

A typological sketch of Hausa¹

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1.0 Preliminary remarks

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 the language as belonging to the West Chadic genus in the Chadic sub-family of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Newman (2000:1) describes Hausa as a member of the Chadic language family, “which itself is a constituent member of the Afro-Asiatic 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 in itself within West Chadic, because according to him, Gwandara, 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 Afro-Asiatic, Jaggar (2001:2) 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

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the comments of three anonymous reviewers and Albert Lee which greatly helped in improving the paper. Ultimately of course, all errors are mine and I take full responsibility for them.

mā, Berber *mai*; Hausa *sūnā* 'name', compared to Hebrew *sem*, Bedawi/Beja (Cushitic) *sim*, etc.

Hausa is a tone language with three lexical tones: high, low and falling (Leben, Inkelas and Cobler 1989; Inkelas and Leben 1990). Consistent with their assertion is that of Newman and Jaggard (1989:227) who explain 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”; **makèeraa** “blacksmiths” vs. **makeeraa** “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) states 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 Jaggard (2001:1) as “a major world language with more first-language 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 (2004:56) 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, which is by no means exhaustive, is presented.

2.0 Typological sketch of Hausa

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 (1953) 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 whose examples I chose not to alter.

2.1 Basic word order

Crysmann (2010) observes 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. Jaggar (2006:224) provides a broader schema of 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 in (1) of a ditransitive clause:

(1) *daalibîn* *ya* *kaawoo* *wà* *maalàminsà* *'aiki*
 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 negation as shown in the following sentence in (2):

(2) *màlāmai* *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 state that Hausa follows Greenberg's Universal no.1 which states that "in declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which the subject precedes the object" (1963:76).

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 any 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 include *ga: [wàndòn [dà [nà sàja:]]* "here are [the trousers [that [I bought]]]". This example supports the claim of Abraham (1941 cited in Whaley, 1997: 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 (2013:33) 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:ffe* 'except'; *gà/gàre* '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. Except for *gà* which takes the form *gàre* when it occurs before a direct object pronoun (PNG.ACC), e.g. *gàre: tà* 'by her', all basic prepositions take independent pronouns as

complements, e.g. *sabò: dà ita* ‘because of her’. There are also, among the basic prepositions, compound prepositions containing an adverb followed by the preposition *dà*, e.g. *ban dà* ‘apart from’; *duk dà* ‘despite’; *fije dà* ‘more than’; *gàme dà, tà:re 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’); *ɸikin* ‘inside’ (< *ɸiki* (adv.) ‘inside’); *kân* ‘on top of’ (< *kâi* ‘head’); *ba:jan* ‘behind’ (< *ba:ja* ‘at the back’); *màimakon* ‘in exchange for’ (< *màimako*: ‘replacement’ (2013:33).

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 in (3):

- (3) a. *dà* *Audù* *nee* *mukà* *fita*.
 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 in (3) are indicators that prepositions come before nouns. Even though there are exceptions elsewhere in Africa, this again is consistent with Greenberg’s Universal no.3 that “languages with dominant SVO order are always prepositional” (1963:77).

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 are genitive markers in Hausa – the former for masculine and the latter for feminine, with the examples in (4):

- (4) a. gida + n Audu
 house of Audu
 ‘Audu’s house’
- b. mata + r Yahaya
 wife of Yahaya
 ‘Yahaya’s wife’

Caron (2013:20) explains that the Genitive Linker in Hausa connects an NP with a following NP as shown in the examples above, or with 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 in (5):

Free	Bound	
(5) gida: na sarki:	gida-n sarki:	‘the chief’s house’
go:na: ta sarki:	gona-r sarki:	‘the chief’s farm’
gida:dʒe: na sarki:	gida:dʒe-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: ʃe* ‘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, 1986:57) in the example in (6).

- (6) az ember ház-a
 the man house-3SG.
 ‘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 head-marking languages are those with agreement and no case (Nichols, 1986). However, referring to Nichols (1992) Abdoulaye (1992:21) sees Hausa as a “detached” marking language by giving the example in (7).

- (7) 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 a 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-marking¹. 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 . . .” (2006:78). 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 characteristic² of head-marking languages is the tendency to “drop any nominal argument cross-referenced by a suffix on the head” drawing examples from Lakhota (1992:22) in (8).

- (8) 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 example in (9); an example he describes as an “endocentric clause structure” because the pronoun does not actually attach to the verb.

- (9) yaa fa nùfi gidaa
 3MS.PERF indeed head-II home
 'Abdu indeed headed home'

¹ A reviewer points out that attribution is a generalised relation which can be head-marking or dependent-marking.

² A reviewer calls my attention to the fact that it may not be a defining characteristic but may be a typical consequence of head-marking.

He thus concludes from the above that “Hausa, for all practical purposes, can be analyzed as patterning like a head-marking language” (1992:23). But Crysmann (2009:3) again demonstrates a tendency for dependent-marking in Hausa in the following example in (10) which he observes is because the genitive marker appears initially on the possessive modifier as a free form:

- (10) Naa karàntà na Kànde
 1SG.COMPL read L.m Kànde
 ‘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. Even Hungarian which has been reported to exhibit head-marking above, displays a “split” marking pattern in the following examples in (11) by Nichols (1992:54):

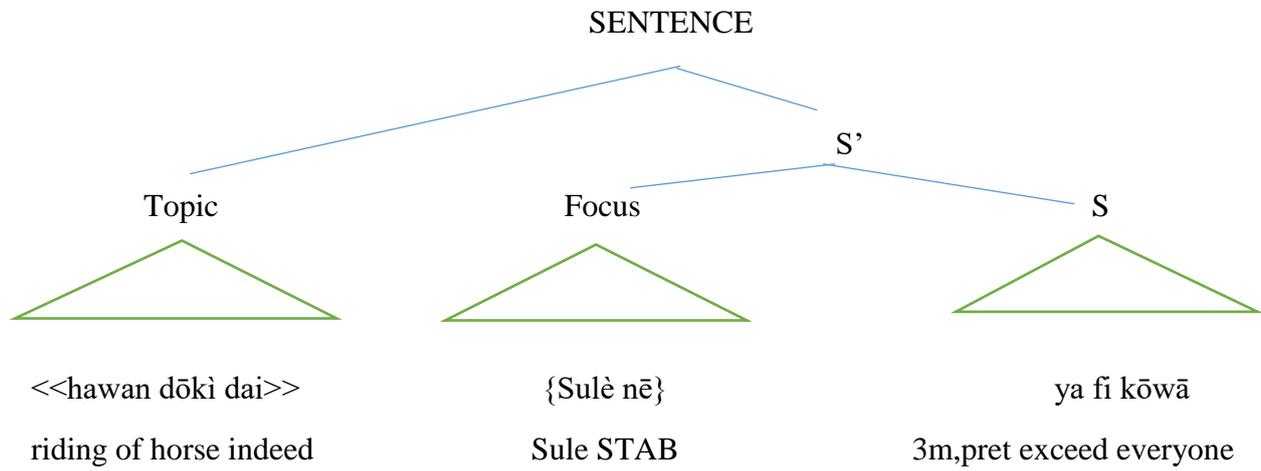
- (11) a. mellett-*e*
 beside 1sg
 ‘beside me’
- b. a ház **mellett**
 the house beside
 ‘beside the house’

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 connects with the “pragmatic preamble” of the utterance whereas the focus belongs to the syntactic/predicative organisation of the utterance. Newman (2000:187) 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” (2000:615). The following tree diagram from Newman shows a sentence with both focus and topicalisation.



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.) (2000:615).

In topicalisation, then, an NP is set in an utterance-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) (2000:616).

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 Hartmann and Zimmermann (2007). The former, they explain, 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 (2015:17) also maintains that focus constituents contain “focus-marking copulas which are optional in addition to a special morphology on the verb”. Hartmann and Zimmermann (2007) give the following examples in (12) and (13).

- (12) Mèè sukà kaamàa?
 What 3.PL-REL.PERF. catch
 ‘What did they catch?’
- (13) **Kiifii** (nèè) 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 as noted in (14) and (15).

- (14) **Mèè** sukà kaamàa?
 What 3.PL-REL.PERF catch
 ‘What did they catch?’
- (15) Sun kaamà kiifii
 3PL-ABS.PERF catch fish
 ‘They caught fish’

2.6 Case-Marking

Zimmermann (2006:456) 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 (2013:25) provides instances of case-marking in the language in the following example in (16).

- (16) Kadà kà kafe: mu!
 Don’t you kill us
 ‘Don’t kill us!’

Caron describes the example in sentence (16) above as an instance of Accusative case-marking because the direct object pronoun immediately follows the verb. He also views sentence (17) 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*.

- (17) An gina: wà sarki: gida:
 They 4.PFV.NFOC build for (DAT) chief house
 ‘They built a house for the chief’

This paper considers these examples as instances of split case-marking. It also takes exception to both the glossing and the translation of *An* in sentence (17) as “they”. It is argued 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. In Hausa, verb-fronting is used in focus constructions according to Abdoulaye (1992:372). He states that 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. In this language, the verb is not repeated “in situ” as it is in some languages. He illustrates this in (18) thus:

- (18) 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 mille
 'It is throwing off/ away the millet sack that Abdu did.'

It is evident from the sentence in (18.a) that the object of the “complex nucleus” *bùhun hatsii* “sack of millet” has to follow the verb otherwise an anomalous construction will result as seen in (18.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 in (19) and (20), (also cited in 2.5 above), the verb occurs last as in sentence (19) or is sometimes followed by an adverb as in sentence (20).

- (19) [Mūsā nè] ta àurā
 Musa it was 3FS.COMPL married
 ‘It was Musa she married’
- (20) [Bellò kàm] yā¹ 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 paper that Hausa is largely a head-marking language or a language that shows a number of head-marking patterns. The language however, shows consistent typological patterning with languages that share similar syntactic and morphological structures.

¹ A reviewer calls my attention to the absence of focus in this sentence; the pronoun yā indicates topicalisation.

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