When did Gwandara split from Hausa?

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1. Introduction

The Gwandara language is the closest cognate with Hausa within Western Chadic group of languages, though both are mutually unintelligible. The Gwandara area, Nigerian middle belt, is not adjacent to Hausaland, and various ethnic groups such as Gwari, Gade, Yeskwa and Koro intervene between them. As the Hausa homeland lies far north, it is reasonable to assume that the Gwandara ancestors parted from mother Hausa communities and migrated southwards to the present area.

Then when did they leave? And what part of Hausaland did they come from?

2. Gwandara Traditions and Kano Chronicle Cross-checked

All versions of tradition relating to Gwandara origin contain the following common elements.

1) The Gwandara ancestors had been in Kano
2) They fled Kano because Sarkin Kano (King of Kano) accepted Islam and they did not.
3) They moved southwards and settled down in and around Keffi country.

An interesting version stated by Sarkin Keffi (Abdullahi dan Jibrilu, 1902 - 1921) shows that:
..... when a certain Sarki [i.e. King of Kano] named Gaikiga-Kuma adopted Islam, at the instance of Shehu Maigilli, his younger brother, Gwandara, refused to change his beliefs and led a section of the people southwards to Gwagwa near Keffi

......[Temple 118].

When we compare Abdulahi’s description with the Kano Chronicle, the only surviving historical material from Kano school, some coincidences are found.

1) Sarki Gaikiga-Kuma must be the tenth king of Kano, Sarki Usman Zannagawa (1343 - 1349), who possessed an epithet “Gakingarkuma” [Hogben & Kirk-Greene 212]. Also he was the first Sarki who bore a Moslem name in Kano Chronicle.

2) In the reign of Usman Zannagawa, the Maguzawa (present meaning, ‘non-moslem Hausa’) left Kano town and went to the countryside called Fankull [Palmer 104 and Hausawa 28].

3) In the time of eleventh Sarki, Yaji dan Tsamiya (1349 - 1385), Wamragawa missionaries arrived from Mali to propagate Islam, but some of the Kano people opposed them [Palmer 104-5 and Hausawa 29-30].

4) The twelfth Sarki, Bugayya dan Tsamiya (1385 - 1390) ordered the Maguzawa to leave Fankull and scatter [Palmer 107 and Hausawa 31].

5) Shehu Maigilli, undoubtedly Shaikh Muhammed al-Maghili of Tlemcen, visited Kano during the reign of Sarki Muhamadu Runna (1463-1499) [Palmer 111 and Hausawa 37].

2), 3) and 4) suggest clearly that there had been some conflicts between Maguzawas and ruling party, that received some
Islamic influence, and the former separated from the Eano area. Obviously, this kind of group splitting was not all at one time phenomenon, but occurred in successive waves. If we set the date of Gwandara separation purely from oral/historical materials, it is most probable that it occurred between the reign of Sarki Zammagawa and of Muhammadu Rumfa, that is between 1343 and 1499.

3. Nimbia Dialect of Gwandara

Nimbia area lies northeast far from the main body of Gwandaras, in Jemaa's Local Authority area just at western foothill of the escarpment of Jos Plateau. About the origin of Nimbia group, no first-hand tradition is available. But a few colonial administrators left some notes on this topic.

.... About 200 years ago the Gwandara were split by internecine strife by two claimants to the chieftainship of the tribe. The western section migrated from West of Keffi Northward and settled in a District 12 miles East of Jemaa where they called the settlement Karshi after their old chief town....... [Sciortino: 1914]

To support this description, a small village called Fadan Karshe exists 6 kilometers south of Nimbia village. Another account goes along with Sciortino's;

.... The main part of the Gwandara tribe live in the Keffi Emirate of the Benue Province and only a small part (less than two thousand) in the Jemaa Emirate. These all came from Keffi in small independent parties and founded little villages, most of them being in the north-west corner of the
Emirate amongst thick bush. Some of them came before the
days of the Emirs of Jemaa, others came as recently as about
1850. They were never united under any chief but existed in
independent units and paid tribute to the Emirs of Jemaa....
[Ames 243]

But Sciortino wrote another note that is apparently
incompatible with his former one.

.... The Gwandara appear to have spread over the parts of the
Province best stocked with game, and scattered from the
North-Western foothills of the Bauchi Plateau [Jos Plateau,
the present usage], then inhabited by the Nimbia, Southward
and Westward, till they came in contact with the Koro and the
Gwari. The Gwandara claim to have been a race of hunters
originating in the country North-East of Kano, and to have
followed game-tracks South to Nimbia.... [Sciortino: 1920,
p.4].

If we rely on first two accounts, Nimbia group migrated from
the Keffi Gwandara area starting from the early 17th century, and
possibly kept on arriving in small groups until the mid 19th
century. But from the lexical and grammatical point of view,
Nimbia dialect is too divergent from the main Gwandara groups in
Keffi. It is impossible to explain this divergence by a mere 300
years of separation, though we have to make some allowances for
the fact that Nimbia group was overwhelmingly under an influence
of neighbouring Benue-Congo language groups, having lost their
political independence [Gunn 78-9]. This political and cultural
subjugation obviously quickened the linguistic change.
4. Glottochronological Estimation

Four dialects of Gwandara were selected for the Swadesh’s 100, and compared to Kano Hausa. For the vocabulary list and method of calculation, see [Swadesh 271-284]. They were Karshi (central dialect), Garaku (western dialect), Gitata (northern dialect) and Nimbia (north-eastern offshoot).

The chart shows the minimum centuries since separation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>Karshi</th>
<th>Garaku</th>
<th>Gitata</th>
<th>Nimbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hausa (Kano)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.5 - 10.0</td>
<td>12.3 - 13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karshi</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.5 - 3.9</td>
<td>7.0 - 7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garaku</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7 - 3.1</td>
<td>5.8 - 6.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitata</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.1 - 7.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At least, the Karshi dialect that has a chronological distance of more than 7 centuries since its separation from Hausa, supports the conclusion achieved in section 1. Mutual divergence among Keffi groups, namely Karshi, Garaku and Gitata, is small enough. Clearly it was caused by the secondary dispersal within the area and the influence of the indigenous population into whose territories Gwandarae plunged.

Nimbia dialect occupies entirely peculiar position among all Gwandara dialects. It is chronologically almost equidistant from Karshi, Garaku and Gitata dialects, but much more divergent than Sciortino and Ames suggested in their notes.

Is Nimbia dialect simply a Gwandara offshoot that had undergone
5. Grammatical Peculiarity of Nymbia Dialect

The subject pronouns of the continual tense in Hausa and Gwandara dialects are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hausa</th>
<th>Karshi</th>
<th>Garaku</th>
<th>Gitata</th>
<th>Nymbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sg.</td>
<td>ndaa</td>
<td>nda</td>
<td>ma</td>
<td>ndaa</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II sg.</td>
<td>kanaa (m)</td>
<td>ka</td>
<td>ka`</td>
<td>kaa</td>
<td>ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kinaa (f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III sg.</td>
<td>yanaa (m)</td>
<td>iy`</td>
<td>iy<code>/ya</code></td>
<td>a`</td>
<td>ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tanaa (f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pl.</td>
<td>munaa</td>
<td>muwa</td>
<td>mwa</td>
<td>mwaa</td>
<td>ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II pl.</td>
<td>kunaa</td>
<td>kuwa</td>
<td>kw`</td>
<td>kwaa</td>
<td>kw`</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III pl.</td>
<td>sunaa</td>
<td>shwa</td>
<td>sw`</td>
<td>swaa</td>
<td>wa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Pers.</td>
<td>ana`</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gwandara high tones are marked with ', low tones with '.

The characteristic of Nymbia pronouns is its coherent low-tone, while other dialects show, generally, a high-toned pronominal part followed by low-toned suffixes -na, -ya, -wa. Newman and Schuh reconstructed the preverbal pronouns with a low-tone for Proto-Hausa. They made a hypothesis that the imperfective (later split into continual and future) had been formed with a preverbal pronoun followed by *naa/*aa form, and at a later stage,
phonological change raised the tone of the preverbal pronoun [Newman et Schuh 23-29].

If this reconstruction and the subsequent tonal change are applied to the Gwandara situation, we can assume that:

1) Nimbia group had split from mother Hausa group before the tonal raising occurred, therefore all tones remained low.

2) Other Gwandara groups migrated when the tonal raising was in progress, therefore some forms were raised to high tone while the other forms were not affected and remained low.

6. Conclusion

Considering the linguistic evidences, Gwandara separation occurred at least twice, the first being Nimbia split and the second, main Gwandara migration into Keffi area around 14 – 15 century. Date of Nimbia separation was much older, the glottochronological calculation shows it broke out at least 12 centuries ago.

Obviously, the secondary migration of some Gwandara group took place around 3 centuries ago. They removed themselves from Keffi area, specifically Gwandara headquarters of Karshi, and settled in Nimbia area. Nimbia village of Karshi, or Padan Zarebe, is the best testimony of this historical occurrence.

But these new immigrants were not very significant in number, because they did not leave any serious linguistic traces except a few place names and, possibly, the name of the language "Gwandara". The migration of this new group might have given a good excuse to Nimbia people to uplift themselves and connect
their language to Gwandara language, though the former was practically a distinct language from the latter. At the same time, an oral tradition was established to link Nimbia people to the Gwandaras in Keffi who used to have a regional supremacy and possessed a higher prestige in the surrounding areas. This new version was picked up by Sciortino and Ames.

But Sciortino was not satisfied with this stereotype and found another version [Sciortino 1920] somehow. Linguistic evidences accredit this account.
Bibliography


Hausawa da Makwabtane na Biyu, 1971, Zaria.


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