

ARTICLES

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Transitive L-verbs (grade 2) and transitive H-verbs (grades 1, 4, 5, and 6) in Hausa verbal compounds*

Abstract

This paper examines Hausa verbal compounds in terms of the division of regular verbs (verbs in the “grade system”) into verbs which have a High or Low tone first syllable. The focus of the paper is the surprisingly small number of transitive L-verbs (verbs beginning with a Low tone – “grade 2”) and their limited use of compound markers which contrasts strongly with the frequency of transitive H-verbs (verbs beginning with a High tone) and their markers. I also describe several devices (e.g. grade-switching and covert subjects) which “allow” the formation of verbal compounds with transitive L-verbs.

Keywords: Hausa, verbal compounds, (modified) grade system

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1. Introduction

Hausa verbal compounds are many and varied. Their first member is generally a verb, although a few verbal compounds have either a person-aspect-complex or a /*ma-*/ prefix preceding the verb (see subsection 2.1). A wide variety of verbs are found in these compounds, both regular (those found in the “grade system” – see subsection 2.2) and irregular. In this paper I focus on the regular transitive verbs in compounds and describe a stark contrast between compounds which have a H[igh] or L[ow] tone first syllable (“H-verbs” versus “L-verbs”, defined in subsection 2.2.2). In a word, the number of transitive L-verbs found in Hausa verbal compounds is surprisingly small.

Before explaining this contrast I describe verbal compounds and the verbal “grade system”, as well as various modifications to that system, concluding with my own definition of regular H- and L-verbs.

2. Hausa verbal compounds and Parsons’s “grade system”

Here I describe verbal compounds in terms of the types of verb and marker found in these compounds (subsection 2.1). In subsection 2.2 I describe Parsons’s “grade system” (originally proposed in 1960) and the modifications which have been suggested since that date.

2.1. Hausa verbal compounds

Most Hausa verbal compounds have an imperative form (see 1a); a further form – the tone-lowered form – is only found in compounds (1b); in a number of compounds the finite form of the verb is found (1c):

(1a) The verb with an imperative form:

<i>rùfa-baaya</i> ¹	(cover back)	‘support’
<i>nèemi-naakà</i>	(look.for yours)	‘a name’
<i>sàkoo-tumaaki</i>	(loosen sheep)	‘simpleton’

¹ Hausa examples and words in the text are written in *italics*; when the vowel is long it is written double, when short it is written with a single vowel. High (H) tone vowels are unmarked, e.g. *-uwaa* is HH and the vowels are short-long; low (L) tone vowels are marked with a grave accent, e.g., *gyàaru* is LH and the vowels are long-short. The ‘trilled’ /r/ is marked *ṛ*, the ‘flapped’ /r/ is unmarked (*r*).

(1b) The verb with a tone-lowered form (not found in normal verbal morphology):

<i>dāfāa-dukà</i>	(cook all)	'jollof rice'
<i>kàarèe-dangi</i>	(finish family)	'type of arrow poison'
<i>bii-bango</i>	(follow wall)	'leakage along a wall'

(1c) The verb with the finite form:

<i>mootsà-jìkii</i>	(move body)	'sport, physical exercise'
<i>tunà-haifùwaa</i>	(remember birth)	in: <i>ran</i> ~ 'birthday'
<i>kashè(e)-wàndoo</i>	(kill trousers)	'unemployment'

In many compounds with a noun direct object the final vowel of the direct object is shortened. In the examples below the nouns *baayaa* 'back', *dangii* 'family' and *bangoo* 'wall' have a short final vowel, marking the compound (along with the verb):

(1d) Final vowel shortening:

<i>rùfa-baaya</i>	(cover back)	'support'
<i>kàarèe-dangi</i>	(finish family)	'type of arrow poison'
<i>bii-bango</i>	(follow wall)	'leakage along wall'

Compounds with a noun direct object are the main focus of this paper; however, other syntax is found; in the examples below the first example has two transitive verbs but their direct object is assumed; the second has a pronoun direct object; the third has a pronoun indirect object and a noun direct object:

(1e) Varied syntax:

<i>dàki-bàri</i>	(beat stop)	'strong, reliable thing'
<i>maīmaītoo-nì</i>	(desire me)	'small plant used in love potions'
<i>ciree-mìn-Kayàa</i>	(pull.out for.me thorn)	'children's game'

There are compounds where a person-aspect-complex (expressing person, number and aspect) precedes the verb; in the example below the person-aspect pronoun is fourth person subjunctive (= 'one should'). In a few compounds a *ma-* prefix precedes the verb which is tone lowered and phonologically reduced (*ràs* ← *rasàa* 'lack'):

(1f) Person-aspect-complex or *ma-* prefix preceding the verb:

<i>à-kòori-buuzuu</i>	(4pl.SBJ chase-Tuareg)	'police-like house guard'
<i>maràs-hankàlìi</i>	(ma:lack sense)	'senseless person'

The above examples exemplify the kinds of compound markers and syntax found in these compounds.

2.2. Parsons’s “grade system” and modifications

The term “grade system” was introduced by Parsons (1960, 1962, 1971-72). He proposes seven grades in which morphology (tone pattern and final vowel or consonant) and syntax operate in different forms of the verb (A-, B-, C- and D-form²).

TABLE 1. A résumé of disyllabic verb grades (Parsons 1960, 1962, 1971/72)

Form Grade	A-form ØDO	B-form PDO	C-form NDO	D-form IO
1	HL-àa	HL-àa	HL-à	HL-àa
2	LH-aa	LH-ee	LH-i	Gr1, 4, pds
3	LH-a	–	–	Gr1, 4, pds
4	HL-èè	HL-èè	HL-è(e)	HL-èè
5	HH-ař	HH-ař dà	HH-ař dà	HH-ař (dà)
6	HH-oo	HH-oo	HH-oo	HH-oo
7	LH-u	–	–	Gr1, 4, pds

The abbreviation ‘pds’ (Table 1, D-form/IO) means “pre-datative suffix” (see Newman 2000: 283-284). The pds is suffixed to a verb with a H tone first syllable (i.e. it is an H-verb) and ends with a consonant, *-m* or *-ř*. The pds is only used with verbs in grades 2, 3 and 7. These facts dovetail nicely with my description of L-verbs and indirect objects (subsection 2.2.2.1).

Grades 1, 4 and 6 have both transitive and intransitive verbs, verbs in grades 2 and 5 are only transitive, and in grades 3 and 7 only intransitive. Grades also have a semantic component: the basic form and semantics of a verb are found in grades 1, 2 or 3, while grades 4, 5, 6 and 7 change the semantics of the basic verb, adding an extra meaning³.

² The A-form refers either to a transitive verb where the direct object does not immediately follow the verb (ØDO) or to the sole form of an intransitive verb; the B-form is immediately followed by a pronoun direct object (PDO), and the C-form by a noun direct object (NDO); the D-form is associated with the indirect object which may be either a noun or a pronoun (PIO/NIO).

³ Grade 4 has a “totality” meaning, grade 5 is “causative”, grade 6 is “ventive”, and grade 7 “sustentative”.

Parsons defines all verbs whose basic form does not match those of the seven grades as “irregular”. Irregular verbs have a basic (non-grade) form but may also add/change meaning by taking the form of a grade, e.g. the irregular verb *faadî* ‘fall’ may take the grade 6 form *faadoo* ‘fall (down here)”; the irregular verb *sanii* ‘know’ may take the grade 5 form *sanaā* ‘inform (cause someone to know)’.

2.2.1. Modifications to the grade system

Over the years various modifications have been suggested (Lukas 1963, Pilszczikowa 1969, Furniss 1981, 1983). Significantly, Newman (1973) suggests both a radical modification to the grade system as well as a historical basis from which the system developed; he replaces Parsons’s idea of secondary grades with the idea that semantic “extensions” were available both to verbs in the grades and to irregular verbs⁴. Nevertheless, Parsons’s system has survived and has even been extended by the addition of grades 0 and grades 3a and 3b (Newman 2000 & Jaggat 2001) – verbs which Parsons defined as irregular.

2.2.2. Further modifications. McIntyre: regular H and L-verbs

McIntyre (2005/2008, 2006) retains Parsons’s definition of irregular verbs and suggests that the verbs in the grades be called “regular” verbs, a term not previously used. More radically, I suggest that there are two kinds of regular verb: those whose first syllable has a [H]igh tone (“H-verbs”) and those whose first syllable has a [L]ow tone (“L-verbs”). Thus grades 1, 4, 5 and 6 are H-verbs while grades 2, 3 and 7 are L-verbs. Tonal opposition is not the only difference between H- and L-verbs⁵; further contrasts are found in the form of the verb preceding an indirect object (2.2.2.1), in the morphology of the respective verbal nouns and in the related syntax (2.2.2.2).

2.2.2.1. Regular H and L-verbs: Indirect objects

When followed by an indirect object H-verbs (grades 1, 4, 5 and 6) have their own form – starting with a H tone – preceding the dative object; L-verbs (grades 2, 3 and 7) either “borrow” the form of an H-verb (Parsons’s “D-Form”) or use the pds (see subsection 2.2 above). The following examples contrast the forms of

⁴ Newman (1973) identifies extensions in verbs of grades 1 and 2 – alongside basic verbs; he identifies basic verbs in grade 4 – alongside extensions.

⁵ A radical interpretation of this difference holds that syntactic relations and the associated semantics are coded by this tonal difference, even if such tonal opposition is no longer productive. Various authors have made suggestions which seem to relate to semantic differences between H- and L-verbs: Gouffé (1988), Caron (1991), Abdoulaye (1992, 1996), De Campos (1998), Frajzyngier & Munkaila (2004), and McIntyre (2006).