

A NOTE ON INALIENABLE POSSESSION IN HAUSA

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A widespread syntactic distinction found in Chadic languages is that between alienable and inalienable possession of nouns. The inalienable construction is generally reserved for body parts, kinship terms, and perhaps a few other items like 'name', while the alienable construction is used with all other nouns.

To illustrate how alienable and inalienable possession are distinguished syntactically in Chadic, we may draw on Kanakuru, a language which systematically marks the distinction. Data are from a pre-publication manuscript of Newman (1973). Newman says (Chapter 7), "... inalienable possessives are formed by immediate juxtaposition of the head and the possessor while regular [=alienable] possessives make use of an overt possessive marker". Kanakuru examples are given in (1).

(1) <i>Inalienable</i>		<i>Alienable</i>	
mānda Miyim	'Miyim's wife'	gam ma tamnoi	'the woman's ram'
fiil kimne	'a bushcow's horn'	tiŋa ra lowoi	'the boy's ewe'
bo-wo	'your father'	kure moŋ-go	'your corn'
noŋ-mu	'our mother'	gam maa-mu	'our ram'
wuro-no	'my tooth'	tiŋa ra-no	'my ewe'

Thus, the nouns in the Inalienable column are directly followed by the "possessor", while in the Alienable column a linking morpheme /ma/ for masculine possessed nouns or /ra/ for feminine possessed nouns is required. This same pattern (with language specific differences in the phonological shape(s) of the actual linking morphemes) can be observed as a systematic process in many other Chadic languages, e.g. Tera (see Newman, 1970) and Angas (see Burquest, in preparation). Traces of the same pattern can still be observed in a number of languages where it is no longer systematically used, e.g. Ngizim (see Schuh, 1972) and Ron (see Jungraithmayr, 1970).

Hausa now productively uses only the "alienable" type construction, where a linking morpheme is required. Thus, for masculine possessed nouns /ná/ is required and for feminine possessed nouns /tá/ is required, regardless of the semantic relation between the "possessed" and the "possessor". For example, with masculine nouns we have gééró-n Áli 'Ali's millet' and gāatá-rí-n-kà 'your axe', with the alienable semantic relation, as well as cíkí-n Áli 'Ali's stomach' and míjì-n-ki 'your husband', with the inalienable semantic relation; and we have dáawà-r mánòomì 'the farmer's sorghum' and àkwíyà-r-sà 'his goat', with the alienable semantic relation, as well as káfà-r mánòomì 'the farmer's foot' and màatá-r-sà 'his wife', with the inalienable semantic relation. In such constructions in modern Hausa, the morphemes /ná/ and /tá/ have been phonologically reduced to [n] and [t] (which has subsequently become [r] in syllable final position), but the full morphemes still occur in the independent possessive forms such as ná Áli

'Ali's', *táa-sà* 'his', and the full forms can even occasionally be heard when the possessed noun is present, e.g. *màatáa táa-sà* 'his wife'.

Hausa does retain a trace of the Chadic inalienable construction, however. This construction is heard in the well-known curses *úwáakà* and *ùbáakà*, which Abraham (1962) decorously translates 'blast you!' and 'damn your eyes!' respectively. In modern Hausa, these curses contrast formally with *úwá-r-kà* 'your mother' and *ùbá-n-kà* 'your father', though there is a pattern of avoidance of the latter constructions through substitution of such phrases as *gyáatúmá-r-kà* 'your mom' and *bàabá-n-kà* 'your dad'.

The two curses are remarkable, of course, in having no linking morpheme before the pronoun *-kà*. The explanation for this fact is that these expressions are an archaic survival in Hausa of the Chadic inalienable construction, where no linker was used. One might suggest that the form of these expressions is the result of phonological wear and tear on a certain type of fixed phrase. Such a solution is totally ad hoc, and there is no support elsewhere in Hausa that phonological reduction of this type might be expected. In fact it would require that we claim that **ùbá-n-kà* with an *-n-* and **úwá-r-kà* with an *-r-* (or *-t-*) were reduced in exactly the same way at the same time in history.

Moreover, phonological reduction of the type suggested typically indicates that internal analysis of the expression has been lost, e.g. most English speakers are not even aware that 'good-bye' is from 'God be with you'. While *úwáakà* and *ùbáakà* are fixed phrases, occurring only in second person singular as far as I know, they can be used in wider contexts, e.g. *bàa dóok* in *ùbáakà bá nèè* translated by Abraham (1962:908) as 'it's not your blasted father's horse!' and *káa cí úwáakà* 'you fornicated with ("ate") your mother' which has a close counterpart in the American Negro expression 'mother-fucker'. Such contexts show that speakers are still well aware of the internal analysis of these expressions. Since even speakers of modern Hausa are aware of the noun+possessor analysis of *úwáakà* and *ùbáakà*, there is no reason to believe that these curses were ever subjected to phonological reduction because of their "fixed-phrase" status. The historical explanation for the form of these expressions, based on Chadic comparative evidence, is much more straightforward.

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