Language, Style and Register in Contemporary Hausa Environment

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The study investigated the functions of the Hausa language in social interaction. Recent studies in sciences and humanities have indicated that languages play significant role as the only instruments or tools used in disseminating information. Language is also used in expressing, documenting, and recording all forms of research findings. People were made to understand that communication is central to most scientific and socially related achievements the world has ever seen in history. Many issues are involved in bringing changes and development to language. The Hausa environment undergoes various stages and processes in pursuance of linguistic and social development. This is always the case for any communities in search of nationhood. The Hausa people developed city-states, and experienced religious transformation before the British conquered the area. The Hausa language has been part of the political, social, economic and cultural development that occurred since then to the present. The Hausa language was used in education and therefore had gained considerably in the process. Today, it is one of the most developed indigenous languages in Nigeria. With Nigeria as an established institution, although English remains the official language, Hausa has positioned itself well in all important aspects, such as education, commerce, media, and politics. Speech involves the use of styles and registers among others by individuals and social groups in any given environment. This paper has examined the processes through which styles and registers were used and developed, and concluded that both formal and informal situations are relevant especially the latter.

Introduction

The Hausa people reached its climax of civilization after the eighteenth century revolution. Over these two centuries, and with the beginning of the third century, it has been strengthening its role as the main channel of inter and intra-ethnic communication in the region. When the British came with their colonial expansion, they quickly realized the importance of Hausa in achieving their goal. Therefore they took the lead in developing it. In present-day situation, Hausa is being widely used throughout the region for trade, education, and communication. In contemporary Hausa society, Hausa is the key to social and cultural development. This is because language plays significant role in portraying history, tradition and culture of all societies. Interaction is highly required for exchange of ideas, opinions, and information. As the importance of language cannot be over emphasis, in relation to commerce, trade, and education, Hausa is the leading contender to these and other areas concern with human development. In pursuance of these goals, contact is a very fundament issue. Language usage normally decides the status of a language. Hausa has been codified in the nineteenth century, with its own script borrowed from Arabic and Roman, now is being used for religious and literary purposes.
It is broadly divided into an eastern and a western form with a considerable degree of mutual comprehensibility. Now with considerable number of radio stations broadcasting in Hausa in local, national and international levels, and newspapers published in the language, and taught in schools and universities, the continuing use of the language for normal purposes in everyday communication is grantee.

Northern Nigeria is the domain of Hausa people and language, as of now, is experiencing heavy influx of immigrants from other sections of the country, in villages, towns and cities. The Hausa people also migrated to other areas in Nigeria and overseas. This explains the reason of the growing number of Hausa in Diaspora. Hausa tradition and culture is influencing other communities, thus assimilation of some of these immigrants could be seen vividly in the area. In some of these core northern states, one can observe that some of the immigrant children are now speakers of Hausa fluently. The trend is so natural that they reflect the different dialects of the area of their domicile. This has cut-across all the ethnic groups, particularly those born and grown in the areas. Ethnic sentiment is very low and religious bigotry declining at a very high speed. This paper is concerned with the use of Hausa in normal, natural speech situation. This means focusing on words and expressions used in informal social situations by individuals and groups. We shall also explore the effects of languages in contact briefly.

**Language, History and Hausa Environment**

Language use is normally determined by the environment one finds himself. Therefore, environment is a very important aspect when it comes to language use. By environment we refer to the space where language is domiciled. Some used the word geography to refer to the space or area where the people live, or the population. It contains the natural resources and habitat like (plants, stones, trees, rivers, animals, insects, etc.), social (cultural practices, like marriage life, burial ceremonies, naming ceremonies, dances, songs, education, food, dresses, etc.), and economic (trade, businesses, commerce, industries, money, wealth, etc.). The Hausaland (Northern Nigeria before amalgamation of 1914) or environment has its history, which talked about contact of Hausa and other nationalities. The Arabs and the Europeans were in contact with Hausa, and therefore many events happened, one thing leading to another. Politics, Hausa had a perfect system tempered by the Fulani, and later the Europeans. They had their original economic and social systems, all affected by the contacts, which eventually experienced some influences, modifications, and transformations, naturally part of human life. We are mainly concerned here with the linguistic issues, although not very much different from the other issues discussed earlier.

Hausa language was influenced by Arabic and English as a result of the contacts, which started from the nine century up to the nineteenth century. The evidence of those contacts could be seen in the lexical inventory of Hausa, which shows a significant number of borrowed words from Arabic and English. This is the linguistic side of history of contact between Hausa on one side and Arabic and English on the other side. As history does not stop at linguistic only, other aspects of history, here we will consider only four, namely religion, politics, education, and trade.
Islam is the dominant religion in Northern Nigeria, which came centuries ago. The Hausa converted to Islam and became Muslims. As Islam was revealed in Arabic, it became the language of the religion. The contact of Arabic and Hausa provided opportunity through which hundreds of religious related vocabularies from the former entered into the latter. Thus for example, words such as these are now adopted into Hausa vocabulary:

   b. Arabic=alwulu=‘Hausa=alwala’=English=ablution.
   c. Arabic=‘sallah’=‘Hausa=sallah’=English=prayer.
   d. Arabic=‘addu’a=Hausa=addu’a=English=prayer.
   e. Arabic=zakkat=Hausa=zakka=English=charity.
   f. Arabic=hajj=Hausa=hajji=English=holy pilgrimage.
   g. Arabic=shari’a=Hausa=shari’a=English=justice.
   h. Arabic=‘iman’=Hausa=imani=English=faith.
   i. Arabic=niiyat=Hausa=niyya=English=intention.

This has shown that historically, Arabic have had contact with Hausa, and linguistically influenced it as evidently seen above.

The Hausa environment clearly seemed to have long contacts with Islamic and Western culture. These contacts have been reflected in various forms in the community. Hausa language contains political vocabularies reflecting Islamic and Western influences. The presence of certain political lexis in Hausa political discourses have indicated that words from both Arabic and English had been in use in Hausa environment. For example, Arabic and English words commonly found in Hausa discourses include the following:

2. a. Arabic=majalis=Hausa=majalisa=English=parliament.
   b. Arabic=mulk=Hausa=mulki=English=administration or power, or government.
   c. Arabic=siyasa=Hausa=siyasa=English=politics.
   d. Arabic=jumhuriya=Hausa=jumhuriya=English=republic.
   e. Arabic=malakiyya=Hausa=mulukiya=English=monarchy.
   f. Arabic=daulatu=Hausa=daula=English=dynasty.
   g. Arabic=alhukuma=Hausa=hukuma=English=government or authority.
   i. Arabic=wazir=Hausa=waziri=English=deputy, and so on.

All these are also now part of Hausa vocabularies. As for English, being the language of colonizer, and having the intent to impose it, British government financially and academically supported Hausa programmes. Therefore many English words were adopted into Hausa. Some are considered here as examples:
3 a. English=democracy=Hausa=‘dimokuraxiyya’.
b. English=secretary=Hausa=‘sakatare’.
c. English=director=Hausa=‘darakta’.
d. English=governor=Hausa=‘gwabna’.
e. English=councillor=Hausa=‘kasila’.
f. English=chairman=Hausa=‘cayaman’.
g. English=minister=Hausa=‘minista’.
h. English=constitution=Hausa=‘kwansutushin’.
i. English=messenger=Hausa=‘masinja’.
j. English=register=Hausa=‘rajista’.
k. English=headmaster=Hausa=‘hedmasta’.
l. English=principal=Hausa=‘firinsifal’ and so on.

The impact of the contacts of both Arabic and English languages on the Hausa language was also clearly acknowledged in some lexis related to education. Arabic words borrowed include:

4 a. Arabic=alqalam=Hausa=‘alqalami=English=pen.
b. Arabic=ilm=Hausa=‘ilmi’=English=education or knowledge.
c. Arabic=jami’atu=Hausa=‘jami’a=English=university.
d. English=secondary=Hausa=‘sakandare’.
e. English=primary=Hausa=‘firamare’.
f. English=college=Hausa=‘kwaleji’.
g. English=table=Hausa=‘tebur’.
h. English=pencil=Hausa=‘fensir’.
i. English=ruler=Hausa=‘rula’.
j. English=ink=Hausa=‘inki’.
k. English=pencil=Hausa=‘fensiri’.
l. English=uniform=Hausa=‘unifom’.
m. English=duster=Hausa=‘dasta’.
n. English=file=Hausa=‘fayal’.
o. English=cleaner=Hausa=‘kilina’.
p. English=typewriter=Hausa=‘tafireta’.
q. English=computer=Hausa=‘kwamfuta’, etc.

For many centuries, trade has been an important activity in many regions of the world. So it was in West African sub-region, and Hausa language played significant role in intra- and inter-ethnic interaction, and in trade relations. Therefore, it is not by chance that these activities developed into what it is today. The most outstanding landmark visible for everybody to see is the impact of both Arabic and English languages on Hausa language, which contributed greatly to its development. Arabic lexis related to trade borrowed into Hausa includes:
Trade, commerce, economics or business all conceptualised development of exchange between two or more parties involved in giving and taking or collecting and paying, etc. This is one of the many dynamic areas where usually communication plays big role, and linguistic mechanism such as borrowing, innovation, code-switching, code-mixing, etc, manifested. Language can establish political, cultural, social and religious relations with other nations. For English there are words such as ‘bizines’ business, ‘kas’ cash, ‘faun’ pound, ‘dala’ dollar, ‘yan’ yen, ‘riyal’ riyal, etc. As far as language is concerned, trade remains an important source of lexical expansion. It is worth noting also that trade provides the most possible avenue for interaction of people from various social background, different ethnic background, different gender, and different educational background too.

Language environment is made up of four elements: people, their purpose, the rules of communication by which they achieve their purpose, and the actual talk being used in the situation (Hybels and Weaver 11, 1998, p. 94, cited Postman, 1977, p. 9). The people (Hausa) have controversial history, which relates to its identity. Many scholars examined the issue among them Adamu (1978) and Usman (1979), the first emphasised geological and typological reasons as basis for identity. He argued that father or grandfather must be Hausa man, language usage, Hausa culture, and Islamic belief as factors major factors in deciding who a Hausa man is. The second argues on the basis of ethnic diversity whereby many other tribes could be considered as Hausa using Shehu Usmanu’s jama’a as yardstick of measuring the identity. Usman (ibid) concluded that Adarawa, zabarmawa, Nupawa, zamfarawa, gobirawa, etc, as all being Hausa. The Bayajidda legend also provided another dimension to the claim. This is all for the history, now we consider the environment.

There are three important issues related to language and environment: ritual, appropriateness and specialization. These can be used as a means to reveal some cultural information about a particular community. We consider Hausa community here since their language and environment are the focus of this discussion. We state with ritual which Hausa culture gives high regard to, for example greetings. In a typical Hausa community, one is expected to great any elders when he meets them. Not only elders, even youth expect greetings from their peers and elders. Children also great elders and their seniors, therefore, greetings are part of Hausa culture. This aspect represents some part of the rules of communication. For example words and expressions such as: sannu, barka, inna kwana? ina wuni? ya ya aiki? lale marhabun, a gaishe ka, baba ho, inna ho, kwan lafiyarku, ina yini, and so on. Greetings occupy high position in Hausa cultural
values, and Islam encourages it to Muslims. However, the Islamic form of greeting is different. One needs to say *Assalamu alaikum*, this means, peace be with you and the other Muslim will answer by saying, *Amin wa alaikum salam*, meaning, peace be with you also.

Societies have cultural values which they cherished and protected or guided jealously, as such they consciously or unconsciously try to sell them out to others. Greeting is part of ritual. You talk about rules when you are concerned with appropriateness and specialization. Appropriateness in language use is expected from the educated class and specialization also comes from educational training. However, even the uneducated are aware of it, because culture plays great role in checking individual’s speech, where the expectation is for utterance to conform to situation, personality, and even gender. For example, the Hausa use certain expression to emirs and chiefs, such as *ranka ya daxe, sabbaini, mai martaba, mai girma*, and so on. These are also used to greet elders, teachers or malams, and high ranking government officials. These include those that wear uniforms such as the police, army, immigration, customs, etc. This category also have educated among them, especially the officers. Therefore, they use language appropriately too.

The Hausa society is male dominated therefore, expressions for greetings to women remain very low. For women in high executive position expression such as: *ranki ya daxe* is used. The reason for the low availability of greeting expressions to women may not be unconnected to religious belief. Women are married to men who register, provides food, shelter and clothing to them, even if they are wealthy, and education is not a barrier to this tradition and religious practice. In fact, some women who have excellent home training, greets individuals who are lower in social rank than them. Although women respect men in Hausa society, the men are devoting their entire life to provide all their needs. This attitude indicates that men also respect women even more. For some Muslims, particularly Hausa, the most important status of a woman is to be a house wife. However, with the development of education in Nigeria, many women have obtained high level of both Islamic and Western education. Thousands are career women, who work in public or private sectors. Thousand are university graduates, while some have obtained masters and even doctorate degrees. This shows that women are moving upwards in social hierarchy.

Specialization in Hausa society just like in any other society brings differences in language usage. The society consists of traditional craft and artisans on one hand, and modern professionals on the other hand. The first group used language consisting of lexical items that were found in their profession. For example, butchers, blacksmiths, builders, fishermen, etc., used certain specialized vocabularies only known by their members. They have some form of registers, which they used more often than not. Every profession has an emir which indicates that a form of status exists. The modern professionals also used theirs in conformity with different specializations. Social stratification exists in Hausa society, but in terms of Hausa usage, there was no stigma in using any dialect, at least officially. Although people residing in cities *birni* plural *birane* laughed when they heard rural pronunciations, but no dialect was considered superior or
The Hausa have high respect for their tradition and so traditional rulers, malams and the aristocrats are respected in the society. The phrase gafarta mallam is used to great Islamic and even Western scholars. This shows that education or knowledge has high regard or virtue and is among the most prestigious.

There are certain words and expressions, for example, arne referring to non-Muslim, which is hardly used by educated Hausa people, but frequently used by uneducated. It is not religion only that is reflected in some speech habits. For example the word qyadari has no religious connection but perhaps ethnic. There is also the word baubawa, referring to one not alert to certain social values of a particular community. Some others used the word kafiri to non-Muslims, which also has religious connotation. Usually, the educated among the Hausa have awareness of cultural diversity therefore they tend to have more tolerance towards other people’s culture. The Hausa have sufficient vocabulary to be used in social situations to indicate or describe behaviour of individuals. For example, there are words such as dolo, wawa sususu, gaula, gavo, and so on, referring to particular exhibition of certain stupid behaviour. The words refer to fool, clown, witless, fool, and simpleton. Therefore using language appropriately in any circumstance or situation is possible, provided the person concerned is educated.

Language use and the issue of appropriateness also concerns euphemism, which among the Hausa community is highly regarded because of their strong Islamic religious belief. Some Hausa words should and must be avoided, such as: tusa, kashi, gindi, fitsari, xuwwawu, and so on. The word mutu is now gradually disappearing in normal Hausa conversation. In its place some use other the word or phrase such as: rasu, zan babu, koma ga Allah (SWA), baza, etc. The first word is a colloquial term in eastern dialect, the second colloquial term in western dialect, the third general term for both east and west dialects, while the last is a slang used mostly by the youth. Language usage experiences improvement through maturity and sophistication. Maturity is a natural phenomenon, while sophistication is acquired through education or experience of life. We can see that appropriateness and speciality relate to choice of words to suit certain or specific context.

**Style and Register**

Style in Hausa language saloo is heavy loaded functional word, which seems to carry nearly everything that one thinks about doing as an activity. Thus, style is related to the present, past and future. For example, in the world of fashion, you can have current style or old style, and for an ambitious mind future intention of how to impress somebody, a group or even community. Therefore, for style, sky is the limit, in other words it is for dynamic mind. Style is about modernity, civilization, leadership, improvement, sophistication, and awareness, etc.

In the academic, style is claimed by the literature specialists, by the culture experts, and by the linguists. The reason is that style is relevant to quite a number of fields of specialization unless you do not care to to feel involved. In drama, characters or actors need style to out play others, and for poets competition is high and so different styles are displayed. And for culture, the list is endless, for example, style of dress, style of dance, music style, hair and weaving styles, etc. For cultural perspective, you may
need dance style, dress style, musical style or even style of a song. Now, it is evidently clear that style concerns me, you, and everybody. In contemporary Hausa society, and in relation to Hausa language, impact of style on the environment can be observed in Hausa discourse. We are concerned with speech situation here, which implies that formal and informal circumstances should be focused. This is because the two situations normally determined which ever style one intends to use.

Register in Hausa *rajista* refers to variation according to use in specific situations Yule (1996, p. 194), mostly used by professionals and social groups. These include groups such as college or university students, lawyers, doctors, sport fans, army, police, journalists, etc. In urban centres, use of register is a regular practice, and it increased the beauty of dialogue, debate, or even religious sermon, etc. As the case may be, one person may control a variety of registers, for example, a stockbroker and a car dealer, or a newspaper vendor and a even a professional driver. Registers help in the identification of individuals or groups.

Basically, there are two environments, rural and urban. As languages vary in many ways, styles and registers are also elements of variation. In both rural and urban environments, you can sometimes observe these aspects of language use. However, since education is more in urban centres, its influence is also more, therefore innovation, style and register usage tend to occur among educated youth groups and Western educated adults. These social groups are the arrowhead in making society linguistically vibrant. Styles and registers are new phenomena for constructing new expressions and phrases in languages, Hausa language inclusive. The styles and registers are indication of language variation through social groups or classes. Registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupation or social groups (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 52).

All over the world, education is considered as the most effective instrument of modernization. In fact, in the global world of today, education, economic strength, political wizardly and professional successes are also among the dimensions of evaluating social statuses. In the same parable, all of those aspects are considered stylish since currently they represent the goals of most minds. Furthermore, age, gender, profession and social class can reflect style or register from view point of sociolinguistics. This means that as far as language is concerned, these linguistic variables can be used in identifying and associating style or register. In other words, there can be a particular age group style or register, a gender specific style or register, a particular class style or register and a professional style or register.

Recently in Nigeria, some new Hausa political registers were introduced, they are *NPP SAK* (literally, it means genuine or legal), and *a kasa, a tsare, a raka* which (literally means to display, to protect, and to escort), referring to ballot paper. The first expression was introduced to refer to General Buhari’s faction of the NPP, while the second was a slogan to his party supporters. The slogan was an advice to his supporters to protect their votes and disallow political rigging in elections. The two expressions have been part of new political registers now used in political discourses.

The use of style and register should be guided by content and context. The terms ‘content’ and ‘context’ are important. In many instances, users of language could use any
style or register, but should be associated with certain context and content. Thus settings and topics are also important. Therefore proper usage helps to express your identity at a specific time or place, i.e., how you seek to present yourself to others. In this regard, we should examine style using linguistic variables as tools to gauge its link if any to modern usage of Hausa language. The use of both style and register is connected also to environment, culture and class. Different classes have different cultures, different taste, and different awareness. Class is a touchy affair, thus people sometimes avoid it in order not to embarrass individuals or groups.

Class in the views of some Americans concerned money and education. However, according to other Americans, it is not riches and education only that defined classes, because style, taste and awareness are as important as money and education. For some even profession or occupation are important yardstick for class evaluation (For details see Fussell, 1983). It is clear for us now that class phenomenon is controversial even in developed societies. The idea has been developed in economically dynamic, politically conscious, educationally advanced, and socially sophisticated nations. Style in language use especially when viewed from class perspective, indicates the human capacity to generate consensus and diversities in dealing with the enormous linguistic probabilities created by him, for example, the issue of variations in linguistic studies.

Linguistic change and variations are products of social change. Hausa society have been changing, linguistically 19th century was the pick period, the Jihad and then British conquest, and then independence to date. Independence gave way to political, economic, social and educational reforms and revolutions. Of noticed was linguistic challenges poised by English dominance in education, politics, commerce and media communications. With the standardization Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, the tendency of challenging English has been established. Today, all are taught in tertiary institutions and universities. Books on grammar, literature, culture and dictionaries were written and published. Studies in Hausa are at various levels, which consist of Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees.

There are also other levels, which include Diplomas and Certificates. Hausa is now a language of wider communication in West African sub-region, and is a popular language with regional and social varieties. Social dialect is a form of language or (variety) developed and used by social groups defined according to class, education, occupation, age, and sex. It has regional varieties all over Northern Nigeria. It is a dominant medium of broadcasting in Northern Nigeria. Its simplicity and flexibility has encouraged thousands of non-natives to engage in learning it both in Nigeria and abroad. The fact that Hausa is associated with education means that use of styles and registers defined according to class, occupation, gender or age should and must be expected in conversations and discourses.

Style is a functional issue, which means, it is situational and user biased. It is found in speech and in writing. Slang is also used as style in some situations. For detail discussion on varieties of slangs and its usage by social groups, males and females, professional groups, educated and uneducated, and both educated and uneducated youths and adults (see Xantumbishi, 2004). One can use style in either formal or informal
situations. By formal style we mean sticking to standard grammar while informal style refers to use of slang, jargon, colloquial, etc. The most natural style according to Labov (cited in Mesthrie et al 2004), is the vernacular because it is the least conscious of the act of speaking.

When change has been established variation becomes regular in formal or informal communication situations. Linguistic development would be measured in particular environment by the frequency or regularity of style and register usage among others. Let’s see some Hausa syntactic examples from religious dimension:

6. Da ikon Allah za a ga gaskiya ta tabbata (By God’s power the truth would emerge).

7. Allah ke baiwa kowa abinci (God provides food to everyone).

8. Ana duba ayyuka daidai niyya (Actions are judged according to intentions).

9. Allah mai jin tausayin bayinsa ne (God has mercy for His servants).

Formal circumstance enjoyed formal style while informal enjoyed informal style, for example, written language versus spoken, in formal letter you can write Ina fata kai da iyalinka kuna lafiya ...; (I hope you and your family are fine), but in informal style you can write I ce ko lafiya kuke ... (Hope you and the family are fine). The youths both males and females, and orally or in written forms, enjoyed using registers to identify with their groups, or as a matter of choice. The availability of Hausa registers in various forms is an indication of its natural development.

Register like style has strong relation with professionalism, therefore education in Hausa environment can be a factor of determining all types of registers, particularly those related to modernity. Thus highly educated university and college students used registers that reflect their specialization or level of education. For example, a computer specialist may use the following expression of registers: I am logging up; The keyboard is bad; It is a new mouse; This is windows seven; I am downloading; I am browsing; It is shutting down; It is booting, etc. This is just some few English examples of computer registers.

Registers and jokes might be used as an indication of intimacy verbally in discourse. Therefore linguistic habits and practices such as use of registers served as functional variety in normal specific speech situation and context. Casual conversation is quite informal, and this happens between intimate friends or family members, etc. Individuals and groups can develop register variation along many dimensions. Thus like dialect or style, registers are just another dimension of variation found in different circumstances, but engineered by formality or otherwise, and also by the need of the time. The following are some examples of Hausa football registers: Ya xeba shi (He has brought him down); Ya bayar da shi (He has deceived him); Ya ja su (He has misled them); Ya xaga ta sama (He has raised it up); Ya sa kai (He has used his head); Sun lallasu su (They have beaten them hands down); Ya kuskure raga (He has missed); Ya
‘aika ta hagu’ (He has sent it to the left); ‘Ya buga kwana mai kyau’ (He has kicked a good corner); ‘Ya yi rimi’ (He raised the ball up very well); ‘Ya riva shi’ (He has kicked the ball on him); ‘Ya buga qafar dai’ (He has kicked the ball wildly); ‘Ya falle shi,’ (He has brought him down) etc.

Whenever styles or registers are used, and whatever its causes, it must be an instantaneous event or circumstance, because it must reflect natural linguistic usage. This is what language use is generally about, of course except certain situations such as careful or formal ones where care must be taken to avoid embarrassment. According to Hudson (1996, p. 46), register differences are at least three-dimensional, they are those associated to ‘addressee’, ‘power’, and ‘solidarity’. The last is concerned with intimacy which has been discussed in this paper, and the other two are also important but are not the concern of this work.

**Conclusion**

This paper has discussed style and register in Hausa environment with the view to highlight their significance in the study of language, particularly with regard to formality and informality of speech situation. The study of languages, especially developing one like Hausa, may find use of style and register very interesting, because language is a highly flexible instrument, whereby use of registers and styles bring rapid changes in a community more than any other elements. Hausa has borrowed and adopted a great many words from Arabic and English to describe Islamic religion and culture, and also technology and modernity of the West. Terms relating to politics, economics, and education have been borrowed into Hausa, and are now part of its vocabulary. The beauty of it all is that other languages, i.e. English also did the same between 15th and 17th century, when it borrowed significantly from Greek and French. What this implies, only the future may tell.
References


