

THE “COGNATE ACCUSATIVE” IN HAUSA

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English has a construction, termed “cognate object”, in which the direct object of a verb is a lexically related deverbal noun (Quirk et al. 1985, pp. 750-51). With the exception of a few very common collocations, such as ‘He will sing a song’, where the cognate form has become lexicalized as a concrete noun, the cognate noun tends to be modified, e.g.,

They fought a clean fight.
He breathed his last breath.
She lived a life of leisure.
We danced an incredible dance.
I dreamt a wonderful dream.

The construction is not esoteric, but it does have a certain literary or, as Quirk et al. put it, “orotund” quality.

In Latin (Henderson and Fletcher 1900, pp. 95-96), and Greek (Goodwin 1958, pp. 223-24), the construction, which is well known to classics scholars, is referred to as “cognate accusative”. In these languages, the cognate verbal noun may be a direct object, but it is not necessarily so, since it also may accompany intransitive verbs.

A similar construction, termed “maf^uul mut^laq”, exists in Arabic (Abboud et al. 1975, pp. 247-48). Arabic differs from Latin and Greek in that the cognate verbal noun never occurs as a direct object. It functions instead as a verbal complement. Semantically it serves to intensify, modify, or enumerate the action represented by the verb.

1. Hausa has two “cognate accusative” type constructions involving the co-occurrence of a verb and its cognate verbal noun. The first has many similarities to the corresponding constructions in English, Latin, Greek, and Arabic. With some collocations, such as *an kashèe shi muugùn kisàa* ‘He was killed violently’ (lit. one killed him horrible killing), this construction is quite common, in written as well as in spoken Hausa. With others, it is much less so; nevertheless, it is potentially productive and available with almost any verb–verbal noun pairing.

In the Hausa cognate accusative, the verb is followed later in the sentence by a noun phrase containing as its head a cognate verbal noun. The noun phrase with the cognate item functions adverbially, i.e., it qualifies the basic meaning of the verb in a detailed and specific way. The cognate

verbal noun does *not* function syntactically as a direct object. If the verb is transitive, it will normally take its regular direct object followed by the cognate accusative phrase. Examples¹:

wani macijii yaa sàari yaaròn mùmmuunan saaraa
 some snake he slash boy.the horrible.L slashing
 ‘A snake has bitten the boy seriously.’

taa màaree shì maariì màì ciwòò
 she slapped him slap with pain
 ‘She gave him a painful slap.’

taa zàagee shì zaagìì na baatà hankàlii
 she insulted him insulting of spoiling sense
 ‘She hurled a gross insult on him.’

With intransitive verbs, the cognate accusative typically occurs immediately after the verb, e.g.,

yaa tsayàa tsayìn dakàa
 he stood standing.of pounding
 ‘He stood firmly in his resolve.’

yaa mutù mutuwâf marâr kyâu
 he died death.of lacking goodness
 ‘He died a miserable death.’

gidan nân yaa ginu ginìn gaskiyaa
 house.of this it is-built building.of truth
 ‘This house is well/honestly built.’

sun kookàa kuukaa màì ban tàusàyii
 they cried crying with giving.L pity
 ‘They cried in a pitiful manner.’

This last example could be translated into English as ‘They cried a pitiful cry’, with ‘cry’ functioning as an object. In Hausa, the long final vowel on *kookàa* shows that the verb is intransitive and that *kuukaa* does not constitute a direct object.

¹ [In the examples *b*, *d*, and *k* are glottalized consonants. The symbol *ř* represents the rolled/tap rhotic; the retroflex flap is indicated simply as *r*. In the literal glosses, morpheme boundaries within a word are indicated by a period. The bound linker used with pronominal adjectives and pre-object verbal nouns is noted as L, whereas the particle *dà* that accompanies grade 5 verbs is left unglossed].

The cognate verbal noun is always (or almost always) modified in some way. Commonly occurring modifiers include pre- or post-nominal adjectives, post-nominal genitive phrases introduced by the linker *na/ta* ‘of’ (masculine/feminine), or less often, the corresponding zero vowel allomorphs *-n/-ñ*, and post-nominal phrases containing the common particle *mài* ‘possessing, with’, or its negative counterpart *maràñ* ‘lacking’.

mun goodèe masà dà matukañ gòodiyaa
we thanked to.him with enormous.L thanks
‘We thanked him profusely.’

Audù yaa shàhañà shàhañàa sànnaniyaa
Audu he is-famous fame known.fem
‘Audu is extremely well known / overwhelmingly popular.’

yaa dòokee shì duukàa na rashìn hankàlii
he beat him beating of lack.of sense
‘He beat him severely.’

an kaayañ dà Bàlaa kaayãrwaa ta wulaakancii
one threw Bala throwing of humiliation
‘Bala was thrown down (e.g., in a wrestling match) in a humiliating manner.’

yaa sai dà mootãrsà sayãrwaa ta tiilàs
he sell car.of.his selling of perforce
‘He was forced into selling his car.’

mun zaunàa dà shii zaman tàare
we sat with him sitting.of together
‘I lived together with him.’

an wankèe minì kaayaa wankii mài kyâu
one wash to.me clothes washing with goodness
‘My clothes were washed spanking clean.’

yaa buusà sàreewàa buushii marãñ kyâu
he blew flute blowing lacking goodness
‘He blew the flute badly.’

Instead of having an adjectival modifier, the cognate accusative can be accompanied by a numeral or other quantifier. In this formation, the semantic interpretation is normally the number of times that the action

took place. In all cases, the cognate noun can be replaced by the word *sàu*, which is the normal means of expressing ‘times’. Examples:

taa màaree shì maarii goomà
 she slapped him slapping 10
 ‘She slapped him 10 times.’
 = *taa màaree shì sàu goomà* (lit. she slapped him times ten)

yaa feekè fensìrìi fiikàa ukù
 he sharpened pencil sharpening 3
 ‘He sharpened the pencil 3 times.’

mun bugàa musù wayàa bugùu hudù
 we beat to.them wire beating 4
 ‘We telephoned them 4 times.’

taa gwadà tàakàlmii gwajii hudù
 she tested shoes test(ing) 4
 ‘She tried on the shoes 4 times.’

mun zaunàa dà shii zamaa ukù
 we sat with him sitting 3
 ‘We lived together 3 times.’

matsòoràcii zâi mutù mutuwàa mài yawàa
 coward will.he die death with many
 ‘A coward will die many deaths.’

In principle, there is no reason why the cognate noun cannot occur with both a modifier and a numeral, e.g.,

macijii yaa sàaree sù mùmmuunan saaraa ukù
 snake he slash them horrible.L slashing 3
 ‘The snake bit them seriously 3 times.’

yaa kaayâr dà Bàlaa kaayâr waa bakwài na wulaakancii
 he threw Bala throwing 7 of humiliation
 ‘Bala was thrown down 7 times in a humiliating way.’

The verbal noun that appears in the cognate accusative phrase is not limited to any particular morphological type. Verbs that have corresponding derivational verbal nouns (more or less equal to the “secondary verbal nouns” of other scholars) tend to use them, see (a); but other verbal noun

types are also common. Grade 5 “effferential” verbs, for example, take weak inflectional verbal nouns (the so-called *wa*-verbal nouns, as their cognate nouns, see (b)), whereas the cognate verbal nouns of monoverbs, irregular verbs, grade 3 verbs, and some other verbs are morphologically non-*wa* strong inflectional verbal nouns, see (c).

- (a) *taa zàagee shì zaagìi na baatà hankàlii*
 she insulted him insulting of spoil sense
 ‘She hurled gross insults on him.’

yaa dòokee shì duukàa na rashìn hankàlii
 he beat him beating of lack.of sense
 ‘He beat him severely.’

yaa yàbee mù yàboo na karyaa
 he praised us praise of lying
 ‘He praised us insincerely.’

an kashèe shi muugùn kisàa
 one killed him horrible killing
 ‘He was killed violently.’

Musaa yaa dāuru dāurìn kàawoo wukaa
 Musa he was-tied tying.of bring knife
 ‘Musa is tied up very well
 (hands and feet like a ram to be slaughtered)’

- (b) *yaa tsooratař dà suu tsooratāřwaa mài ban tsòoroo*
 he frightened them frightening with giving.L fear
 ‘He frightened them beyond description.’

yaa sai dà mootāřsà sayāřwaa ta tiilàs
 he sell car.of.his selling of perforce
 ‘He was forced into selling his car.’

- (c) *yaa ci àbinci muugùn cí irìn na hàřâm*
 he ate food evil eating type.the of forbidden
 ‘He ate the food horribly/maliciously.’

naa gan kà ganii na kwarai
 I saw you seeing of very
 ‘I got a good look at you.’

Audù yaa shàhàrà shàhàrà sànnaniyaa
 Audu he is-famous fame known.fem
 ‘Audu is extremely well known / overwhelmingly popular.’

jirgin samà yaa sàuka sàukaa màì ban màamaakii
 plane.of sky he alight alighting with giving.L amazement
 ‘The plane landed in an amazing way.’

jirgin samà yaa taashì taashii shidà
 plane.of sky he arise arising 6
 ‘The plane took off 6 times.’

sun caashè hatsii muugùwař càasaa
 they thresh grain evil.L threshing
 ‘They threshed the grain maliciously.’

The typical contrast in cognate accusative constructions is between the verb (which has normal inflectional and conjugational properties of verbs) and the corresponding verbal or deverbal noun (which has normal nominal properties such as case and gender). For example, in the sentence *sun kookàa kuukaa màì ban tàusàyii* ‘They cried pitifully’, *kookàa* is an intransitive verb belonging to the grade 1 morphological class, whereas *kuukaa* is a verbal noun with masculine gender. However, in certain syntactic environments in Hausa, most notably in imperfective tense/aspects, finite verbs in some classes are replaced by non-finite verbal noun forms, cf. *mun zoo* ‘We came’ (finite verb *zoo*), vs. *munàa zuwàa* ‘We are coming’ (verbal noun *zuwàa*). Since the erstwhile verb in the verb slot may appear as a verbal noun, one finds cognate accusative constructions in which both related forms are nominal, often being identical. Examples:

sunàa kuukaa kuukaa màì ban tàusàyii
 ‘They are crying pitifully.’

yanàa tsayàawaa tsayìn dakàa
 ‘He is standing firmly in his resolve.’

anàa wankìn kaayaa wankii na gaskiyaa
 ‘They wash clothes properly.’

yanàa duukàntà duukàa na rashìn hankàlii
 ‘He is beating her mercilessly.’

tanàa zaagìn mijìntà zaagii na baatà hankàlii
 ‘She is hurling gross insults on her husband.’

yanàa sàyen hatsii sàyen gaskiyaa
 ‘He is buying grain at an honest price.’

In the examples so far, the cognate accusative served to elaborate on or specify the nature of the action of the verb. The cognate accusative can also function contrastively. This can be indicated either by inserting *ammaa* ‘but’ before the cognate accusative phrase and/or by negating it.

yanàa yàbontà àmmaa yàbon karyaa
 he.is praising.L.her but praise.of lying
 ‘He is praising her insincerely.’

munàa kòoyon Tuuřancii àmmaa kòoyon gaggaawaa
 we.are learning.L.English but learning.of haste
 ‘We are learning English but in a rushed manner.’

sun kwaana à gidàn àmmaa kwaanan zàune
 they spent-night at house.the but spending-night.of seated
 ‘They spent the night at the house without sleeping.’

naa san Bàlaa bà sanìn shaanuu ba
 I know Bala neg knowledge.of cows neg
 ‘I know Bala very well (i.e., not casually).’

Audù yaa shaa ruwaa àmmaa bàa shân hàukaa ba
 Audu he drank water but neg drinking.of madness neg
 ‘Audu drank water but not gulping it down selfishly.’

2. The second construction type in Hausa that employs a “cognate accusative” consists of a verb followed by a direct object made up of the genitive linker *na/ta* plus a cognate verbal noun, e.g., *sun sàyi na sàyee* ‘They bought the ones to be bought (and left the others)’ (lit. they bought of buying). The semantic thrust of this construction is that the things or people in question (represented by the cognate accusative) constitute the set affected by the verb as opposed to those that are not. This construction requires that the verb take an object, i.e., it must be transitive or prepositional; it cannot be strictly intransitive nor passive. As with the cognate accusative construction described above, the cognate verbal noun is not restricted as to any particular morphological type. Also, as with the previous construction, the erstwhile verb in the syntactic verb slot may appear as a verbal noun form, thereby producing a sequence of two, often identical, verbal nouns. Examples:

sun baĩ na barìi (lit. they left of leaving)

‘They left those that had to be left
(e.g., injured soldiers by a retreating army).’

sun haĩbè na haĩbèewaa (lit. they shot of shooting)

‘They shot dead the ones who were supposed to be shot.’

sun sòoki na suukàa (lit. they criticized of criticizing)

‘They criticized those who deserved to be criticized.’

sunàa suukàn na suukàa (lit. they are criticizing.L of criticizing)

‘They are criticizing those who deserved to be criticized.’

sun zàabi na zàabee (lit. they chose of choosing)

‘They chose those available to be chosen.’

sunàa zaabìn na zàabee (lit. they are choosing.L of choosing)

‘They are choosing those available to be chosen.’

an kyaalè na kyaalèewaa (lit. one ignored of ignoring)

‘They ignored what could/should be ignored.’

sun ci na cì (lit. they ate of eating)

‘They ate the edibles.’

sunàa cìn na cì (lit. they are eating.L of eating)

‘They are eating the edibles.’

mun tsoorataĩ dà na tsoorataĩwaa (lit. we frightened of frightening)

‘We frightened the ones subject to fright.’

sun tsaamè na tsàamaa (= *sun tsaamè na tsaamèewaa*)

they picked-out of picking-out

‘They picked out the ones to be taken out.’

sun waarè na waarèewaa (lit. they separated of separating)

‘They separated the ones to be separated.’

The linker plus cognate verbal noun represents a noun phrase with a missing but understood head, e.g., [*∅ na waarèewaa*], where the *∅* stands for the things or animals or people to be separated. Since the understood head is semantically plural, the linker is usually *na* rather than *ta*. However, since singular nouns in Hausa may be, and often are, used in a plural or

generic sense, the feminine linker *ta* will appear if the understood referent has feminine gender, e.g.,

gyàdār Ràbo, mun caasà ta caasàawaa; mun zubà ràgoowâf à rùmbunsà
peanut(s).of Rabo, we shelled of shelling; we poured leftover.the in
bin.of.his

‘As for Rabo’s peanuts, we shelled the ones to be shelled; we put what was left in his bin.’

(àyàbà), an sayār dà ta sayâr̄waa; an koomàa dà sauraa cikin gaāreeji

(bananas), one sold of selling; one returned with remainder in garage

‘(Bananas), one sold the ones for sale; one put the rest back in the garage.’

3. Hausa has two cognate accusative constructions represented by sentences such as (a) *taa yàbi yaarò yàboo na karyaa* ‘She praised the boy insincerely’ (lit. she praised boy praise of lying), and (b) *taa yàbi na yàboo* ‘She praised those deserving praise’ (lit. she praised of praise). Both of these sentence types are considered commonplace by native Hausa speakers. Although these constructions—at least the first—are familiar to most Hausaists, they have on the whole been neglected in descriptive as well as pedagogical grammars of the language. The purpose of this paper is to rectify that omission by providing an explicit sketch of the “cognate accusative” in Hausa .

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