

# THE HAMITOSEMITIC PRESENT-HABITATIVE VERB STEM IN RON AND MUBI<sup>1</sup>

H. JUNGRAITHMAYR

## I

Geographically speaking, Ron and Mubi may be considered the western and eastern outposts of the so-called Chad or Chadohamitic languages, i.e. the Central Sudanic branch of Hamitosemitic (Afroasiatic). The Ron group, comprising at least five languages, namely Fyer, Bokkos, Daffo-Butura, Sha and Kulere, is found in the south-western corner of the Northern Nigerian Plateau adjacent to languages of the Benue-Congo stock like Mama and Mada. On the other side, Mubi belongs to the eastern section of the Chad languages which cover parts of the Chad Republic.

While information on the Ron languages has increased during the last few years,<sup>2</sup> our knowledge of Mubi is still limited to what J. Lukas has observed and collected in 1933.<sup>3</sup> Our main basis of operation in this discussion will therefore be Ron. On the other hand, the structural resemblance between Ron and Mubi, at least for the case in question, is so striking that a first comparative treatment shall be attempted.

## II

The Ron languages of today may be historically considered to have been dialects of one single language. Thus, each of them displays a mixture of common Ron heritage and the results of dialectally peculiar development. Whether the one or the other of these two components became predominant depended upon various factors among which external influence exercised by a different linguistic surrounding upon the respective dialect/language plays an important role. Fyer, therefore, having been isolated from the main block of the Ron dialects/languages, is the only one among them that has lost an essential feature of Common Ron, namely the internal formation of the habitative or present verb stem. A reason for this change may be that Fyer—located in the neighbourhood of Pankshin—is a tiny enclave within the Angas-speaking majority, the more so since the kind of change reminds one vividly of the respective structural feature in Angas-Sura, where most tenses are formed by modifying or extending the subject pronoun (and/or the tone of the verb stem), only leaving the verb stem otherwise unaltered.<sup>4</sup> Thus, we have in Fyer the following opposite forms:

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the VIIIth West African Languages Congress held at the University of Lagos in March 1967.

<sup>2</sup> The materials on Ron will appear within the series of *AFRIKANISTISCHE FORSCHUNGEN* (Hamburg).

<sup>3</sup> Published in *ZENTRALSUDANISCHE STUDIEN* (Hamburg, 1937), pp. 155-91.

<sup>4</sup> See H. Jungraithmayr, 'Texte und Sprichwörter im Angas von Kabwir (Nordnigerien)', *AFRIKA UND ÜBERSEE*, vol. XLVIII, pp. 17-35, 114-27.

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	Basic tense		Present-habitative
Fyer:	í/yí lèf	I cut	yaá léf I (usually) cut
Formula:	SP- $\phi$ -CVC <sup>5</sup>		SP-aá-CVC

The other four Ron languages, however, display this difference between the forms of the basic tense (or simple tense, Aorist, etc.) and the habitative-present in the following way:

	Basic tense		Present-habitative
Bokkos:	(a) í cu <sup>6</sup>	I eat	í cwáá(y) <sup>6</sup> I (usually) eat
	(b) í fu'	I blow	í fwáá'
	(c) í lèf	I cut	í lyááf
	(d) í musàs	I laugh	í músáàs
Formula (b):	SP- $\phi$ -CVC		SP- $\phi$ -CV-aa-C
Daffo-B.:	(a) í cu	I eat	í cwaáy
	(b) í fû	I blow	í fwáá'
	(c) í lèf	I cut	í lyááf
	(d) í lifit	I stand up	í lifyaát
Formula (b):	SP- $\phi$ -CVC		SP- $\phi$ -CV-aa-C
Kulere:	(a) nì ci	I eat	nì cááy
	(b) nì fud	I blow	nì fwaád
	(c) nì syel	I hear	nì syáláy <sup>7</sup>
	(d) nì bisiky	I shoot	nì bísyáák
Formula (b):	SP- $\phi$ -CVC		SP- $\phi$ -CV-a(a)-C
Sha:	(a) nì ci	I eat	nì cáyây
	(b) nì fud	I blow	nì fwadaf
	(c) nì gáh	I cut	nì gáháh
	(d) nì gilif	I beg	nì gilifyáf
Formula (b):	SP- $\phi$ -CVC		SP- $\phi$ -C <sub>1</sub> V-a-C <sub>2</sub> -a-O <sub>2</sub>

The above given examples make it clear that the morphological opposition basic tense stem: present-habitative stem consists essentially in what can be illustrated by the following two allo-formulas:

- (1) C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>:C<sub>1</sub>V-A-C<sub>2</sub> or C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>VC<sub>3</sub>:C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>V-A-C<sub>3</sub>,  
 (2) C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>:C<sub>1</sub>V-A-C<sub>2</sub>-A-C<sub>2</sub> or C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>VC<sub>3</sub>:C<sub>1</sub>VC<sub>2</sub>VC<sub>3</sub>V-A-C<sub>3</sub>.

Thus, Bokkos, Daffo-Butura, Sha and Kulere display as the principle of their present-habitative stem formation an intercalation of A before the last radical, and Kulere, in addition to this, a reduplication of the final radical.

As for the meaning and syntactic use of this so-called present-habitative tense the following few examples may help to illustrate and explain it:

Bokkos: mùrûm tâàŋ ló kyél kwà tâŋ:tâàŋ

<sup>5</sup> SP = Subject Pronoun;  $\phi$  = empty slot.

<sup>6</sup> The basic radicals of this widely spread root are probably TWY. Cf., for example, Mehri *twee!* 'eat!', to which O. Rössler-Marburg has drawn my attention.

<sup>7</sup> This type of formation consisting of intercalated -a- plus suffix -ay is frequent in Kulere; cf. Mubi, op. cit., p. 169, wiri: *wiray* 'to sit down'.

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- (a) Hyena picks meat place not  
 (b) The hyena does not select her meat

arof sí dwáán aryà kwà      dun:dwáán

- (a) Women they lack men not  
 (b) Women never lack men

Daffo: á bwáám cìRa tá ku tá gòòr-ha      bûm:bwáám

- (a) You save dog before he bites you  
 (b) (There is no gratitude in this world)

dâsh à hyaák maâr kwà      hyek:hyaák

- (a) Thrashing it kills boy not  
 (b) A (sound) thrashing does not (yet) kill a boy

These examples taken from Bokkos and Daffo elucidate the meaning and function of the present-habitative tense. In contrast to the tense formed by the basic stem, which describes a punctual event in the past or present or which narrates a definite unique happening, the present-habitative expresses characteristic action and happening, general statements, timeless truth, repeated happening and action, etc.; in other words, it is a timeless present often used as a durative or a habitative.

III

If we now turn to Mubi we find the following corresponding situation.<sup>8</sup> Beside a 'Suffix-preterite' ('Suffigiertes Präteritum'), *téé-nà* 'I ate', which we may neglect in this context, there are two prefix verb forms called by Lukas 'Präfigiertes Präteritum' and 'Präsens' respectively. It is a major aim of this paper to show that the Ron basic tense corresponds to Mubi 'Präfigiertes Präteritum' (shortly called Preterite) and the Ron present-habitative to Mubi 'Präsens' or present tense respectively. Cf. the following oppositions available from Mubi:

Preterite stem		Present stem	
(1) <i>tìi</i>	ate	<i>túwà</i>	eat
(2) <i>síi</i>	drank	<i>súwà</i>	drink
(3) <i>cii</i>	took	<i>cuwa</i>	take
(4) <i>sak</i>	came	<i>suwak</i>	come
(5) <i>wècìk</i>	danced	<i>wìcáák</i>	dance
(6) <i>hèuwír</i>	barked	<i>hùwwâr</i>	bark
(7) <i>beeni</i>	built	<i>bìnnáá</i>	build
(8) <i>rát</i>	made	<i>riḏaat</i>	make
(9) <i>dâ</i>	lay/lain down	<i>ḏìḏáá</i>	lie down
(10) <i>dat</i>	farmed	<i>daad</i>	to farm

The scarcity of the materials available does not yet allow us to establish any one definite rule about the construction of the present tense in Mubi. Yet the general principle underlying the above given examples can be elucidated. As can be seen from above, the following replacements occur:

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from J. Lukas, op. cit.

(1) -ì	}	replaced by	-úwà
(2) -í			-úwà
(3) -ii			-uwa
(4) -a-			-uwa
(5) -è-í-			-i-áá-
(6) -è-î-			-ù-â- <sup>9</sup>
(7) -ee-i-			-i-G-áá- <sup>10</sup>
(8) -á-			-i-d-áá-
(9) -â			-i-R-áá <sup>10</sup>
(10) -a-			-aa- <sup>11</sup>

If we disregard in (1)–(9) for the moment the first of the two replacing vowels, i.e. u and i respectively, the remaining vowel common to all ten present stem forms is A (= a, aa). Examples numbers (7) and (9) display in addition to that gemination and reduplication respectively. Thus, the vowel A and the allomorphs gemination/reduplication can be, at least provisionally, considered the basic morphemes of Mubi present stem. About its meaning and use only very little can be said on the ground of the few pertinent sentence examples published by J. Lukas, *op. cit.*:

(51.) Fúgá <sup>12</sup> hùwwâr	the dog barks (:Fúgá hëuwír the dog barked)
(145.) tír wigáág wàâr	she pounds corn
(144.) lùk rígám tiyá	the woman cooks food
(155.) njíi wicáák	the people dance
(86.) njíi sùwáák	the people come
(160.) ar irám sùwák	he will come tomorrow
(159.) menderet binnáá gír	the men build a house.

As for the nature and function of this Mubi present tense, Lukas tried to explain it in the following way (*op. cit.* p. 168): 'ein Präsens, das die Funktionen des semitischen Imperfekts haben könnte, da es durch dieses im Arabischen wiedergegeben wird. . . ' In view of the fact that Arabic lacks the corresponding present tense, the Mubi present had to be translated—*faute de mieux*—by the imperfect. The exact correspondence, however, would have been the Akkadian present or the Berber 'habitual' or 'forme d'habitude'<sup>13</sup> which, morphologically, are both derived from a basic stem, e.g. in Akkadian CCVC/CVCC, by

<sup>9</sup> There might also be gemination of -w- involved. Both notations, *huwwâr* and *huwââr*, are given by Lukas, *op. cit.* pp. 169, 176.

<sup>10</sup> G = gemination (of second radical); R = reduplication (of initial or final radical).

<sup>11</sup> Apart from final radical change t > d.

<sup>12</sup> Capital F here represents bilabial f.

<sup>13</sup> The identity of these forms in Akkadian and Berber was first proposed and stated by Otto Rössler, 'Libyca', *WIENER ZEITSCHRIFT F.D. KUNDE DES MORGENLANDES (WZKM)*, vol. XLIX (1942), pp. 282–311, and 'Verbalbau und Verbalflexion in den Semito-ägyptischen Sprachen', *ZDMG*, vol. C (1950), pp. 461–514; soon afterwards also by J. H. Greenberg, 'The Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic) Present', *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOC.* vol. LXXII, no. 1 (1952), pp. 1–9. I am aware of the serious objections brought forward by A. Klingenberg against this thesis. According to his view the Akkadian present and the Habitative of Berber would be totally different forms which should not be compared with each other. For further details see his 'Die Präfix- und die Suffixkonjugationen des Hamitosemitischen', *MITTEILUNGEN DES INSTITUTS FÜR ORIENTFORSCHUNG*, vol. IV, no. 2 (Berlin, 1956), pp. 211–77.

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geminating the second radical and inserting -a- before and/or after this geminated radical. Semantically, they both express general and timeless statements, for instance in Akkadian<sup>14</sup> in ritual instructions, e.g. *ta-sarraq* 'du schüttest hin' ('You pour there!'), *i-karrar* 'er legt hin' ('He puts there!'), or in juridical utterances like *mamman ul i-parras* 'niemand entscheidet' ('Nobody decides'), or very frequently in proverbs. In Berber, too, this form is favourably used in proverbial sayings,<sup>15</sup> e.g.:

Wr e-**yerZ**<sup>16</sup> aw-Aadem akus wa-day i-saass (no. 2) sw/su:saass

Nobody will break the vessel from which he drinks

Abuyis en taZuuli itaazzey, abuyis n-iiles wr itezzi (no. 4) zzi:t-aazaa-i

A wound received from a weapon heals, a hurt done by a tongue never

Wa yoyen amiidi-nniit, i-taammettaat, ma iraa kerteba? (no. 7) mmet:t-aammett-aa-t

One who leaves his friend alone when he is dying, can he still be called a man? (lit. '... does he need trousers?')

Aalek i-zaahaal anebdun (no. 21) zehel:zaahaal

Reward makes jump (even) a lame person.

### IV

1. Morphologically, there is a high degree of correspondence between the principles underlying the formation of Ron and Mubi present-habitative stems respectively. Beyond that the Akkadian present and the Berber habitative also display clearly related forms.

2. Semantically and functionally, the present-habitative seems to serve in Ron and Mubi as an extratemporal Form and as a durative. These exactly again are main qualities of the corresponding forms in Berber and Akkadian.

3. In Table 1 an attempt is made to show the distribution of the most characteristic procedures in the formation of the Hamitosemitic present-habitative stem. Kanakuru (Dera),<sup>17</sup> another language of the Western Chad Section spoken on both sides of the river Gongola, and Jegu,<sup>18</sup> a member of the Eastern Section, are added.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from Wolfram von Soden, 'Grundriss der Akkadischen Grammatik', ANALECTA ORIENTALIA, vol. XXXIII (Rome, 1952), pp. 102 f.; cf. also Erica Reiner, A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF AKKADIAN (The Hague, 1966), pp. 77 f.

<sup>15</sup> These Berber proverbs are quoted from P. de Foucauld et A. de Calassanti-Motylnski, TEXTES TOUAREG EN PROSE (DIALECTE DE L'AHAGGAR) (Algiers, 1922), pp. 137 ff. The transcription is slightly changed. As for their translation and interpretation, my sincere thanks are due to Prof. O. Rössler-Marburg, who also gave the initial impulse for the study of these phenomena.

<sup>16</sup> Capital Z here stands for emphatic z.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from unpublished materials of the author.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from H. Jungraithmayr, 'Beobachtungen zur tschadohamitischen Sprache der Jegu...' AFRIKA UND ÜBERSEE, vol. XLV (1961), p. 104.

Table 1

	Akkad.	Berber	Ron	Mubi	Kana.	Jegu
I (a)	prus parras	frəs farrəs	—	—	—	—
I (b)	—	—	—	beeni binnaa	—	—
II	—	—	fud fwadaf	—	—	—
III (a)	muut mwaat	—	fud fwaad	dat daad	—	—
III (b)	—	—	lifit lifyaat	wecik wicaak	—	—
IV	—	—	gilif gilifyaf	—	—	—
V (a)	—	—	mot mot-ay	wiri wir-ay	—	—
V (b)	—	—	—	—	tu tu-a	t- t-a

The corresponding formulas:

I (a)	-a-G-a-
I (b)	-G-aa
II	-a-C-a-RC <sup>19</sup>
III	-aa-
IV	-a-RC <sup>19</sup>
V (a)	-ay
V (b)	-a

<sup>19</sup> RC = Reduplicated final consonant.