

DEARTH OF HAUSA CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

Lack of Hausa Children's written literature has become an issue in schools for children's learning. Therefore, the paper examines Hausa written Literature with an aptitude for children and highlights the importance of such books to the development of Hausa language and literature for the growth and development of the Hausa child. The content of the paper is on the growth of Hausa literature and Hausa language, using three selected primers to illustrate, and ends discussion with some suggestions and recommendations on the ways out.

Introduction

In various schools today lack of Hausa written children's literature has become a threat to the Hausa child. As he cannot find new books written in Hausa for his usage. The Hausa writers today mostly concentrate in writing for adults.

Andrizejewski and Pilaszewicz (1985) noted that written Hausa literature did not begin to appear until the early 19th century, even though Hausa had a broad gamut of literary genres which were transmitted through oral tradition. In 1933, the Translation Bureau at Zaria announced a literary competition for prose work and this led to the emergence of the first generation of imaginative prose writing in Hausa language. Yahaya (1986), in a paper presented at a workshop on creative writing in Hausa, Organized by Nigerian Book Development Council, Federal Ministry of Education, held at Durbar Hotel, Kaduna, titled "A History of Literary Tradition in Hausa", also traced the growth and development of Hausa language and literature in Hausa land to the oral traditions and the influence of Arabs.

Skinner (1971: 167-187) in "Realism and Fantasy in Hausa Literature" observed that Hausa tales like most, were intended mainly for children, though usually told by adult, probably with at least some moral purpose. The question now is, is there such thing as children's literature vis-à-vis a general literature of a people or a nation? The answer to this question is Yes. Children's literature, the world over, exist on its own right and exhibits qualities peculiar to it. The development of children's literature in any society is closely related to its educational development, its literary awareness and the availability of opportunities for buying books and for reading the books.

A Hausa child like other African children derived their early literary experiences from moonlight play sessions and storytelling art sessions. From an early age, they tell stories on their way to the farm, bush to fetch firewood or the stream to fetch water or to the market to sell farm produce. This is captured in the earliest Hausa language/literature primer called *Aliyu da Fadimatu*. Because much of their (children's) time was spent with adults around them, they developed language skills and a sense of literary appreciation from an early age. The moonlight plays such as "*Wasannin Tashe*" (1980) by M. B. Umar was such a text that evidently depicted oral and informal children's performative arts among the Hausa people. However, it was Umaru Dembo's *Wasannin Yara* (1970), that captured all other forms of Hausa children's play namely, poetic recitations, quizzes, riddles and jokes and some physical jumps such as "skip and tap!"

It has been noted that since 1976, children's literature has become a subject of national interest in Nigeria and elsewhere. The year 1979 was tagged by UNESCO as the International year of the Child. However, creative writing for Nigerian children as well as Hausa children is a growing but relatively recent phenomenon. For example, a full length novel for Nigerian children was written in 1960 by Cyprian Ekwensi in the English language and was published by Cambridge University Press. This was the *Drummer Boy*. Before British Missionaries introduced Western Education in the area known as Nigeria today at about 1842, which in turn led to the need for books, Nigeria derived their literary and aesthetic pleasure as well as their education from oral tradition. Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya's "Oral Art and Socialization Process, a Socio-Folkloric Perspective of Initiation From Childhood to Adult Hausa Community Life" captures cogently the role and function of oral literature in the formation of the personality of a Hausa child.

Definition of Children's Literature

In this plethora of books, there is the need to categorically define children's literature. Children's literature has become a subject of study and academic disciplines in Colleges of Education, Universities and other centres of learning, but there are always the problems of definition. To fully grasp the concept and avoid contradictions, we shall examine who a child is, what literature means and what actually do we mean when we talk about children's literature.

Children are generally regarded as the younger members of the human species aged between two and eighteen years old. The Concise Oxford dictionary, describes a child as "An Offspring of an adult couple". To a Hausa man, a child or "Yaro" is "Karamin mutum wanda bai san ciwon kansa ba bai mallaki hankalin kansa bad an shekara uku zuwa sha biyar"/A child is someone who is between the ages of three and fifteen and has not reached the age of maturity.

Literature is defined as the "sum total of human experiences fictionalized". Literature has also been described by Skinner (1980) as the expression of the best and worse in a culture through the medium of language". Most of the definitions of children's literature available in scholarly circles emerged from Europe and we shall examine a few in order to understand the qualities that make up children's literature. Darton (1982) described children books as "works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure and not primarily to teach them nor solely to make them good nor to keep them profitably busy".

Ray (1982) in her book said that, "a good children's book is one which has a good strong plot, clear characterization and a clearly unsophisticated style".

Andzayi (2002: 8-9) defined children literature as books that could often be read to children. They are also books that children can read themselves for pleasure and other purposes.

Children's literature can therefore be seen as that piece of literary writing which draws its subject from the child's world view and which is written in a language and style the child can comprehend.

The Growth of Primers

With so much Hausa written matter cropping up and filing up for publication due to assorted school text book such as "*Ka Koyi Karatu Series* and *Karamin Sani Series*", the Hausa prolific novelists, Dr. Abubakar Imam alongside other Hausa elites such as Alhaji Nuhu Bamali, A. Abdul Malik Mani, A. Usman Mairiga, A. Ahmadu Ingawa. A. Abdulkadri Makama, A. Abubakar Tunau and Mal. Abu Musawa produced primers. The setting up of the North Region Literature Agency, popularly known as NORLA in 1953 to augment the activities of the existing Literature Bureau saw yet another concerted effort for the then government to accelerate the production of Hausa literature with which to meet the expanding demands by schools, as well as for use in the newly launched programme of *Yaki Da Jahilci* (War-against Ignorance).

There are seven types of written Hausa fiction: such as primers fused into language teaching text. Books like *Mutum da Sana'ar Sa* and *Hausa BA Dabo Ba Ne* which are for general readers, are meant to document Hausa culture. *Aliyu da Fadimatu* and *Bala da Babiya* are texts for children's educational development. While *Gandoki* and *Iliya dan Mai Karfi* are juvenile story books. *Tafiya Mabudin Ilmi* is a travelogue. For works on translation, there are *Dare Dubu da Daya/Alfulaila Wa laila* from Arabic, and *Magana Jari Ce/stories* from different books (wisdom is an Asset), and as history or legends and myth, is *Amina Sarauniyar Zazzau*.

This article has selected three particular texts for the purpose of close and critical analysis to buttress the fact that Hausa literature has not a definite written literature for Hausa children as evident in the oral and unwritten literatures. The text are: *Aliyu Da Fadimatu*, *Karamin Sani* Vol. I & II, and *Sauna Jac*.

- a) **Aliyu Da Fadimatu** (1960) was published as a primer to aid in teaching Hausa language and by inference, Hausa culture to children. The book has about eight pages. The writer is not known. Pictures are drawn graphically depicting the story line. Thus, words match pictures so that a child reader could look and retell the story. This interesting text is meant to teach Hausa language in particular, but it has instances of description of a Hausa child life style. The story is about children, a male and a female, Aliyu and Fadimatu. The story is therefore reflective

of an age group – pupils in primary 1 – 3. They, Aliyu and Fadimatu, are presented as dutiful and obedient children who are helpful to their parents at home and in the farm. The story tells us, using simple statement sentences, how Aliyu and Fadimatu travelled from home to the market. It is not a history or true story, but an imaginative story. It is only a model for teaching of words, sentences, description and grammatical laws of both written and spoken Hausa language. The text may not be literary but it stimulates creative thought and imagination.

- b) **Karamin Sani Vol. I & II.** (1973) Mal. Sidi Sayudi Muhammad, Jean Boyd and John Hare co-wrote a serial *Karamin Sani* Vol. I & II with a sub-title “Sabuwar Hanya Series”/New Approaches a publication of the Northern Nigerian Publication Company, Zaria. These volumes are also meant for teaching Hausa language and literature. However, literature is presented in form of “Labari or Labarai”/Tale or Tales and as pieces of passages whereby the pupil’s remembrance skill in comprehension and summary is tested. In volume one, there are three fictive stories: “*Labarin Gafiya Wadda ta Saci Rakumi*”/Story of a Rat that Stole a Camel (pp. 1 – 3), “*Labarin Wata Giwa_Da Madinki/* a Story of an Elephant and a Tailor (pp 6 – 8), and *Da-na-Sani Shi ne Karshen mai_Girman Kai*/Regret is the End of pompous person (pp. 10-10-12). These are short stories. They are also centred on teaching moral lessons. These stories are also descriptive. One could say that there is a seeming borrowing from folktales and fables. Though the intent is to teach Hausa language skills, the stories are incorporated to test pupil’s intelligence and develop their vocabulary.

In volume II of *Karamin Sani*, there are two stories; “*Labarin Wadansu Wawaye*”/The Story of some Fools (pp. 52-55) and *Bakatsine mai kan Kwarya*”/A Katsina man with Calabash Head (pp. 60-62). We could therefore see that these texts have been designed to appeal to children. The books have been made reader-friendly by having rich and interesting pictures. The letters are also bold and attractive.

- c) **In Sauna Jac**, the appeal is dramatically pictorial as the story is both drawn as cartoon stripes as well as written in simple prose. The popularity of this text among primary and secondary school pupils/students among Hausa people was enormous. However, today there hardly any written Hausa imaginative prose meant for the Hausa child. *Sauna Jac* tells a story of a young male child growing up and his numerous experiences as he was becoming an adult. Thus, we see a story of a Hausa boy adjusting to modern times and its complexities. For example, Sauna did not have any proper paper qualification after his primary school as he could not secure the prestigious white collar job of being a clerk as he desired. Rather, we see him trying his hands on all trades, and we see him as a Jack-of-all trades, trying everything to survive both as a social being and a human being. The most interesting thing about this text in the eyes of the children, lies in the characterization of Sauna. He is portrayed as a village pumpkin who gains experiences from travels, living in a city and a host of others. Though he is almost a simpleton, the artist presents him as an experienced person undergoing some transitions. *Sauna Jac* therefore aims to educate through humour, it is satirical in such a way that children should learn to be above him than to imitate him.

The survey of various Hausa writers, critics and scholars (Furniss, Skinner, Yaro Yahaya) indicate that there is a paucity of written Hausa children’s literature in the corpus of imaginative prose writing in particular as well as in other genres. The survey above notes that there exists certain text or stories written specifically for the Hausa child but the stories are more fused in primers meant to teach Hausa language proficiency. These evaluations further confirm the fact that Hausa as a people have not evolved any systematic formal and serious means of training their children through written creativity as in writing children’s literature or stories. The few that exists are coincidentally in the market not because the writers deliberately wrote the books with children at heart.

The various types of primers identified wrote on general readership for both Hausa speakers, learners, and a sort of documentation inherited from the colonial legacy. Such books as *Karamin Sani*

Kunkumi ne (1944) by Rupert East and Abubakar Imam, *Labarun Na Da Da Yanzu* (1931) by Whitting Charles and Muhammadu Hadeja. What is definitely lacking therefore, is a written imaginative text, whether in prose or poetry or drama for children in Hausa language. This is the essence of this paper.

Conclusion

Children are the future. A well educated child would definitely deliver his citizenry from extinction and penury. This article advocates for immediate rethink on children's written literature for it is Hausa language which gives the Hausa thinking form, sequence and coherence and it is by mean of Hausa language that the substance of the Hausa people as an entity comes into shape.

Recommendations

The National Policy on Education (2004) has made ample provisions for the development of indigenous languages and literatures; the Nation should not deny the citizenry of using indigenous languages through literacy and literature. All the language policies approved by the nation especially those in the *National Policy on Education* should be effectively implemented regularly monitored and reviewed.

There is the need to devise a way to recognize the writers of indigenous language and literature, by awarding merits and National awards to them.

Literary and Linguistic Associations such as Association of Nigerian Authors and "Kungiyar Marubuta" should ensure deliberate creation, cultivation and sustenance of children's literature in the indigenous languages.

Individual writers should also join forces with linguistics in the field of Hausa language to imitate what Yoruba and Igbo languages writers have been cultivating for their children.

Universities and Colleges of Education and Department of Hausa languages should join forces to promote Hausa scholarship to make Hausa language and culture a life-time pre-occupation, for; out of well over 250 languages in present day Nigeria, Hausa was, perhaps, the first to be committed to writing. This began with the mastery of the Arabic pattern of writing which gave birth of the *Ajami* which is actually Hausa written with Arabic characters before the arrival of colonialism and *Boko/Roman* script. But where are we today?

Finally, the book industry should, with the supervision of the Book Development Council and in collaboration with the Nigerian Educational Research Council, declare a State of Emergency on the dearth of written children's literature in Nigerian with particular references to literature in the indigenous languages such Hausa language.

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