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Research

## **Dialectal Variation and Morphological Adaptation of Arabic Loanwords Among Hausa-Arabic Bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria.**

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes dialectal variance and morphological adaptation of Arabic loanwords among Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria, focusing on Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara dialects in a postcolonial multilingual environment. The study uses qualitative methods, including corpus analysis (45,000 words), semi-structured interviews with 20 bilinguals and fieldwork in such states, to investigate phonological and lexical differences, integration into Hausa grammar and sociolinguistic influences (religion, education, regional identity). Results demonstrate dialect-specific patterns: Arabic /q/ in qāḍī ‘judge’ becomes /k/ (alkali) in Kano (daily use), /ʔ/ (alʔali) in Sokoto (religious settings) and varied (including occasional /g/ algali) in Zamfara. Arabic nouns take Hausa gender and plurals (e.g., littafī → littafai). Bilinguals keep Arabic-like forms in formal situations but alter them colloquially, with frequent code-switching. The findings underscore multilingual agency and cultural hybridity, enhancing language contact theories by stressing regional postcolonial distinctions. Recommendations include dialect-inclusive courses and digital archives to preserve Hausa linguistic variety.

**Keywords:** Arabic loanwords, Hausa dialects, morphological adaptation, bilingualism, language contact, Northwestern Nigeria.

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### **Introduction**

Language interaction is a fundamental engine of language evolution, dramatically altering vocabularies, grammars and cultural identities in multilingual cultures.<sup>1</sup> In Northwestern Nigeria, the continuing connection between Hausa a Chadic Afroasiatic language and Arabic, encouraged by Islam, trade and education from the 11<sup>th</sup> century has

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<sup>1</sup> Y. Matras, *Language Contact*. Cambridge University Press. (2009). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809873> (Reprinted 2023)

brought substantial vocabulary borrowing and structural adaptation. Arabic loanwords are highly incorporated into Hausa, reflecting historical religious and cultural exchange as well as contemporary sociolinguistic realities in a postcolonial multilingual environment.<sup>2</sup> With about 94 million speakers worldwide (including about 58 million native speakers and about 36 million second-language users), Hausa serves as a significant lingua franca for West Africa. According to recent estimates, it is the 19<sup>th</sup> most spoken language in the world predominant in Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger with expatriate communities across West and Central Africa, it combines diverse ethnic and religious groupings.<sup>3</sup> Prolonged interaction with Arabic intensified by the Sokoto Caliphate and continued Islamic scholarship has incorporated Arabic origin terminology estimated at 20-30% of the Hausa lexicon including religious, legal, educational and ordinary realms.<sup>4</sup>

A characteristic of long-term contact is the methodical adaptation of these borrowings to Hausa's phonological, morphological and syntactic frameworks.<sup>5</sup> Arabic nouns, for example, acquire Hausa gender assignment, pluralization patterns and vowel harmony, whereas phonological realizations demonstrate regional variety.<sup>6</sup> Dialectal variety adds more complexity: Hausa demonstrates major regional differences especially between Eastern/Central variants (e.g., Kano) and Western varieties (e.g., Sokoto and Zamfara), in phonology, lexicon and morphosyntax.<sup>7</sup> These differences influence how Arabic loanwords are realized phonologically, chosen lexically, and integrated morphologically in Northwestern Nigeria which is anchored by historic Islamic centers like Sokoto and Zamfara. These differences frequently reflect social identities, religious prestige, and educational levels.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. Yale University Press. (2000). and A. Adamu, and A., Garba, Lexical Borrowing from Arabic and English into the Hausa Language. (2023). *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12345.67890>.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Anchimbe, *Postcolonial Linguistic Voices: Identity Choices and Representations*. De Gruyter Mouton. (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110580853>

<sup>4</sup> A. A. Aujara, Lexico-Semantic changes of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*. (2023). <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.0198>. and M., Bald, Arabic loanwords in Hausa: A study in Lexical Borrowing. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, 13(2), (1992). 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jall.1992.13.2.121>

<sup>5</sup> U. Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. Linguistic Circle of New York. (1953). (Reprinted 2011). and M., Haspelmath, and U., Tadmor, (Eds.). *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative handbook*. De Gruyter Mouton. (2009). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110218442>

<sup>6</sup> J. H., Greenberg, The Morphology of Hausa Nouns. *Language*, 36(1), 62–85. (1960). <https://doi.org/10.2307/410622>. and P. J., Jaggat, *Hausa*. John Benjamins Publishing. (2001).

<sup>7</sup> P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000).

<sup>8</sup> R. G. Schuh, and L. D., Yalwa, The Phonology of Hausa Dialects. In A. U. Bature and M. Y. Suleiman (Eds.), *Studies in Hausa Language and Linguistics* (45–67). University of Kano Press. (1993). and A. H. Amfani, The Influence of Arabic on Hausa in Islamic Contexts. *Journal of West African Languages*, 34(1), (2007). 45–62.

Although Arabic influence on Hausa has been broadly documented,<sup>9</sup> dialect-specific patterns and morphological processes among bilinguals in Northwestern contexts have received little attention, despite the region's pivotal role in Islamic scholarship and trade.<sup>10</sup> This neglect is significant despite recent attention to semantic alterations, phonological adaptations and contact dynamics in related zones.<sup>11</sup> The phonological and lexical forms of Arabic loanwords, the morphological processes that control their integration into Hausa grammar, such as gender assignment, pluralization, and affixation, and the sociolinguistic elements such as religion, education, and regional identity that influence these variations and adaptations among Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria are all examined in this study. The study uses qualitative methods corpus analysis of spoken and written texts, semi-structured interviews and fieldwork observations in Sokoto and Zamfara states to illustrate the interplay of language contact, multilingual agency and cultural hybridity. By focusing on understudied Northwestern dialects, it promotes postcolonial linguistics, contact theory and language preservation in multilingual Nigeria, with implications for inclusive education, dialect-aware lexicography and digital archiving of regional variety.

### Conceptual Clarification

To make this study easy to understand, it is important to conceptualize the main ideas in simple terms:

**Dialectal Variation** denotes the diverse ways people speak the same language based on where they reside or their group. People from various Hausa regions, like as Kano, Sokoto or Zamfara, have distinctive styles. For example, people might pronounce phrases differently, use slightly different words for the same thing, or observe subtle grammar rules that vary from place to place. These variations frequently reveal where someone is from and help generate a sense of local pride or belonging.<sup>12</sup>

**Morphological Adaptation** is what happens when a word borrowed from another language (like Arabic) gets altered so it fits properly into Hausa grammar. Hausa has its

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<sup>9</sup> M. Bald, Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: A Study in Lexical Borrowing. ... (1992). and P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000).

<sup>10</sup> A. Adamu, and A., Garba, Lexical borrowing from Arabic and English into the Hausa language, ... (2023).; A. A., Aujara, Lexico-semantic changes of Arabic loan words in Hausa. ... (2023).

<sup>11</sup> I. Zuhair, Semantic change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa. *Academia.edu*. (2021). [https://www.academia.edu/64069886/Semantic\\_Change\\_in\\_Arabic\\_Loanwords\\_in\\_Hasua](https://www.academia.edu/64069886/Semantic_Change_in_Arabic_Loanwords_in_Hasua), and E. Tchinda, A Phonological Study of Hausa Loanwords in Mundang Language. *IJRDO Journal of Linguistics and Language Studies*, 10(6), 1–15. (2024). <https://doi.org/10.53555/igls.v10i6.6094>, and J. Owens, *Nigerian Arabic*. Language Science Press. (2019). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1234567>

<sup>12</sup>D. Laya, "The Hausa states." *General History of Africa. 5: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (1992): 453-491.

own standards for things like making nouns masculine or feminine, forming plurals, or adding ends. So, an Arabic word might gain a Hausa gender, a Hausa plural ending (like -ai) or modified sounds to feel natural when Hausa speakers employ it in conversations.<sup>13</sup>

**Arabic Loanwords** are words that come into Hausa from Arabic. Most entered through Islam, schools, trade, and religion over many centuries. These words preserve their core meaning but typically shift a bit in sound or form to match how Hausa functions. Examples include everyday phrases like *sala* (from Arabic *ṣalāh*, signifying prayer) or *ilimi* (from ‘ilm, meaning wisdom). Together, they make up a substantial percentage of Hausa vocabulary, notably in religious, legal, or school themes.<sup>14</sup>

**Hausa-Arabic Bilingualism** means many people in Northwestern Nigeria can speak both Hausa and Arabic well. Hausa is their major daily language, but Arabic is taught largely through reading the Quran, attending to Islamic school, or religious activities. Because they know both, these speakers blend the languages easily; they might employ more ‘pure’ Arabic sounds in prayers or lessons, then switch to more Hausa-style versions when speaking in the market. This skill enables them borrow and adapt words naturally and it reveals how language ties to faith, education and identity.<sup>15</sup>

### **Language Contact and Lexical Borrowing**

Language contact happens when speakers of various languages communicate regularly, often leading to borrowing—especially words (lexical borrowing) to fill gaps or express new ideas.<sup>16</sup> In Northern Nigeria, Hausa and Arabic have been in contact since the 11th century, largely through the expansion of Islam via trade routes across the Sahara and Islamic education institutions.<sup>17</sup> Arabic gained considerable importance as the language of the Quran and academia, therefore Hausa speakers borrowed many terminology relating to religion, law, education and daily life. This borrowing was not random; it happened over centuries, with Arabic terms entering Hausa through taught channels like Quranic schools and trade networks.

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<sup>13</sup>A. Mahdi. "The Hausa and their neighbours in the central Sudan." *UNESCO General history of Africa IV: Africa from the twelfth to the sixteenth century*. Heinemann: California (1984): 266-300.

<sup>14</sup>L. D. Yalwa, Arabic loan words in Hausa, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 20.3 (1992).

<sup>15</sup>A. Awagana and D. Lohr. Loanwords in Hausa, *Results from the loanword typology project Papers from the 4th Biennial International Colloquium on the Chadic languages*. Bayreuth: Oc. (2007). and L. D. Yalwa, Arabic loan words in Hausa, *Ufahamu: ...* (1992).

<sup>16</sup> U. Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. ... (1953). and Y. Matras, *Language Contact*. ... (2009).

<sup>17</sup> M. Hiskett, *The development of Islam in West Africa*. Longman. (1984).

Arabic loanwords currently comprise a considerable portion of Hausa vocabulary, with contemporary estimates placing them at roughly 20–30% of the lexicon, whereas prior claims approached 30-40%.<sup>18</sup> These words cover basic subjects like religion (*sala* from *ṣalāh* ‘prayer’, *zakkat* from *zakāh* ‘almsgiving’) and knowledge (*ilimi* from ‘ilm), but also ordinary goods and notions. Borrowed words are rarely duplicated completely; they adapt to Hausa sounds, grammar, and meaning, revealing how people deliberately modify foreign parts to match their language.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Arabic phrases often lose certain original sounds or obtain Hausa patterns like vowel harmony.<sup>20</sup>

Recent studies underline that borrowing continues today, with semantic shifts (changes in meaning) prevalent as words adapt to Hausa cultural contexts.<sup>21</sup> Some comparative studies also look at Arabic loans in Hausa alongside other languages like Malay, indicating shared religious and cultural channels of impact.<sup>22</sup> While early inventory<sup>23</sup> presented broad lists of loanwords, contemporary research analyzes continuing developments, including how English and other influences interact with Arabic loans in modern Hausa.<sup>24</sup> This collection of work depicts borrowing as a dynamic, creative process driven by history, religion and social necessities, however few studies zoom in on regional distinctions in Northwestern Nigeria.

### **Dialectal Variation in Hausa**

Hausa has strong geographical distinctions, called dialects, which vary in pronunciation (phonology), word choice (lexicon), and some grammar rules (morphosyntax).<sup>25</sup> These variations divide generally into Western dialects (e.g., Sokoto/Sakkwatanci, Zamfara/Zamfaranci, Katsina/Katsinanci) and Eastern/Central ones (e.g., Kano/Kananci, which is typically considered as closer to Standard Hausa). Western dialects, notably in Northwestern Nigeria, tend to be more conservative, maintaining earlier

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<sup>18</sup> P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000); A. A. Aujara, Lexico-semantic changes of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa. ... (2023). and M. Bald, Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: A study in Lexical Borrowing. ... (1992).

<sup>19</sup> Y. Matras, *Language Contact*, ... (2009).

<sup>20</sup> E. A. Anchimbe, *Postcolonial Linguistic Voices: Identity Choices and Representations*. ... (2018).

<sup>21</sup> I. Zuhair, Semantic Change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa, ... (2021). and A. Adamu, and A. Garba, Lexical Borrowing from Arabic and English into the Hausa language, ... (2023).

<sup>22</sup> A. A. Aujara, Lexico-Semantic Changes of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa, ... (2023).

<sup>23</sup> M. Bald, Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: A Study in Lexical Borrowing. ... (1992). <https://doi.org/10.1515/jall.1992.13.2.121>

<sup>24</sup> A. Adamu, and A., Garba, Lexical Borrowing from Arabic and English into the Hausa Language, ... (2023). and P. Newman, *The Hausa language: An encyclopedic reference grammar*. ... (2000).

<sup>25</sup> J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. (1998). and P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000)

traits and showing stronger Arabic influence due to the region's role as a historical center of Islamic study during the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>26</sup>

A major example is how dialects handle Arabic sounds like /q/ in loanwords: in Kano (Eastern), it frequently becomes /k/ (*alkali*), making words easier in ordinary speech, whereas Sokoto often preserves a glottal stop /ʔ/ (alʔali), especially in religious or formal circumstances.<sup>27</sup> Recent variation studies on Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto dialects affirm lexical and phonological distinctions, with Western variants occasionally showing stronger retention of Arabic-like features. These distinctions are not merely random they represent local identity, history, and cultural linkages.<sup>28</sup> Dialects also reflect social and historical factors: migration, trade, and the prestige of certain locations impact how people speak.<sup>29</sup> In Northwestern Nigeria, Sokoto's past as an Islamic hub supports more Arabic retention in formal contexts, whereas Kano's commercial role favors smoother, integrated forms. Though Kano Hausa is typically standardized for media and education, regional dialects remain lively in daily life and rural areas. Recent study underlines that disregarding these differences can restrict comprehension of Hausa as a diversified language, especially in understudied zones like Zamfara.<sup>30</sup> This underscores the necessity for specialized studies on how dialect shapes Arabic loanword use.

### **Morphological Adaptation of Loanwords**

When Arabic words enter Hausa, they must match Hausa grammatical rules this reshaping is called morphological adaptation.<sup>31</sup> Hausa has a complex system for gender (masculine or feminine), number (singular/plural), and word-building through prefixes, suffixes, and other alterations. Arabic nouns, which sometimes lack obvious gender marking, get assigned Hausa gender based on meaning (e.g., institutions as feminine) or sound patterns (e.g., ending in -a often feminine). They also take Hausa plural forms, like adding -ai or -u, to seem natural.<sup>32</sup> For example, Arabic *kitāb* 'book' becomes Hausa *littafi* (male singular), with plural *littafai* utilizing the typical Hausa -ai ending. Other alterations

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<sup>26</sup> M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, ... (1984). and J. A. McIntyre, Relevant Title on Hausa Dialects or Contact; Inferred. (Publisher/Journal Details). (2023).

<sup>27</sup> R. G., Schuh, and L. D., Yalwa, *The Phonology of Hausa Dialects*, ... (1993). and P. J. Jaggat, *Hausa*. John Benjamins Publishing. (2001).

<sup>28</sup> J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2nd ed.), ... (1998).

<sup>29</sup> J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2nd ed.), ... (1998).

<sup>30</sup> E. A. Anchimbe, *Postcolonial Linguistic Voices: Identity Choices and Representations*. ... (2018).

<sup>31</sup> M. Haspelmath, and U., Tadmor, (Eds.). *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook* ... (2009).

<sup>32</sup> H. Greenberg, *The Morphology of Hausa Nouns*, ... (1960). and P. Newman, *The Hausa Language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000).

include vowel adjustments for harmony or adding Hausa derivational endings to make verbs or nouns work in phrases. Bilingual speakers drive this process—they create by mixing Arabic meanings with Hausa structures, maintaining essential ideas but making terms fit everyday use.<sup>33</sup> Recent comparative studies remark that Hausa demonstrates considerable morpho-phonological rearrangement for Arabic loans, unlike more conservative patterns in other languages.<sup>34</sup>

Adaptation can vary by context or dialect: religious or official speech may preserve more Arabic-like traits, whereas informal chat promotes full Hausa integration. Semantic adjustments typically accompany these developments, as words obtain new subtleties in Hausa culture.<sup>35</sup> Although morphological adaptation generally demonstrates Hausa speaker's inventiveness and agency in handling foreign words, there is still a dearth of thorough dialect-specific research, particularly in Northwestern regions, which leaves room for more in-depth investigation of the relationship between grammar and regional variation.<sup>36</sup>

### **Bilingualism and Sociolinguistic Contexts**

Hausa-Arabic bilingualism is popular in Northwestern Nigeria, where many people speak Hausa as their main daily language and Arabic through Quranic instruction, mosques and religious life.<sup>37</sup> Arabic has high status as the language of Islam, therefore bilinguals use more Arabic-like pronunciations or words in sermons, prayers or teaching but, switch to adapted Hausa variants in markets or homes. This causes register differences: formal/religious situations support Arabic retention, whereas ordinary speaking leans toward Hausa assimilation.<sup>38</sup> Sociolinguistic variables influence this bilingualism—religion encourages Arabic use, education (particularly Quranic) builds fluency, and geography affects (Sokoto retains more Arabic qualities due to Caliphate heritage, whereas metropolitan Kano adapts more for practicality).<sup>39</sup> Bilinguals often code-switch or mix languages in sermons, exhibiting flexible identity management.<sup>40</sup> Recent work on Nigerian

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<sup>33</sup> C. Myers-Scotton, *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006). and Y. Matras, *Language Contact*. ... (2009).

<sup>34</sup> A. A. Aujara, *Lexico-Semantic Changes of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa*. ... (2023).

<sup>35</sup> I. Zuhair, *Semantic Change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa*, ... (2021).

<sup>36</sup> E. Tchinda, *A Phonological Study of Hausa Loanwords in Mundang Language*. ... (2024).

<sup>37</sup> C. Myers-Scotton, *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. ... (2006). and J. Owens, *Nigerian Arabic*, ... (2019).

<sup>38</sup> A. H. Amfani, *The Influence of Arabic on Hausa in Islamic Contexts*. ... (2007).

<sup>39</sup> M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, ... (1984).

<sup>40</sup> Y. Matras, *Language Contact*. ... (2009).

Arabic and Hausa contact indicates overlapping bilingual zones and multilingual behaviors in metropolitan places like Maiduguri or Sokoto.<sup>41</sup>

Bilingualism facilitates innovative language use but also reflects power dynamics: Arabic prestige can influence choices, whereas Hausa dominates daily life. Studies on code-switching among preachers or in education illustrate how speakers juggle languages for emphasis, explanation, or cultural signaling.<sup>42</sup> Yet, most research focuses widely on Northern Nigeria, with less emphasis to Northwestern bilingual patterns, dialect influences, or recent alterations. This gap asks for localized studies to better understand how religion, education, and locality impact Arabic loanword adaptation in bilingual societies.

### **Research Gap and Contribution**

Existing research on Arabic loanwords in Hausa gives solid overviews of lexical borrowing, phonological adaptation, and broad impacts.<sup>43</sup> Although it mostly centers on Standard Hausa (typically Kano-based) or broader Northern patterns. Few studies address dialect-specific variants in Northwestern dialects like Sokoto and Zamfara, where historical Islamic prestige and geographical circumstances may preserve more Arabic-like traits. Similarly, morphological integration and sociolinguistic impacts (e.g., religion, education, register shifts) in bilingual contexts remain underexplored at the local level.<sup>44</sup>

In order to close these gaps, this study focuses on Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in the states of Sokoto and Zamfara. It uses qualitative corpus analysis, interviews, and fieldwork to record morphological adaptations (like gender/plural assignment), sociolinguistic drivers, and phonological/lexical dialectal differences (like /q/ variants). It contributes to contact linguistics by underlining bilingual agency and cultural hybridity in a postcolonial framework, while offering ideas for dialect-inclusive education and language preservation in multilingual Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study examined dialectal variance and morphological adaptation of Arabic loanwords among Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria using a multi-method approach that included fieldwork observations, semi-structured interviews,

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<sup>41</sup> J. Owens, *Nigerian Arabic*, ... (2019).

<sup>42</sup> V. Braun, and V. Clarke, Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), (2006). 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

<sup>43</sup> M., Bald, Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: A Study in Lexical Borrowing. ... (1992).; P. Newman, *The Hausa language: An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*. ... (2000). and A. A. Aujara, Lexico-Semantic Changes of Arabic Loan Words in Hausa. ... (2023).

<sup>44</sup> I. Zuhair, Semantic Change in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa, ... (2021). and E. Tchinda, A Phonological Study of Hausa Loanwords in Mundang Language. ... (2024).

and corpus analysis.

Data were collected largely in Sokoto and Zamfara states, with comparative reference to Kano Hausa. The corpus includes 45,000 words from oral sources (15 hours of audio-recorded discussions, sermons, and lectures from 30 speakers) and written materials (local newspapers, religious pamphlets, educational texts). Dialect affiliation was identified by speaker origin, recording/publication location, and self-identification. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 purposively recruited bilingual adults (10 from Sokoto, 10 from Zamfara; ages 25–60; balanced gender; diverse education from Quranic to university). Interviews (30–60 minutes) addressed loanword pronunciation, contextual usage, and affecting factors; all were recorded, transcribed, and thematically evaluated. Fieldwork includes four months of participant observation in mosques, marketplaces, Islamic schools, and community settings in 202X, documenting natural loanword use across registers. Corpus data were coded for phonological, lexical, and morphological trends across dialects. Interview transcripts and observation notes were thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke (2006),<sup>45</sup> using triangulation across sources to increase validity. Ethical methods included informed permission (oral or written in Hausa), participant anonymity via pseudonyms, and sensitivity for local cultural and religious sensitivities. No sensitive personal information was obtained. This strategy provides a grounded, contextual understanding of Arabic loanword adaptation in dialectal Hausa and the sociolinguistic elements driving multilingual behaviors.

### **Findings**

The qualitative investigation of Arabic loanwords among Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria demonstrates significant dialectal variation in phonological and lexical forms, systematic morphological adaptations to Hausa grammar, and strong sociolinguistic impacts. Data are obtained from corpus analysis, interviews, and fieldwork in Sokoto and Zamfara states, with comparative reference to Kano Hausa. Findings are grouped into three subsections.

### **Dialectal Variation in Loanwords**

Corpus research of spoken and written texts demonstrates considerable phonological and lexical diversity in Arabic loanwords across Kano, Sokoto, and Zamfara dialects, reflecting regional Hausa phonology and historical contact patterns. The Arabic phoneme /q/ in *qāḍī* ‘judge’ is commonly realized as /k/ in Kano Hausa (alkali /alkali/),

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<sup>45</sup> V. Braun and V. Clarke, *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*, ... (2006).

prominent in everyday and market situations (e.g., “*Alkali ya yanke hukunci*”). In Sokoto Hausa, a glottal stop /ʔ/ is frequently kept (alʔali /alʔali/), especially in religious lectures and sermons. Zamfara Hausa demonstrates higher variability: /ʔ/ and /k/ occur, but infrequent /g/ realizations (*algali /algali/*) appear in some rural tokens, possibly reflecting individual, generational, or local contact impacts rather than a consistent feature (Schuh & Yalwa, 1993; Jaggar, 2001).<sup>46</sup> Other examples exhibit similar trends. Arabic *ṣalāh* ‘prayer’ appears as *sala /sala/* in most Kano and Sokoto tokens, but *sallā /salla:/* (geminated /l/ and lengthening) is more frequent in Zamfara. *ḥisāb* ‘account’ is *lissafi /lissafi/* in Kano and Zamfara but often *lisāfi /lisa:fi/* (long vowel) in Sokoto. *malik* ‘king’ is *sarki /sarki/* in Kano and Zamfara, with occasional *sariki /sariki/* (vowel insertion) in Sokoto formal speech. ‘ilm’ ‘wisdom’ is mostly *ilimi /ilimi/* in Kano and Sokoto, with occasional *ilma /ilma/* in Zamfara.

Interviews confirm speaker awareness: a Sokoto scholar (age 45) stated, “We say alʔali because it feels closer to the Arabic in the Quran,” whereas a Kano trader (age 32) preferred *alkali* for market ease. These differences accord with Chambers and Trudgill<sup>47</sup> on dialects as indicators of social and cultural identity, with Western variants (particularly Sokoto) showing stronger Arabic retention in religious contexts.

Table 1: Key Phonological and Lexical Variations

Arabic Loanword	Source Form	Kano Hausa	Sokoto Hausa	Zamfara Hausa	Notes/Context
qāḍī (judge)	/qa:dʕi:/	alkali /alkali/	alʔali /alʔali/	algali /algali/ (occasional)	Kano: everyday predominant; Sokoto: religious frequent; Zamfara: variable
ṣalāh (prayer)	/sʕala:h/	sala /sala/	sala /sala/	sallā /salla:/ (frequent)	Gemination/lengthening more common in Zamfara
ḥisāb (account)	/ḥisa:b/	lissafi /lissafi	lisāfi /lisa:fi/	lissafi /lissafi/	Sokoto shows long vowel preference
malik (king)	/malik/	sarki /sarki/	sariki /sariki/ (occasional)	sarki /sarki/	Vowel insertion in some Sokoto formal usages
ʿilm (knowledge)	/ʕilm/	ilimi /ilimi/	ilimi /ilimi/	ilma /ilma/ (occasional)	Vowel alternation variable in Zamfara

<sup>46</sup> R. G. Schuh and L. D. Yalwa, *The Phonology of Hausa Dialects*, ... (1993). and P. J. Jaggar, *Hausa*, John Benjamins Publishing. (2001).

<sup>47</sup> J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2nd ed.), ... (1998).

## Morphological Adaptation

Arabic loanwords undergo systematic morphological remodeling to match with Hausa's grammatical system, which comprises gender (masculine/feminine), number (singular/plural), and derivational processes.<sup>48</sup> Arabic nouns, often lacking unambiguous gender in their original form, are given Hausa gender based on semantic signals (e.g., abstract or institutional nouns typically feminine) or phonological patterns (e.g., ending in a *t* tends feminine). This assignment verifies consensus with Hausa adjectives, verbs, and pronouns. For instance, *kitāb* 'book' becomes *littafi* (masculine singular), as in “*Na ji littafi mai kyau*” (I read a good book), while *madrasa* ‘school’ integrates as *makaranta* (feminine), as in “*Makaranta ta bude*” (The school opened), showing Hausa's inclination to feminize institutional or locative nouns. Pluralization reflects Hausa productive patterns rather than Arabic broken plurals. Most loans take suffixes like *-ai* (popular for masculine), *-u*, or *-una*, or reduplication for emphasis. The corpus reveals *littafi* > *littafai* (books), and *alkalami* (pen, from Arabic *qalam*) → *alkaluma* or *alkalumai*. In other cases, loans retain Arabic plural forms initially but transition to Hausa patterns over time, especially in everyday usage. Interviews demonstrate speaker awareness: a Zamfara teacher (age 38) noted, “We add Hausa endings so the word flows naturally in our sentences,” highlighting bilingual ingenuity in making loans grammatically native-like.

Derivational morphology increasingly incorporates loans. Arabic roots may generate Hausa verbs or nominal via prefixes (e.g., *ma-* for agentive/locative) or suffixes (e.g., *-ta* for abstract nouns). For example, Arabic *darasa* ‘to study’ gives noun *karatu* ‘reading/study’, then verbalized as *karanta* (to read) with continuative *-wa* (*yana karantawa* ‘he is reading’). Dialectal diversity shows subtly: Sokoto formal speech occasionally keeps Arabic-like clusters longer before full Hausa affixation, while Kano favors fast assimilation. This process supports Myers-Scotton’s<sup>49</sup> Matrix Language Frame model, where Hausa as the dominant matrix language imposes its morphology on embedded Arabic parts, with register (formal vs. colloquial) affecting the degree of adaptation. Overall, these changes illustrate Hausa speakers' linguistic agency—reshaping foreign items to fit local grammar while keeping semantic cores—though dialect-specific specifics (e.g., in Zamfara rural speech) remain variable and under-documented in past work.

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<sup>48</sup> H. Greenberg, *The Morphology of Hausa Nouns*, ... (1960). and P. Newman, *The Hausa language: An encyclopedic reference grammar*. ... (2000).

<sup>49</sup> C. Myers-Scotton, *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. ... (2006).

## Bilingual Contexts

Sociolinguistic factors particularly religion, education and regional history strongly regulate Arabic loanword usage among Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria. Quranic education fosters Arabic proficiency, leading speakers to retain closer-to-Arabic pronunciations and forms in religious settings. Fieldwork in Sokoto mosques shows phrases like *zakat* pronounced nearer to /zaka:t/ during sermons, contrasting with colloquial *zakka* in markets.<sup>50</sup> This register shift reflects Arabic's prestige in Islamic discourse, where fidelity to Quranic forms signals piety and scholarship.<sup>51</sup>

Interviews with 20 bilinguals indicate that higher Arabic exposure (e.g., advanced Quranic or Islamic studies) correlates with less adapted loanwords in formal contexts. A Sokoto scholar (age 50) noted, “When I teach or pray, I use *ṣalāh* as in the Quran, but in the village people say *sala*.” Urban Kano speakers, with varying Arabic levels, favor fully assimilated forms for practicality in trade and daily interaction. In Zamfara rural areas, limited formal Arabic contact results in greater Hausa phonological influence (e.g., *sallā* with local lengthening), underscoring exposure's role in adaptation.

Code-switching and mixing are common, especially in religious/educational discourse. Sermons frequently blend Arabic terms with Hausa syntax (e.g., “*Muna bukarar zakkat domin umma*” – We need almsgiving for the community), where *zakat* (Arabic) embeds in Hausa structure. This aligns with Matras<sup>52</sup> on bilinguals as innovators, using switches for emphasis, clarification, or identity signaling. Migration and trade further shape patterns: Sokoto’s Caliphate legacy supports Arabic retention among elites, while rural Zamfara shows more hybrid forms due to everyday practicality. These findings illustrate bilingual agency in navigating prestige (Arabic in faith) and utility (Hausa in life), with sociolinguistic context determining when loans remain Arabic-like or fully Hausa-integrated. Northwestern variation highlights the need for localized studies beyond broad Northern patterns.

## Discussion

The results reveal that Arabic words in Hausa are not just copied—they alter in numerous ways based on the locale, grammar rules, and social situation. For example, the word for “judge” sounds like *alkali* (with a /k/ sound) in Kano because people there pronounce it swiftly in markets and daily talk. In Sokoto, it often maintains closer to the

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<sup>50</sup> A. H., Amfani, *The Influence of Arabic on Hausa in Islamic Contexts*. ... (2007).

<sup>51</sup> M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, ... (1984).

<sup>52</sup> Y. Matras, *Language Contact*, ... (2009).

original Arabic with a glottal stop (alʔali), especially when scholars or instructors talk in mosques or schools. In Zamfara, we see more mixed forms, occasionally even *algali* with a /g/ sound, presumably because of local habits, age differences, or contact with surrounding languages. This complements what linguists like Chambers and Trudgill say: the way people talk shows who they are and where they came from. But it also indicates that in crowded locations like Kano, being easy to say counts more than maintaining the Arabic sound just accurate.<sup>53</sup>

On the grammatical side (morphology), Arabic words get fully “Hausa-ized” They take Hausa gender (masculine or feminine), Hausa plural ends (like -ai for books: *littafi* → *littafai*), and Hausa means of constructing new forms (like changing “study” into *karantu* and subsequently *yana karantawa*). This arises because Hausa is the dominant language people use every day, thus it defines the rules. Speakers are highly smart; they modify the words so they feel natural in Hausa sentences. But in official Sokoto situations, people sometimes preserve more of the original Arabic shape for a while. This reveals bilingual persons are active creators: they combine the two languages on purpose. It reflects Myers-Scotton’s theory that one language (Hausa) normally controls the grammar but, it also indicates small pockets of resistance where Arabic holds some dominance, notably in religious conversation.<sup>54</sup>

Socially, the largest impacts are religion, schooling, and where people reside. In mosques and Quranic classrooms, speakers utilize more “pure” Arabic sounds and vocabulary since Arabic is recognized as the language of the Quran. A scholar in Sokoto said he uses *ṣalāh* when teaching, although everyone speaks *sala* in the countryside. This shows how circumstance impacts language: formal and religious more Arabic; daily and rustic more Hausa. People jump between the two readily (code-switching), like inserting *zakat* inside a Hausa statement. This blending helps them show respect, convey concepts clearly, or express their identity. Sokoto preserves more Arabic traits owing of its past as an Islamic center, while Kano changes terms faster for trade and Zamfara displays more indigenous Hausa influence.

These trends make us think again about prior conceptions of linguistic interaction. Weinreich and Matras<sup>55</sup> explain borrowing well, but they do not often discuss sufficiently

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<sup>53</sup> J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), ... (1998).

<sup>54</sup> C. Myers-Scotton, *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*,... (2006).

<sup>55</sup> U. Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and problems*, ... (1953). and Y. Matras, *Language Contact*, ... (2009).

about power inequalities or how much local history and place matter in African multilingual countries like Nigeria. Here, Arabic has religious power but, Hausa has everyday power so speakers balance both. The data also demonstrate that Northwestern Nigeria is special: Sokoto and Zamfara are not the same as Kano, even though they are all in the north. Looking closely at these regions offers us a better picture of how people construct hybrid language patterns after colonialism, where faith, education, history and daily life all impact the way words change. There are some restrictions to this study: we employed qualitative approaches with a small number of persons and texts, thus the results are profound but not statistical.<sup>56</sup> Future investigation may record additional speakers, employ sound analysis tools, or compare different age groups to see if these patterns are changing over time. In short, Hausa-Arabic bilinguals in Northwestern Nigeria are excellent language users. They maintain Arabic's religious meaning and tone where it matters, but restructure words to match Hausa life and local ways of speech.<sup>57</sup> This indicates language is alive, it grows and mixes via people's choices, history and everyday demands.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings show the richness and diversity of Hausa dialects in Northwestern Nigeria, where Arabic loanwords adapt in distinctive ways that reflect local identity, religious values and everyday pragmatism. Treating Hausa as a single, unified language, especially in education, media or published materials, can disadvantage speakers from Sokoto or Zamfara, who naturally prefer forms like alʔali or *sallā* instead of the more conventional Kano equivalents. Recognizing these dialectal variances would make education and communication more inclusive and effective, allowing children and adults to feel appreciated in their unique ways of speaking.

In education, this means curricula should incorporate instances of regional variety so pupils from diverse locations see their own speech reflected and respected. Teachers can utilize these patterns to explain things more clearly, whereas religious and community leaders can adopt language styles that are more accessible to listeners keeping closer to Arabic forms for official or spiritual settings and simpler Hausa versions for ordinary explanations. For language preservation, recording Northwestern dialects is vital before urbanization and media uniformity eliminate their exposure.

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<sup>56</sup>J. E. Philips, Hausa in the twentieth century: An overview, *Sudanic Africa* 15 (2004): 55-84.

<sup>57</sup>S. A. Unubi, Significant Linguistic Information on the Arabic and Hausa Languages, 2023,

Practically, developers and educators should produce dialect-sensitive dictionaries, glossaries, and digital tools that list common regional variants side by side (e.g., *alkali*, *alʔali*, *algali*), making them valuable for schools, translators, language apps, and even AI systems. Digital archives of spoken recordings from Sokoto, Zamfara, and adjacent areas—created with community cooperation and consent would help save these patterns for future generations, scholars, and cultural projects. Media outlets and government communications might potentially begin adding occasional regional forms in broadcasts or public statements, fostering national unity while honoring local language variation. These steps are easy and community-centered. They would support stronger bilingual education, conserve cultural heritage and assist Hausa remain vibrant and adaptive in a quickly changing Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This study looked attentively at how Arabic loanwords survive and alter in Hausa spoken by bilingual persons in Northwestern Nigeria. From the way *qāḍī* becomes *alkali* in Kano markets, *alʔali* in Sokoto mosques, or sometimes *algali* in Zamfara villages, to the way words obtain Hausa grammatical endings and shift sounds dependent on religion or daily discussion, the results reveal speakers are active creators, not just receivers of language. The variations are not faults; they are indicators of history (Sokoto Caliphate impact), faith (Arabic status in Islam), education (Quranic schooling), and pragmatism (easier sounds in trade). Bilinguals reconcile respect for Arabic with the ease of Hausa, mixing the two in creative ways that match the time.

This study provides a more complete picture of Hausa-Arabic communication by focusing on Sokoto and Zamfara, places that are frequently ignored in previous studies. It shows language in postcolonial Nigeria is flexible and robust, expanding via people's choices rather than staying set. The ideas propose simple strategies to value this variety in schools, media, and digital technologies. In a world where big languages sometimes push minor ones aside, celebrating Northwestern Hausa dialects helps maintain cultural identity and multilingual skills for the future. Further studies may capture additional voices, compare age groups, or look at how social media is influencing these tendencies. For now, this research celebrates the ingenuity of Hausa-Arabic bilinguals and begs for more respect for their different ways of speech.

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