

HAUSA PRONOUN FORMS - A TEST CASE

NEIL SKINNER

1. Ana nan, ana nan, har madugu ya tashi, za shina fatauchi.
Some time passed, and at length the caravan-leader set out on a trading journey.
Edgar. *LITAFI NA TATSUNIYOYI NA HAUSA*. C.M.S./Constable. 1924.
VOL. I, p. 96, l. 28.
2. Sai ya che 'To, za muna gida.'
Then he said 'Well, we're off home now.'
IB. VOL. II, p. 87, l. 7.
3. Sai ya che 'Za muna gida.'
Then he said 'We're off home now.'
IB. VOL. II, p. 102, l. 6.
4. 'Ku fita, ku bar mani gida in za kuna garin kallon gidan Dibin-na-Jore.'
'You can get out of my compound and stay out, if you're on your way to gape at Dibin-na-Jore's compound.'
IB. VOL. II, p. 169, l. 27.
5. Ya che 'Za nina yawon duniya, baba.'
He said 'I'm off to see the world, Dad.'
IB. VOL. II, p. 224, l. 4.

These five examples of the same Hausa construction are culled from Major Edgar's three volume collection of Hausa miscellanea - folklore, history, proverbs, tongue-twisters, riddles and versions of Arabic documents current in the Hausa states. This was compiled sixty years ago, mostly in Sokoto Province, where Edgar was a Political Officer. As would be expected, much of this work is in Sokoto or Katsina dialect, but I do not think that the idiom common to the five examples quoted is dialectal, for I have myself heard No. 3 used by a Kano man in his speech.

All five include both *zaa* and *n̄aa*, which Parsons defines as defective verbs.¹ Both are in normal use as auxiliaries, *zaa* preceding and *n̄aa* following the personal pronouns; the former indicates futurity, the latter that the action of the following verbal is incomplete and continuing or habitual. There is, however, a special use of *zaà* - note the variant tone - in which, instead of indicating only futurity, it is used as a verb in its own right, meaning 'go'. In this usage also it has the - exceptional in Hausa - habit of preceding its subject pronoun. Parsons² suggests that this was originally a verb meaning 'go', which - as in modern English - came to be used as an indicator of the future. It agrees with other Hausa verbs in having forms in -e (jee, 'go') and -o (zoo, 'come'). If Hausa and Arabic do both in fact stem from Greenberg's 'Afro-Asiatic', one may suspect a relationship with the Arabic *ja'a*, 'come, arrive'.

And while on origins and Parsons' note on Hausa defective, monosyllabic verbs, I would tentatively cast doubts on the classification of *yaa*, 'come' as a verb - though the English gloss is normally a verb. In this he follows Abraham, who in his dictionary³ has

¹ 'The Verbal System in Hausa', *AFRIKA UND ÜBERSEE*, Band XLIV/1 - 1960, pp. 4-5.

² *OP. CIT.*

³ *DICTIONARY OF THE HAUSA LANGUAGE*, University of London Press, 1962.

an entry, *yaakà*, 'come here'. I feel myself that this may be a simple borrowing of the Arabic vocative particle, *yaa*. And, in fact, in Abraham's dictionary, there is another entry, under *ya*, where he gives an example, *yaa ku, jàma'á*, 'oh populace!', where *yaa* is clearly a vocative particle. Admittedly there is a high tone on the pronoun in this case, but if – as Abraham does – you admit the vocative particle into Hausa, it would not require a big shift of meaning for mere address to have developed into summons of the one addressed. And, if you accept this analysis, you do away with the need of postulating a verb which breaks all the rules of Hausa verbs, and indeed does not even fall within Parsons' definition of a verb.⁴

But to return to *zaa* and *nàa*. The above examples, by combining in a single phrase both of these words, reinforce the analysis of *zaa* – in these cases – as a verb in its own right, meaning 'go', and not an auxiliary indicating futurity. For there is otherwise no 'main verb' in these sentences. Now *nàa* never has independent verbal status, so that these must be cases of *zaa* in its rôle of 'go'. So far so good. But when we consider the form of the pronoun used in each case, difficulties arise. Parsons has a complete table of pronoun forms,⁵ in which the form that follows *zaa*, 'go' (a form given by him the number B(b)a) differs from the form which precedes *nàa* (B(a)i). Which forms of the pronoun then have we in the examples quoted? Tone can be no guide here, for the evidence is written, not said. In any case, the second person forms and the third person feminine forms are the same for both B(b)a and B(a)i. It is in the first person singular that the criterion for testing the matter will be found. For, whereas before *nàa* we have 'n or na for 'I', after *zaa* we have *ni*. Judging then from the fifth example above – where we find *ni* – it would seem that we are dealing here with pronouns of Parsons' category B(a)i.

But in these cases the B(a)i pronouns are used preceding *nàa*, which conflicts with what both Parsons and Abraham⁶ say. Admittedly, this is, perhaps, unusual Hausa, possibly likely only to occur in colloquial speech. It is significant that all the examples given are from short, quoted comments. Nevertheless, we may fairly use it to test the validity of any classification of pronoun forms.

In order to consider what was in the speakers' minds when they used these unusual combinations, we must consider the limitations of *zaa* when used as a verb in its own right. This usage is limited to 'present (progressive) or future, never past'.⁷ It is, in fact, unable to divest itself of the aura of futurity that it has acquired from its use as an auxiliary verb, even when used with its pristine meaning. This is supported by the evidence of all these examples, none of which is past in time. But in all of them too, it would seem as though the speaker was a little disconcerted by this same aura of futurity and wished to correct it and emphasise that the action was actually going on, actually in progress. For this we may compare the English colloquial 'I'm coming' – which is, incidentally, exactly paralleled by the Hausa *inàa zuwà* – where the chances are that the speaker has not yet moved a muscle, but wishes to make clear his sincere intention of doing so at once! So, in these examples the speakers felt that *zaa* was an inadequate verbal description of the action, and went on to add, after the pronoun, the *nàa* of continuing action, emphasising the progressive at the expense of the future.

⁴ *OP. CIT.*, p. 3.

⁵ AFRICAN LANGUAGE STUDIES II, 1961, p. 104.

⁶ LANGUAGE OF THE HAUSA PEOPLE, University of London Press, 1959, p. 8.

⁷ Parsons, *OP. CIT.*

Although unusual, these are by no means exceptional cases, and, as I have said above, are to be heard in the mouths of Kano speakers, as well as W. Hausa. This being so, it might be wise to consider a small emendation to Parsons' table of pronouns, in order to accommodate the fact, not there recognised, that the first person singular form *ni* CAN occur before *n̄aa*. If we again look at the relevant point on the table⁸ - B(a)(i) - we shall see that, in fact, *ni* is already there, but - in a footnote - expressly limited to use before *k̄an* and *k̄ee*. These are other auxiliary, defective verbs, *k̄an* expressing habitual action and *k̄ee* - and perhaps this is significant for our purpose - in 'complementary syntactic distribution with *n̄aa*'. Either then, this limitation on the usage of *ni* should be removed. Or it may be that there is a case for amalgamating the two categories, B(a)(i) and B(b)a; for, as I have tried to show, the same pronoun form CAN be used both following *zaà* and preceding *n̄aa*.

⁸ Parsons, AFRICAN LANGUAGE STUDIES, 1961, LOC. CIT.