

HISTORICAL SOUND LAWS IN HAUSA AND IN DERA (KANAKURU)

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The proof of genetic relationship does not depend on the demonstration of historical sound laws. Rather, the discovery of sound laws and the reconstruction of linguistic history normally emerge from the careful comparison of languages already presumed to be related. This is especially true in the case of languages whose similarity in lexicon and grammar is such that the fact of relationship is not open to question.

In this paper, I propose to describe historical sound laws in Hausa and in Dera¹, two closely related members of the Platel branch of the Chadic language family.² The sound laws to be described in each case are not shared by the other language and thus constitute relatively recent historical developments (in terms of linguistic time). Working within a shallower time-period, it is possible not only to reconstruct sound laws with greater confidence, but it is also possible to perceive structural and temporal inter-relationships among various developments. In short, sound laws can be seen as dynamic processes rather than as static abbreviations for observed correspondences.

Part I describes the historical development of liquids in Hausa. Part II describes weakening as a historical process in Dera. Though necessarily presented in sequence, the two parts are structurally interrelated since the sound laws occurring in one language must be assumed in order to provide evidence in support of a sound law in the other.

I. HAUSA

*r > y

In Newman and Ma, the change of syllable final *r to y in Hausa was described as a 'less regular [than the change of syllable final stops] but nonetheless recurring change'.³ This change was also noted in intervocalic position but no statement was made regarding its generality. It was assumed at the time, although never explicitly stated, that *r > y had taken place under limited conditions (not yet understood) and that present-day Hausa r⁴ was a normal reflex of the earlier Chadic *r. This assumption now appears unfounded.

¹ Dera is spoken in the Northeast State of Nigeria along the Rivers Hawal and Gongola. The two most important Dera villages are Shani, in Biu Division, and Shellen, in Numan Division. 'Dera' is the peoples' own name for themselves and is much preferred to the more well-known designation 'Kanakuru'.

² I take the Chadic family to consist of two co-ordinate branches: 'Platel' (formerly 'Plateau-Sahel'), which includes Greenberg's subgroups 1, 2, 9, and 7, 8 (?), and 'Biman' (formerly 'Biu-Mandara'), which includes his subgroups 3, 4, 5, 6. (See Newman and Ma, 'Comparative Chadic: phonology and lexicon', *JOURNAL OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES*, vol. v (1966), pp. 218-51, and J. Greenberg, *THE LANGUAGES OF AFRICA* (Bloomington, 1963), p. 46.) Subgroup 1, to which Hausa and Dera belong, contains Ngizim, Bolewa, Tangale, Seiyawa, Angas, and Ron, among others.

³ 'Comparative Chadic...', p. 226.

⁴ In discussions of Hausa the symbol r refers specifically to the flap r, as in riga 'gown', and not to the rolled consonant, as in Rubutu 'writing', that I am representing by cap R.

