba mkubwa*. Family members of both mother and father are important since they take on the responsibilities of parents if they themselves are unable to take care of their children. The children of a brother or a sister are no less than their own. Therefore, the family members are rarely referred to as cousins.

Additionally, mothers and fathers are usually referred to by the name of their firstborn child. Therefore, *mama Hadija* will imply that the given woman is a mother of Hadija. In general, calling someone by name is avoided and proper forms of address, including nicknames, have to be acquired in order to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts.

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[19] Izabela Will, 'Pojęcie "wody" w języku i kulturze Hausa', *Afryka* 51 (2021), p. 76. <DOI 10.32690/AFR.51/52.4>.

[20] Ewa Gorlewska, '"Rodzina" i "społeczeństwo" w latach 80. i dziś. Konotacje potoczne nazw wybranych wartości wspólnotowych w ujęciu porównawczym', in: *„Powroty do przeszłości" Literatura i kultura lat 80. i ich współczesna recepcja*, eds. Wiktor Gardocki and Dariusz Piechota, Białystok 2022, p. 302.

[21] Nina Pawlak, 'Rodzina w języku i kulturze hausa', *Etnolingwistyka* 33 (2021), p. 53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/et.2021.33.49>.

Standard version of the language versus usage

The Hausa language is the only one out of all the languages taught at the Chair of African Studies which is not the official language in any of the African countries. Although standard Hausa has been recognised as the norm for the written language, it is used in books, newspapers, and broadcasting stations as well as the language of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities, there exists no single institution that systematically superintends and controls the development of the language. In 1955, the Hausa Language Board, set up by the Northern Region House of Assembly, was the main organization focusing on language development and standardization in Nigeria,[22] but when the Northern Region ceased to exist and Nigeria was divided into several states, the organization no longer functioned. The role of today's institutions that take responsibility for indigenous languages is quite limited. One such body is the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) – the federal institution preparing, among other things, the dictionaries of technical, legislative, governmental, economic, or medical terms in the Hausa language.[23] However, due to the fact that the dictionaries have a printed rather than online edition, they seem to play no role in unifying the specialistic vocabulary. The other institution is the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages set up in 1970 and later renamed the Centre for Research in Nigerian Languages, Translation, and Folklore, which is an independent research unit within Bayero University Kano. Its influence on standardization is rather restricted to academic circles, regional editors, and broadcasting stations, but it seems to have little or no influence on national and international agencies.[24] Therefore, in the media, one can see several terms referring to the same concepts or different spellings of the same word. The expressions that popped up during the recent coronavirus pandemic can serve as an example. The term for lockdown was referred to in various ways: *dokar kulle* (lit. the rule of purdah), *dokar hana zirga-zirga* (lit. the rule prohibiting constantly going to and fro), *dokar zama a gida* (lit. the rule of staying at home), *dokar hana fita* (lit. the rule prohibiting going out), while the loanword from English for 'virus' was spelt either *virus*, *birus* or *bairas* (the latter spelling best reflects Hausa pronunciation). Paradoxically, none of these words can be found in most contemporary English-Hausa dictionaries[25], where the entry for 'virus' is *cuta* (lit. illness, disease). This situation shows that the lack of agency coordinating the development of the language affects not only editors and publishers but also academicians and teachers of the Hausa

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[22] Ma Newman Roxana and Paul Newman, 'The Hausa Lexicographic Tradition', *Lexikos* 11 (2001), pp. 263–286.

[23] D. Muhammed (ed.), *Hausa Metalanguage. Kamus na Keɓaɓɓun Kalmomi. Vol 1: A Glossary of English-Hausa Technical Terms in Language, Literature and Methodology*, Ibadan (Nigeria) 1990; *Quadrilingual Glossary of Legislative Terms* (English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba), Lagos 1991.

[24] Marcin Krawczuk, Izabela Will, and Beata Wójtowicz, 'Wpływ pandemii koronawirusa na rozwój słownictwa w językach afrykańskich', in: *Afryka w dobie pandemii COVID-19. Fakty i prognozy*, ed. Bara Ndiaye, Olsztyn 2022, p. 42.

[25] Paul Newman and Roxana Ma Newman, *Hausa Dictionary for Everyday Use. Hausa-English / English-Hausa, Ƙamusun Hausa: Hausa-Ingilishi / Ingilishi-Hausa*, Kano 2020.

language. The variety of forms in the lexicon is much more diverse than for example the variety between British and American English where two terms referring to the same concept or two different spellings of the same word exist. However, each of these forms is a standard form for a given variety of English. In the case of African languages, various forms do not represent different dialects, different language registers, or different styles. Two different forms may occur in the same utterance or in the same text. The students are not used to such variety and often ask about the standard or the most commonly used form which they can note as the proper one. They are quite irritated when they find out that such a form does not exist.

A slightly better situation may be observed for Swahili, which is the official language in several East African countries. However, the spread of the language across the whole region of East Africa influences the development of many variants of the language as well. Despite the existence of the National Swahili Councils, which aim at developing and standardising the language, the variants are present and widespread, and the students have to be made aware of them.[26]

Another challenge, especially with regard to the spoken language, is the tendency to use code-switching and code-mixing by native speakers. This tendency is widespread in the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa, where multilingualism is a common phenomenon. In northern Nigeria, the traditional education in Quranic schools is based on the Arabic language while formal education in public or private schools is conducted in English. These two languages are often intertwined in Hausa utterances. The fragment of an interview with a popular Hausa actress, Maryam Usman, quoted in ex. 6, may serve as an illustration of this phenomenon.

6. An haife ni **nineteen ninety-three** wata-n **October twenty-eight**.
   4.PRF give.birth.to me *nineteen ninety three* month-SG.M.GEN *October twenty eight*
   Na yi **primary school** ɗina a **Ebony Nursery and Primary School** [...]
   1SG.PRF do *primary school* DEF.my in *Ebony Nursery and Primary School*
   Sai na yi **diploma** a **Bayero University** a ɓangare-n **mass communication** [...]
   then 1SG.PRF do *diploma* in *Bayero University* in section-SG.M.GEN *mass communication*
   Sannan kuma na fara **masters** ɗina **in project management** a **same** makaranta
   then PRT 1SG.PRF start *masters* DEF.my *in project management* in *same* school
   'I was born in 1993, the month of October, 28. I did my primary school in Ebony Nursery and Primary School [...]. Later on, I did my diploma at Bayero University at the Department of Mass Communication [...]. Then I started my master's in project management at the same university'

More than half of the words used in ex. 6 are in English. The actress uses English for numerals, names of the months, institutions, and fields of study. All these names have their equivalents in Hausa, but because the actress went through formal education, she

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probably finds it natural to recall the expressions connected with the domain of education in English. Such a situation strongly affects the listening comprehension of authentic texts. The students, who expect to hear Hausa words, find it difficult to accept the fact that the speaker may unexpectedly use an English or an Arabic expression. Moreover, they are disappointed that they have to learn the correct spelling and pronunciation of Hausa numerals, the names of months or institutions, while the native speakers use the English counterparts of these terms.

Teachers, teaching methods, and language materials

Although the African languages taught at the Chair are the major languages of the continent, and each of them is spoken by a much larger community than those using the Polish language, from the European perspective, they can be categorized as less commonly taught languages. This translates into less availability of language materials and the necessity of relying on textbooks usually published in a language other than Polish. There are a few dictionaries and textbooks to study African languages in Polish,[27] however, many of them are outdated, devoted to more advanced students, or sacrificed to one aspect of learning the language (e.g., grammatical drills). Therefore, the teachers rely on their own materials or English textbooks, which are also somewhat outdated. The former situation generates many complaints from the students, who prefer to have all the teaching materials in one book and are used to elaborated textbooks which contain the entire content necessary to study a language on a given level: short texts and dialogues, grammatical exercises and explanations as well as cultural notes. The option of relying on English teaching materials is not satisfactory either. First of all, many accessible textbooks[28] were published decades ago and, therefore, the quality of the sound and the content of dialogues stand away from the contemporary world. The possibility of producing new textbooks by the teaching staff is quite limited due to the fact that each African language is taught by two or three staff members and some of them are not specialized in linguistics.

Those who are better prepared to teach the language usually conduct their research on other aspects of language than glottodidactics. A recent attempt to fill the gap in the teaching materials published in Polish is a textbook edited by a team of researchers from Bayero University, Kano and the University of Warsaw. It contains a collection of Hausa stories (taken from the textbooks published in Nigeria) concerning important aspects of Hausa society and culture such as rites of passage, cuisine, folktales, feasts, traditional occupations, and children's plays.[29] However, the book is devoted to more advanced students of Hausa.

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[27] E.g., *Elektroniczny słownik suahili-polski*, Viewed 22 September 2022, <www.kamusi.pl>; Beata Wójtowicz, *Słownik suahili-polski*, Warszawa 2013; Laura Łykowska, *Gramatyka języka amharskiego. Ćwiczenia*, Warszawa 1998; Nina Pawlak, *Język hausa*, Warszawa 1998.

[28] Abdullahi Bature and Russell G. Schuh, *Hausar Baka*.

[29] Aliyu Mu'azu, Nina Pawlak and Hafizu Miko Yakasai (eds.), *Labaran Al'adun Hausawa. Teksty kulturowe hausa*, Warszawa–Kano 2018.

According to observations made by Wójtowicz[30], teachers conducting language courses are mainly linguists with no methodological training, hence the main emphasis is placed on learning linguistic structures, and a traditional grammar-translation method is often used. The communicative approach is sometimes forced by the textbooks used in language classes, but these are mostly in English and outdated since being printed in the 1980s.

Furthermore, still-popular teaching methods used to reflect the dominant direction of research in the field of African studies. Initially, teaching was mainly focused on the analysis of texts in African languages (either in ajami script, based on Arabic letters, or in Latin script) in line with the research conducted at the Institute of Oriental Studies, where African languages were taught. Students were prepared to conduct a philological analysis of such texts and many master's theses were devoted to the analysis of unpublished manuscripts. We believe that current teaching methods should reflect the interests, expectations, and possibilities of contemporary students. Nowadays, students have much easier opportunities for travel and cooperation with African countries. Available technologies make it possible to watch African films and various other programs, listen to podcasts, and interact with native speakers of African languages through social media. Students are more interested in contemporary living and spoken language as well as contemporary aspects of culture. They are also more exposed to spoken rather than written language and, therefore, the traditional grammar-translation method does not meet their expectations anymore.

Conclusion

There are different reasons to learn a foreign language. Some languages are studied for practical reasons while others are acquired as part of a curriculum of foreign culture studies. Irrespective of the motivation, learning a language is a process built on multiple layers.

In the process of learning, some languages may pose more challenges than others, especially when it comes to the language structure as well as the cultural background of the speakers. Such is the case with studying African languages in Europe, especially in Poland, a country where the African diaspora is scarce and travel to African countries is still not very popular; knowledge of African languages and cultures hardly exists. In such circumstances, teaching African languages poses numerous challenges, not only associated with structural differences but also with cultural ones influencing language use. In order to use the language fluently, one needs to know the cultural constraints governing the language use such as social structure, family relationships, common beliefs, and values.

When it comes to languages of different morphological types, one of the common challenges is the language's structure. Sometimes even basic concepts such as expressing possession, location, or existence pose problems to language learners. African languages in general have no equivalents for the verbs 'to be' or 'to have'. Instead, several verbless

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[30] Beata Wójtowicz, 'Elementy Kulturowe w Nauczaniu Języków Afrykańskich', *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 64/10 (2016), pp. 97–113.

constructions are used to convey the meanings associated with those verbs. Many African languages also lack word classes typical for European languages such as adverbs or adjectives which entail a completely different conceptualization of certain phenomena such as quality or comparison.

The structure of African societies, on the other hand, forces certain linguistic behaviours, which are not always natural to Polish learners. One of these is a standard positive response to a greeting, no matter the circumstances, or a positive attitude towards marriage and childbearing. Another challenge encountered by Polish students is the fact that many native users of African languages are Muslims and they express their religious background in their daily language practices. Language attitudes and policies are also different. Lack of standardisation, the use of code-switching, or the co-existence of several variants of the language are the norm in multilingual African societies, but such phenomena are hardly known in Poland. Many instances of practical and cultural anisomorphism make the learning process challenging and undoubtedly force teachers to reach for effective teaching methods, which is also a challenge in a situation where the teaching/learning market is small and the availability of materials is poor.

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