

1. Introduction

1.1 *General information*

1.1.1. *Location*

Tadaksahak is the language spoken by the Idaksahak (also known as Dausahak), a nomadic group living mostly in the administrative 'cercle de Ménaka' and in the northern part of the 'cercle d'Ansongo' in the seventh region of the Republic of Mali.

The area is between longitude 0° and 4° east and between some degrees north and south along latitude 16° north. The area is also inhabited by speakers of other languages such as the Tuaregs, the Songhay, Arabs, and the Fulfulde.

1.1.2. *Classification*

Tadaksahak was classified (Nicolai 1981:25) as part of the Songhay languages spoken along the Niger river in Mali and the western part of Niger. Songhay was tentatively attached to the large Nilo-Saharan phylum (Greenberg 1966). More recent hypotheses published by Robert Nicolai (1984, 1990) suggest that Songhay came into existence as a creole language with important lexical input from Tamasheq.

The Songhay branch comprises roughly the following languages as indicated on the website of the online Ethnologue (2005) and in combination with Nicolai's classification (1981).

Language names	Location: country	city
Southern Songhay		
Songhay, Koyra Chiini	Mali	Timbuktu
Songhay, Koroboro Senni	Mali	Gao
Songhay	Mali, Burkina Faso	Hombori
Zarma	Niger	Niamey
Dendi	Benin	

Northern Songhay

Tadaksahak	Mali	Menaka
Tagdal	Niger	
Tasawaq	Niger	In-Gall
Korandje	Algeria	Tabelbala

The speech varieties labeled ‘Southern Songhay’ on the list will be called ‘Mainstream Songhay’ in this work. This is to indicate that they behave differently from the Northern Songhay varieties. Tadaksahak is part of the Northern Songhay group. All Northern Songhay languages have undergone heavy influence from Tuareg. Tuareg is a Berber language from the Afro-Asiatic phylum which, from a Songhay perspective, exhibits very different syntax, morphology and lexicon.

Some authors consider Tadaksahak to be a ‘mixed language’ (Lacroix 1968, Nicolai 1990, Benítez-Torres 2008) on the basis of the large percentage of non-Songhay lexicon and grammatical morphemes. In this description I shall remain neutral as to this issue, as it aims at describing the synchronic facts in the language.

1.1.3. Name of the language

Tadaksahak is the name that the people use themselves for their language. Authors of linguistic works have used this name, too. Authors of other reports and the administration in Mali also use this name, though rarely.

The “Ethnologue” of the SIL International (Online version 2005) lists a number of names associated with this language. Apart from the name of Tadaksahak, a variety of different spellings are listed, which recall the name used by the Tuareg to designate the people: Dausahaq, Daoussak, Daoussahaq, Dawsahaq, Daosahaq.

The names used by the people themselves refer to a female or a male person, singular or plural.

native term	meaning
<i>a-dáksahak</i>	man of the group
<i>i-dáksahak</i>	men/group of the group
<i>t-a-dáksahak(-k)</i>	woman of the group
	name of the language
<i>t-ə-dáksahak</i>	women of the group

These names indicate at the same time the social status within the caste system of that society. They are only used to designate individuals belonging to the fair-skinned highest caste. The caste of the blacksmiths and the one of the slaves, formerly captured on raids in the South, are referred to by different terms.

Prasse et al. (2003) list Dăw-Şahak / Idd-aw-Işăhak 'son/s of Isaac (the Jewish ancestor)', which seems to be an indication that they are of Jewish origin. This opinion is widely held by the neighboring ethnic groups. The Idaksahak themselves do not claim Jewish ancestry.

The Colonial French administration and today's local civil authorities use the term "daoussahak" to designate the people and the language.

The sedentary people speaking Mainstream Songhay in the three largest market towns in the area use a variant of this term, "dosahak".

1.2 History and Geography

The Idaksahak themselves indicate Morocco, or more generally, "the North", as their place of origin from where they left some centuries ago. A well educated Adaksahak did some research in genealogies and found evidence that the Idaksahak do not share ancestors with the Tuareg, but probably come from another Berber group in North Africa (Mohammed Ag Guidi, p.c. 1993).

According to some traditions, the Idaksahak may have lived in the Timbuktu area for a period of time before moving on together with a Tuareg group towards the area where the Idaksahak live today.

The Idaksahak are part of Tuareg society, and are considered a group inside the Kel-Ataram ("people of the west"). They have traditionally been herdsman for the nobility of the Iwəlləmmədān

Tuareg and have thus been under protection of the (Tuareg) warrior caste (the so-called nobility). Since they represent a distinct ethnic group and a dependent social community, their relationship was not so close that the Kel-Tamasheq would inherit from the Idaksahak (Mohammed Ag Guidi, p.c., 1993). Until recently, to marry outside the ethnic group, or the caste, was not considered as appropriate and would be sanctioned by the community.

Besides being herdsmen, the Idaksahak were a Maraboutic tribe, which performed the religious duties for the nobility of the Tuareg. Traditionally, these Islamic specialists were not allowed to carry weapons and thus depended on the protection of the Tuareg warriors. The clan of the *Id-affarif*, considered to be direct descendants of the clan of the Prophet Mohamed, is the best known maraboutic clan among the Idaksahak, but there are also other groups that claim to have maraboutic knowledge.

In recent years, this interdependence has become less important, as the Tuareg community in Mali no longer seeks this service. Tuareg maraboutic clans, such as the Kel Assuk, also perform these religious rites.

The severe and returning droughts of the past three decades have seriously put into difficulties the different pastoral groups herding in the area. In addition, the armed uprising of a number of nomadic groups against the central Malian government from 1990 to 1995 shook the area on a social and security level.

For lack of work in their homeland, many young men seek work abroad in the countries of the Maghrib. They often work as herdsmen or as traders. Women rarely leave the area.

However, there are established Idaksahak communities found outside the homeland. Isolated communities of black Idaksahak, descendants of the former slaves, live as farmers on the west bank of the Niger river in the Republic of Niger, and possibly also in the most northern part of Burkina Faso (Sudlow 2001:6). A larger community lives in Tamanrasset, Algeria, which was established there after the first Tuareg rebellion in the 1960s.

1.3 Earlier studies

Pierre-Francis Lacroix was the first to mention Tadaksahak in linguistic literature, together with related languages. They were referred to as “mixed languages” because of the evidence of strong influence from Tamasheq (Lacroix 1968). Further studies include the phonological sketch in Nicolaï (1979) and Nicolaï (1980) as well as the description of verb derivation in Christiansen & Christiansen (2007).

In his extensive study of Songhay languages, Robert Nicolaï classified Tadaksahak as part of Northern Songhay (Nicolaï 1981:25, see Fig. 1). According to Nicolaï, Tagdal and very similar Tabarog (which he refers to together as Tihishit), together with Tadaksahak form the nomadic subgroup. According to the Idaksahak, the Igdalen, who speak Tagdal, are considered to be their descendants. They live in the region further east to the Idaksahak’s territory in the Republic of Niger. The Igdalen used to have economic links with the Iberogan (speaking Tabarog), who now live further south as agriculturists.

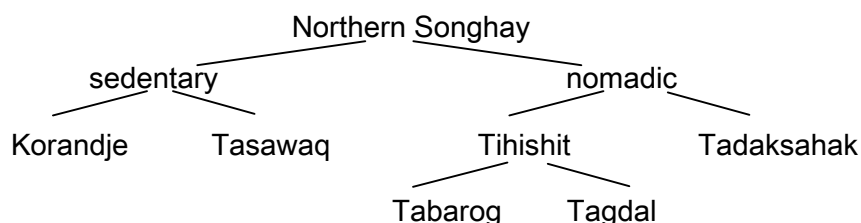


Figure 1: Classification adapted from Nicolaï

1.4 Dialects

There are about 31,800 speakers of Tadaksahak (Ethnologue 2005) including all social groupings. Like the Tuareg society, the Idaksahak traditionally have a caste system that divides the community into three distinct social classes of ‘free masters’ (*i-dáksahak*), ‘craftspeople’ (*zeem-án*, comprising blacksmith families for woodwork, metal and silver) and the ‘captives’ (‘slaves’) (*taam-én*) from black ethnic groups from the south.

In this work I describe the language variety as it is used in the area around Menaka, consisting of several fractions over a larger area, who communicate in this speech variety.

As to lexical deviations, I have placed them under one of the following three location names: Tamalet, on the Azawagh valley (mainly spoken by the clan of the Ibhan and Tarbanasse); Talatayt, north-west of Menaka; Infukaraytan, on the southern border of the Idaksahak's homeland, situated between Menaka and Niamey, on the border to the Republic of Niger.

The most significant phonetic feature of the Tamalet variety is the merging of the palatal plosives /c/ and /j/ with the fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ respectively. In addition, the feminine plural prefix /t-ə-/ of Tadak-sahak is pronounced [ʃi-]. There are also a number of lexical particularities. The speakers of this variant live at the easternmost border of the Idaksahak territory in the Azawagh valley around Tamalet.

Pharyngealisation is much less prominent in the southern speech varieties (Infukaraytan), while it is very strong in the north (Talatayt). The clan around the former traditional tribal leader of the group, now settled in the Talatayt area, seems to be the most conservative, linguistically speaking. They use lexemes and forms no longer used elsewhere in the area. The groups around Menaka are reported to be the most innovative.

1.5 Fieldwork

I made a first trip to Menaka in the fall 1992 together with my husband Niels. The following year, we moved to this administrative town, and over a period of nine years, from September 1993 until December 2002, we spent fifty percent of our time there. We were first assigned to do further socio-linguistic studies to explore the viability of the language and the possible need for development of linguistic materials under the auspices of SIL International (former Summer Institute of Linguistics). A year later, the assignment was changed to language learning and documentation.

Since the literacy rate is very low in this group and since schools were virtually absent at the time we started our work, it was a challenge to find educated speakers with whom I was able to communicate in French.

The basis for this analysis consists of data from elicitation, as well as a corpus consisting of generally known folk tales, short dialogues and personal experiences and several hours of taped radio emissions

from “Radio Rurale de Menaka”. The lexical data base was worked over twice in its entirety, once in the summer 2000 in Gao with the late Moussa ag Mohammed from Menaka, then agent of the *Service des Eaux et Forêts* and a second time in the fall 2002 in Menaka with Hadmahammed ag Mohammed, known as Ḥabəlla, originally from Ḥariya, now headmaster of the school in Inkiringia.

The textual transcriptions, based on tapes from other speakers, were made in collaboration with various Tadaksahak speakers. The National Institute for Literacy DNAFLA (former *Direction Nationale pour l’Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle et Linguistique Appliquée*) did not have a section for this language, but I was in contact with both the Songhay and the Tamasheq unit.

1.6 Acknowledgements

Without the help, encouragement and teaching of many people, this book would never have been realized. First of all I want to thank my family, who has often had to stand back when this work was underway. I also want to express my gratitude to my SIL colleagues Phil Davison, Brad Smeltzer, Robert Carlson and Steven H. Levinsohn for their essential teaching and encouragement along the road, while we were still living in Mali. Once we were settled in Europe, the University of Leiden was of crucial importance and a tremendous help to work on all the collected data. A grant from NWO (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) made it possible to realize the major part of this study. It is part of the research project “Tuareg and the Central Sahelian Languages, A History of Language Contact”. The manuscript has been in different hands to clarify my thoughts and to improve my English. My thanks go to Peter Thalmann and Kathy Bow for their suggestions.

But without the faithful and patient listening, repeating, teaching and speaking on tape of many different speakers of this extraordinary language, this work would not have been possible. I want to express my thanks to: Jaddi, Ḥamad-Maḥmud, Maḥamad, Fatimata, Ḥad-Maḥammed, Taḥa, Ḥaduwa, Ayuuba, Fatmata, Assalim, Aḣaafaḣa, Ḥabəlla and many more. God may, as you, the Idaksahak say, have taken all the leftovers of the other languages to give the last one to you, but He made your language a very special one!

