

Mada Language Adaptation: Clans, Classifications and Skills

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ABSTRACT

This review on Mada Language Adaptation examines a brief history and originality of Mada people, the language classifications, clans and skills vis-a-viz listening, speaking, reading and writing in Mada language. The Mada people are predominately farmers and found in Nasarawa and Kaduna States. Some of them are found in Abuja, F.C.T. Mada people are located in North-Western part of Cameroon. The work has recommended ways forward to improve Mada Language adaptation to include taking advantage of existing works in Mada language to improve the listening, speaking, reading and writing of the language.

Keywords: *Language Skills, Mada Language, adaptation*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols (Sapir, 1921). Language is a means of communication, and communication almost always takes place within some sort of social context (Amberg and Vause, 2012). This is why effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it. Language is the divine gift that distinguishes man from animals (Husain 2015). According to Amberg and Vause (2012), language is integrally intertwined with our notions of who we are on both the personal and the broader, societal levels. Husain (2015) argues that language does mean a collection of words strung together in sentences but each word having a separate identity and meaning. According to Amberg and Vause (2012):

Language reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. You'll also learn that languages are rule-governed systems made up of

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signs, so for an outsider to learn the language of a community, he or she must learn which signs are meaningful and which are not.

Language is not random behaviour but is systematic where certain orderings are accepted as having prescribed meanings (Husain 2015). According to Sapir (1921), it is true that in a certain sense the individual is predestined to talk, but that is due entirely to the circumstance that he is born not merely in nature, but in the lap of a society that is certain, reasonably certain, to lead him to its traditions. However, absence of language is mere dearth of communication (Sadiku, 2015).

The Mada language belongs to the Benue-Congo of the Eastern Plateau cluster (Zaigi, 2014). Since the Ham (Jaba) who most of the archaeologists seem to agree are the direct descendants of the makers of the Nok civilization are also members of the Eastern Plateau cluster of the Benue–Congo, the Mada and the Ham might have been one and the same people (Moore and Durban, 1935).

Mada is a regionally important Plateau language of Nigeria, with many dialects. It is a highly tonal language (Hammarström; Forkel, Haspelmath and Bank, 2016). Mada is one of the over 6,500 languages spoken in the world (Olaofe, 1996). It is one of the minority languages spoken in Nigeria and Cameroon but one of the major languages spoken in Nasarawa State, parts of Kaduna State and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and North - Western part of Cameroon. Mada people have a First Class Traditional Ruler in Nasarawa State, His Royal Highness, Mr. Samson Gamu Yaren, the Chun Mada.

Mada is one of the major tribes and languages in Nasarawa State as Dandaura and Ngheren (1997) explain that the original home of the Mada lies in the present Akwanga Local Government and Akwanga West (Rinze) Development Area. Dandaura and Ngheren also explain that the Mada have neighbours with Kokona Local Government Area to the West, Sanga and Jema'a Local Government Areas of Kaduna State to the North-West, Wamba Local Government Area to the East and Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area, Akpata Development Area to the South. Hammarström, Forkel, Haspelmath and Bank (2016) has revealed that there are about 50,000 Mada people living in Monren Area, Tokombere District of North-Western Cameroon. Continuing on the originality of the Mada people, Dandaura and Ngharen (1997) opine that a migration narrative theory simply explains that the Mada are a break away unit of a large group, probably the Jukun society as there exists many similarities, social and occupational paraphernalia between the two tribes till date with a man then called Mada a courageous hunter who led Mada people from Wukari through Keffi where a few of them settled while the rest proceeded to wards Gburmwa Hills in the present Akwanga Local Government Area. Therefore, the aim of this study

is examine the history and originality of Mada people, the language classifications, clans and skills vis-a-viz listening, speaking, reading and writing in Mada language.

Mada Language: Classifications and Clans

Mada has been classified as part of the Plateau language group (Greenberg 1963), Hansford, Bendor-Samuel and Stanford (1976), Gerhardt (1989) and Crozier and Blench (1992) have followed this view. Mada was put together with Ninzam, Ayu, Che, Ninkyop and some other languages as part of Plateau IV (Blench, 2006). More recently, this group has been christened ‘Ninzic’ in the light of the numerous languages with a –nin- element in their ethnonym (Blench, 2006).

According to Crozier and Blench (1992), the principal modern work on Mada language is Price (1989), which covers the phonology and orthography of Mada spoken in Rija, a village central to Mada country. Mada has an extensive dialect network and there is quite a high level of variation from village to village (Blench, 2006). Price (1989) gives a valuable comparative wordlist in different dialects, which shows that at least some of them have markedly different phonology from Rija Mada and probably have been influenced by Eggon (Blench, 2006). Greenberg (1963), Dandaura and Ngheren (1997) and Price (2006) as quoted by Saleh (2016) point out that Mada language is classified under the Benue-Congo linguistic sub-group, a branch of the larger Niger-Congo African Language family. The most basic convention of any language community is the acceptance of a set of signs that convey meaning; these signs could be sounds or words or punctuation marks on a page or even silence in a conversation; any of these things is able to carry meaning (Amberg and Vause, 2012).

While Sabo (2010) presents 35 Clans in Mada, Ngheren, Mua'azu and Saleh (2014) present 36 Clans in this order:

1. Abam
2. Ade
3. Aka
4. Bohar (Kəja)
5. Gbagyi
6. Gbənje
7. Gbugyor
8. Gohon
9. Gbuncu
10. Gbukun
11. Gwadi
12. Kədon

13. Kəgbə
14. Kəmbre
15. Kəmwa
16. Kəngbɔ (Ningo)
17. Kənzwe
18. Kwandar
19. Məntə
20. Lalle
21. Njoto
22. Mɔcu
23. Njugban
24. Nighan
25. Ncɔ
26. Ncukpə
27. Nduwon
28. Njida
29. Nkwɔ
30. Nunkucun
31. Ntsakpə
32. Rice
33. Ringa
34. Rinzɛ
35. Tsu
36. Koko

Mada Language Adaptation Skills

Language is a system of rules or conventions because a single language convention, for example, a single word, a pause, or an alphabet letter, does not tell us much beyond its immediate meaning (Amberg and Vause, 2012). Thus, we usually combine these conventions together to convey larger meanings. According to Morehouse (2017), there are four skills of language, which are a set of four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend and produce spoken language for proper and effective interpersonal communication. Sadiku (2015) opines that the four skills are the pinnacles of language which will take you to greater heights, though separate, they are bound together with an inseparable bond. These skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Morehouse, 2017). These skills give learners scaffolder support, opportunities to create, contexts in which to use the language for exchanges of real information, evidence of their own ability and, most importantly, confidence (Sadiku, 2015). The

four language skills in any language are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Williams, 1990). Williams further explains that:

The various skills and aspect of language are interrelated: listening, and speaking, reading and writing, involving the same time correct and appropriate use of phonology, lexis use of phonology, lexis and syntax Some individuals learn a language readily through causal perception (sense of hearing).

Language is an essential skill which comes naturally under psychomotor (Husain, 2015). According to Lewis (Nd), listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are fundamental to language learning. Husain (2015) presents these skills in a diagram as shown below:

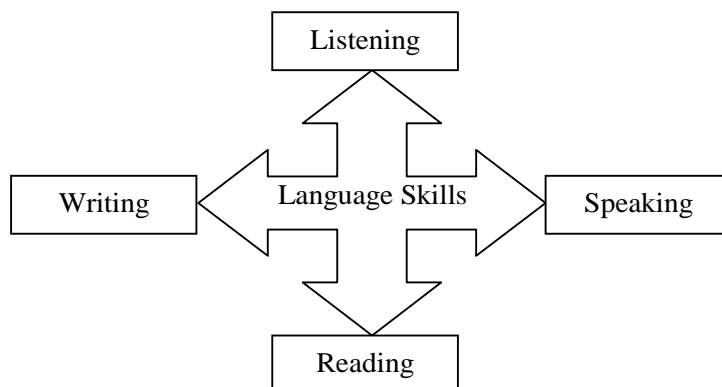


Figure 1: Language Skills

Listening to Mada Language

Listening is the first language skill; it is the first of two natural language skills, which are required by all natural spoken languages (Morehouse, 2017). Listening is a requirement in language learning. It is not merely hearing: it is a state of receptivity that permits understanding of what is heard and grants the listener full partnership in the communication process (Sadiku, 2015). According to Morehouse (2017), it is what is known as a receptive skill, or a passive skill, as it requires us to use our ears and our brains to comprehend language as it is being spoken to us. Therefore, listen to Mada discussions, Mada music, Radio or Television programmes in Mada language, and other discussions, in Mada language are some of the ways Mada language can be learned and spoken. Another means are watching VCDs in Mada language for example, Glo Kyu, Bwar, Nzε and so on.

Speaking Mada Language

Speaking is the second of two natural language skills; it is what is known as a productive skill, or an active skill, as it requires us to use our vocal tract and our brains to correctly produce language through sound (Morehouse, 2017). According to Sapir (1921), it is true that psychologists speak of the localization of speech in the brain. This can only mean that the sounds of speech are localized in the auditory tract of the brain, or in some circumscribed portion of it, precisely as other classes of sounds are localized; and that the motor processes involved in speech (such as the movements of the glottal cords in the larynx, the movements of the tongue required to pronounce the vowels, lip movements required to articulate certain consonants, and numerous others) are localized in the motor tract precisely as are all other impulses to special motor activities. Speaking is the most effective thing you can do to improve your language skills (Lewis, Nd). Speaking is all special; it has many masks - public, friendly or academic contexts are few from the lot (Sadiku, 2015). Greetings/pleasantries, compliments, brief discussions, long discussions are the beginning steps to learn Mada language.

Reading Mada Language

According to Morehouse (2017), reading is the third language skill. As with listening, it is a receptive or passive skill, as it requires us to use our eyes and our brains to comprehend the written equivalent of spoken language. In reading, control is lodged in the visual tract of the brain over all those processes of visual recognition (Sapir, 1921). Morehouse (2017) states that reading is one of the two artificial language skills, as not all natural spoken languages have a writing system. Reading is fun-way to knowledge hunt; it brings wisdom and through reading, we learn a lot and it is the most prominent language skill (Sadiku, 2015). But one of the problems of Mada language remains getting people to read it (Blench, 2016). There are pamphlets, Bible chapters in Madalanguage to read, for instance,

“Rɛn Zeze ɔtu Yɛso Krisɛti yan Marku car”.

Rɛn Zeze ɔtu Yɛso Krisɛti yan Yɔna car”.

We can also through reading, translate books on Mada though written in English or other languages. Books like Mada People and Culture (Dandaura and Ngheren 1997), Kagwor: the Stubborn Boy (Chikada 2008), the Mada of Central Nigeria (Sabo 2010), A dictionary of Mada (Blench and Kato, 2010), Ban Mada (Ngharen, Mua'zu and Saleh 2014) and many others written on Mada which we might not have come across. We can see publications such as "Mada Pronouns", Mada Dictionary, "Mada Phonemes and the Learning of English as a Second Language" on Mada language in the international network.

Writing Mada Language

Morehouse (2017) opines that writing is the fourth language skill; as with speaking, it is a productive or active skill, it requires us to use our hands and our brains to produce the written symbols that represent spoken language. A writing system is "a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systemic way" and related to the terms of script and orthography (Coulmas 1999). Alongside 'writing system' come the terms 'script' and 'orthography'. A script is the physical implementation of the writing system. Orthography consists of the general rules for using a script in a particular language (Cook, Vaid and Bassetti, 2009). Along with reading, it is one of the two artificial language skills, as not all natural spoken languages have a writing system (Morehouse, 2017). Writing system has two distinctive connotations; it involves the general ideas of writing and the specific languages (Cook and Bassetti 2005). For many language learners, writing is the first time they actively try to produce language, rather than consume the language (Lewis, Nd). Mada language did not have a standard script and standard orthography. However, a writing system was devised for Mada language in 1999 and this was made the basis of the literacy programme (Blench, 2016). Hence, we can start scribbling words or even letters in the language. We can write names in Mada language; for example,

Wunka, Gyunka, Mbət, Oor Mbeto, Yuk, yake Gyunka, TŌnzε etc.

We can send texts to parents, friends, colleagues, contemporaries, children and so on in the language - wu shen na? wu nye ha?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has brought to fore the need for true identity. Speaking the Mada language is identifying with the Mada culture as language and culture are inseparable. For Mada language and culture to be preserved, all hands must be on deck - parents, elders, youth and children must make deliberate and conscious efforts to listen, speak, read and write the Mada language. It is the only treasure handed down to posterity as such should not go into extinction. Mada language committee should make charts and pamphlets available for both children and adults; this will help in first knowledge or contact with standard Mada orthography. We should endeavour to listen to Mada Radio programs on NBS or Precious FM, this will improve our knowledge of listening skills and Mada Language generally. Primary school teachers of Mada descent in the rural areas should co-mix and code-switch (using both Mada and English languages) to teach primaries 1-3. This will help in preserving the Mada Language and culture. Pastors in the rural areas of Mada descent should also use code-mixing and code-switching in their sermons in the Churches. Conscious efforts should be made to read the Bible in Mada language as well as other Mada written contents.

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