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UNVEILING HAUSA: A TYPOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF ITS GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX

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Abstract: This paper presents a typological account of Hausa, an Afroasiatic language spoken in subSaharan Africa. The paper focuses on word order, relative clauses, order of prepositions, head and dependent marking, information structure, case-marking; and verb fronting, making in most cases, a comparison with languages that exhibit similar and/or contrasting features. There does not seem to be a consensus as to whether Hausa is a head or dependent-marking language. Furthermore, although some accounts propose that Hausa has a case system, this paper identifies itself with the accounts that hold a contrary view. However, it calls for further research in these areas.
Key Words: Hausa, Typology, Afroasiatic, Chadic, Head-Marking, dependent-Marking

1.0 **Introduction**

Hausa is a member of the Chadic group of the Afro-Asiatic language family (Abdoulaye, 1992; Newman 2000, Jaggar 2001, McIntyre, 2006; Caron 2013). WALS Online classifies Hausa as belonging to the West Chadic genus in the Chadic subfamily of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Newman (2000, p.1) describes Hausa as a member of the Chadic language family, "which itself is a constituent member of the Afroasiatic phylum that also includes Semitic,

Cushitic, Omotic, Berber, and Ancient Egyptian". He identifies "Hausa's closest relatives" within Chadic to include "West Chadic languages belonging to the Bole-Tangale, Angas, and Ron groups". He however points out that Hausa is significantly a group of itself among the West Chadic, because according to him, Gwandara which was the only other member of the group, "is a creolized offshoot of Hausa rather than a sister language".

In justifying the categorisation of Hausa as Afroasiatic, Jaggar (2001, p.2) explains that it is grounded on the occurrence of characteristic Afroasiatic structures including an **n/t/n** masculine/feminine/plural gender-number marking form in the deictic system; a prefix mV- used in the derivation of agential, instrumental and locative nouns; common pronoun archetypes, as exemplified in the Hausa second person feminine Perfective subject-agreement pronoun **kin** (< ***kim),** Berber **(kə)m,** and Egyptian **cm**; using the affixes – **n** and – **a** in the formation of the plurals of nouns; obvious cognates for basic terminology such as Hausa **mutu** 'die', compared to Hebrew **met,** Rendille (Cushitic) **mut;** Hausa **me** 'what?', compared to Arabic **mā**, Berber **mai;** Hausa **sūnā** 'name', compared to Hebrew **sem,** Bedawi/Beja (Cushitic) **sim**, etc. Zimmermann 2006 describes Hausa as a tone language which has three lexical tones: high, low and falling. Consistent with his assertion is that of Newman and Jaggar (1989, p.227) who explained earlier that Hausa is a "simple two-tone language" comprising Low, marked

by a grave accent alongside High, which is unmarked. Examples provided by them are **goorà** "cane" vs. **gòoraa** "large gourd"; **maƙèeraa** "blacksmiths" vs. **maƙeeraa** "smithy". In addition, there is a "surface falling tone" specified by a circumflex accent analysable as H+L on a single, usually, heavy syllable. The following example is given: **bàkân** "the bow" <**bàkaa** "bow" + – **'n** "the". They conclude that considering two independent tones, four tone patterns are expected in bi-syllabic words, i.e. H-H, H-L, L-H and L-L.

The language is widely spoken in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Niger Republic. Wolff (2013) describes Hausa as the "most important indigenous lingua-franca in west and central Africa". The language is spoken by many speakers as a first, second or third language but there does not seem to be a consensus among scholars on the number of these speakers. In the opinion of McIntyre (2006), 30 million people speak Hausa as a first language while another 30 million speak it as either a second or third language. Mucha (2012) reports that the language is spoken by about 35 million speakers whereas Caron (2013) points out that Hausa has about 50 million speakers. By and large, this paper argues that Hausa is an important language of West Africa not only because it has been described by Jaggar (2001, p.1) as "a major world language with more firstlanguage speakers than any other sub-Saharan African language" but also because of the scholarly attention it has attracted over the years. Similarly, writing in Hausa which began using the Arabic (Ajami) script has a considerably long history even though Philips (2004, p.56) claims that there was no documentary evidence for any prose or poetry written in Hausa prior to the 17th Century. In what follows, a typological account of Hausa language, which is by no means exhaustive, is presented.

2.0 **Typological Sketch of Hausa Language.**

This paper is not meant to put to test the validity or otherwise of the various postulations made by scholars of Typology, particularly Greenberg's Universals about languages of the world. However, where such propositions are found to be consistent with what obtains in the language, they will be acknowledged. Likewise, where they seem to have been overtaken by events, this will be indicated. It should however be noted that some inconsistency will be noticed in the transcription of Hausa throughout this essay. This is caused by the different conventions used by the different authors examples as cited in this paper, which I chose not to alter.

2.1 **Basic Word Order:**

Crysmann (2010) contends that Hausa is a strictly SVO language with tense, aspect and mood markers immediately preceding the lexical verb. This view is shared by Zimmermann (2006) who adds that in addition to the word order being SVO, pronominal subjects could be dropped. Zeller (2015) provides the following example to support the SVO word order of Hausa:

Zân sayá wa mátātā rígā
FUT 1SG buy IOM wife 1SG dress
'I'll buy a dress for my wife'

Jaggar (2006, p.224) provides a broader schema of the Hausa word order which he outlines as being S-V-IO-DO and clarifies that "goal/recipient arguments precede theme arguments" citing the following example of a ditransitive clause:

ɗaalìbîn ya kaawoo wà maalàminsà 'aikìi student, ART 3MASC.SG.PERF bring to teacher, 3SG work
"The student brought the work to his teacher"

Crysmann (2010) also adds that the SVO word order of the language is equally maintained in negations as shown in the following sentence:

mằlàmai bà sù ji kōmē ba teachers NEG 3.P.CPL hear anything NEG

'The teachers did not hear anything.'

Given the above examples, it is plausible to contend that Hausa follows Greenberg's Universal no.1 which posits that "in declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which the subject precedes the object" (1963, p.76).

2.2 **Relative Clauses:**

Relative clauses in Hausa are postpositional according to Caron (2013). He shows that they have the structure REL + Embedded Clause that does not result in the change of word order. He demonstrates that some degree of definiteness is found in the antecedent of the relative which is commonly attached with the definite article -n/-r/-n. The relative is mostly da or a relative pronoun containing it, e.g. wanda, jadda, inda, etc. Examples cited to buttress this argument includes ga: [wàndòn [dà [nà sàja:]] "here are [the trousers [that [I bought]]". This example supports the claim of Abraham (1941) cited in Whaley, (1997, p.272) that "Hausa has an overt linker da for the coordination of noun phrases but no linker for clauses".

This is consistent with the trend reported for SVO languages i.e. that "VO languages consistently have N Rel" which is in consonance with Dryer's (2011) position that "If in a language the relative clause precedes the noun, then it usually has an object-verb order while if a language has verb-object order, then the relative clause usually follows the noun".

2.3 **Order of Prepositions:**

Caron (2013, p.33) splits prepositions in Hausa into two – basic and genitive. He gives an inventory of basic Hausa prepositions as: **à** 'at, in, on'; **dà** 'with'; **dàgà** 'from'; **bisà** 'on, about', **fà**:**ʧe**: 'except'; **gà/gàɽe**: 'by, in, near, in connection with, in relation to'; **har** 'up to, until'; **hàtta**:'including'; **ija**: 'as far as'; **illa**: 'except'; **kà**:**fin** 'before'; **sabò**:**dà** 'because of, on account of'; **sai** 'except, until'; **ta** 'via, by means of, by way of'; **tun** 'since'; **wàr** 'like'; **jà**: (= **ì**) 'like, among'; **zuwà**: 'to'. Many of these basic prepositions according to him also function as conjunctions. With the exception of **gà** which takes the form **gàɽe**: when it occurs before a direct object pronoun (PNG.ACC), e.g. **gàɽe**: **tà** 'by her', all basic prepositions take independent pronouns as complements, e.g. **sabò**: **dà ita** 'because of her'. There are likewise, among the basic prepositions, compound prepositions containing an adverb followed by the preposition **dà**, e.g. **ban dà** 'apart from'; **duk dà** 'despite'; **fìje dà** 'more than'; **gàme dà, tà**:**ɽe dà** 'together with', etc.

Genitive prepositions on the other hand, are made up of an adverb or a noun attached with any of the short Genitive Linker **–n/-r/-t.** These are usually preceded by a basic preposition such as **à/dàgà/ta**, e.g. **a kân te**:**bùr** 'on the table'. Other examples include: **bà**:**kin** 'at the edge of, in
exchange for' (< **bà**:**ki**: 'mouth'); **ʧikin** 'inside' (< **ʧiki** (adv.) 'inside'); **kân** 'on top of' (< **kâi** 'head'); **ba**:**jan** 'behind' (< **ba**:**ja** 'at the back'): **màimakon** 'in exchange for' (< **màimako**: 'replacement' (2013, p.33).

Similarly, Abdoulaye (1992) states that prepositions in Hausa can undergo pied-piping in NP focus constructions. He however adds a caveat that this is only possible with the associative dà, the locatives gà 'against, on', à 'at', dàgà 'from', bisà 'on top', etc. He points out that gr5 dà never undergoes pied-piping and cites the following examples:

a. dà Audù nee mukà fìta.

with Audu cop.m 1p-REL PERF go.out-III

'It is with Audu that we went out.'

b. *dà bùhuu nèe mukà fitar.

V sack cop.m 1p-REL PERF go.out-VN-of

'It is the sack that we took out.'

It is clear from the above examples that in sentence (a), the associative dà can follow the fronted nominal but Grade 5 dà cannot undergo fronting as seen in (b).

Two phrases from Caron's examples, sabò: dà ita "because of her" and a kân te:bùr "on the table" and the two sentences from Abdoulaye's examples are indicators that prepositions come before nouns. Even though there are exceptions elsewhere in Africa, this again is significantly consistent with Greenberg's Universal no.3 that "languages with dominant SVO order are always prepositional" (1963, p.77).

2.4 **Head and Dependent Elements:**

Hausa is a head-initial language according to Crysmann (2009). I take examples from genitive constructions to explain this: –n and –r suffixes mark genitives in Hausa – the former for masculine and the latter for feminine, with the following examples:

a. gida + n Audu

house of Audu

'Audu's house'

b. mata + r Yahaya

wife of Yahaya

'Yahaya's wife'

Caron (2013, p.20) explains that the Genitive Linker in Hausa connects an NP with a following NP as shown in the examples above, or with or an adverb in a 'possessed and possessor' construction, though no examples of such constructions are cited by the author. He identifies two types of Genitive Linkers – a free form (na/ta/na) for male, female and plural; and a bound form (n/r/n) again for male, female and plural as in the examples below:

	Free	Bound	
gida:	na sarki:	gida-n sarki:	'the chief's house'
go:na:	ta sarki:	gona-r sarki:	'the chief's farm'
gida:ʤe:	na sarki:	gida:ʤe-n sarki	'the chief's houses'

Caron adds that the bound form is the default form while the free form is used in three senses:

(i) when the possessed object is understood or separated from the possessor such as in the case of topicalisation, e.g. mo:tar nan ta sarki: ʧe "this car is that of the chief"

(ii) to form ordinal numerals with the structure N-GL-NUM, e.g. litta:fi na biju "the second book"

(iii) to express measurements or evaluation, e.g. na:ma: na si:si: "meat for a shilling".

The genitive constructions using bound genitive linkers are in the opinion of this essay, evidence of head-marking. This is in view of what is found in languages with similar construction patterns such as exhibited by Hungarian (Nichols, 1986, p.57) in this example: az ember ház-**a** "the man's house"

Also, Zimmermann (2006) describes Hausa as a language in which "arguments are identified by their position relative to the verb and by subject agreement". This statement adds to the evidence that Hausa is a head-marking language in line with the proposition that strictly headmarking languages are those with agreement and no case (Nichols, 1986). However, Citing Nichols (1992) Abdoulaye (1992, p.21) sees Hausa as a "detached" marking language by giving the example below:

Abdù yaa fa nùfi gidaa
Abdu 3MS PERF indeed head II home
'Abdu indeed headed home'

He proposes that the marking in the above instance is "detached" and not occurring on either the head or the dependent. He proposes that Hausa in this context exhibits "detached marking" because the word yaa follows the subject Abdu and marks person and tense/aspect separately from the verb nùfi. He argues that this marking is separate from the verb because the marker is followed by a modal particle fa.

Similarly, though Creissels (2006) agrees that the suffixes –n and –r are genitive linkers occurring when the noun fulfils the role of head in genitive constructions, he highlights a potential problem which puts to question, the classification of Hausa as a head-marking language. These suffixes he asserts, equally appear with attributive adjectives preceding nouns, e.g. fari-n karee "white dog" and fara-r saaniyaa "white cow" and cannot as such be accepted as instances of head-marking. But he suggests that in situations where attributive adjectives precede nouns, they should be understood to take additional "gender agreement marker homonymous with the suffix of the construct forms of nouns . . ." (2006, p.78). Thus, it could be assumed that he acknowledges the head-marking potential of the language.

However, in an apparent reconsideration of his earlier claim, Abdoulaye cites and concurs with the position of van Valin (1987a, 1992) that the vital characteristic of head-marking languages is the tendency to "drop any nominal argument cross-referenced by a suffix on the head" drawing examples from Lakhota (1992, p.22):

a. lakhota ki thathaka ota wicha-Ø-kte.
Indian the bison many 3pU-3sgA-kill
(lit: 'the Indian bisons many they-killed-them')
'The Indian killed many bisons.'
b. wicha-Ø-kte.
3pU-3sgA-kill
'He killed them.'

He contends that Lakhota shows a "clausal head-marking strategy" because in (a), the subject and object nominals are both cross-referenced on the verb whereas (b) shows the possibility of omitting the two nominals without affecting the grammaticality of the head verb. He argues further that Hausa equally behaves the same way as Lakota "because the subject nominal is totally optional and the verb with only the person – tense/aspect marker can stand on its own as a full clause" and provides the following example; an example he describes as an "endocentric clause structure" because the pronoun does not actually attach to the verb.

yaa fa nùfi gidaa
3MS.PERF indeed head-II home

He thus concludes from the above that "Hausa, for all practical purposes, can be analyzed as patterning like a head-marking language" (1992, p.23). But Crysmann (2009, p.3) again demonstrates a tendency for dependent-marking in Hausa in the following example which he observes is because the genitive marker appears initially on the possessive modifier as a free form:

Naa karàntà "I read Kande's"

It appears from the foregoing that languages do not seem to follow a consistent pattern and head or dependent-marking patterns are determined by phrasal or clausal structures. This is because even Hungarian that has been reported to exhibit head-marking above, displays a "split" marking pattern in the following examples by Nichols (1992, p.54):

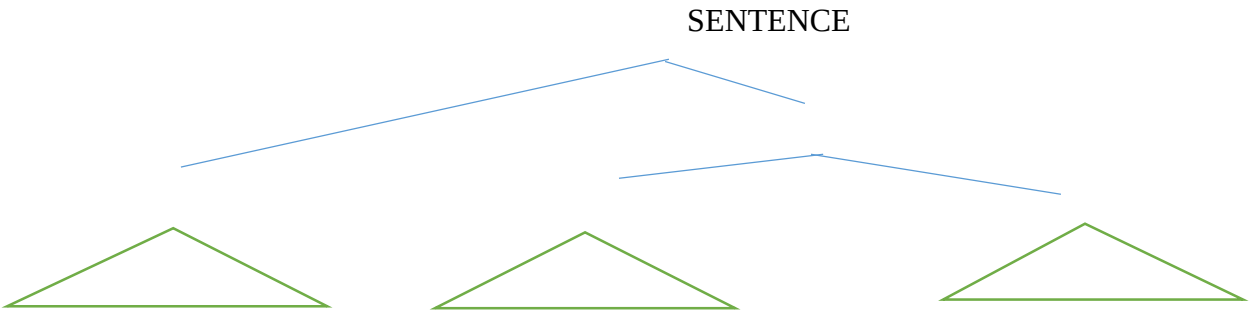
a. **mellett**-em beside 1sg
"beside me"

b. a ház **mellett** the house beside
"beside the house"

Prepositional phrases are head-marking when they occur with pronouns but there is no marking when they occur with nouns as shown in the above examples.

2.5 **Information Structure: Topicalisation and Focus**

Topicalisation and focus in Hausa according to Caron (2013), occur by means of "left- dislocation of an element of a sentence" although they differ in their morphological, syntactic and pragmatic forms. The topic, he contends, connects with the "pragmatic preamble" of the utterance whereas the focus belongs to the syntactic/predicative organisation of the utterance. Newman (2000, p.187) observes that focus constructions in Hausa resemble English



cleft sentences as in [Mūsā nè] ta àurā "It was Musa she married" (not someone else). He concludes that in topicalisation, a "discourse-old" NP is usually mentioned beforehand, while the rest of the sentence makes a comment on it, for example: <<Bellò kàm>> Topic [yā dāwō jiyà] Comment "As for Bello, he returned yesterday" (2000, p.615). The following tree diagram from Newman shows a sentence with both focus and topicalisation:

S'

Topic Focus S

<<hawan dōkì dai>> {Sulè nē} ya fi kōwā riding of horse indeed
Sule STAB 3m,pret exceed everyone As for riding horses, it is Sule who is the best.

Where:

SENTENCE → <<Topic>> S' (where S' is the "Comment")
S' → {Focus} S (where S is the sentence from which the Focus is extracted)

S → Subject PAC Predicate (etc.) (2000, p.615).

In topicalisation then, an NP is set in a reference-initial position and the remainder of the utterance makes a comment about it in such a way that the TAM of the remaining part of the sentence is not affected by the topicalisation as summed up by Newman below: The topic belongs to the pragmatic preamble of the utterance, and is separated from the rest by either (i) the intonation; (ii) the insertion of a modal particle like dai 'indeed', fa 'well', kam 'really', kuwa (= kò (:)) 'moreover' etc. (or a succession of such particles) (2000, p.616).

Focus on the other hand, is expressed through either the fronting of the focus constituent – "ex situ focus" or leaving it in its base form – "in situ focus" according to Zimmermann (2005:2). The former he explains may either be marked syntactically through fronting, or morphologically by the presence of a relative auxiliary caused by fronting. Furthermore, it may take the particle nee (masculine) or cee (feminine) or yet still, be "prosodically-marked by an intonational phrase boundary between the ex situ constituent and the rest of the clause". Zeller (2015, p.17) also maintains that focus constituents contain "focus-marking copula which are optional in addition to a special morphology on the verb". Zimmermann (2005, p.2) has the following examples:

a. **Mèe** sukà kaamàa?

What 3.PL-REL.PERF. catch

"What did they catch?"

b. **Kiifii** (nèe) sukà kaamàa

Fish PRT 3PL-REL.PERF catch

"They caught fish"

Note: the focussed element is emboldened in each case.

With respect to the in situ focus, there is no morpho-syntactic marking because the auxiliary remains in its absolute form as there is no focus movement. Similarly, there is no prosodic marking and the particle nee/cee is rarely found, for example:

a. **Mèe** sukà kaamàa?

-What 3.PL-REL.PERF catch

"What did they catch?"

b. Sun kaamà kiifii

3PL-ABS.PERF catch fish

"They caught fish"

2.6 **Case-Marking:**

Zimmermann (2006, p.456) defines Hausa as a language that has no overt case-marking. He points out that in the language, ". . . arguments are identified by their position relative to the verb and by subject agreement". However, Caron (2013, p.25) provides instances of casemarking in the language in the following examples:

a. Kadà kà kaʃe: mu!

Don't you kill us

"Don't kill us!"

Caron describes the example in sentence (a) above as an instance of Accusative case-marking because the direct object pronoun immediately follows the verb. He also views sentence (b) below as a Dative/Accusative case-marking in view of the occurrence of the indirect object before the direct object; marked by the particle wà.

b. An gina: wà sarki: gida:
They 4.PFV.NFOC build for (DAT) chief house
"They built a house for the chief"

This paper takes exception to the translation of An in sentence (b) as "they". I argue that an is used where no subject is identified; mostly in perfective or passive constructions. Hence, the most appropriate translation of the sentence is "a house has been built for the chief". It is nonetheless, the opinion of this paper that consistent with being a predominantly head-marking language, Hausa has no case-marking.

2.7 **Verb-Fronting:**

As found in some languages such as Chinese and Cantonese, verb-fronting equally occurs in Hausa. The argument of Maurer, et al. (2013, p. 419) that this phenomenon is found nearly solely in Atlantic creoles may be faulted because of the number of languages exhibiting it. In Hausa, verb-fronting is used in focus constructions according to Abdoulaye (1992, p.372). According to him, one constituency for fronting in Hausa is V + dà and that it is not regular for the verb to be fronted while dà + NP are left hanging. He illustrates this thus:

a. jeefar dà bùhun hatsii nèe Abdu ya yi.
Throw-VN-of V sack-of millet COP.m Abdu 3ms.REL PERF do
'It is throwing off/ away the millet sack that Abdu did.'

b. *jeefar nèe Abdu ya yi dà bùhun hatsii.
throw-VN-of COP.m Abdu 3ms.REL PERF do V sack-of millet
'It is throwing off/ away the millet sack that Abdu did.'

It is evident from the sentence in (a) that the object of the "complex nucleus" buhun hatsi "sack of millet" has to follow the verb otherwise an anomalous construction will result as seen in sentence (b). This contrasts with NP focusing discussed in 2.5 above in which the focused element does not immediately follow the verb. In the following examples (also cited in 2.5 above), the verb occurs last as in sentence (a) or is sometimes followed by an adverb as in sentence (b).

a. [Mūsā nè] ta àurā
Musa it was 3FS.COMPL married
"It was Musa she married"

b. [Bellò kàm] yā dāwō jiyà
Bello as for 3MS.COMPL returned yesterday
"As for Bello, he returned yesterday"

3.0 **Concluding Remarks:**

The brief typological sketch of Hausa language given in this paper makes it clear that Hausa is a well-researched and well-documented language. My purpose in writing this article therefore is not to disprove what others have proved but rather, to stimulate further research on the language particularly in areas where scholars disagree about the presence or absence of certain typological features. It should be clear from what has been reported in this article that except with head and dependent marking for which the status of Hausa either as a head or dependentmarking language remains a matter of controversy, the language shows consistent typological patterning with languages that share similar syntactic and morphological structures.

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