

A NOTE ON THE HAUSA VOICELESS LABIALS

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In "Some Problems in Hausa Phonology", Greenberg [1941] discusses, among other things, the distribution of the voiceless labials and their relationship to /h/, against the background of "a general tendency in Hausa towards palatalization before front vowels and velarization before back vowels" (p. 322). Because of the complexity of the distribution of these sounds in such environments, Greenberg proposed that "in accordance with their treatment of these phonemes, we may divide Kano speakers into f -speakers and p -speakers" (p.322). The distribution of the sounds and their patterns of contrasts and replacements were set out thus:

f -speakers, where /f/ = [ɸ]:

fa faa

fYa fYaa fYe fYee fYi fYii

ha haa he hee hi hii ho hoo hu huu

p -speakers, where /p/ = [p]:

pa paa pe pee pi pii po poo pu puu

pYa pYaa

ha haa he hee hi hii

Though undeniably "neat", such an analysis seems neither phonologically defensible nor bears any relationship to what actually obtains in the language. For one thing, there does not seem to be any phonologically plausible motivation for the non-palatalization and non-velarization of the voiceless labial(s) by the p -speakers except to assume that unlike the f -speakers who do palatalize and velarize, these speakers stopped applying such rules after the contrasts between the simple and the palatalized labial and /h/ became established.

Secondly, for the above division and subsequent pattern analysis to be a reality in the dialect, alternate realizations of words containing voiceless labials before front or back vowels should be noticeable not only in the speakers' realizations of native words, but also in their realizations of loans. That is, for such categories, two intradialectal alternate realizations of the same word should be observed. As the following examples indicate, however, such is not the case:

English

'pedal'	peedàa	[pYeedàa]	
'speaker'	sìpiikàa	[sìpYiikàa]	
'officer'	ʔoopisàa/ʔoopusàa	[ʔoopYìsàa/ʔoopʷusàa]	
'photo(graph)'	hòotoo	[hòotʷoo]	*[pòotoo]
'powder'	hoodàa	[hoodàa]	*[poodàa]
'gramophone'	gàrmahòo	[gàrmahòo]	*[gàrmápòo]
'police'	pòolis	[pʷòolìs]	*[hòolìs]
'pump'	pampòo	[pampʷòo]	*[panhòo]
'shampoo'	shàmpuu	[shàmpʷuu]	*[shànhuu]

Regardless of the phonetic alternant a given speaker favours ([p], [ɸ], or, as is at least now found with certain speakers, [f]), the variable and non-variable realizations of the voiceless labials before front or back vowels is uniformly the same. That is, for all speakers, the voiceless labial is obligatorily fronted (palatalized) before front vowels. Before back vowels, velarization is optionally applied. Therefore, the alternate realizations of words comprising voiceless labials are due not to the variant treatments of those sounds by p - or f -speakers, but to the differing persistence of the palatalization and velarization rules with respect to the voiceless labials. Further, contrary to the assumption on which the above division was made, the use of any of these sounds ([p], [ɸ] or [f]) by a given speaker of Kano Hausa, is based not so much on such straightlaced divisions but, in general, on purely stylistic factors. However, it is entirely natural that certain speakers may, as a rule, prefer the use of one or the other of the phonetic variants in their speech.

The tacit acceptance of this proposition is probably the reason why all three alternants are, in current practice, both phonologically and orthographically (except in certain specific cases as recommended by the Working Party on Hausa Orthography [1972:3]) represented by a single symbol, f. Though the orthographic representation of these sounds by f may be accepted as simply a matter of convention and/or affectation, phonologically such a practice constitutes an unnecessary abstraction. This is so because the use of f as the underlying representation (or phoneme) of the voiceless labials is in reality a theoretically indefensible creation of an isolated and unnecessary phoneme class in the language. But since voiceless labials are a part of the phonetic inventory of the language, it is desirable that one of the phonetic alternates be used to represent the others in phonological analyses. Otherwise, all three will have to be indicated in all instances. Since the use of /f/ will constitute a theoretical misrepresentation, it will have to be replaced by another more plausibly acceptable form. One way of achieving this aim might be through the adoption of the model for representing variable representations, which the voiceless labials in Hausa are, of Natural Generative Phonology. The model for delimiting such a representation

in this theory which rejects unnecessary abstraction (see Vennemann [1972; 1974a, b] and Hooper [1976]) is based on the assumption that variable representations of the same underlying form are relatable to one another by variable rules. Further, the use of such variable representations in speech is determined by the speech styles and tempos of the languages in which they occur. For this reason, Hooper [1976:112] suggests that "underlying representations should be based on the most explicit, naturally occurring spoken forms", i.e. forms used in the careful speech style. The variant forms used in the artificially explicit style (see Labov [1972:31]) and the more casual speech styles can then be derived from these by the use of adaptive or variable rules.

By adopting the above principles for the present case, and on the basis of the following observations with respect to the use of the voiceless labials in Kano Hausa, it is possible to determine which of the voiceless labial alternates can justifiably be used as the underlying representation of the voiceless labials:

1. The use of any of the voiceless labial surface realizations, [f], [p], or [ɸ] in the Kano dialect of Hausa is determined mainly by the social and/or conversational rules of the language applicable during the speech event.
2. But as a rule, the alternant used in the artificially explicit speech style (relatable in most cases to Hausa/English bilingual or pseudo-bilingual speakers) is [f]; the careful speech style alternant is [p] and the casual/fast speech style alternant is [ɸ].
3. All three alternants obey the same P-rules uniformly.

These observations and the principles that NGP advocates as the bases for representing underlying forms therefore suggest that the variable used in careful speech would be used as the underlying representation of the voiceless labials. The other variables (alternants) can then be derived from it, where necessary, in the following way:

1. /p/ > [f] / artificially explicit speech style
2. /p/ > [ɸ] / casual/fast speech styles

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