

**SUBJECT ANALYSIS OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS
IN THE NORTHERN HISTORY RESEARCH
SCHEME (NHRS)
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA**

BY

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Abstract

Content analysis was made to find out the various subject structures of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. A total of 754 manuscripts was analyzed, and seventeen different subjects discipline were revealed. This micro-study contrary to expectation, opines that the contents of the Arabic manuscripts are not limited to the religion or history, they encompass all subjects ever taught and learned by man. Finally the study suggests that a collaborative effort should be made by scholars of different backgrounds to engage in research and translation of the documents. However, these efforts would increase access and use of the manuscripts, and would also serve as a means of saving the resources from going to extinction.

Introduction

Education is the basis of the structure of Islam. Indeed the place of knowledge in Islam and among Muslim communities cannot be over emphasized. As asserted by Galadanci (1993:98-99), Islamic education must realize three basic things; i.e. a Muslim must acquire religious knowledge so as to know his creator, obey His laws as revealed to the prophet of Islam, worship Him and fulfill all the religious obligations as stipulated. Secondly, he must learn how to cultivate the earth (farming) and benefit from what God has created. Thirdly, he must learn to be responsible and useful citizen capable of performing his duties in the best interest of the community he lives (a responsible citizen).

Islam is regarded as not just a religion in the usual meaning of the word, which only includes "ibadat" or worship. No. Islam is also a socio-political order and a way of life that deals with all aspects of man's life be it physical, mental or spiritual. Arabic is a language that is written and spoken like any other language in the world. Information is recorded or inscribed using Arabic characters irrespective of subject or ideology. By this, it does not imply or mean that Arabic is Islam.

The Arabic Manuscripts

Arabic manuscripts in general are regarded as pieces of handwritten information which could be in the form of a book, pamphlet, letter or poem. The recorded information could be records of events, transactions, judgments proceedings, sermons, preaching, treatise, records of medicinal herbs, spiritual and magical incantations. Arabic manuscripts are in two distinct forms serving the same purpose. We have the pure Arabic manuscripts and the Ajami manuscripts. The pure Arabic manuscripts are those manuscripts that are written in Arabic and using Arabic characters, while the Ajami manuscripts are those written in other languages apart from Arabic, but using Arabic characters. Hashimi (2009:1) notes that the word 'Ajami' which means non Arabic, is the utilization of Arabic characters in writing other languages to write to express thoughts and ideas. It is known as the process of linguistic domestication of Arabic letters.

Consequent upon the above, there exist today in Nigeria and particularly in the north and the southern parts of the country, a lot of literature written in Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Nupe, Etsako and Yoruba languages, using Arabic characters, that are referred to as Ajami manuscripts.

There is no doubt that in the 17th and 18th centuries in the western Sudan, the facilities for Islamic education were more advanced. That gave birth to a class of *Ulama* (Scholars), who were recognized as preservers and teachers of Islamic education, natural and social sciences. The system of master seeking and that of itinerant teachers, that is Sheikh and Talib, was well established and it produced great scholars in the area. Through this effort the *Ulamas* were able to deploy the Arabic characters to write their first languages such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Nupe and Yoruba. The writings of these scholars constitute important and valuable resources for human development and a source of inspiration.

Some of these scholars were the leaders of the Jihad movements in Hausa land, like Sheikh Usmanu Danfodiyo, His brother Abdullahi and his son, Muhammadu Bello. Through their efforts, the Sokoto caliphate was established. These leaders adopted Arabic as their official language with which they communicate among themselves and documents the governmental transactions, such as legal records, correspondences, financial records and property configurations of the period, the Kano Chronicles and Mahram in Kanem Borno. The Kano Chronicles and Mahram are records of history that document vital aspects of the of

their respective areas. These are what Miskin (2007:36) described as the heritage which is essentially documented in Arabic and enjoyed official status in both Kanem-Borno and Sokoto Caliphates. More so, Smith (1961:176) was reported saying, that the learning of these leaders showed itself in their writings which were voluminous and covered a very wide range of subjects These included all the classical Islamic sciences as well as history, mysticism, medicine and others. The literary output from these scholars is noteworthy. They produced large body of literatures, written with the aim of educating qadis, teachers and the generality of people.

The Northern History Research Scheme

According to the Northern History Research Scheme (N.H.R.S) A.B.U., Zaria, first interim report (1966), the scheme was conceived in 1960 by the Vice Chancellor of the University College Ibadan, K.O. Dike, as an interdisciplinary research project combining the resources of both the then University College, Ibadan, and the then Government of Northern Nigeria. By 1961 and 1962, the preliminary work necessary for the launching of the scheme was completed and it emerged as a project for the initiation of a large scale research into the history of Northern Nigeria.

The responsibilities of the Northern Government in connection with the project were transferred to the Ahmadu Bello University in 1962 when the University was founded and the first phase of the scheme was launched in 1964 as a joint project of the University of Ibadan and the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. According to the first interim report on the scheme, these considerations made the initial selection of topics of study extremely difficult. Somehow, some topics of study were identified for a start; they included the following:

- i. The 'Recovery' of the Arabic Script literature of the north.
- ii. Publication of Arabic Literature, biographies of reputable leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and translations of their works from Arabic to English
- iii. The scheme's objectives in a nutshell were; to promote the growth of material on the history of Northern Nigeria and its peoples; to acquire relevant records for preservation, dissemination and computerization for easy access by the public; to recruit and train personnel to manage the collections of the scheme effectively; and to meet the needs of researchers.

At present according to what this researcher saw during his survey, the scheme is having hundreds of copies of various Arabic and Ajami manuscripts on Northern Nigeria, and so many books, journals and magazines on the history of Northern Nigeria, Nigeria and Africa in general.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is simply defined by Berelson (1952:1) as a research technique for an objective, systematic and qualitative description of manifest content of communication. It is a research tool that focuses on actual content and internal features of media. These could be themes, subjects, authors, titles, languages, ages formats etc. Whichever one, Ibrahim (2003:1) posited that, in analyzing the content of any form of communication resource, the collected data are changed into sets of symbols like motives, concepts, etc. These symbols could further be quantified by breaking down the contents of materials into relevant units for information to point out characteristics of messages, which would help to detect the biases, the intentions, prejudices, oversight, etc of the people responsible for the work.

However, from this perspective, analysis refers to the ability to breakdown the bibliographical components or elements of media

into parts that their organizational structures may be clearly understood. Subject analysis has been a practice with library and information scientists and some teaching historians, to determine a particular subject area of study. The technique has been used to determine the information in some specialized subject areas from different media that would help in understanding the structure of the subject.

Literature Review

Bradford (1948) was one of the pioneers of bibliographic study. In our context Aiyepku (1978) was the first scholar to conduct bibliometric documentation, On the geographical literature in Nigeria from 1901- 1980. The work conducted by Aiyepku differs from this work as his analysis were confined to some literature that emanated from a section of the country and were not classified according to subjects.

Smith (1958:238) also made some lists of the literary works of the great African *Mujahidun* (Jihad leaders). It was found that the list made by Smith contained enough bibliographical details such as the author, year of composition, page number, place etc. Subsequently, Ibrahim (1988) analyzed some Arabic manuscripts in the early Nupe kingdom in Nigeria. He too was able to come out

with enough bibliographical details that can aid one to locate the documents easily. Afolabi and Muhammed (1984) analyzed the final year undergraduate library projects from the department of library science. This analysis brought out the bibliographical details of the resources, but the work was done based on the years of composition. Also Ibrahim (1991) made a bibliometric analysis of entomological research in Nigeria 1900 — 1983 in his masters' thesis in library science. This work was based on subjects and the frequency of contributions by authors in the field from the years of the study. More so, Ibrahim (2003) analyzed the information content of the quarterly Journal of Administration. The result of his finding revealed that out of the total of 400 articles analyzed, two hundred and twenty nine (229) 57:25% articles were on administration. The finding was not surprising since the journal emanated from the school of administration and management.

However, this study analyzed the contents of Arabic manuscripts in the collection of Northern History Research Scheme (A.B.U.) Zaria with a view to finding out their subject structures, just like the works done by Smith (1958), Ibrahim (1988) and another Ibrahim (1991) and (2003).

Statement of the Problem

The Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are invaluable resources that contain a great deal of information on the indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage of the people of northern Nigeria. The problem faced by these resources is lack of permanent preservation, as they are scattered in various repository centres and outside the country, in the hands of individuals and in private collections and public centers. There is also a great problem with the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts including their identification as documents which emanated as a result of the insufficient details of their bibliographical information. As a result of these problems, most of the *ulama* (scholars), teachers, researchers, professional historians and the public are having difficulty in for exploiting the enormous and rich information contained in the documents for the development of new knowledge.

Research Question

1. What are the subject coverage of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U, Zaria?

Objective

To find out the coverage by subject of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) A.B.U., Zaria. This is

because, understanding the subject of a document will considerably ease access to the document.

Significance of the Study

The study will provide the coverage by subject of the Arabic manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS), to ease access and retrieval. It will also help in its usability and save the documents from extinction. More over, the study is a step forward in the development of new knowledge.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the Arabic and Ajami manuscript collections of the Northern History Research Scheme, A.B.U, Zaria. By this, it means that other resources such as books, audio visual e.t.c. of the NHRS are excluded.

Methodology

The study is set to analyze the subject field structure of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme of A.B.U, Zaria as a case. The study employees the documentary method through which possible data would be obtained to achieve the objective of the study.

A total number of seven hundred and fifty four (754) manuscripts, representing 50% of the total manuscripts of 1508 were physically analyzed with a view to collecting the data that will help in achieving the objective of the study. For each manuscript, information about its intellectual content was collected. Secondly, quantitative representation was made, as to the number of subjects, and the data was presented using descriptive statistics and illustrations.

Report of The Findings

Subject Structure of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme.

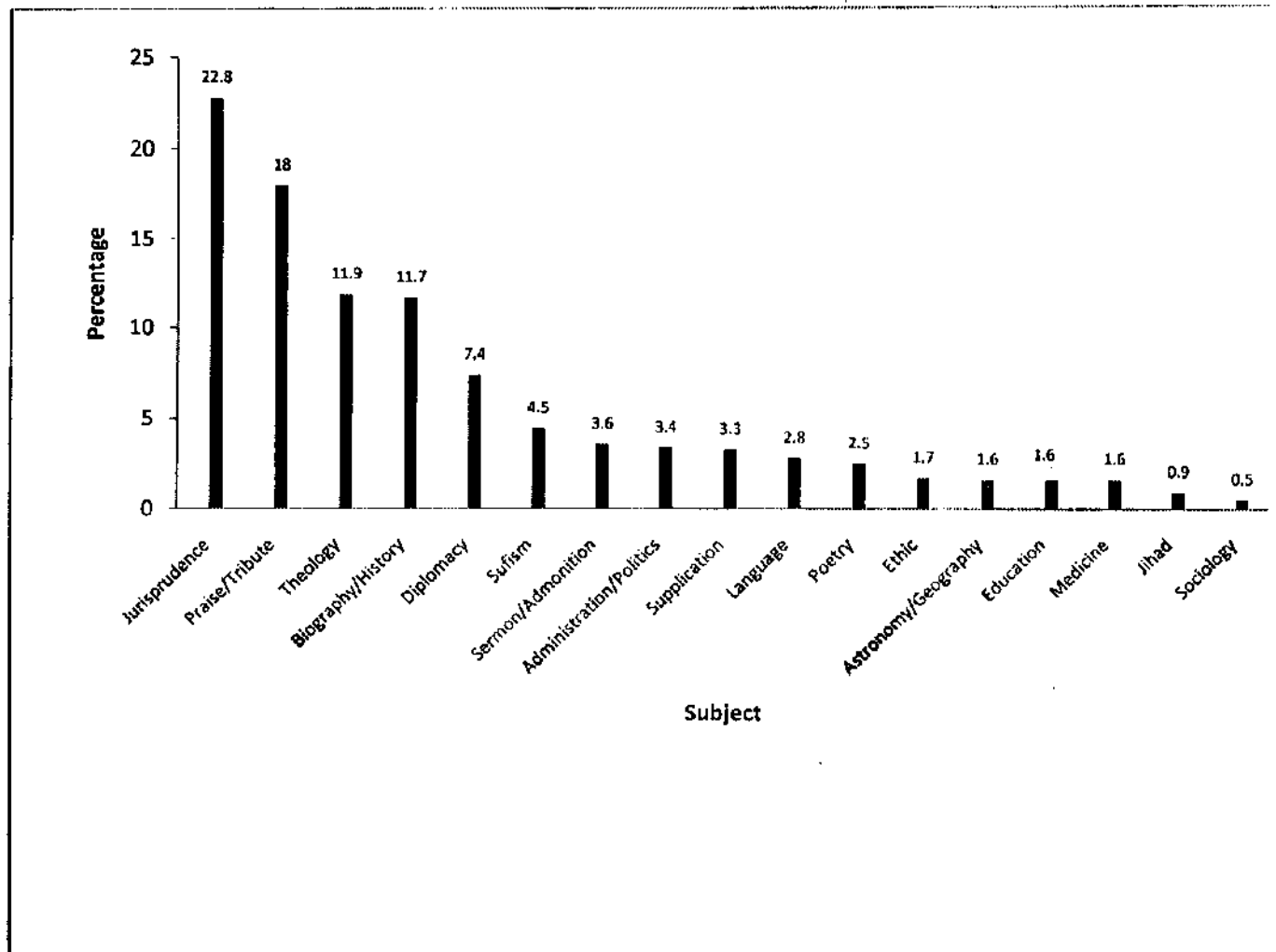
Classification of manuscripts into subject areas is definitely something difficult because topics in Arabic manuscripts are interrelated. Furthermore, most of the Arabic and Islamic literatures are encyclopedic in nature; encyclopedic in the sense that a subject (jurisprudence) can deal with so many topics such as prayer, law, commerce, administration e.t.c.

However, the classification of the manuscripts into specific subject areas was done in conjunction with some experts in Arabic language both within and outside Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

At the end, this effort resulted in the classification of the manuscripts into seventeen (17) subject areas.

Classification of Manuscripts by subject areas

S/N	Subject	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Jurisprudence	172	22.8
2.	Praise/Tribute	136	18
3.	Theology	90	11.9
4.	Biography/History	88	11.7
5.	Diplomacy	56	7.4
6.	Sufism	34	4.5
7.	Sermon/Admonition	27	3.6
8.	Administration/Politics	26	3.4
9.	Supplication	25	3.3
10.	Language	21	2.8
11.	Poetry	19	2.5
12.	Ethic	13	1.7
13.	Astronomy/Geography	12	1.6
14.	Education	12	1.6
15.	Medicine	12	1.6
16.	Jihad	7	0.9
17.	Sociology	4	0.5



The study reveals from the table above that, from the total of seven hundred and fifty four manuscripts, one hundred and seventy two 172 (28.8%) are in Jurisprudence in Islam. This is not surprising, as jurisprudence is the source of all pragmatic aspects of worship in Islam. Any other knowledge in Islam is built upon the understanding of the laws of God. More so, jurisprudence is naturally dominated all other aspects as Islam was just taking root in Nigeria.

Next is praise and tribute with one hundred and thirty six 136 (18%) manuscripts. This is not surprising because praise and tribute usually are conveying works and achievements of those praised in the media, during or after their death. This is as a result of their selfless contributions in their various of endeavors to benefit their immediate society and beyond. Then theology which is a strong basis in Islam was recorded with ninety 90 (11.9%) manuscripts and history and biography are having eighty eight 88 (11.7%) manuscripts.

This analysis, from jurisprudence, praise/tribute, theology and biography/history, indicates that the NHRS possesses relevant manuscripts that are tied to the Scheme's aims and objectives. Such as the 'recovery' of the Arabic Script literature of the north Nigeria and the publication of Arabic Literature, biographies of reputable leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and translations of their works from Arabic to English

Furthermore the table shows that there is wide range of essential subjects in Islam. Diplomacy as a subject has fifty six 56 (7.4%) manuscripts. Diplomacy here involves internal and external relationships through exchanges of letters which may take different forms by the ruling class and the *Ulamas*. The relationship could

be on seeking for guidance on religious issues Fatwa clarifications on issues or events, requests, conveyance of appointments. instructions and notices or invitations. Sufism as a subject has thirty four 34 (4.5%)manuscripts. Sufism to go with this number the researcher is of the view that at period of time most of the jihad leaders and *Ulamas* were busy on the issues of settling the society and issues such as mysticism were not the borne of contention in the caliphate. Sermon and Admonition each are having twenty seven 27 (3.6%) manuscripts. Administration and politics had twenty six 26 (3.4%) manuscripts.

Supplication had twenty five 25 (3.3%) manuscripts. Language, which is wholly Arabic, had twenty one (21)manuscripts 21 (2.8%). Poetry is having nineteen 19 (2.5%) manuscripts and ethics is having thirteen 13 (1.7%) manuscripts. Astronomy, Geography, Education and Medicine are equally having twelve 12 1.6%. manuscripts. Also the classification indicates that Jihad had seven 7(0.9%) manuscripts.

Sociology has four 4(0.5%) manuscripts. This might be because at that time the scholars in Sokoto Caliphate were busy with the issues of the reconstruction of the society on religious, economic and political bases.

Beside the other subjects disciplines indicated in table 1 and figure 1 respectively, as discovered Jihad was recorded with 7 (0.9%) manuscripts which is very low. In this regard the researcher is of the view that this may be due to the fact that, most of Arabic and Islamic literatures are encyclopedic in nature. For instance, as it is the nature of the Holy Qur'an a verse that is talking about marriage or charity, fasting, supplication, politics or administration, it suddenly changes discussions on the very issue to other issues such as justice, piety, humility, education, and many others as it relate to subjects or the theme on discussion. Essentially this is done by the Qur'an in order to draw the attention of it's readers on the imperatives and importance of the message is communicating. In most cases this is the nature and tradition of Islamic literatures. This More so, this is the nature of the prophetic sayings of the prophet in their contents and subjects.

The representation of this wide range of subjects by the Arabic manuscripts shows that Muslim Scholars in Nigeria are highly learned and their knowledge encompasses most disciplines of knowledge. Conspicuously, this confirm the assertion made by Umar (2007:) that Arabic manuscripts were never limited to religious ritual practices. They treat natural and social sciences,

agriculture, astronomy, algebra alchemy, physics, pharmacy, medicine and engineering.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The analysis of the subject structure of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts as resources in Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, shows that the Arabic manuscripts as resources in the Scheme cover different subjects of human endeavor and their intellectual contents are not limited to religion or history. More so, the study also shows the capability of the people of the Northern Nigeria in recording their literary heritage, historical antecedence and ideas. This has encouraged the tradition of scholarship that allows them to learn much about the past, engage the present to imagine what the future may likely be. It is this effort that allows them to participate in promoting world civilization and scholarship.

Despite the availability of these resources in Northern History Research Scheme, A.B.U., Zaria, they may be known only to a very few of the people in the academia, who spearheaded the responsibility of imparting knowledge and re-sharpening the society.

In view of the above, this paper suggests that a collaborative effort should be made among the information professionals, historians and Arabic linguists to engage in thorough research and translation of the documents with a view to, towards analyzing the intellectual contents of the manuscripts in the Northern History Research Scheme(NHRS) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This is with the sole objective of revealing the different subjects for the full and comprehensive development of new knowledge.

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