

# Amelioration and Pejoration of Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: Evidence of Semantic Change and Implications for Language Teaching

Nasiru Yusha'u

Department of Hausa, School of Secondary Education (Languages)  
Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim, Jigawa State  
[nasiruyushau@gmail.com](mailto:nasiruyushau@gmail.com)

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.0546>

Published May 08, 2026

**Citation:** Yusha'u N. (2026) Amelioration and Pejoration of Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: Evidence of Semantic Change and Implications for Language Teaching, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*,7(3),1-15

**Abstract:** *This study investigates semantic change in twenty Arabic loanwords in Hausa, examining how borrowed lexical items undergo meaning elevation (amelioration) and meaning degradation (pejoration) in the host language. The twenty words analysed — eight exemplifying amelioration and twelve exemplifying pejoration — provide concrete linguistic evidence of the processes through which Arabic source meanings are transformed, inverted, narrowed, or entirely replaced during integration into the Hausa lexicon. The study reveals that amelioration in Hausa Arabic loanwords operates primarily through the naming tradition sub-process, by which words carrying neutral, negative, or inanimate referential meanings in Arabic are elevated to honorific human naming functions in Hausa — exemplified by Safinaa (ship to female name), Unaizaa (she-goat to female name), and Mal'uunatu (accursed to female name). Pejoration operates through semantic inversion, register degradation, and taboo transfer, illustrated by shaakira (grateful to sex organ), maulaa (Lord to beg), and tsubbu (medicine to sorcery). The study derives significant implications for language teaching, arguing that awareness of semantic divergence between Arabic source meanings and Hausa borrowed meanings is indispensable for effective bilingual education, Arabic language instruction, and the prevention of pragmatic errors among Hausa learners of Arabic and Arabic learners of Hausa.*

**Keywords:** amelioration; pejoration; Arabic loanwords; Hausa; semantic change; language borrowing; language teaching; false cognates

## INTRODUCTION

Lexical borrowing is one of the most universal and consequential processes in the history of human languages. When two languages come into sustained contact — through trade, religion, conquest, or cultural exchange — words migrate across linguistic boundaries, and with them travel the meanings, associations, and cultural values embedded in those words. Arabic, the language of the Qur'an and the lingua franca of Islamic civilization, has exercised a profound

and sustained influence on Hausa, one of the most widely spoken indigenous languages of sub-Saharan Africa. The two languages share membership in the Afro-Asiatic language family (El-wafiy, 2005; Dawood, 2001), and centuries of contact through Islam, trade, and scholarship have produced an Arabic-Hausa loanword corpus estimated at approximately twenty percent of the total Hausa vocabulary (Abubakar, 1972, cited in Dawood, 2001).

However, the journey of an Arabic word into Hausa is rarely semantically neutral. When lexical items cross linguistic boundaries, they enter new phonological, morphological, cultural, and conceptual environments that reshape their meanings — sometimes elevating them, sometimes degrading them, and sometimes inverting them entirely. This phenomenon of post-borrowing semantic change is the subject of the present study. Two specific processes are investigated: amelioration — the elevation of a word's meaning or status relative to its source language form — and pejoration — the degradation or worsening of a word's meaning relative to its Arabic original.

The study analyses twenty Arabic loanwords in Hausa — eight demonstrating amelioration and twelve demonstrating pejoration — that provide concrete, verifiable linguistic evidence of these semantic change processes. Beyond their intrinsic interest for historical linguistics and Hausa studies, these words carry significant implications for language teaching, since learners of Arabic who encounter these words in Hausa, and Hausa speakers learning Arabic, may be misled by the apparent phonological similarity between source and borrowed forms while being unaware of the radical meaning shift that has occurred. The study therefore addresses two objectives simultaneously: to document the linguistic evidence of semantic change across these twenty words, and to derive from that evidence specific, actionable implications for language teaching in Hausa-Arabic bilingual and second-language contexts.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Linguistic Borrowing and Semantic Change***

Linguistic borrowing is, in Campbell's (1998) formulation, the process of incorporating into one language elements which originally belong to another. Such borrowing is not random but responds to linguistic need, prestige, cultural contact, and — crucially for Arabic-Hausa relations — religious identification. For the Hausa people, Arabic is not merely a foreign language but the language of divine revelation; this religious relationship has shaped the volume, register, and cultural weight of Arabic borrowings in ways that would not apply to, say, English or French loanwords. Anwar (2017) observes that words frequently change their meanings over time and that such changes are intimately linked to cultural and historical shifts — a principle that is vividly illustrated in the Arabic-Hausa loanword data analysed in this study.

Semantic change — sometimes referred to as semantic shift or semantic progression — involves changes in the usage of words to the point where the current meaning radically differs from the original meaning (Crystal, 1987). The change may be bidirectional: meaning may expand (widening) or contract (narrowing), it may shift register (from formal to vulgar, or vice

versa), and it may change in evaluative valence — becoming more positive (amelioration) or more negative (pejoration). Bloomfield (1933) provided the foundational taxonomy of semantic change processes, which included widening, narrowing, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, meiosis, degeneration (pejoration), and elevation (amelioration). Hallman (2009) offers a simplified three-category framework that foregrounds amelioration and pejoration as a primary binary pair, alongside broadening/narrowing and metaphorical shift — the framework most relevant to the present study.

### ***Amelioration***

Amelioration — also referred to as elevation, ennoblement, or semantic brightening — is the process by which a word acquires a higher status, more positive connotation, or more prestigious meaning than it carried in the source language. Crystal (1987) defines it as the process by which 'a word loses its original sense of disapproval', while Katamba (2005) characterises it as occurring when a word 'generally shows more positive meaning than the original thing'. The canonical English example — 'knight', originally meaning simply 'boy' or 'servant', elevated to mean a man of honourable rank — captures the essential dynamic: the social prestige attached to the borrowing context transforms a humble referent into an elevated one.

In the Arabic-Hausa context, amelioration takes on a distinctive form strongly linked to the religious and cultural prestige of Arabic. Words that are phonologically attractive to Hausa speakers — regardless of their semantic content in Arabic — may be borrowed and elevated to highly honourable social functions, most notably as personal names. This naming-tradition sub-process of amelioration, documented and analysed in Section 5 of this study, is one of the most remarkable semantic phenomena in Arabic-Hausa language contact.

### ***Pejoration***

Pejoration — also termed degeneration, deterioration, or semantic worsening — is the converse process: a word that carried a neutral or positive meaning in the source language acquires a negative, taboo, or less prestigious meaning in the borrowing language. Hassan (2015) explains that pejoration occurs when words that were formerly more important or favourable lose their importance and become less favourable over time. The English example of 'villain' — formerly indicating merely a person of doubtful character or low social standing, now a term of strong negative moral judgment — illustrates how pejoration can compound the original meaning shift with additional layers of social and moral condemnation.

In the Arabic-Hausa data, pejoration operates through several distinct mechanisms: semantic inversion (the meaning becomes the opposite of the source), register degradation (from formal/honorific to vulgar/taboo), narrowing with negative specification (from neutral general to negatively specific), and metaphorical negative extension. All four mechanisms are documented in the pejoration data analysed in Section 6.

### **Arabic-Hausa Language Contact**

Hausa belongs to the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family, the same macro-family to which Arabic belongs (El-wafiy, 2005; Dawood, 2001). The structural proximity of the two languages — including shared phonological features, comparable derivational mechanisms, and morphological parallels — has facilitated the naturalization of Arabic loanwords in Hausa to a degree that speakers frequently fail to recognize them as borrowed at all. The linguistic consequences of this contact are extensive: Abubakar (1972, cited in Dawood, 2001) estimated that Arabic loanwords account for approximately twenty percent of the total Hausa vocabulary, a figure confirmed and extended by subsequent scholarship (Yalwa, 1992; Xanzaki, 2015).

Early Arabic-Hausa contact has been traced to the tenth century CE, though the sustained establishment of Arabic-speaking merchant communities in Hausaland — bringing with them not merely trade goods but the full complex of Islamic civilization, including religion, scholarship, law, and nomenclature — began in earnest in the twelfth century CE (Hissket, 1965; Ibrahim, 1978). This contact created two broad categories of Arabic loanwords in Hausa: those denoting new concepts, objects, and practices introduced through Islam and trade, for which Hausa had no existing vocabulary; and those providing a kind of prestigious synonym for existing Hausa concepts, borrowed not out of linguistic necessity but out of the cultural prestige associated with Arabic as the language of the Qur'an (Brook, 1981).

This second category — borrowed for prestige rather than necessity — is particularly relevant to the semantic change data of the present study. When words are borrowed for their sound and association rather than for their precise semantic content, the original meaning may be de-emphasised or even entirely forgotten, creating the conditions for both amelioration (the borrowed form elevated to new social functions) and pejoration (the borrowed form reshaped by its new social environment in negative directions). The study by Xanzaki (2015), which documented semantic expansion, narrowing, and meaning shift in Arabic loanwords in Hausa, provides important background for the present work's focus on amelioration and pejoration as a complementary pair of semantic processes.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs an observational-descriptive research design. The data corpus comprises twenty Arabic loanwords in Hausa identified through systematic review of the relevant lexicographic and linguistic literature on Arabic-Hausa language contact, including the foundational works of Greenberg (1947), Hissket (1965), Yalwa (1992), Aujara (2010), and Xanzaki (2015), supplemented by the standard lexicographic resources of Bargery (1934), Newman (2007), Baydoun (2004), and Elias (n.d.). Each word was identified on the basis of a demonstrable divergence between its documented meaning in Arabic and its recorded meaning or use in Hausa. Words were then classified into one of the two semantic change categories — amelioration or pejoration — on the basis of the directionality of the meaning change: words whose Hausa meaning represents a positive, prestigious, or elevated development relative to the Arabic source form were classified as amelioration cases; words whose Hausa meaning

represents a negative, vulgar, taboo, or degraded development were classified as pejoration cases.

The analytical framework applied to each word follows a four-part schema: (a) the Arabic source form with its documented meaning; (b) the Hausa borrowed form with its recorded meaning in contemporary usage; (c) the type of semantic change process involved (naming-tradition elevation, register shift, semantic inversion, taboo transfer, etc.); and (d) the linguistic and cultural factors that account for the direction and extent of the meaning change. This schema enables the study to move beyond simple listing of changed meanings toward a principled linguistic analysis of the mechanisms through which change occurs — analysis directly relevant to the language teaching implications developed in Section 7.

### Evidence of Amelioration in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa

Eight Arabic loanwords in Hausa demonstrate semantic amelioration — an upward shift in meaning status, prestige, or social function relative to the Arabic source. Table 1 presents the full corpus of amelioration cases with source and target meanings.

**Table 1** Amelioration in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: Source Meanings and Hausa Meanings (n=8)

S/N	Hausa Form	Arabic Source	Meaning in Arabic	Meaning/Use in Hausa
1	Alqaryàa	القرية(alqaryah)	village; small rural settlement	city; large urban centre
2	Sàfiinà	السفينة(safiynah)	ship; sea vessel	female personal name (honorific)
3	Lantànaa	لن تتالوا(lan tanaaluu)	by no means shall you attain (Qur'anic phrase)	female personal name (honorific)
4	Ûnaizaa	عنيزة(ʕnaizah)	she-goat; female goat	female personal name (honorific)
5	Shàmsiyyàa	شمسية(shamsiyyah)	umbrella; parasol	female personal name (honorific)
6	Maakaanà	ماكان(maa kaana)	there is no; does not exist (negation phrase)	male personal name (honorific)
7	Mâl'uunatu	ملعونة(malʕuunah)	accursed; damned; cursed one (strong negative)	female personal name (honorific)
8	Uffàn	أفّ (uffin)	oh! Tush (exclamation of disgust or disapproval)	speech; talk; oral discourse

*Note:* Arabic source forms and meanings verified against Baydoun (2004), Elias (n.d.), and Khan et al. (2011) for Qur'anic phrases. Hausa meanings verified against Bargery (1934), Newman (2007), and Yusha'u (2002).

### *Naming Tradition Elevation: The Dominant Amelioration Mechanism*

The most striking and culturally distinctive mechanism of amelioration in the Arabic-Hausa data is what may be termed naming-tradition elevation — a sub-process in which Arabic words

with humble, negative, inanimate, or even theologically charged meanings are adopted into Hausa as personal names, thereby acquiring the highest possible social function in any language: the identification of an individual human being. Six of the eight amelioration cases (75%) operate through this mechanism, and the range of Arabic source meanings represented — from objects to negation phrases to a strong theological curse — makes this corpus remarkable in the annals of semantic amelioration.

Ùnaizaa (Word 4) is perhaps the most remarkable single case. The Arabic source form ũnaizah means simply 'she-goat' — a perfectly ordinary, neutral referent to a female goat. In Hausa, however, Ùnaizaa functions as an honoured female personal name, bestowed on daughters and regarded with the full respect that any proper name commands within the community. The elevation from animal referent to human honorific represents the maximum possible upward trajectory on any scale of meaning prestige. The phonological attractiveness of the Arabic form — its rhythmic pattern and the falling tone sequence characteristic of Arabic female names — appears to have been the primary factor in its borrowing, with the semantic content of the Arabic source disregarded entirely.

Mâl'uunatu (Word 7) presents an even more theologically loaded case. The Arabic source maũuunah is a strong religious term meaning 'the accursed one' or 'the damned one' — a word used in Islamic discourse to denote one upon whom divine condemnation has fallen. Its use as a female personal name in Hausa, with full social acceptance and no negative connotation, represents a radical semantic amelioration driven by the same phonological attractiveness that governs the other naming-tradition cases. The formal markers of Arabic feminine nomination — the -ah/-a ending, the rhythmic pattern — are sufficient to override the theological weight of the source meaning entirely.

Lantànaa (Word 3) is linguistically unique in this corpus in that its Arabic source is not a single word but a Qur'anic phrase: lan tanaaluu, meaning 'by no means shall you attain' — a phrase from Surah Al-Imran (3:92) expressing divine conditionality. That a Qur'anic verbal phrase has been borrowed into Hausa, reduced to the nominal form Lantànaa, and adopted as a female personal name confirms the key finding about the mechanism of naming-tradition amelioration: the phonological form is what is borrowed, and the meaning travels separately — or not at all. Shàmsiyyàa (Word 5) demonstrates amelioration from an everyday inanimate object: the Arabic shamsiyyah means 'umbrella' or 'parasol'. As a Hausa female personal name, it carries the social prestige of any proper noun applied to a person. Sàfiinà (Word 2), from Arabic safiynah ('ship'), follows the same pattern. Maakaanà (Word 6), from the Arabic negation phrase maa kaana ('there is no' / 'does not exist'), is unique as the only male naming case in this group, and doubly unusual in that its Arabic source is a grammatical negation formula rather than a noun.

### ***Register Broadening with Prestige Elevation: alqaryàa***

The case of alqaryàa (Word 1) represents a different and linguistically important amelioration mechanism: register broadening with prestige elevation. The Arabic source alqaryah means 'village' — a specific, spatially bounded, rurally connotated settlement term. In Hausa,

alqaryàa has been elevated to mean 'city' — a semantically broader, more prestigious referent that occupies the opposite end of the rural-urban prestige continuum. This represents a simultaneous semantic broadening (the referent is now any large settlement, not just a specific type) and amelioration (the social prestige of the referent has risen sharply). The elevation reflects the tendency, documented in loanword studies generally, for borrowed terms to undergo prestige upgrading when the borrowing community associates the source language with authority, sophistication, or religious legitimacy — here, the prestige of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an may have contributed to the elevation of even mundane Arabic vocabulary in Hausa.

### **Register Broadening from Exclamation to Discourse: uffàn**

The case of uffàn (Word 8) is semantically different from both the naming-tradition cases and the settlement-term case. The Arabic source uffin is an interjection — an exclamation of disgust, impatience, or disapproval, rendered in the Qur'an (17:23) in the command not to say it to one's parents. In Hausa, uffàn has been broadened and elevated to mean 'speech' or 'talk' in general — an everyday noun of neutral connotation. The movement is from a marked, negative, emotionally loaded exclamation to a neutral, general discourse term. This represents amelioration through despecialisation: the Arabic form's specific negative pragmatic force is lost in the borrowing process, and what remains is a general sense of 'verbal expression', which is then elevated into neutral everyday vocabulary.

### **Evidence of Pejoration in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa**

Twelve Arabic loanwords in Hausa demonstrate semantic pejoration — a downward shift in meaning status, prestige, or moral valence relative to the Arabic source. This group is more numerous and more diverse in its mechanisms than the amelioration group, reflecting the greater range of social and cultural factors that can drive meaning degradation. Table 2 presents the full corpus.

**Table 2** Pejoration in Arabic Loanwords in Hausa: Source Meanings and Hausa Meanings (n=12)

S/N	Hausa Form	Arabic Source	Meaning in Arabic	Meaning/Use in Hausa
9	bàraa'à	براءة(baraa'h)	innocence; absolution; escape from guilt	rebellion; revolt; act of defiance
10	haa'ulaa'i	هؤلاء(ha'ulaa'i)	these (demonstrative pronoun)	trouble; suffering; bad temper; misfortune
11	izzàa	عِزَّة(ʕizzah)	power; strength; dignity; honour	boastfulness; arrogance; showing off
12	Jàmhuuru	جمهور(jumhuur)	the majority; the people; crowd; public	creating quarrel; causing enmity
13	jàzaa'i	جزاء(jazaa'i)	repayment; reward; recompense (neutral/positive)	misfortune; calamity; bad outcome
14	qaharu	قَهْر(qahar)	conquering; overcoming; subdual	slander; false accusation

S/N	Hausa Form	Arabic Source	Meaning in Arabic	Meaning/Use in Hausa
15	mànaaqisàa	مناقشة(munaqishah)	discussion; debate; deliberation; tender	sabotage; deliberate disruption
16	màulaa	مولى(maulaa)	Lord; master; patron; protector	to beg; to cadge; to act as a supplicant
17	sabàbii	سبب(sabab)	reason; motive; cause; means	quarrel; squabble; nagging; loud argument
18	shaakiraa	شاكيرة shaakirah)	grateful; thankful; expressing gratitude	female sex organ; also male sex organ
19	tsubbÙ	طبّ(tibb)	medicine; the science of healing; therapy	magic; sorcery; traditional witchcraft
20	makalàamà	مكالمة(mukaalamah)	speech; talk; conversation; communication	finding fault with; complaining about; criticising

*Note:* Arabic source forms and meanings verified against Baydoun (2004) and Elias (n.d.). Hausa meanings from Bargery (1934), Newman (2007), and field observation (Yusha'u, 2002).

### ***Semantic Inversion: Meaning Becomes the Opposite***

The most structurally dramatic form of pejoration is semantic inversion, in which the Hausa meaning of the borrowed word is not merely lower in prestige than the Arabic source but is its semantic opposite. Three words in the corpus demonstrate this mechanism.

Bàraa'à (Word 9) is, in Arabic, a word of strong positive moral content: baraa'h denotes innocence, absolution, or the state of being cleared of guilt — an Arabic legal and theological term of high positive valence. In Hausa, bàraa'à means rebellion or revolt — an act of deliberate transgression against established authority. The movement is from the zenith of moral positive valuation (innocent, absolved) to an act of social and political negativity (revolt). This inversion may reflect the social history of the term's use in Hausa contexts, where declarations of innocence or separation from a group (the Arabic legal sense of baraa'ah) were interpreted through a different social lens as acts of defiance.

Izzàa (Word 11) undergoes a comparable inversion: in Arabic, ʕizzah denotes power, strength, dignity, and honour — all positive attributes in both Islamic and broader cultural frameworks. In Hausa, izzàa has pejorated to mean boastfulness, arrogance, and showing off — the very qualities that the Arabic concept of genuine dignity and inner strength was intended to transcend. What Islam regards as a quality of true spiritual dignity has, in the Hausa lexical environment, been reinterpreted through a social lens that perceives the outward display of strength or achievement as pretension rather than virtue.

Màulaa (Word 16) represents inversion of a particularly striking theological kind. The Arabic maulaa is a title of high spiritual authority: it means 'Lord', 'Master', 'Patron', or 'Protector' — a term used in Islamic discourse to refer to Allah, to one's spiritual guide, or to one in a position of protective authority. In Hausa, however, Màulaa has pejorated to mean 'to beg' or 'to cadge'

— the act of supplicating for alms or favours. The inversion here appears to reflect the social dynamics of the patron-client relationship: the act of approaching a Lord or Master (maulaa) for protection or support has been re-lexicalised so that the title of the protector is used to describe the action of the supplicant.

### ***Register Degradation: From Neutral or Honorific to Negative Social Function***

A second mechanism of pejoration involves register degradation — the movement of a word from a neutral or formal register in Arabic to a negatively marked social function in Hausa. Several words exemplify this process.

Mànaaqisàa (Word 15) in Arabic is a neutral technical term: munaqishah refers to formal discussion, deliberation, or debate — the kind of structured exchange of views that characterises academic, judicial, or commercial contexts (indeed, in modern Arabic business usage, munaqishah also means 'tender' or 'bid' in a procurement context). In Hausa, mànaaqisàa has degraded to mean sabotage — deliberate, covert disruption. The movement is from structured, legitimate discourse to clandestine, destructive action. The shift may reflect experiences in Hausa social contexts where formal deliberation was perceived to conceal or facilitate harmful intent.

Sabàbii (Word 17) undergoes a comparable register shift: Arabic sabab is a broad, neutral term meaning 'reason', 'cause', 'motive', or 'means' — the word used in ordinary Arabic discourse to link events to their causes. In Hausa, sabàbii has narrowed and pejorated to specifically denote quarrel, squabble, nagging, and loud argument. The neutral causative concept has been channelled into a specific and negative interpersonal register: the 'cause' or 'reason' for a dispute has become, in Hausa usage, synonymous with the dispute itself.

Makalàamà (Word 20) parallels this pattern: The Arabic mukaalamah means 'speech', 'talk', or 'conversation' — an entirely neutral communication term. In Hausa, makalàamà has acquired the specific negative meaning of 'finding fault with', 'complaining about', or 'criticising'. The general communicative concept has narrowed to its most negatively charged interpersonal manifestation.

### ***Taboo Transfer and Moral Degradation***

The most socially consequential pejoration in the corpus involves what may be termed taboo transfer — the movement of a word from a morally positive or neutral domain in Arabic to a taboo or socially stigmatised domain in Hausa.

Shaakìraa (Word 18) is the most extreme case in the entire corpus of twenty words and represents the most dramatic semantic distance between Arabic source and Hausa borrowed meaning. The Arabic shaakirah means 'grateful' or 'thankful' — a word of clear positive moral and spiritual connotation in Islamic discourse, since gratitude (shukr) is one of the cardinal virtues of Islamic ethics. In Hausa, shaakìraa has undergone radical taboo transfer: it refers to the female sex organ and, by extension, the male sex organ — terms that, in Hausa cultural context, are strongly taboo in formal and public discourse. The complete inversion of moral

and social register — from one of the highest Islamic virtues to one of the most socially restricted referents — represents a semantic change of extraordinary magnitude. The phonological form's divergence from recognizable Islamic vocabulary appears to have allowed its complete semantic reattribution in the Hausa lexical environment.

Tsubbu (Word 19) illustrates a domain transfer with moral degradation: the Arabic *ṭibb* means 'medicine' or 'the healing arts' — a knowledge domain of high prestige in Islamic civilisation, associated with the Prophet's medicine (*ṭibb al-nabawi*) and with the great classical physicians of the Islamic golden age. In Hausa, *tsubbu* refers to magic, sorcery, and traditional witchcraft — practices that Islam explicitly prohibits and that carry strong social stigma in Hausa-Muslim communities. The movement from the most legitimate form of Islamic therapeutic knowledge to a domain of prohibited occult practice represents not merely pejoration but theological inversion: what Islamic tradition regards as legitimate healing has been displaced by what Islamic tradition condemns as forbidden magic.

### ***Narrowing with Negative Specification***

Four pejoration cases demonstrate narrowing with negative specification — the narrowing of a broad Arabic meaning to a specific, negative Hausa application. *Haa'ulaa'i* (Word 10) in Arabic is simply a demonstrative pronoun meaning 'these' — a grammatical function word with no inherent semantic content. In Hausa, it has been narrowed and negatively specified to mean 'trouble', 'suffering', or 'bad temper'. *Jàmhuuru* (Word 12), from Arabic *jumhuur* ('the people', 'the majority', 'the public' — a neutral or even positive democratic collective term), has narrowed in Hausa to the specific negative function of 'creating quarrel' or 'causing enmity'. *Jàzaaii* (Word 13), from Arabic *jazaa'i* ('repayment', 'reward', or 'recompense' — neutral or positive depending on context), has narrowed in Hausa to 'misfortune' or 'calamity', retaining only the negative valuation sense of recompense (what one 'receives' for wrongdoing) and discarding the neutral and positive senses. *Qaharu* (Word 14), from Arabic *qahar* ('conquering', 'overcoming', 'subduing'), has narrowed to slander and false accusation in Hausa — capturing only the coercive, power-over-another dimension of the source meaning and re-specifying it in the negatively social domain of interpersonal harm.

### **Implications for Language Teaching**

The twenty words analysed in this study — eight demonstrating amelioration and twelve demonstrating pejoration — are not merely historical curiosities. They constitute a systematic body of evidence with direct, practical consequences for how languages are — and should be — taught in Hausa-Arabic bilingual contexts, including Colleges of Education and secondary schools across Northern Nigeria. The implications are organised below around five teaching principles derived from the specific evidence documented in Sections 5 and 6.

### ***False Cognates: The Naming Tradition and Pragmatic Risk***

The six naming-tradition amelioration cases — *Sàfiinà*, *Lantànaa*, *Ùnaizaa*, *Shàmsiyyàa*, *Maakaanà*, and *Mâl'uunatu* — demonstrate that a significant number of Hausa personal names are, in their Arabic source forms, semantically inappropriate or even theologically troubling. A Hausa speaker introducing herself as *Ùnaizaa* in an Arabic-speaking country may be

unknowingly presenting herself as 'she-goat' to an Arabic-speaking interlocutor; a woman named Mâl'uunatu is, in Arabic, 'the accursed one'. These are not merely amusing linguistic coincidences — they are potentially serious intercultural communication failures.

For language teachers, this evidence generates an important curriculum obligation: learners of Arabic whose mother tongue is Hausa must be explicitly taught that many Hausa personal names derived from Arabic carry meanings in Arabic that differ radically — and sometimes shockingly — from their Hausa social function as honoured personal names. Similarly, Arabic speakers learning Hausa must be taught not to interpret Hausa personal names through Arabic semantic lenses. This instruction is not about shaming the naming tradition but about equipping learners with the pragmatic awareness needed to navigate cross-cultural communication without unintended offence or embarrassment.

### ***Taboo Vocabulary and the Risk of Transfer Errors***

The taboo transfer cases — particularly shaakiraa (Word 18) — represent the most pedagogically urgent finding of this study. A Hausa learner of Arabic who encounters the Arabic word shaakirah ('grateful', 'thankful') — a word of routine occurrence in Islamic religious contexts, including the daily formula al-hamdulillah — may, if the phonological similarity triggers the Hausa association, be caught between the formal Arabic meaning and the powerful Hausa taboo association. Conversely, an Arabic speaker learning Hausa who attempts to use the Arabic-derived form to express gratitude may produce a deeply offensive utterance.

Language teachers in Arabic-Hausa bilingual contexts — including Islamiyya schools, Arabic departments in Colleges of Education, and secondary school Arabic language programmes — must address this risk directly. Teaching should explicitly identify the words where the Hausa form carries a taboo meaning that has no connection to the Arabic source, and learners must be warned against assuming semantic equivalence on the basis of phonological similarity. The broader pedagogical principle is contrastive pragmatics: learners must be taught not only what words mean in the target language but how those meanings differ from — and may conflict with — meanings carried by formally similar words in their first language.

### ***Semantic Inversion Cases: Vocabulary Teaching and Cultural Context***

The semantic inversion cases — bàraa'à (innocence → rebellion), izzàa (dignity → boastfulness), Màulaa (Lord → to beg), and tsubbu (medicine → sorcery) — all demonstrate that cultural recontextualisation can produce meanings that are not merely different from but opposed to the Arabic source. For language teaching, this has implications in both directions. For Hausa learners of Arabic, these cases reveal what may be called the 'false cognate trap': words that are phonologically recognisable as Arabic may be assumed to carry their Hausa meanings in Arabic discourse, leading to systematic comprehension and production errors. A Hausa learner hearing the Arabic word ʕizzah in a Qur'anic recitation context — where it means 'might', 'honour', and 'dignity' — may unconsciously interpret it through the Hausa lens of boastfulness and arrogance, fundamentally misunderstanding the religious text. For Arabic learners of Hausa, the inversion cases signal that formal borrowing provides no guarantee of semantic continuity. Language teachers should build explicit false-cognate identification into

vocabulary units, creating dedicated contrast exercises that require learners to compare the Arabic and Hausa meanings of the same phonological form.

The case of tsubbu (medicine → sorcery) is particularly important for Islamic studies and Arabic language teaching in Hausa contexts. Students learning about ṭibb al-nabawi (Prophetic medicine) in Arabic — a legitimate Islamic knowledge tradition — must understand that the cognate Hausa term tsubbu refers to something Islam categorically prohibits: sorcery and witchcraft. Conflating the two, or assuming that knowledge of ṭibb in an Arabic context sanctions engagement with tsubbu in a Hausa context, represents a serious theological error that language teachers must be equipped to address.

### ***Register Awareness: The Degradation of Formal Vocabulary***

The register degradation cases — m̀anaaqis̀aa (discussion → sabotage), sab̀abii (reason → quarrel), makal̀aam̀a (speech → finding fault), and j̀amhuuru (the people → creating enmity) — demonstrate that some words whose Arabic forms are associated with formal, educated discourse have been narrowed in Hausa to specifically negative interpersonal functions. This has implications for vocabulary instruction at intermediate and advanced levels.

When a Hausa student of Arabic learns the Arabic word munaqishah in the context of parliamentary debate, academic discussion, or tender proceedings, they must also be explicitly taught that its Hausa cognate m̀anaaqis̀aa carries the connotation of sabotage in everyday Hausa usage — a meaning they may inadvertently import into their Arabic production. Similarly, students learning Arabic sabab as a neutral causative term must be informed that its Hausa form sab̀abii specifies quarrel and argument. These register divergences are not merely lexical curiosities; they are sources of systematic transfer errors in learner production that explicit vocabulary instruction can prevent.

More broadly, the register degradation cases suggest a general teaching principle for Arabic vocabulary in Hausa-Arabic bilingual contexts: formal Arabic vocabulary should be taught with explicit attention to whether its Hausa cognate has undergone register degradation, because the learner's prior Hausa knowledge of the form will create interference at the register level even when the learner intellectually understands the Arabic meaning. Contrastive vocabulary lists — Arabic meaning versus Hausa cognate meaning — are a concrete and immediately implementable teaching tool that these data justify.

### ***Etymology and Meaning Awareness: A Vocabulary Teaching Principle***

The cumulative evidence from all twenty cases — eight amelioration and twelve pejoration — supports a general principle for vocabulary teaching in language contact contexts: words should be taught with explicit attention to their etymological origins and to the semantic distance between the source form and the borrowed form. This principle is directly applicable to Hausa language teaching, Arabic language teaching, and Islamic studies instruction across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

In practical terms, this means: (a) vocabulary units in Hausa language courses should include, where relevant, the Arabic source form and its original meaning, so that learners understand the process of semantic change; (b) Arabic language courses at institutions with predominantly Hausa-speaking students should include a dedicated module on Arabic-Hausa semantic divergence, using the documented cases as data; (c) teacher training curricula in Hausa language and Arabic language departments at Colleges of Education should include applied lexicology — the study of how words change meaning through borrowing — as a core component, equipping future teachers to raise awareness of these issues in their own classrooms; and (d) learning materials, including textbooks and dictionaries, should clearly differentiate between the Arabic source meaning and the Hausa borrowed meaning wherever divergence is documented.

The naming-tradition cases, in particular, suggest an engaging and culturally resonant entry point for vocabulary awareness instruction at the secondary level: asking students to research the Arabic meaning of their own names — or the names of family members — is a concrete, personally meaningful exercise that introduces the concept of semantic amelioration in a way that connects academic linguistics to lived cultural experience.

## CONCLUSION

This study has documented and analysed twenty Arabic loanwords in Hausa that provide concrete linguistic evidence of semantic change through the processes of amelioration and pejoration. The evidence demonstrates that Arabic loanwords in Hausa do not maintain fixed semantic relationships with their source forms; on the contrary, the process of borrowing creates conditions for radical meaning transformation that may operate in either direction — upward toward higher prestige and social function, or downward toward negative, taboo, or socially marginalised meanings.

Amelioration in the Arabic-Hausa data is dominated by the naming-tradition sub-process, through which words with humble, inanimate, negative, or grammatically functional meanings in Arabic are elevated to the highest social function available to a lexical item in any language: the designation of an individual human being. The six naming-tradition cases — Ùnaizaa, Mâl'uunatu, Lantànaa, Shàmsiyyàa, Sàfiinà, and Maakaanà — confirm that Hausa naming practices draw heavily on Arabic phonological forms with little or no attention to Arabic semantic content, producing the conditions for the most extreme ameliorative elevation possible.

Pejoration in the Arabic-Hausa data is more diverse in its mechanisms — encompassing semantic inversion (bàraa'à, izzàa, Màulaa), taboo transfer (shaakìraa, tsubbu), register degradation (mànaaqisàa, sabàbii, makalàamà), and narrowing with negative specification (haa'ulaa'i, jàmhuuru, jàzaa'ii, qaharu) — reflecting the variety of social, cultural, and contextual factors that can drive meaning deterioration in a loanword environment.

The implications for language teaching are substantial and direct. Teachers and curriculum designers in Hausa and Arabic language education must build explicit awareness of semantic divergence into their practice: through contrastive vocabulary instruction that compares Arabic source meanings with Hausa borrowed meanings; through dedicated attention to false cognates and taboo transfer cases that present pragmatic risks for learners; through etymological literacy that equips learners to investigate the histories of the words they use; and through the incorporation of applied lexicology into teacher training curricula at Colleges of Education. The twenty words analysed in this study are not merely historical evidence; they are teaching materials — concrete, culturally situated, and linguistically precise — for a more informed and effective approach to bilingual vocabulary instruction in Northern Nigeria and beyond.

## REFERENCES

- Abubakar, A. (1972). *El-thaqafatu el-arabiyyatu fi Nijeriya min 1750-1960*. Cairo: Daru el-Mu'arif.
- Anwar, F. (2017). Semantic change in language borrowing: The case of Arabic borrowed words in Urdu. *Language in India*, 17(2). Retrieved from [www.languageindia.com](http://www.languageindia.com)
- Aujara, A. A. (2010). *Sauye-sauyen ma'ana a kalmomin da Hausa ta aro a Larabci* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Bayero University, Kano.
- Bargery, G. P. (1934). *A Hausa-English dictionary*. A.B.U. Press.
- Bature, A. (1982). *Semantic relationship between Hausa lexical items* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Bayero University, Kano.
- Baydoun, A. A. (2004). *Students' dictionary: Arabic-English, bilingual English-Arabic*. Dar Alkotob Al-Ilmiyah.
- Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. Allen & Unwin.
- Brook, L. J. (1981). *Words in everyday life*. Macmillan.
- Campbell, L. (1998). *Historical linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dawood, T. M. (2001). *Tahliyl al-shabah bainal lughatul arabiyya wa lughatul Hausa* [Unpublished research]. Department of Arabic, Bayero University, Kano.
- Xanzaki, M. A. (2015). *Semantic change in Arabic loanwords in Hausa*. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilisation. Kuala Lumpur. Retrieved from <http://worldconference.net>
- El-wafiy, A. A. (2005). *Nash'atu el-lughati 'inda el-insani wa el-tifi* (2nd ed.). Daru Nahdati Misra.
- Elias, L. E. (n.d.). *Modern dictionary: Arabic-English*. Elias Modern Press.
- Greenberg, J. H. (1947). Arabic loanwords in Hausa. *Word*, 3(1), 85–97.
- Hallman, W. B. (2009). *Semantic change*. In J. Francis (Ed.), *Linguistics handbook*. Routledge.
- Hassan, M. (2015). *Semantic change of words entered into another language through the process of language borrowing: A case study of Arabic words in Bengali*. *Bengali International Journal of Social Science*, 1(1), 1375–1390.
- Hissket, M. (1965). *The historical background of the naturalization of Arabic loanwords in Hausa*. *African Language Studies*, 4, 18–26.
- Hornby, A. S. (2015). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (9th ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Ibrahim, M. S. (1978). Are-aren kalmomi cikin Larabci a Hausa. In Proceedings of the First International Conference on Hausa Language and Literature. Bayero University.
- Kadim, E. N. (2016). The phenomenon of borrowing in English and Arabic languages. Special Fourth Scientific Conference 2016. Retrieved from [www.ranes/articlehd/388](http://www.ranes/articlehd/388)
- Katamba, F., et al. (2005). English language: Description, variation and context. Palgrave.
- Khan, M. M., et al. (2011). The noble Qur'an in the English language (Rev. ed.). Darrusalam.
- Newman, P., et al. (2007). Modern Hausa-English dictionary. University Press.
- Omofoyewa, K. A. (2014). An inquiry into lexical affinities between Arabic and Yoruba. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 19(1). Retrieved from [www.iosrjournal.org](http://www.iosrjournal.org)
- Sapir, E. (1921). Language. Harcourt Brace & World.
- Yalwa, L. D. (1992). Arabic loanwords in Hausa. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 20(3), 101–131.
- Yusha'u, N. (2002). Lexico-semantic changes in Hausa: A synchronic approach — A case study of Ringim LGA [Unpublished bachelor's thesis]. Department of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University, Kano.
- Zarruq, R. M. (1978). Dangantakar Hausa da Larabci. In C.N.H.N. (Vol. 1, No. 1) (Eds. Dr. Ibrahim Y.Y. & Dr. Abbas R.). Bayero University.