

**SYNTACTIC MARKERS IN CHADIC.  
AN ARRAY OF PHONOLOGICAL FORM, MORPHOSYNTACTIC  
BEHAVIOUR AND LEXICAL MEANING**

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the results of diachronic analysis of independent grammatical morphemes which function in the grammatical systems of Chadic languages. The following markers are being considered: genitive-linking morpheme, subject and object markers, copula, focus marker. With the reference to a comparison of 15 grammatical systems<sup>1</sup>, it is shown that the present markers are innovations in the languages which have lost their former grammatical systems. Etymologically, the markers may be traced back to lexical sources which are common to Chadic, but their use and grammatical functions are different. It is claimed that what is a retention on phonological ground, is an innovation on the grammatical level and the use of the comparative method in the reconstruction of Chadic is methodologically inadequate.

**Keywords:** African linguistics, historical linguistics, reconstruction, etymology, Chadic

## 1. CHADIC LANGUAGE STUDIES

Chadic languages are spoken in sub-Saharan Africa in the region located west, south and east of Lake Chad. They constitute a separate group (family) within the Afroasiatic phylum. Some 140 languages are divided into three coordinate branches, i.e. West Chadic (WC), Central Chadic (CC) and East Chadic (EC). The widely known Chadic language, Hausa, is spoken by as many as 25 million speakers. Other Chadic languages are used by small groups of people, estimated at a few thousand to a few hundred speakers. The sociolinguistic diversification is of

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<sup>1</sup> Specification of the data and their particular analysis is available in (Pawlak, 1994).

a special value for historical studies on Chadic since the present-day data preserve different stages of their transformation.

Intensive studies on Chadic during the last few decades focused on establishing their external relations with other members of Afroasiatic as well as on internal connections between different Chadic languages. In diachronic investigations of that kind, the concept of Proto-Chadic was regarded to be the essence which allowed presentation of Chadic development in the form of a genealogical tree. Although much has been done in the field of reconstruction, such a linear development is still difficult to achieve. A huge work on lexical comparison (Jungraithmayr and D.Ibriszimow, 1994) shows that relatively little of lexical inventory could be traced back to Proto-Chadic forms. It becomes evident that the contact with genetically unrelated languages of the region has resulted in features which make the boundaries of the family unclear. In the ongoing discussion on Chadic, the most interesting problem concerns the division between common innovations and common heritage in what is known as Chadic language family.

The structural level which gives the evidence of genetic relationship and historical development is not fully investigated as yet. A part of this structure may be referred to overt grammatical morphemes. Now, I would like to present the results of an analysis of syntactic markers in Chadic, which consists in the relation of recognized typological features of the relevant structures to their phonological representation. The criterion of distribution is also included, if the data allow drawing the conclusions. What conjoins different elements of the comparison is the etymology of markers which is recognizable for the languages analyzed. The grammars and other descriptions usually present the etymology of the markers, because for most of Chadic it is to be identified within the frame of the language system.

## 2. GRAMMATICAL MORPHEMES IN CHADIC

### 2.1. *Typological level: Structural differentiation and similarity*

Syntactic devices vary in form, structure and function. They are attached to the stem in the form of either a bound morpheme or an independent morpheme. The periphrastic constructions on one hand and pure grammatical morphemes on the other are structurally linked with the fact

‘this’; in Musgu (CC) the relation between verb and object is marked by a pronoun (*ti* ‘it, her’), i.e. *á mál-tí kúmdáji-ní* ‘he took (it) his gown’. There are also languages in which grammatical words (morphemes) are not so clearly identified as meaningful items. The genitive marker in Hausa (WC) has two variants: a short genitive particle which is attached to the first element, e.g. *gida-n sarkii* ‘the house-of the chief’, and a long form (*na*) which functions as an independent morpheme, i.e. *gidaa na sarkii* ‘house of the chief’ (house which belongs to the chief). The feminine singular counterparts are *-r* and *ta* respectively. These markers do not occur in such form in lexical inventory, unless the items *nân* and *cân* (‘here’ and ‘there’) are their equivalents. Typological features (such as binary distinction between *-n* and *-t/c* in both cases) support the thesis of their historical interrelation. These criteria of typological nature make the ground for comparison which includes the phonological level, reduced to the basic consonantal elements.

The etymology of the relevant structure may be different even in the same language. In genitive construction, the semantic opposition between alienable and inalienable constructions is grammatically marked in some Chadic languages, similarly to the differentiation between nominal and pronominal form of the constituent. The most common differentiation is gender/number agreement. In those Chadic languages which mark this distinction, one form of the marker is restricted to feminine singular, the other one to masculine singular and plural. All these contexts which are based on semantic ground, make several markers for one grammatical function possible. Here are some examples of such diversification:

Kera (EC): *cærə həlgəŋ* ‘the head of the woman’

(head-woman)

*hárgó kə həlgəŋ* ‘the goat of the woman’

(goat-of-woman)

Margi (CC): *mbəl-á bzər* ‘the boy’s liver’ (his own organ)’

(liver-boy)

*mbəl gə bzər nə* ‘that boy’s liver (piece of meat)’

(liver-of-boy)

Kanakuru (WC): *miyo Basha* ‘Basha’s co-wife’

(wife-Basha)

*lo ma Basha* ‘Basha’s son’

(son-of-Basha)

It is interesting to note that etymological identification of the grammatical markers is restricted to a limited number of sources. Two of them, i.e. demonstratives and pronouns, have to be

examples analyzed, three consonants, i.e. /n/, /t/ and /k/ occur very often in morphemes which are etymologically related to demonstratives. The deictic system, common to Chadic, is also based on items to which the above consonants belong. Moreover, they are reconstructed as proto-Chadic evidence (Schuh, 1983: 157-210), among which \*n is supposed to represent masculine singular and possibly plural demonstrative, \*t - feminine singular demonstrative and \*k - the marker of previous reference. In the contemporary grammatical systems, the markers containing the above phonological elements, are widely attested across Chadic<sup>2</sup>. Apart from demonstratives, the consonants are to be met in markers related to pronouns. Some other lexical sources have been identified in consonantal and vocalic morphemes, but they are not so widely attested across Chadic. The syntactic function of the demonstratives and pronouns identified by the above mentioned consonants is as follows:

Table 1. Languages preserving the vestiges of the demonstratives and pronouns in grammatical functions

Function	/n/ Demonstr. Pron.	/t/ Demonstr. Pron.	/k/ Demonstr. Pron.
Subject	Gude Pero		
Direct object		Lamang Fyer Gude Musgu	Kwang Tera Gude
Genitive (gender neutral)	Pero Buduma Kera	Gude	Kera
Genitive (gender sensitive)	Hausa Musgu	Hausa (t > r) Bidiya	Bidiya
Copula	Hausa	Hausa Bidiya	Bidiya
Focus	Ngizim Pero Gude Logone		

<sup>2</sup> The presentation contains only the cases in which consonants are manifested apparently or (as in Hausa) their regular correspondences have been established.



The variety of the direct object (D.O.) markers which are based on one consonantal element (**t** - in this case) is illustrated by the following examples:

- Fyer (WC): mi yal **ti** bará 'he called the boy'  
 (he/IMPERF-call-D.O-boy)  
 Gude (CC): kəngirə Musa **tə** ngyala... 'Musa picked-up the knife'  
 (pick up/COMPL-Musa-D.O.-the knife)  
 Gude (CC): kə nee Musa **ka** faara 'Musa has seen a stone'  
 (see/COMPL-Musa-D.O.-stone)

### 2.3. *Distribution*

The analyzed material is not sufficient to draw any conclusions which would be based exclusively on distribution. The only observation is that etymological identification and phonological representation are not parallel, at least in terms of the transformations of one common source. Regular phonological counterparts are possible in different languages, but they are treated as such only together with the criterion of etymology. However, one may distinguish the binary oppositions within the system of marking grammatical categories and syntactic relations. The gender/number distinction has the exponents in two sources, but arranged not in the same way (/n/ and /t/ in Hausa, but /k/ and /t/ in Bidiya). In the function of subject marker only /n/ marker has been attested, which, on the other hand, does not appear in the position of object marker. Markers based on /t/ in the function of direct object are attested for some Central and West-Chadic languages (Fyer, Gude, Lamang), but those containing /k/ element are to be met in some other distantly related languages (Tera, Kwang). What seems to be common is that the consonant /t/ (and its phonological variants /c/, /r/) represents the feminine singular marker in languages which mark the gender distinction. Although based on common inventory of the lexical sources, their combinations in the present-day languages suggest their independent development. If we assume that Chadic determiners in full lexical shape and their phonological counterparts are structural equivalents, we may state that syntactic markers in Chadic can be looked at as innovations. In contemporary Chadic, they represent a string of different stages that meaningful items underwent in the process of their development.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of syntactic markers in Chadic indicates that the present-day forms represent

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