

A NEW LOOK AT THE PREDICATING PARTICLES IN HAUSA

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1. The predicating particles

In this paper I wish to consider the status of three words in Hausa which have been called 'predicating particles' by Kraft.¹ These words

¹Vide A Study of Hausa Syntax, vol. I, pp. 136ff.; vol. II, pp. 51ff.; "The Morpheme *nā* in Relation to a Broader Classification of Hausa Verbals," p. 238. Kraft also includes the words *dà* 'there is...' and *gàa* 'there ...is; behold; voilà' among the predicating particles. I will not be dealing here with these two words, other than to note that *dà* seems to be some type of clause case marking or complementizer occurring optionally in *àkwai* clauses, and which can condition the optional deletion of *àkwai*: e.g. *dà àkwai dooyàa* = *dà dooyàa* 'there is a yam'. I am at a loss to link this particle with *dà* 'and, with', although there is no morphological difference. The use of *dà* to introduce time adverbials such as *dà raanaa* 'during the daytime' and *dà kàrfèe biyu* 'at two o'clock' seems to me in some ways similar to its use in the existential predication, but I have not found sufficient evidence to link both uses to a common syntactic basis. In A Study of Hausa Syntax, Kraft identifies the existential negative *baà* 'there is no...' with the *baà* which marks the negative continuative, as found in *baà shi dà dooyàa* 'He doesn't have any yams'. There is no evidence in favor of equating these two forms, other than the trivial facts that they both are negatives of some sort and that they look alike. In the 1964 article cited above in this note, Kraft revised his position, and has treated the *baà*'s as separate entities. For Gregersen's comments in criticism of Kraft's analysis, see "Some Competing Analyses in Hausa," p. 44, note 3. He states that "we shall probably have to reject Kraft's attempt to set up an anomalous sentence type without any kind of subject at all." I agree with Gregersen only insofar as Kraft's treatment is taken to represent the ultimate (= deep structure) level of analysis, rather than a surface structure typology. Gregersen's objection that the predicating particles "do not constitute a substitution group in the usual sense (*dà* may be followed by a disjunctive pronoun but *gàa* never is, *àkwai* and *baabù* can occur as independent utterances, e.g. as answers to questions, but *dà* and *gàa* cannot)" and that therefore Kraft's analysis "seems untenable on other grounds as well", is misleading in that the criteria Gregersen poses are irrelevant to the question of underlying syntactic equivalence. I do agree that *gàa* should not be lumped together with the existential predications at the deep structure level. The significance of the fact that both *gàa* and the existentials take following NP complements rather than "normally" preceding NP subjects, the main point of Kraft's analysis, lies in its universal ramifications, which I touch on in section 5 of this paper.

have a verbal character, but nevertheless differ from ordinary verbs in that they do not occur with a preceding subject NP and person-aspect prefix, but rather take an immediately following NP complement. These words are:

àkwai	'there is ...'
baabù	'there is no ...'
baà	'there is no ...'

Semantically, these predicating particles share the feature that they make an assertion about the existence of the referent of the complement NP. Examples of their use with a noun complement are shown in (1) - (4) below.

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|-----|---------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) | àkwai dooyàa | 'there is a yam' |
| | | [dooyàa (n. fem.) 'yam(s)'] |
| (2) | àkwai dooyàa? | 'is there a yam?' |
| (3) | baabù dooyàa | 'there is no yam' |
| (4) | baà dooyàa | 'there is no yam' |

When the complement is a pronoun, it is taken from the set of direct object pronouns in the case of àkwai, but from the set of independent pronouns in that of baabù and baà. This is illustrated in examples (5) through (7) below, where tà is the third person feminine direct object pronoun, and ita is the corresponding independent pronoun.

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------|
| (5) | àkwai tà | 'there is one; it is to be had' |
| (6) | baabù ita | 'there is none' |
| (7) | baà ita | 'there is none' |

If the identity of the NP complement is clear from context, it can be and is preferably left "understood" (a phenomenon called 'zero anaphora' by Russell Schuh), and both àkwai and baabù can then stand alone as complete sentences. Baà, however, cannot by itself constitute a sentence. These facts about zero anaphora are illustrated in examples (8) through (10).

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|--|
| (8) | (ii,) àkwai | '(yes,) there is [i.e., in answer to (2) above]' |
|-----|-------------|--|

(9) (aa'aa) baabù '(no,) there is not'

However:

(10) *(aa'aa) baà [For the meaning of (9)]

2. Baà from baabù, not vice versa

As might be expected, some Hausanists have seen a connection between the words baà and baabù, which, though differing slightly in distribution, mean exactly the same thing. Some grammars and dictionaries merely list the two as variants of one another, but a considerable number give baabù as derived from the combination of baà plus àbù 'thing', giving baà àbù 'there is no thing', which presumably has contracted to the form baabù. The earliest reference I could find to this etymology was in Charles Henry Robinson's Dictionary of the Hausa Language.²

I should like to challenge here this analysis of baabù as baà àbù, and suggest instead somewhat the reverse situation: that baà is the contracted form of baabù. I am positing a synchronic, relatively

²Third edition, revised and enlarged, 1913, p. 23. Robinson also gives the etymology in his Hausa Grammar, fifth edition, revised, 16th impression, 1959. The first editions of the Grammar and the Dictionary were published in 1897 and 1899, respectively, but I have not seen these earlier works. Adam Mischlich, who was harshly critical of Robinson's 1899 Dictionary, also carried the etymology in his Wörterbuch der Hausasprache, 1906. Until examination of Robinson's first edition proves otherwise, I shall assume that it was he, and not Mischlich, who introduced the analysis in question. I could not find mention of this treatment of baabù in Schön's 1862 Hausa grammar nor in his 1876 dictionary, the last lexicographic work on Hausa published before Robinson's.

Other authors who have given essentially the same analysis were F. W. Taylor, in A Practical Hausa Grammar, second edition, 1959; the first edition, published in 1923, was unavailable to me. D. A. Olderogge, editor, Kamus na Hausa=Rashanci, first edition, 1963. The other grammars and dictionaries which I have consulted have been mute on the question of the relative primacy of baà or baabù. Those that do claim that baabù is from baà àbù do not note whether this is to be understood synchronically, diachronically, or from both viewpoints. In this paper I use the terms "analysis" and "etymology" interchangeably and without implication of a diachronic claim. My own proposals are to be viewed from a synchronic standpoint.

late optional phonological rule which deletes the last syllable of *baabù* before an NP complement. We can write such a rule in the form given in (11), below.

(11) Optional truncation of *baabù* before complement NP³

$$\text{baabù} \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{opt} \\ \rightarrow \end{array} \quad \text{baà} \quad / \quad \underline{\quad} \text{NP}$$

I base my case for rejection of the *baà àbù* derivation on the following four points:

- a. The full hypothesized underlying form, *baà àbù*, is itself a fully complemented predication, and following it with another NP is ill-formed in Hausa. Thus we can have (12), but not (13):

(12) *baabù dooyàa* 'there is no yam'
 but

(13) **baà àbù dooyàa* [for the meaning of (12)]

- b. The combination *àbù* + NP (with no genitival linker) is found nowhere in the language, and it would be difficult to conceive of what such a combination would mean.
- c. From what is now known of how tone works in Hausa, we would expect that the contraction of *baà àbù* into one word would come out as [*baàbù*], not [*baabù*], since low tones (here, specifically, the low mora of *baà*) are always retained in contractions. (Cf. *kaṅsà* [not **kansà*] 'his head' [*< kaṅ* 'head' + *-nsà* 'of his'].) Conversely, the expected tone on the monosyllabic resulting from contraction from an underlying high-low disyllabic word such as *baabù* would be precisely

³Presented in this form, the rule does not really capture the fact that the last syllable of *baabù* is deleted, with subsequent tone contraction. I have written the rule this way in order to avoid the question of whether it is *-bù* or *-bà* which gets deleted when the truncation rule applies. The latter case might be appropriate in case the suggestion presented in section 4 is accepted. If the second syllable were not deleted, it would obligatorily change to *bù*.

the falling tone we do observe in baà. (Cf. the two variants of the negative continuative prefix: baa-yàa and its contracted form baì.)

- d. Finally, the original hypothesis seems to have been based on a false analogy drawn from the corresponding words in the Kanuri language. In his dictionary, Robinson [p. 23] invites the comparison of the "similar use in Kanuri of ago something, and bago nothing." The available information concerning existential predications in Kanuri does not preclude the possibility that the lexical items àkwai 'there is ...' and 'negative morpheme' in Hausa are of Kanuri provenance. After looking more deeply into what seems to be going on in Kanuri, however, we find that the assumption of borrowing lends no support to the claim that baabù comes from baà àbù. In Johannes Lukas' description of Kanuri [1937:68], bâ is a shortened form of bágò 'be not', where the gò in bágò is the verb 'to be'.⁴ The relation of agó 'thing' to bágò seems illusory.

In addition to these reasons for rejecting the old derivation, I offer the following two arguments in support of the proposed truncation rule given in (11):

- e. This approach neatly accounts for the non-occurrence of baà in cases of zero anaphora [examples (9) and (10)], since it is precisely in those cases that the conditioning environment of a following NP complement is missing. Without this explanation, we would have an anomalous constraint on baà, making our description of the facts more complex than necessary.
- f. For verbs and certain particles in Hausa, the shortening of a final syllable before a non-incorporated NP complement is a widespread phenomenon, and the existence of such a shortening rule for baabù would be in accord with these other cases.

Once we have accepted the analysis of baà as the shortened form

⁴This deletion of the verb 'to be' in the negative has its counterpart in Hausa, as we shall see in the next section.

of *baabù*, our next task is to specify what relation, if any, exists between it and *àkwai*, the word which *baabù* negates.

3. The phrase structure difference between *àkwai* and *baabù*

First, let us note the significance of the observation, presented in examples (5) through (7), that *àkwai* takes direct object pronouns, while *baabù* and *baà* take independent pronouns. In this respect, *àkwai* acts like a transitive verb, while *baabù* and *baà* do not. The reason for this divergent behavior lies, I believe, in the fact that *àkwai* is a verb whereas *baabù* is not.

Let us consider the Hausa object pronoun incorporation rule⁵ which readjusts the hierarchical structure of the phrase marker to render an object pronoun part of the preceding verb in the surface structure. This rule may be used as a basis for distinguishing between the direct object pronouns and the independent pronouns: the former are pronouns which have been so incorporated, while the latter are ones which have not. In the case of *àkwai*, then, I am postulating a level such as that illustrated in (14) [below], which, upon application of object pronoun incorporation, is transformed into the phrase structure of (15), with subsequent phonological reduction of *ita* to *ta* and tonal polarization to the (high) last syllable of *àkwai*.

⁵The object pronoun incorporation rule accounts for the difference in form between the direct object pronouns in pairs of sentences such as (a) and (b):

(a) Audù yaa kaawoo tà

Audu he-completive bring her

'Audu brought her.'

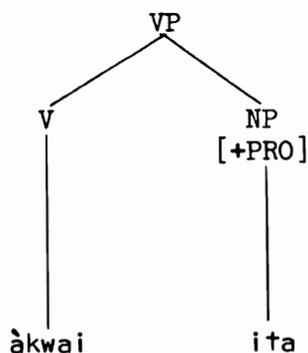
(b) Audù yaa kaawoo wà Gambo ita

Audu he-completive bring to Gambo her

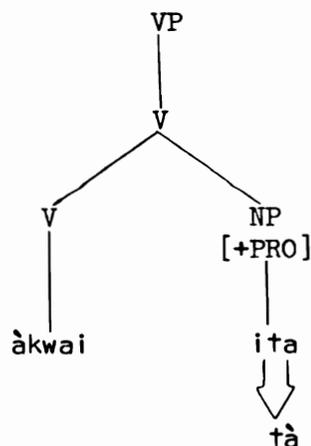
'Audu brought her to Gambo.'

In sentence (a), the direct object pronoun *tà* is phonologically part of the verb, since its tone is completely determined by that of the verb. In sentence (b), no object pronoun incorporation can take place, since the indirect object phrase *wà Gambo* comes between the verb and the direct object pronoun. In this case, the non-incorporated pronoun *ita* acts phonologically independent of the verb and retains its high tone regardless of the preceding tones.

(14)



(15)



The next question to be considered is what there is about *baabù* that makes it behave unlike a verb. I submit that the answer is that *baabù* is essentially a form of the negative morpheme -- which in other contexts appears as the discontinuous *bà(a) ... ba* -- and that the existential verb *àkwai* is present in the deep structure of every sentence containing *baabù*, but is deleted before the level of surface structure. We can represent this at a first approximation with a rule like that in (16):

(16) Deletion of *àkwai* after NEG

àkwai → ∅ / NEG _____

Now, a rule such as (16) might seem a bit strange were it not for other similar rules which can be written not only for Hausa, but for quite a few other languages as well, where either existential copulas or aspect morphemes are deleted in the negative. Specifically, in Hausa we find aspect-morpheme-deletion in the completive and continuative aspects under negation. On the basis of the similarity of the aspect-morpheme-deletion phenomenon to the deletion process described by the rule in (16), I would suggest that the deletion of *àkwai* is best regarded as a specific instance of that more general rule, so that the rule in (16) is more generally written as in (17), below:

(17) Aspect morpheme deletion under negation

[+V, +Aspect,] → ∅ / NEG _____

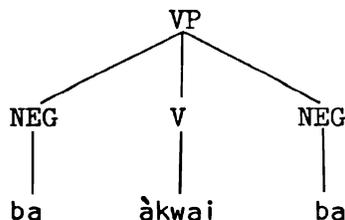
The dots in the feature specification of the aspectual verb represent the feature or features needed to uniquely delimit the class which includes the completive, continuative, and existential (àkwai) aspects while excluding all other aspects, since the latter do not participate in this deletion process under negation.

Note that a rule like this deletion rule makes sense only if we conceive of àkwai as a verb of the same class as that of the aspect verbs. It is interesting to observe in this regard that we have an additional reason for classing àkwai together with the other aspect verbs: namely, the fact that a well-formed, non-elliptical sentence in Hausa must have some aspect marker on its main verb, unless it is a copular sentence such as with àkwai. This fact suggests that àkwai and the other aspect verbs share the selectional feature that they may be the highest predication in a well-formed sentence. A treatment of Hausa aspect which did not acknowledge that the aspects were best represented in deep structure as verbs would still have to recognize this structural similarity between the various aspects and the existential predicate, àkwai.

4. Baabù from baa-ba?

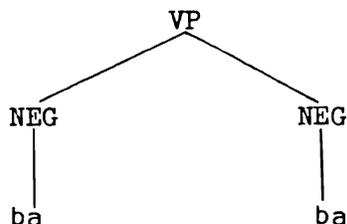
The fact that baabù seems to be a reduplicate form of a simple ba(a) morpheme may either be a superficial idiosyncrasy of no special significance, or else it may be related to the regular discontinuous negative morpheme, bà(a) ... ba. That is, it may be the case that the two syllables in baabù are actually the first and second negative morphemes in a construction such as that in (18):

(18) Hypothetical source for baabù:



When àkwai is deleted in the presence of the negative, we are left with the form shown in (19):

(19) After àkwai is deleted from (18):

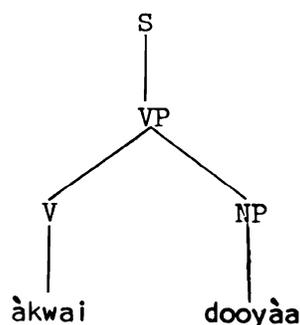
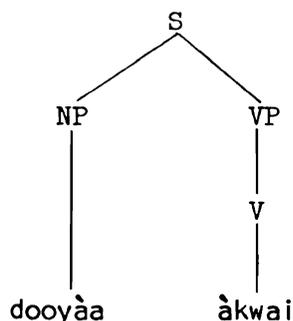


The form in (19) would then change to baabù by a minor phonological rule which would account for vowel length, tone, and the -u of the second syllable. I must admit that the evidence for the existence in Hausa of the phonological processes needed in such an analysis is not readily forthcoming, although on the other hand I cannot show that this is not indeed what actually happens. Thus the question of whether the apparent reduplication in baabù is traceable to that found in the regular discontinuous negatives must await further research, and I am merely mentioning the possibility here.

5. Subject inversion

Before concluding this paper, I wish to deal with the matter of word order. In most kinds of sentences, the subject NP comes first, before the verb. In the case of both àkwai and baabù, I would suggest a simple rule of subject postposing, which would carry a subject NP from its underlying position on the left of the sentence to a position on the right of the verb phrase. This rule is illustrated in (20) and (21), which respectively show the phrase structure before and after application:

(20) Before subject postposing (21) After subject postposing



A dividend of our analysis of *baabù* as being derived from the negative plus *àkwai* is that this subject postposing rule need be stated only once -- for *àkwai* -- and will take care of both the affirmative *àkwai* and the negative *baabù*. Thus this distinctive syntactic property -- the fact that they are predicating particles in surface structure, rather than run-of-the-mill verbs -- is due to an underlying syntactic equivalence.

One might speculate as to why the language would have such a subject postposing rule in the first place. We note that it is the unmarked situation in languages -- English included -- to place the existential/locative copula before the true subject. English inserts a dummy *there* in subject position, while the true subject is postposed to the right of the main verb, yielding (23) from (22):

(22) A blonde is (in my soup).

(23) There is a blonde (in my soup).

The reason for such rules probably lies in the increased efficiency they provide by reducing left branching and the concomitant load on short-term memory.

6. Summary

In summary, then, we have taken a look at three particles of existential predication in Hausa. We have considered and rejected a time-honored but deficient analysis of two of them, and proposed a new analysis of all three particles which integrates the various otherwise anomalous facts about these words into the independently motivated system of rules of the language as a whole.

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