

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS  
OF ABUSIVE EXPRESSIONS IN HAUSA

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## Introduction

Language is an important aspect of culture. It is flexible, mobile, and ever changing. It is also a tool through which a society or group expresses its culture. In any given speech community, members of such a community constitute a kind of social unit. They share a certain linguistic repertoire which they use to interpret their speech in all contexts. Civilization of any kind would not be possible if there were no mutual understanding that language has made possible. Through language, people communicate effectively, share knowledge, information, experience, understand each other, persuade, and even convert or control others.

A number of studies on sociolinguistic issues have so far indicated that language, culture and society are interrelated in the sense that they depend on each other in order to function effectively (Trudgill 1974/1980). They are all concerned with population units such as ethnic groups, tribes, communities, states or nations. In all these units, language is the main issue in their organization. Studies in anthropology, or to be precise, on ethnography of communication reveal that language could best be studied by reference to its structure and use, in social and cultural contexts (cf. C. O. Frake 1964; D. Hymes 1962; J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes 1964, 1972). In reaction to Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence (with respect to autonomous linguistics theory) Hymes (1972) tries to deal with the problems connected with the issue of competence. He introduces the concept of communicative competence which is mainly concerned with psychological, cultural, and social rules of language use in social settings. In essence, this concept suggests that any member of a speech community does not only acquire the rules of grammar of his language, but he also acquires the knowledge of cultural and social values of his society. In addition, he also acquires rules in the choice of the appropriate situations and contexts in his speech community. Furthermore, in any speech community "a verbal performer, to be successful, must know what his culture considers humorous, tragic, ironic and so on" (*ibid*). It is probably true that all speech communities involve some cultural or social structural knowledge for their adequate performance and appropriate realization (C. M. Kernan and K. T. Kernan 1975).

This clearly indicates that speech acts<sup>1</sup> such as proverbs, poems, myths, tales, insults, songs, riddles etc, involve performative utterances. Their functions, content, message, structure and origins have to be explained. Also the status of the participating interlocutors has to be taken into consideration. In this paper, I want to examine the status of abusive expressions/insults<sup>2</sup> in Hausa community. That is an attempt will be made to find out how abusive expressions are viewed by the community, what types of people use it, why, to whom and, when it is actually used.

### How is Abuse Viewed in Hausa Community?

Abuse is a kind of communicative act that is used in some way to hurt or injure the feelings of someone (or even to lower his self-esteem). The abusive expressions directed to the addressee are viewed to be vulgar or contemptuous.<sup>3</sup> It is generally considered a bad act and taboo because it is prohibited both by "social etiquette" and religion. However, there are certain instances where they carry a different interpretation, depending on the context and the relationship of the persons involved. This indicates that abuse/insult is one of those things that have a dual character in the sense that "it can be used to reinforce assumptions about the relative status and hierarchy of the speakers and listeners and so perpetuate the wider status quo" (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1964:221; Sharman 1969:115, quoted in D. Parkin 1980). Secondly, "abusive expressions/insults are also among those critical areas of language use which, simply because they are ritualized. . . contain the potential for the starkest possible contrasts of meaning" (D. Parkin 1980). This is so because abuse/insult is basically an aspect of behavior realized in an interpersonal speech act that essentially involves the use of language which has a great socio-cultural importance.<sup>4</sup> The language used is also semantically determined in terms of the relative status of the persons involved in such an act. But the general view that will first come to the mind of a native speaker is that, abuse is a bad thing which is disapproved by the culture. Therefore one should as much as possible refrain from it because doing it suggests that he violates the rules of conduct that are expected of him, which will normally be followed by some serious social and religious<sup>5</sup> consequences.

### What Categories of People get Involved in the Abusive Act?

#### Husband and Wife Conflict:

Husband and wife sometimes abuse/insult each other when there is friction or misunderstanding between them. They may accuse and

insult each other on suspicion of unfaithfulness of one to the other. The husband may accuse and abuse his wife for indulging in a kind of improper marital relations with another person. The same accusation can be leveled against the husband by the wife. The friction can also be due to cheating or selfishness in other aspects of married life, such as feeding, clothing, health care, jobs or rearing of children, condoning hear-say about the kind of life either of the two is leading without the knowledge of the other. The kinds of expression used are sometimes so strong that in many cases lead to a very unfortunate situation/event. That is, it can lead to a separation or divorce. The husband might abuse his wife as daughter of destitute/poor, devils, cantankerous, ill-mannered etc, and the wife might respond/trade-back with anger and denials. She may even claim that the husband is the worst kind of husbands that any woman could ever imagine. In other words he is good for nothing. She might even go further by saying that since their meeting/marriage (as couples irrespective of the number of years they have been together), she has been a battered wife. Furthermore, she can even add, by saying that throughout their married life, she did not gain anything from him, except sufferings, lack of any good care or love, humiliations etc.

#### Parent - Children:

Parents sometimes insult their children when the latter do something bad. For instance, the parent may abuse/insult the child by the use of derogatory expressions either verbal or gestural or even both. This is done for corrective purposes. The expressions usually made to abuse/insult are words and phrases like *ubanka/ki* (some people also say *ubaka/\*ki* cf. R. G. Schuh 1974 for historical linguistics account on the use of the inalienable and alienable forms) "your mother" (m./f.), *uwaka/i* (*uwarka/ki*) "your mother" (m./f.), *d'an/ 'yar banza* "son/daughter of a bitch/stupid" etc. Note that semantically, the word(s) or expression used is meant to rebuke the child and make him/her behave in a manner that will conform to the norms of the society. This abuse/insult will make the child to stop being naughty so that the parents will not make such expression(s) again by attributing it to the person they value and revere to a great esteem. Furthermore, most of these expressions are elliptical constructs which are normally very heavy for someone to utter. Note further that, if it were two adults who get involved in this kind of situation, the full-loaded language (i.e. the attributes) usually used may lead to a very serious confrontation.<sup>6</sup>

## Co-wives:

Co-wives usually abuse/insult each other when the relationship between them deteriorates. This is normally due to extreme jealousy that eventually creates hate or friction. The abuse/insult can either be direct or indirect. They accuse each other, especially if something is wrong or is happening to the husband or the family as a whole. For instance, the abuse/insult can be done when one of them is involved in the activity of pounding or grinding grains while at the same time singing, cursing and accusing the other(s). In the song, she insults the other(s) by using some innuendos. She even accuses the other(s) of doing various misdeeds. The song is sometimes in this form:<sup>7</sup>

<i>Kê 'yar gwamma 'yar sabai</i>	Oh you daughter of regret and wranglers (causers of evil)
<i>Kê 'yar ta da zaune tsaye</i>	Oh you that brings trouble
<i>Ta yi zurum, ta yi zugudum<sup>8</sup></i>	She sat quite despondently (flaccidly)
<i>Sai tana jiran d'an akushi</i>	Well, she is waiting for food in a (wooden) bowl
<i>Wanda bai kai gara ba,</i>	How can one who did not give wedding food presents,
<i>yâi jiran d'an akushi?</i>	will s/he expect food in a wooden bowl?
<i>To, sake batu uwar tsiya,</i>	Oh, well change the topic mistress of quarrel,
<i>Sake batu, naman dala kika ci<sup>9</sup></i>	Change the topic mistress of quarrel, you ate two shillings worth of meat.
<i>Ni na ga kumfalalon gujjiya</i>	I saw a useless woman (kernelless Bambara groundnuts)
<i>Binta na ga kumfalalon gujjiya</i>	Oh, Binta I saw a useless woman
<i>Mijinki bai dace ba etc.</i>	Your husband is not lucky.

## Children:

Children abuse/insult each other when fighting. They do it whether they know the meaning of the expressions they use or not. They may also engage in games of abuse (i.e. trading back and forth type which involve sequencing rules.<sup>10</sup> Children are always discouraged to insult people older than them or even their peers.

## Peer - Peer group(s):

Peer groups abuse/insult each other either as a joke (i.e. just for fun, in which case the actual functional meaning of the abusive expression(s) does not apply here, since it is immaterial), or when there is a misunderstanding/friction between them. Abuse/insult here can lead to a very serious physical fight as noted above. That is, the person to whom the abusive expression(s) is directed feels that his parent (who is actually the carrier of such a derogatory and de-humanizing expression(s) is undignified to the highest degree. Hence, he trades back with a more serious expression or even a blow to the other person who earlier abused him.

## Teacher - Student:

Teachers sometimes abuse/insult their students for being naughty or not paying attention to what they are being taught. Such kind of abuse/insult is done for just corrective purposes and may sometimes be followed by lashes so that they do not end up as *'yan shagwaba* (spoilt children).<sup>11</sup>

## Casual: Non-serious abuse/insult:

People who perform an amazing or incredible act are sometimes showered with abusive/insulting expressions just for complements, or appreciation or even praise. Such expressions are like the following:

(1ms)	(1fs)	(pl.)	
<i>Shege</i>	<i>Shegiya</i>	<i>Shegu</i>	Bastard/rascal/imprudent
<i>matsiyaci</i>	<i>matsiyaciya</i>	<i>matsiyata</i>	Poor/destitute
<i>d'an banza</i>	<i>'yar banza</i>	<i>'yan banza</i>	Useless/foolish person
<i>d'an iska</i>	<i>'yar iska</i>	<i>'yan iska</i>	Idler/loafer/bastard

*'Yan tauri and Maharba* (Hardened people and hunters):

Some members of this category of people do engage in the act of calculated use of abusive expressions at certain occasions such as "*Gangi*" or "*Bishi*" (a kind of gathering where some of them are praised by the praise singers verbally accompanied by drum beats, or when they go hunting in the jungle/bush). These people insult others who they consider their natural enemies. Those insulted will normally trade-back or even resort to using weapons. This inevitably lead to fierce fighting resulting in loss of blood/life.

If we now look at the above groups of people, we can generalize by saying that the whole community is really involved. It normally evolves from individuals and then spreads into the community or social network in so many forms. However, it should be mentioned here that its divergent forms and characteristics depend solely on the social class situations. And the forms of the abusive expressions used may vary between one group and another.

How are those who constantly engage in abusive act viewed by the community?

Lack of proper training:

The community views these kinds of people as those having no manners, which may be due to their up-bringing. That is, their parents did not manage to take good care of them. In other words one or both parents probably taught the children such expressions by constantly using the expressions in the presence of the children or the parents did not bother to discourage the use of the abusive expressions in the home. What is meant here is that when the children developed a habit of abusing people (which they learned at home or outside the home), the parents did not try to stop them and, possibly, the parents habitually engaged themselves in such act, even when the children were around. The children might also be "*yan shagwaba*" who continue using abusive expressions without being stopped by the parents. Such children normally become uncontrollable and using abusive expressions might even become part of their behavior up to old age (cf. footnote 11).

Social deviants and people of certain professions:

Social deviants such as pimps, prostitutes, witches, thieves etc., suffer a lot in a strictly conservative community. In the past, and to some extent at present, people did not want to marry their children nor are they allowed to marry the children of others. The reason is fundamentally cultural (and also religious). Pimps and prostitutes in particular are noted as the natural users of abusive expressions. They engage in this act anywhere and anytime they wish to use them, irrespective of who is present. As for professionals such as *mahauta* (butchers) and *mawak'almarok'a* (praise singers), especially *Bambadawa* (non-disabled professional beggars), etc., they have some problems of socialization in such a conservative community. This is mainly due to some superstitions assumed to be connected with their professions. Such kinds of superstitions are now dying away,

especially in the urban communities.<sup>12</sup> It is also believed by many people that these professional praise singers know how to use abusive language in order to mock, ridicule, jeer at, insult, make a fool of, or denounce other people. People generally tend to forget or ignore the roles these category of people play in society. The irony is that the community (at least some of its members) want to be praised and they even give a lot of money, clothing and other valuable items to the people who do these kind of professions.

We may also note that the majority of people in the community however, have the opinion that individuals who frequently make use of abusive expressions do so due to improper up-bringing either from the parents, as mentioned above, or due to the lack of proper "Islamic education" where use of any kind of abusive expression is shunned by "Islam" (cf. footnote 11). Some members of the community however believe that it is "*genetically*" acquired. For instance, when some members of the community hear some children using insults/abusive expressions, they will normally say, "Ahah! No wonder, they are the children of such and such a person". Note, however, that when we examine the genetic view, it is evident that this is rubbish, because there is no scientific evidence whatsoever to support this assertion. It cannot be determined why they engage in such act, since it is quite possible to find a child of a learned and respectful Malam becoming a deviant who uses abusive expressions frequently. In fact it is very common to hear the Hausa saying, *d'an malam ka ki halin malam, rago da wutsiyar kare d'an malam* meaning, "son of malam (a learned person in Islamic Studies), you refuse to follow the footsteps of Malam, you are (like) a ram with a dog's tail". Therefore, it would be proper or more plausible to consider the idea of environmental influence rather than genetic influence (cf. B. L. Whorf 1956). That is, when a child happens to be in bad company of spoilt friends he plays with, it is easy for him to acquire their bad habits as the Hausas say, *zama da mad'aukin kanwa shi ke kawo farin kai*, meaning, "staying/mingling with bad company of friends (lit. a person who carries potash on his head), makes one like them (lit. have a white head with a gray hair)".

#### Abuse/insult in general:

Abuse/insult in general, especially the most serious type, is seen by the community as something that destroys relationships. As Mary Douglas (1968:372) puts it, "... unrestricted abuse generally threatens to destroy current social categories, hence, it is also a feature that presupposes the consciousness of the individual's role in a community. It explains how every member of the society is expected to maintain his

status quo without interfering with other people's role" (quoted in D. Parkin 1980). The interference is what the community does not like and, consider it an act of abuse which eventually generates criticism and confrontation among people.

As earlier noted, abuse/insult can be generated in so many ways and it is always taken seriously except where the people involved are doing it just for fun. In most cases the interlocutors are people of the same social status (in terms of age, administrative positions, occupations, etc.). But when the aim or purpose of such interaction is defeated, however, the situation could get very serious. Therefore, whenever a serious abuse occurs, one could find that the participant is really pushed to the wall. For instance, when a young person insults an older person, or vice versa, the latter must have seriously offended or hurt the feelings or dignity of the former. However, there are certain cases where the initiator is also the offender. In this particular instance, a third party who has no prior knowledge of what caused the misunderstanding cannot predict who really initiated this communicative act. That is why in any speech act, a common shared knowledge, understanding of the context and the situation is very important. Whatever the case, people do make use of abusive expressions which are always context-sensitive, and this may be due to the following reasons:

(a) To vent anger:

When someone is bothered or pestered, he gets irritated and uses abusive expressions as an outlet for discomfort in his heart. The purpose is to hurt the other person's feelings or dignity as well, a kind of retaliation.

(b) For regulative/corrective purposes:

In this case, abuse/insult can be used as a way of telling someone that he should stop doing something that does not conform to the accepted mode of behavior in the community. For instance, when a child plays with a harmful object like a knife, razor-blade, fire, stone etc., the parents or any other senior person around may abuse/insult the child in order to stop him from that dangerous activity. The abuse/insult can either be through verbal or non-verbal means, as mentioned earlier, and it is sometimes followed by either a threat or beating. Such expressions are like the following:

*Kâi/kê!, uwaka/ki!, ubanka/ki!* etc.

Hey you! your mother!, your father!

*Kâi/kê!, bari!, gidanku!, ja'irira!; d'an/ 'yar nema!* etc.

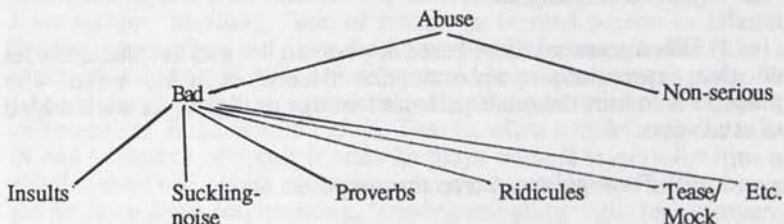
Hey you! stop! idiot/stupid/blast yo!  
 shameless/disrespectful person!; bastard/bother you!  
*Kâi/kê!*, *kalkin ci gidanku!*, *Nâ dake kalki!* etc.  
 Hey you! bastard/bother you!, I will beat you!

(c) As a social control:

Abuse/insult may be used as a sign of contempt or as a social control by some people, especially praise singers and other folk-singers. They do this especially to a person who is either a miser, or is not generous to them or to other people in the community. This is done so that the person mends his ways of life in order that he conforms to the appropriate modes of behavior expected of him. Note that the person is insulted in an indirect way. It is done in a way that only people aware of the situation or the behavior of such individual being abused/insulted in the song or poem would be able to identify him (cf. footnote 12).

Sub-categories of abuse:

There are basically two main types. The serious (bad) abuses/insults and the non-serious ones (somewhat accepted as OK or good). These are shown in the following tree diagram:



The above classification is meant to show different categories of abusive expressions. Under serious bad ones we have insult, which is also divided into two. Serious and mild. The most serious ones are used by almost all people. The expressions used are like *ubanka/ki* (your father), *uwarka/ki* (your mother), and many expressions in the form of *d'an'yar* (son/daughter of + body part(s)). The mild ones are usually used by elders and teachers. The expressions used in this category are like *gidanku!* (bastard/bother you (lit. your home/house)), or *ja'iri* (shameless person). The next category is accomplished by sucking the mouth to produce a contemptuous noise like *mts!* etc. The next one is the use of 'proverbs' like the following:

- (i) *Ta b'arawon jiya ta fi haske* That of yesterday's thief is lighter  
 (ii) *Ba ki kwana gida ba* You (f.s.) did not spend the night at home, etc.

In the first proverb, the speaker is reacting to either the accidental or deliberate lightening of his face or his whole body with a torch-light by the addressee. This is usually in the night when it is dark. The second one is used to insult a woman, by saying that she is just like a prostitute. The next one is *zambo* which is widely used by praise singers to insult other people they either don't like or, who do not appreciate their profession by not giving them money or presents. The teasing/mocking or derision group is done almost by all people. The other category of abuse indicated in the diagram is the non-serious one which is regarded as good or acceptable. The words and expressions used are like: *shege* (lit. illegitimate person/bastard), *matsiyaci/matsiyaciya* (poor/destitute), *arne* (infidel), *maye* (witch), *d'an'yar bala'i* (son/daughter of great misfortune/calamity (what a great performer!)), etc.

#### Structural/linguistic forms:

Even though abusive expressions/insults are composed of words and phrases, we should be aware that these words and phrases are mostly elliptical, although they carry the meaning of full sentences. They are also accompanied with some paralinguistic features. Let us now consider some of the insults mentioned so far, and whose structural classification is as follows:

#### (a) One word type:

Here the character or personality of the addressee is mentioned. Two or three can be combined in one insult. Some of these words are:

<i>mahaukaci</i>	crazy/mad
<i>banza</i>	stupid/bastard
<i>jaki</i>	donkey
<i>matsiyaci</i>	destitute/poor
<i>wofi</i>	useless
<i>kyanwa</i>	cat
<i>mayaudari</i>	deceitful person
<i>shashasha</i>	foolish
<i>b'era</i>	rat/mouse, etc.

Note that each of these words can be used in an equational or copular construction as in the following examples:

<i>Kai dai mahaukacin banza ne!</i>	You are a mad bastard!
<i>Kai dai shashashan woñi ne!</i>	You are a stupid worthless person!
<i>Kai kân jaki ne da kai!</i>	You are very damn (lit. you have a donkey's head)!

(b) One word plus a phrase, usually with comparison, as illustrated below:

<u>Banza</u> + <u>mai</u>	lit.,	<u>useless/stupid who has</u>
		+
(i) <i>tab'ab'b'iyar fуска</i>	"	(i) A stupid terrible looking face
(ii) <i>kân jakil/kare/tokalfatalwa</i>	"	(ii) A donkey/dog/ash/ghost headed stupid person
(iii) <i>kâi sai ka ce duthen Dala</i>	"	(iii) Stupid with a head as big as Dala hill
(iv) <i>bakin jab'a, etc</i>	"	(iv) A stinking shrew-mouse idiot, etc.

(c) Word meaning "son," "daughter," or "children" is used to link two one-word insults, as in the following:

<i>Banza</i> +	<i>d'anl'yarl'yan</i> +	<i>matsiyaci</i>	+ <i>kazami</i>
<i>shege</i>		<i>mahaukaci</i>	<i>b'arawo</i>
etc.		<i>mak'aryata</i>	<i>tsinannu</i>
		<i>Iska</i>	<i>lalatacce</i>
		<i>wofi</i>	<i>sakarai</i>
		etc.	etc.

(d) Name of a private part of a parent following the word 'one fucked/s that part.

NP	AUX	V	NP	
<i>Ubansa</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>uwatâr</i>	His father fucked his own mother

(e) invocation for wrath of God. Here one prays to God to bring harm to the insulted person or someone very close to him/her:

*Allah ya tsine maka!*    May God condemn you!  
*Allah ya kashe shi!*    May God take his life (May he died)

Apart from these, there are also other non-linguistic or paralinguistic gestures used to signal an insult/abuse. Some of these are gestures with fingers, mouth, nose eye movements and tone of voice or intonation which are used to express different types of insults and other speech acts such as command, threat or statement of approval or disapproval of something. This is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

As mentioned earlier, the bad types of abuses/insults are normally meant to injure or hurt someone's feeling, dignity or his status, while the non-serious ones are usually used to complement someone who did or does something worth appreciating, i.e. something incredible, exciting or exceptionally superb. For this reason, abuse/insult can be viewed as an object/tool that really makes people aware of the language they use and the kind of people they interact with. People can create new constructions and ideas within the framework of such ritual acts. We may, therefore, view an abuse/insult in two dimensions, as noted by David Parkin (1980) that, "... the serious abuse attacks social categories unambiguously, and non-serious abuse contains elements of ambiguity . . . because one has to consider whether the proposition contained in the utterance is true or false" (cf. his three fold points). In Hausa community however, people use abusive expressions creatively. They have a licence to use it where it is appropriate, i. e., for certain purposes that require their use. The expressions needed are many, and are provided by the language as M. Black (1963:246) mentions, "that a given language imposes an inherited vocabulary and grammar upon its users is too obvious to require mention". Furthermore, more and more vocabulary and grammar are being adopted from other languages such as Arabic, English, French, Yoruba, Igbo, etc. into the Hausa language. Therefore, this makes the language to be very rich and creative in the use of the new adopted expressions.

We should also note the semantic domain of the words/expressions used as insults/abuses. That is we have to linguistically look at the primary factors of their connotative meanings, i.e. in relation to the speakers' association with the word, the practical circumstances in which the word is used, the linguistic settings and the characteristics of the word. It is only by considering these aspects that we can come out with the right interpretation without any ambiguity. Considering the componential meaning of the isolated words however, will not lead us anywhere. For instance, by just addressing someone with words like *shege* (illegitimate person/bastard), or *arne* (an infidel/heathen/pagan), etc., without any reference to the circumstance(s), s/he and any observer/listener around would not infer

that you are seriously abusing/insulting the addressee i.e. not praising him/her. If however, the addressee did something worth praising (as in a soccer game or wrestling games), and is addressed with words such as those mentioned above, s/he will not feel offended or insulted. We can, therefore, claim that the meaning of any utterance/expression is determined by the context in which it is used. It is then evident that people who use abusive expressions do it creatively. They can make verifiable statements about their social environment and they can also make use of gradable evaluations of the society around them.

#### Conclusion.

I have tried to show that language as a means of communication between individuals is better studied by mastering the two major components of language use, namely grammatical rules and socio-cultural rules. A child in any speech community acquires the language and the socio-cultural rules, such as linguistic taboos, linguistic etiquette and other extra-linguistic rules of discourse of that community. I have also tried to explain some implications and constraints on the nature of this culturally identifiable event. Ritual insults in Hausa community seem to support the view which claims that "insults make social statements" in the sense that they may define the status and role of the interlocutors. For instance, we found that even though abuse/insult is regarded as disgusting and disapproved by the community and religion, there are, however, certain occasions where it is allowed. Furthermore, we also observed that, virtually all the people in the society or community get involved in it, in one way or the other. But there are some differences in the way(s) they manipulate it depending on the context in which it is used. The fundamental constraints we have seen are religious and cultural rather than linguistic.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Speech act in this sense does not refer to the philosophical definition. I use it here to refer to the act of communication in the restricted sense. That is face-to-face interaction (cf. S. R. John 1969; J. L. Austin 1962; and J. M. Sadock 1974 for the philosophical definition).

<sup>2</sup>It is variously termed as insults, metacommunicative event (cf. Mary Sanches 1975), culturally identifiable speech event (cf. J. C. Gumperz 1975), or even speech act (D. Hymes 1972:65).

<sup>3</sup>Here socio-cultural knowledge and the status of the interlocutors is important, especially (i) when one of them is a non-native speaker of the language used. This is,

for instance, in a situation of a greeting encounter between a Hausa person and a white person. In this case one should be aware of the appropriate terms of greetings to be used in appropriate contexts which may be culturally bound. The white person should not say to the Hausa person, "yaya ubanka"? meaning "How is your father?" Similarly, the use of the greeting term *sannu* ("Hi") can sometimes be problematic if the context is not right for the use of this term. (iii) There are also other kinds of social abuses such as performing what are considered as immoral acts, taking any intoxicating substance, committing adultery or fornication, homosexuality, etc. In the past butchers and singers used to be generally viewed as experts in the use of verbal abuse terms. These people perform bad things referred to as acts of social deviants, which are not welcomed by the society or community.

<sup>4</sup>Here, I am not concerned with the social and economic hierarchy of the Hausa people.

<sup>5</sup>Socially, it can lead him to punishment or public shame (P. Trudgill 1980). Religiously, it is prohibited. This is in both the Kur'an and Sunna/Hadith of the Prophet (S.A.W.). (In the Kur'an, refer to chapters 46 verse 17, and 17 verses 23-25. With regard to the Hadith, there are a lot of them which indicate the total condemnation of abusers. One may also refer to *Mutumin kirki* by A. H. M. Kirk-Green (1974:8-12) for more explanation on what makes someone good or bad in Hausa community.

<sup>6</sup>Note that in addition to verbal abuses, other non-verbal ones (like five open fingers pointed towards the person being abused) are also used to serve two purposes: one is as a release, an aggressive outlet, on an audience who can or cannot retaliate; the second is to expose children, though unconsciously, from a very early age to a wide range of taboo subjects. Note that no real attempt is made to limit a child's access to obscenity. He is, however, instructed in rules governing its appropriateness. (cf. Linder Dressel [now Hunter]: "Cultural Aspects of Child Language Acquisition," in *Harsunan Nijeriya* 1976, C. S. N. L., Bayero University, Kano)

<sup>7</sup>For further explanations and examples, cf. L. D. Yalwa 1977, B.A. Dissertation titled "Wasannin Yâra". A. B. U./B. U. K.

<sup>8</sup>*Zurum* and *zugudum* are idiophones describing the way a woman sits with her head supported on the palms of her hands waiting for food.

<sup>9</sup>The *dala* here means two shillings. And two shillings' meat in these days cannot be eaten by one person, not even two or four. This is to abuse her and show that she eats too much in such a way that she would not be regarded as a normal person.

<sup>10</sup>This type is also found in children's insults of American Samoa as reported in C. M. and K. T. Kernan (1975).

<sup>11</sup>Some people believe that these *'yan shagwaba* (spoilt children), normally end up as illiterates due to their inability to have the basic Islamic knowledge or western education and later in their life become social problems to the community since they do not know how to behave and live well with the other members of their community. They are, therefore, at a loss.

<sup>12</sup>For example, the praise singer "Dankwairo," in one his songs titled "*Ba takura kaucin daga*", abuses some members of the royal family of Kano, while praising the Emir Ado Bayero. Part of the song is:

*Ga wani raggon d'an sarki*  
*Sabon gari can ni' isshe shi*  
*Ya kafa 'yar rumfa tai*  
*Yana tallar gwangwaye*

*Tsaye yake yana tallar gwangwaye,*  
*gwamgwaue. gwamgwaue. gwamgwaue!*

Here is one Emir's son  
 I found him there at Sabongari,  
 He constructed his hut/stall  
 He is selling used (tins,  
 bottles, rags etc.)

He was standing selling  
 (chanting/calling) tins, tins,  
 tins, tins!

In short, here he is implying that the Emir's son (basically a rival brother of the Emir) lost the chance of becoming an Emir (after a serious campaign), and he is now doing a detestable occupation. Another example is:

*Ga wani d'an sarki*  
*Ya shafo hoda kamar Dellsu*

Here is a certain Emir's son  
 Who applied make-up (powder)  
 and looks like a prostitute.

For praise singers' social functions refer to M. Hiskett 1975; M. G. Smith 1975 and A. Y. Bichi 1985. Similarly, refer to D'an Maraya's song on *lebura* and *karan mota*.

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