

## 16. Study Hausa, Understand Kanakuru

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1. Some 40 years ago, I published a paper in *Harsunan Nijeriya*, the journal of the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, BUK, entitled "Study Kanakuru, Understand Hausa". The title of today's paper is a direct play on and reference to that earlier paper. The essential theme of "Study Kanakuru..." was that knowledge of small, poorly described Chadic languages, for which Kanakuru (a Chadic language spoken in the Shani-Shellen region south of the Biu Plateau) served as a representative, could throw light on anomalous features of Hausa that lacked explanation when viewed from within Hausa itself.<sup>1</sup> The simplest, but still quite striking, example concerned the Hausa demonstratives **wani** / **wata** / **wasu** 'some' (m.) / (f.) / (pl.), e.g., **wani mùtùm** 'some man' / **wata màcè** 'some woman' / **wasu mutàanee** 'some people'.<sup>2</sup> (Note that Hausa does not distinguish gender in the plural.) Exactly what the **wa-** element is we are not sure, although it would appear to be related to the word **wàa** 'who?'; but what is sure is that these demonstratives are composed of **wa-** + **ni** / **ta** / **su**, which are easily identified as the pronouns 'me' (1st sg.) / 'her' (3rd sg. feminine) / 'them' (3rd pl.), e.g., **Sun kaamàa ni** 'They caught me'; **Sun kaamàa ta** 'They caught her'; **Sun kaamàa su** 'They caught them'; cf. **Sun kaamàa shi** 'They caught him.' The obvious question — although I suppose that the question was not so obvious since up to that time no one had asked it — is why the asymmetry? That is, why does the masculine demonstrative employ the 1st person pronoun when the feminine and plural demonstratives make use of 3rd person pronouns?

Hausaists to whom I posed this question, both Europeans and native Hausa speakers, came up with any number of imaginative and inventive answers involving semantics, psychology, pragmatics, and culture to try to explain why **wani**, the masculine singular form, employed

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to comparative Chadic, see Newman & Ma (1966), Newman (1977), and Schuh (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Hausa examples are given in standard orthography except that vowel length and tone are represented. Long vowels are indicated using double letters, e.g. **aa** vs. **a**, and tone is shown using accent marks, namely **à** for low, **û** for falling and high tone is unmarked, in the case of long vowels the accent being indicated on the first letter only.

the 1st person pronoun as opposed to the feminine singular and plural forms, which used the 3rd person pronouns. But none of these answers were right. It is unlikely that the real answer, which I provided in my paper, could have been found [222] by means of a synchronic analysis of Hausa alone, no matter how detailed. Rather, the answer emerged from knowledge of Kanakuru and other Chadic languages. The simple explanation — simple after the fact — is that historically speaking, the **ni** that one sees in **wani** is *not* the 1st person, as it appears, but rather is a retention of an old 3rd person masculine pronoun **\*ni**. This pronoun form is widespread in languages of the Chadic family (see Kraft 1974) and can also be reconstructed for Proto-Chadic. Chadic languages often do have an **nV** 1st person pronoun; but this typically contrasts with the **ni** 3rd person pronoun by means of the quality of the vowel, e.g., **na** or **no** vs. **ni**, or by tone, e.g., **ni** '1st person' vs. **nì** '3rd person masculine'. What apparently happened in the history of Hausa is that the 1st and 3rd person pronouns phonologically fell together, and to avoid the homophony this would have created, Hausa dropped the 3rd person masculine **ni** pronoun and replaced it by a grammatically conditioned allomorph that was already in the language, namely **sa / shi**. But as a frozen fixed form, **wani** remained in the language as such — it wasn't replaced by **\*washi** — thereby leaving a hidden trace of the old 3rd person masculine pronoun **ni**. Despite being quite short and linguistically somewhat naive, this very early paper of mine proved to be important in three respects: biographical, linguistic, and academic-cultural. I shall discuss these in turn.

2.1. When I began in African linguistics, it was not as a Hausaist. I used Hausa as a lingua franca to conduct research on small Chadic languages when the informants I was working with didn't speak English, but it was not the object of my research as such. To be honest, I had been frightened away from undertaking research on Hausa because of the presence of major Hausaists who were already working on the language. These included Mr. F. W. Parsons at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), who was recognized as the world's leading authority on the language, Professor Neil Skinner, a prolific author of books and articles on Hausa lexicography and literature (and my first Hausa teacher), and Dr. Kabir Galadanci, a SOAS trained and analytically sophisticated young scholar who had the advantage of being a native speaker of the language. My feeling was that with people of this calibre already working on the language, what could I hope to contribute? So I delved into the study of small, undescribed Chadic languages spoken in the general area of Gombe and

Biu. (When asked what languages I was working on, my answer tended to be phrased in the negative: I work on any and all languages in northeastern Nigeria as long as they were *not* Hausa, Kanuri, or Fulfulde.) What the "Study Kanakuru..." paper taught me was that with my comparative Chadic perspective, I could explain things about Hausa that the major scholars who knew so much more about the language than I did couldn't. One thus could say that the [223] publication of this paper marked the beginning of my career-long involvement in Hausa linguistics culminating in my nearly 800 page Hausa reference grammar (2000).

2.2. Prior to the publication of this paper of mine, scholars had looked at Hausa in a vacuum. The studies were almost exclusively synchronic, the classic paper by the German linguist Klingenberg (1927/28) being a remarkable exception, and they all focused on Hausa without reference to related languages. Following "Study Kanakuru ..." scholars gradually began to draw on data from related Chadic languages to stimulate and enrich their investigations of Hausa.

I already mentioned the analysis of the demonstratives **wani/wata/wasu**. Here are a couple of other examples where Chadic data have contributed to our thoughts about puzzling phenomena in Hausa.

2.2.1. Hausa forms commands in two basic ways. One is by using the bare verb with a Low-High tone melody, e.g., **dàakàtaa** 'wait!' **zàunaa** 'sit down!' **kàawoo shì** 'bring him!'. The other means is by using a 2nd person subjunctive pronoun before the verb, which in this case retains its normal tone, e.g., **kà daakàtaa** '(you (m.)) wait!', **kì zaunàa** '(you (f.) sit down!'; **kù kaawoo shì** '(you (pl.) bring him!'. The verbs 'come' and 'go' behave differently, e.g., **jèe ka / jèe ki / jèe ku** (uncommon), 'go! (2m./2f./2pl.)', cf. **jee** 'to go' with its underlying lexical high tone. Here one finds what looks like a postposed subject pronoun, but although this is an extremely strange construction in Hausa, in the absence of comparative evidence there is no good reason to doubt it. However, there is a better and more accurate explanation. In Kanakuru and other Chadic languages, intransitive verbs commonly use a pronominal suffix, referred to as an "intransitive copy pronoun" (ICP), that copies the person and number of the underlying subject.<sup>3</sup> Consider the following (illustrating with singular persons only): **nà**

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<sup>3</sup> In some languages the ICP is obligatory, in others it is optional; in some languages it applies to all intransitive verbs, in some to a subset of verbs; and in some it adds a semantic nuance to the construction, in others it is essentially grammatical and meaningless. For an early comparative study of ICP's, see Frajzyngier (1977).

**pòrò-no** 'I went out'; **kà pòrò-ko** 'you (m.) went out'; **shì pòrò-shi** 'you (f.) went out'; **kaa à pòrè-ni** 'grandfather went out'; **tamno à pòrò-to** 'a woman went out'. In imperatives of intransitive verbs, the preverbal subject pronoun is dropped and the verb often undergoes shortening, e.g., **pòr-ko** / **pòr-shi** 'go out (2m./2f.)'. With the Kanakuru imperative as a vantage point, we can immediately see that the "irregular" Hausa imperative formation seen in **jèè-ka** / **jèè-ki** 'go! (2m./2f.)' is by Chadic standards really a regular formation [224] with a bound ICP pronoun, and that it does not represent a juxtaposed subject pronoun as always thought. Note, by the way, that a bonus of this analysis is that it provides an explanation for the tone in the imperative of the lexically high tone **jee**. What one has here is simply the imposition of the Low-High imperative melody on the word composed of the verb plus the bound ICP.

2.2.2. Within the grade system (Parsons 1960), the grade with the greatest variation and complications is grade 5. This was formerly called "causative" (see, for example, Gouffé 1962), but it is more correctly characterized as "efferential", indicating action away (literally or figuratively) and serving to transitivize inherently intransitive verbs (Newman 1983). This grade is formed with a suffix **-ar** (derived from **\*-as**) and an associated High-High tone pattern, e.g., **zubar** 'pour out', cf. **zubàa** 'pour in'; **sanar** 'inform', cf. **sanii** 'know'; **sayar** 'sell', cf. **sàyaa** 'buy'; **fitar** 'take out', cf. **fiita** 'go out'. When a direct object is expressed, the verb requires a preposition-like particle **dà** before the object, e.g., **Mun sanar dà sarkii** 'We informed the emir'; **Naa fitar dà ita** 'I took her/it out'. A small number of verbs have a short form grade 5 before objects in which the suffix **-ar** does not appear, e.g., **fid dà** (< **fit dà**) = **fitar dà** 'take out'; **kau dà** = **kawar dà** 'move something aside'; **mai dà** = **mayar dà** 'return something'; **sai dà** = **sayar dà** 'sell'; **tsai dà** = **tsayar dà** 'stop something' **zub dà** = **zubar dà** 'pour out'. In northwestern dialects, the **dà** behaves as if it were a suffix attached to the verb stem. For example, (i) the vowel of **dà** undergoes lengthening in certain syntactic environments (e.g., before pronoun objects) as is required of all verbs, e.g., **Naa fiddàa ta** 'I took her/it out' (cf. Standard Hausa **Naa fid dà ita**); (ii) the verb with **dà** can be used without a following object e.g., **Sun tsaidàa** 'They stopped (it)'; (iii) the verb plus **dà** can take on other grade endings, e.g., **maidoo** 'return something here' (from **maidà** plus the grade 6 ventive **-oo** suffix); and (iv) the verb plus **dà** can take the **-`waa** verbal noun suffix, e.g., **Tanàa saidàawaa** 'She is selling (it)'.

Scholars have always assumed (a) that the **dà** in the short-form grade 5 and the **dà** in the long form grade 5 were the same, (b) that the short form was derived from the long form by deletion of **-ar**, e.g., **zubar dà** → **zub dà** 'pour out', and (c) that the northwestern dialect variant was derived from the Standard Hausa form by a process of fusion. At first sight this seems reasonable, but it is probably wrong. Data from other Chadic languages point to an alternative hypothesis.

A number of Chadic languages, such as Bade, Ngizim, Bachama, and Gisiga, have a verbal suffix **-da** (the final vowel varying from language to language), whose main function is to transitive verbs. The similarity between this suffix and the one that is found in Hausa grade 5 was [225] not appreciated primarily because the Hausa grade 5 was thought of (incorrectly) as "causative" and because the **dà** found in Hausa was viewed, not as a verb suffix, but as a separate and distinct preposition or syntactic particle. But given the striking similarity in form and function, I would suggest that we should reject our former way of looking at things and analyze the final **dà** that one sees in grade 5 short forms as an archaic retention of a historically old Chadic suffix. A word such as **fid-dà**, for example, would thus not be derived from **fitar (dà)**, but rather would constitute an independent verbal form. That is, **fiddà** and **fit-ar** (where the suffix **-ar** historically comes from **\*-as**) originally would have contained different suffixes, presumably with different meanings (which we cannot determine at present). What must have happened is that the two formations fell together semantically and the variant represented by **fid-dà** was then reinterpreted as a short form of the now standard grade 5 formation with the suffix **-ar**. Following on this development, the **dà** suffix would have been identified with the originally non-related, although phonologically identical, particle **dà** and thereupon syntactically treated as such. What we have here is a historical process that is the reverse of what we had thought. Rather than the northwestern form being a new, innovative construction created by a process of fusion, that dialectal variant turns out to be the older, original form, and it is the Standard Hausa short form grade 5 that is the new variant, having been created by reinterpretation and mistaken identification of the historically distinct suffix **-dà** and the particle **dà**.

2.3. Viewed from the vantage point of 2011, the title of the "Study Kanakuru ..." paper might seem a bit unusual, but hardly provocative. At the time, however, the title caught scholars in Kano and Zaria off guard and created considerable controversy. For numerous reasons

related to Hausa historical traditions and customs and the intellectual climate at SOAS, to which Nigerian students were exposed, the position of Hausa within Chadic was not fully appreciated. Although Hausa scholars easily accepted the postulation of the Afroasiatic phylum, which entailed the idea of Hausa being a distantly related sister language to Arabic, Somali, and Ancient Egyptian, among others, they were resistant to the idea of Hausa being related to the small tribal/ethnic groups who speak what we now know to be Chadic languages. (An exception is Bagari (1972), published in the same volume as the "Study Kanakuru..." paper.) The notion that Hausa linguistically was on a par with Warji and Tera and Kanakuru and Margi, etc. undermined the viewpoint that Hausas held a unique status in northern Nigeria as a culturally, economically, politically and religiously advanced people, far above the level of the speakers of small languages in northeastern [226] Nigeria, northern Cameroon, and, as one now recognizes, central Chad. The acceptance by Hausa linguists of Hausa's position as only one of some hundred and thirty or so distinct Chadic languages took some time, but I think one can say that it is now well established and uncontroversial. But it took the "Study Kanakuru..." paper to shake up the then well-established conservative ideas about Hausa's place among African languages that eventually led to the scholarly incorporation of Hausa within the Chadic family of languages, an intellectual development that has proved extremely fruitful in the intervening years.

3. The contribution of comparative Chadic studies to Hausa scholarship has been significant. However, one also needs to recognize the importance of in-depth studies of Hausa (and a few other well-described languages) for our understanding Chadic, which is what is intended by the title of this paper, "Study Hausa, Understand Kanakuru" (the reference to Kanakuru standing for the entire family). The importance of Hausa as a key language for the understanding of Chadic should not be underestimated. Nowadays with the growth of the endangered languages movement, the emphasis among linguists has shifted to small undescribed or poorly described languages at the expense of detailed analyses of large languages. The problem with the endangered languages approach, which encourages fast, unsophisticated, shallow research, is that when the researcher finishes his or her year in the field, the language is guaranteed to be poorly described with nothing handled in depth. By contrast, studies of big languages benefit from intensive work by a large number of different linguists over long periods of time, and thus the studies lead to the discovery of complicated

phenomena that one never gets to in elementary sketches of newly described languages. Digging deeply into Hausa, for example, allows us to get a fuller understanding of what comparative Chadic is like and it also raises any number of interesting questions worth exploring that the linguist never would have thought of investigating based on shallow descriptions. Let me illustrate with a few examples.

3.1. Various scholars have asked how many vowels Proto-Chadic had? Answers have varied from two to four to six (the standard five vowels **a, i, e, a, o, u** plus schwa) and even one. Now, whereas Hausa is usually described in straightforward terms as a language with 5 vowels, all of which can occur long or short, this turns out to be too simplistic. What we find digging into the history of Hausa is that "Old Hausa" had a complicated 2 – 3+3 – 5 system consisting of 3 word-medial vowels, **i, a, u**, all of which could occur long or short, 5 word-final vowels, **i, e, a, o, u**, which were short only except [227] in the case of monosyllabic words ending in **aa**, and most likely two word-initial vowels, **i, a**, which were short only. In asking the question how many vowels Proto-Chadic or some particular Chadic language had, expecting a single number, linguists were posing the question wrong. Seeing how Hausa works, scholars studying individual Chadic languages or reconstructing the proto-language now have a richer conception of possibilities to look out for and a model to draw on in analyzing these other languages.

3.2. A special feature of Hausa is the presence of descriptive words such as **zurfi** 'depth', **santsii** 'slipperiness', **laushii** 'softness', **saurii** 'speed', **faadii** 'breadth', **tsaamii** 'sourness', which Parsons (1955) has called "Abstract nouns of sensory quality" (ANSQ's). At first sight, these appear to be simple, monomorphemic words, which just happen to share some phonological features, and they are invariably entered in dictionaries and described in grammars as such. However, because Hausa is a well-described language where we have a deep understanding of morphology and tonology, it has been possible to determine that these words are in fact all bimorphemic, consisting of a stem plus a tone-integrating suffix **-ii** with an associated H(igh)-H(igh) tone pattern.<sup>4</sup> From a historical, analytical point of view, the abstract nouns **zurfi** 'depth', for example, can be broken up into an underlying stem **zurf-**

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<sup>4</sup> A suffix whose tone overrides any underlying stem tone and imposes itself over the entire resulting word is referred to as "tone-integrating" suffix, see Newman (1986).

plus a suffix **-ii<sup>HH</sup>**, and similarly for all the other words of this class. Without this insight from Hausa, no one would have thought to look for comparable morphological constructions in other Chadic languages; but once one had it, scholars were stimulated to look for cognate constructions in these languages; and now that some have been found throughout the family, we can postulate ANSQ's as being a feature of Proto-Chadic.

3.3. Hausa has a remarkable structure which is referred to by classical scholars as the "cognate accusative" (see Newman 2001). This construction, which is also prominent in Arabic, involves modifying, or commenting on, the verb of a sentence by means of a verbal noun related to that verb. Typical examples include the following:

**Taa màari mijìntà maarù màì ciwòò.** 'She gave her husband a painful slap.' (lit. she slapped her husband a slap of pain) [228]

**An kashèe shi muugùn kisàa.** 'He was killed horribly.' (lit. one killed him evil killing)

**Yaa mutù mutuwàr maràr kyâu.** 'He died a miserable death.' (lit. he died death lacking goodness)

**Sun yàbee mù àmmaa yàboo na karyaa.** 'They praised us insincerely.' (lit. they praised us but praise of lying)

**Naa san manajàn bankù àmmaa sanìn shaanuu.** 'I know the bank manager but only superficially.' (lit. I know manager of bank but knowledge of cattle)

Since the cognate accusative is also found in Arabic, a good question is whether the presence of this structure in Hausa is historically recent due to Arabic influence or whether it is an old Afroasiatic feature inherited from Proto-Chadic. If the latter, we would expect some variant of the cognate accusative to exist in other Chadic languages as well. Does it? The answer is that we do not know, and the reason that we do not know is because initial descriptive research on small languages, focusing on basic phonology, morphology and syntax, never gets deep enough into the language to discover the existence of syntactically, semantically, and stylistically elaborate structures such as this. By contrast, in the case of Hausa, we have a wealth of previous studies to build on as well as extensive texts at our disposal, and thus we can document a complex structure such as the cognate accusative in

detail; moreover, we can expect future scholars to expand on what has been described up to this point. For comparative Chadic studies, the description of this phenomenon in Hausa opens up rich avenues of research which otherwise would not have been explored.

4. Let me sum up with an answer to the following question: Why should one pay attention to big languages, many of which have already been described to a great extent, when there are so many small languages that have never been described at all? I would contend that in order to get a true understanding of a language family, such as Chadic, we need to have large, in-depth descriptions of languages consisting of comprehensive grammars and large-scale extensive dictionaries. These do not necessarily have to be of large languages — if we had such descriptions of smaller languages, that would also be welcome and we need to encourage such things —, however, in practice the languages that have been studied extensively or are likely to receive such treatment are major languages with large numbers of speakers, such as Hausa. These languages have benefited from descriptions over long periods of time — in Hausa going back to the mid 19th century —, [229] descriptions by a number of different linguists bringing different skills and specializations and different theoretical backgrounds, and last but not least, careful research by native-speaker linguists. While it is true that our understanding of Hausa was enriched by comparative data from Kanakuru and other Chadic languages, it is equally true that our understanding of Chadic and the emergence of creative ideas on particular linguistic phenomena that deserve investigation when conducting research on these other languages comes from the wealth of insights and knowledge that a century and a half of research on Hausa has disclosed. The title of this paper, "Study Hausa, Understanding Kanakuru" is not meant as a rejection of the viewpoint expressed in the earlier "Study Kanakuru, Understand Hausa" paper; rather it is a natural counterpart to and continuation of that paper. I began my academic career studying small Chadic languages. As my career developed, I began to focus almost exclusively on Hausa, but as a combination of the titles suggests, the scientific enterprise requires that we do both and not neglect one for the other because of misguided demands from the endangered languages movement or because of other fads of the moment. There is no substitute for solid, serious, empirical research at whatever level.

5. In closing, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference, especially Professor Mustapha Ahmad Isa and Dr. Hafizu Miko Yakasai, for having invited me to attend and for allowing me to present this paper in absentia. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Ismail Junaidu, my first Ph.D. student at Indiana University, for agreeing to represent me on this occasion. The year 2011 marks fifty years since I came to Nigeria for the first time as a Peace Corps secondary school teacher in Maiduguri. I had thus hoped to attend the conference to greet colleagues, friends, and former students and to celebrate that fifty year anniversary; but unfortunately, I was prevented from doing so because of personal matters. However, I want all of you to know that I am with you in spirit and I extend my very best wishes for a productive, lively, and successful conference. [230]

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