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SOME COMMON FEATURES ACROSS LANGUAGE FAMILY BORDERS IN WEST AFRICA

Introduction

The linguistic map of Africa is divided into four language families, the boundaries of which (with some particular exceptions) have been quite clearly established. Due to the fact that a historical-comparative analysis is conducted on the basis of contemporary data, many questions still remain unsolved, especially relating to the separation of common heritage from areal influences in the process of language development. In the African context, both areal and genetic factors are valid in reconstructing the history of languages and are also essential in uncovering the history of societies. On the other hand, features defined by genetic criteria "are not restricted to the [..] previously defined narrow genetic confines; on the contrary, their distribution extends to larger zones, often disregarding the limits imposed by genetic families or clusters, or by even narrower areal limits" (Zima 2009: 1).

In the last few decades, intensive studies have been carried out on contact zones and linguistic convergence areas in which genetically unrelated languages have been used within relatively small distances. These zones are mostly found in West Africa where three African language families meet, i.e. Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo. The whole area is termed the Sahel-Saharan zone, for which the contact features between Mande and Songhay, South Mande and Gur, Chadic and Saharan (Songhay and Kanuri), Chadic and Atlantic (Fulfulde) languages have become the main subject of investigation.

The concept of *Sprachbund* in the Sahel-Saharan region of Africa has recently been thoroughly investigated (e.g. Caron & Zima 2006). The groundwork for such ideas was conducted in earlier texts that focused on common lexical stock (Mukarovsky 1987) and lexical diffusion (Nicolaï 1997), leading to wider reflections on the interference of genetic and areal factors (Cyffer & Ziegelmeyer,

ed. 2009; Zima 2009, among others). The newly developed approach takes into account the structural diffusion as well as sociolinguistic aspects that allow for an analysis of the roles and communicative functions of languages in the area. West Africa is widely perceived as a common cultural region and this is reflected in the distribution of Arabic loans in various West African languages (Baldi 2008).

The present paper deals with the structural peculiarities of some West African languages, as seen from the perspective of one specific language, namely Hausa. For a number of centuries, this language has been widely spoken in West Africa in the function of a *lingua franca*. In terms of genetic affiliation, it is an Afro-Asiatic language, a member of its Chadic branch. As has become clear as a result of comparative studies conducted on African languages, the structural peculiarities of Hausa are widely shared not only by other Chadic but also by various non-related languages. The presentation gives examples of marking syntactic relations and some specific morphosyntactic features and categories of verb phrases that occur across family borders.

The morpheme *N - correlation between form and function

Among the most remarkable indications of the ties between non-related languages are those connected to the morpheme *N. The phonological element *n has been recognized as peculiar to the common Chadic system of determiners[1]. There are historical inferences of the development of these determiners into grammatical morphemes, such as the genitive marker, copula, object marker, focus marker and interrogative morpheme (Pawlak 1994: 218). The phonological element n in Hausa is present in the copula (*nē*), the genitive marker (*na*), the locative adverbial noun (*nan*), the focus marker (*nē*)[2], and in some other grammatical words. Typological similarities between morphemes containing the nasal consonant /n/ have been found in Songhay (Nilo-Saharan), but also in Susu and Yoruba (Niger-Congo), e.g. Susu: *a **ná** bé* 'he **is** here', Songhay: *Yakuba go **ne*** 'Yakuba **is** here'; Yoruba: *oníṣòwò **ni*** 'It **is** a tradesman' (Gouffé 1970/71), cf. Hausa *yārò̀ **nē*** 'It **is** a boy'.

The recognized correlation between form and function[3] reveals interrelationships between the languages in the sphere of the development of syntactic structures, but they do not prove any genetic unity between them.

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[1] Along with *T, the phonological element *N is probably related to similar Afro-Asiatic examples, identified as functioning in the role of demonstratives with gender/number distinctions, where *n* is for the masculine singular and plural, *t* for the feminine singular (Pawlak 1994: 46, following Schuh 1983).

[2] Long vowels are further marked as ā or aa, depending on convention adopted in the sources.

[3] Phonological similarities and common strategies in syntactic structures are also recognized in the development of genetically related languages; aside from demonstratives, this also applies to pronouns, nouns and verbs (see Pawlak 1994 for Chadic).

Phonological similarities between lexical items representing basic vocabulary result from contact between languages at the early stages of their development and from processes of grammaticalization that affect particular languages. A structural consistence in grammatical patterns can be defined in terms of universal grammar rather than internal transformations of particular systems.

Multifunctional morphemes - similarities and differences in clausal context

The identification of the West African contact area relies significantly on a set of multifunctional morphemes, the forms of which are very similar (or even identical). They display the same or comparable functions in languages that are genetically different. For example, the *dà* in Hausa and *nda* (with phonological variants *da* and *na*) in Songhay show such areal affinities. Both are highly versatile function words that occur in clausal and subclausal constructions in almost identical contexts (Zima 2010: 87).

Among words of this kind, there are also two morphemes classified as prepositions/ coordinators/ subordinators, depending on the descriptive tradition of a particular language. Identified in Hausa as *har* 'as far as, up to, even, until' and *sai* 'except, until, then', they also occur in genetically related languages (Chadic), as well as in non-related ones. This common areal feature relies more significantly on the function of these words as junctors that connect phrases and clauses rather than on their semantics. The form of the words varies from language to language, however the equivalents of *har* (Fulfulde *ha, haa, hade*, Songhay *hala*, *hal*, Kanuri *hár,* Bade *kar*) seem to have a common origin. which would be the Arabic *ḫatta* 'until' (Baldi 1998: 131)[4] that has been integrated into the structures of many languages (including Mande and Gur languages). Its distribution in the Sahel area is a result of the function of Hausa as a *lingua franca.*

As for *sai*, it is probably of Hausa origin (Ziegelmeyer 2010: 131). Several Nigerian languages have such a preposition/conjunction: in Kanuri attested to as *séde* which is a transformed form of the Hausa *séi déi* (Löhr 2009: 28), in Fulfulde as *sey* (Ziegelmeyer 2008: 220). However, structural equivalents of *sai* in 'until'-sentences are also found in other languages of the area. In terms of structural devices, this function is also fulfilled by the Arabic conjunction *illā* or *'ille* 'excluding', 'except (for)', 'only'(Baldi 1998: 48). Some languages have a borrowed coordinator directly related to this form (in Kanuri – *illá*, in Songhay – *allaa*, and even in Hausa – *ìllā*), but the other 'until'-equivalents seem to be common areal innovations. In Hausa, the two words, i.e. *sai* and *har*, function both as prepositions and conjunctions. *Sai* 'except, not until' (also 'as far as, up

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[4]   The etymology has been traced back to Ar. *ḫattā* by G. Ziegelmeyer (2008: 205).

until, even, when' in contextual use) usually occurs with an explicit or implied negative (Newman 2000: 468), e.g. *dàgà nī̃ sai kai* 'nobody can do except you or I' (Abraham 1962).

Phrases with *sai* are commonly used in everyday communication, e.g.:

Hausa: a) **sai** gò̃be *'until tomorrow'*
/until tomorrow/
'Good bye! [lit. until tomorrow]

Hausa: b) **sai** *mun* *sā̀du*
/until 3Pl/CONT meet/
'See you! [lit. till we meet]'

A similar word exists in many Chadic languages in the function of a preposition/conjunction. It expresses the same wide range of meanings ('only', then,' only when', 'only after', 'not until', etc.), but the form may be slightly different, e.g. *see* in Gude (Hoskinson 1983: 133):

Gude: *pooshi nyi ka pərə ma'yana,* **see** *ci kə ənya dee kwaɓaa-ki*
/Neg 1Sg to get quiet, until 3Sg COMPL return money-my/
'I cannot relax, until (only after) he returns my money'

As aforementioned, in Hausa *sai* is a high-frequency word that occurs in many common phrases. In Gùrdùŋ, a Chadic language from norhern Nigeria, "it indicates a point of time at which a statement holds" (Haruna 2010: 162), e.g.:

Gùrdùŋ: a) **sai** kə wari 'until you come'
/until 2Sg come/

Gùrdùŋ: b) **sai** kàlàu? sai yâmma 'where? Only in the west'
/until where until west/

Also *har* 'up to, including' "connotes action moving forward toward something or some time or some place" (Newman 2000:468), e.g.:

Hausa: *zan yi tàfiyā̀* **har** *nâ ìsa kā̀suwā*
/1Sg.FUT do travel up to 1Sg.POT reach market/
'I'll go on till I reach market'

As a pair of function words, *sai* and *har* differ in connoting a terminal point in time or space. "*Har* serves to lead the action forward, while *sai* serves to put on the brakes and specify an end point" (Newman 2000: 133)[5]. Both are used in elliptical constructions:

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5 They may also be used together in immediate succession to indicate 'up until'.

Hausa: a)   *Mun yi tàfiyằ*   **har** *zuwằ Kanằ*
/1Pl.CONT do travel up to Kano/
'We travelled to (many places including) Kano'

Hausa: b)   *Sun*   *tāshì* **sai** *Kanằ*
/3Pl.PERF leave except Kano/
'They set out on a journey (and they took no direction other than) to Kano'

Other languages in which similar function words exist do not share all the structural properties and all the semantic nuances of the Hausa *sai* and *har*, but they still confirm the structural relevance of the opposition distinguished in their contextual use.

In Kanuri and Fulfulde, languages representing two different families, the two function words are direct loans from Hausa, e.g. (Ziegelmeyer 2008: 220):
Fulfulde: mi hokkay   on   nyiiri e ɓiraaɗam [**sey** on ɗalili]
     /1Sg give.IMPF 2Pl.Obj porridge and milk   until 2Pl have enough.PERF/
     'I will bring you porridge and milk until you are fed up with it'

Kanuri: lené [**sái** bə́ladə́ nanə́míya]
     /go.Imp.Sg until town.Det reach.2Sg.FUT
     'go, until you reach the town'

In Songhay, the function word *hal* 'until' (dialectal variants: *hali, hara, hala, har, kala, kal*) is used. In Western Songhay, its counterpart and the equivalent for 'since' is *jaa.* As quasi-prepositions, they are both common as clause initial morphemes, analyzed as adverbial complementizers, e.g. (Heath 1999a: 108):
Songhay (KC): a)   **hal** *hõõ*
         /until today/
         'even today (not just in the past/

         b)   *[jaa alfajar] yer o   koy   kata   gi*
            /since dawn 1Pl.S IMPF go   bring   3Pl.Obj/
            /starting at dawn we go fetch them'

In the Eastern variant, Koyraboro Senni, parallel structures are formed with *hala* and *zaa.* The etymology of these words leads back to two Arabic words, namely *ḥattaa* 'until' (similarly as in the case of *har* in Hausa) and *zamaan-* 'time, era' respectively, with reference to the Maghrebi Ar. *zmaan* 'long

ago' (Heath 1999b: 144). Their relational functions are comparable with the ones distinguished for Hausa , e.g.:

Songhay (KS): *i   koy   too **hala** makka here*
                 /3Pl.S go   arrive until Mecca   around/
                 'They went and reached (all the way) Mecca'

Songhay (KS): ***zaa** baab-oo   mana kaa*
             /since father-Def.Sg Neg come/
             'before her father came' (lit. since [=back when] her father hadn't come)

Songhay (KS): *ay   hansa ka mebil-oo zur-andi **hala** a   hasara*
             /1Sg.S do-much Infin vehicle-Def.Sg run.Caus until 3Sg.S be-ruined/
             'I drove the car quite a lot, until it broke down'

The multifunctional words *sai* and *har* in Hausa, which have for many years attracted the interest of linguists[6], possess counterparts in many languages spoken in Hausaland and neighboring areas in West Africa. This is the area of the direct influence of the Hausa language. At the same time, there are structural similarities in the use of multifunctional words and their morphosyntactic features across language borders within the whole Sahel-Saharan zone.

Apart from these two words, there are also various so-called function words (morphemes of negation, coordinators, prepositions and some adverbs) that function in non-related languages and construe a coherent linguistic area in West Africa (cf. Ziegelmeyer & Cyffer 2010).

Irregular verbs and their morphosyntactic properties

One of the recognized ways of tracing the earlier stages of language development is investigating grammatical archaisms. In Hausa, the morphosyntactic properties of verbs have been arranged in a fairly regular system of grades. The contextual properties of verbs are predicted on the basis of their segmental shape (basically the quality of final vowel and tonal patterns). However, some verbs do not belong to any of the regular verb classes (grades). The list of such verbs is relatively long and comprises around 1% of all verbal roots. An additional class (grade O), postulated recently by P. Newman, covers many of them, but 10 verbs remain outside the scope of this class (Newman 2000: 629). Among the group of irregular verbs, there are some which denote very "basic" meanings in terms of core vocabulary, i.e.: 'see', 'know', 'leave', 'go', 'come', 'give', 'approach'.

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[6] A comprehensive study on *sai* in Hausa was conducted by Johannes Lukas (Über die Verwendung der Partikel *sai* im Hausa, *Afrikanistische Studien* (Festschrift Westermann), ed. by J. Lukas, pp. 108-17, Berlin: Akademie Verlag).

Here is a list of items common to Hausa and some varieties of Songhay[7] that are somehow exceptional or irregular with relation to patterns which are regular or productive:

	Songhay	Hausa
'see'	*di, dii* (KS)	*ganii/gan/ga*
'know'	*bey* (KC)	*sanìi/san*
	waani~wan (KS)	
'leave, let'	*bara* (KC)	*barìi/bar*
'give'	*noo* (KS)	*baa/bai*
'go'	*koy* (KS, KC)	*jee*
'come'	*kaa* (KS, KC)	*zoo*
'approach'	*man*	*kusa*

Some other irregular forms (particles) in Songhay have their counterparts in Hausa verbs, which however function in accordance with regular grade forms but are still somehow 'exceptional' in their syntactic behaviour, i.e.:

'get'	*du, duu (KS)*	*saamùu*
'be able to'	*hin*	*iyàa*

If we make the assumption that what is regular is an innovation and what is irregular preserves an earlier form, such a list of similar irregular verbs in non-related languages supports the idea of 'basic vocabulary' that is distinguished in diachronic investigation. Therefore, patterns of irregularities may be an indication of very old grammatical rules governing the verbs. The above mentioned words are exceptional because their form is different from that of regular verbs. They are mostly monosyllabic words and do not adhere to the grammatical rules in a regular manner. The irregularities are peculiar to the language system within which the word functions. For example in Hausa, the verb *ganī* has the form *gan* when preceding a direct object pronoun (*ga* when the direct object is a noun):

Hausa: *ganī*, 'see' *yā gan nì* 'he saw me' (cf. *yā ga yārɔ̄* 'he saw a boy')

/3Sg-see.Obj- 1Sg.Obj/

In Songhay, the irregular verb *di* preserves its basic form when followed by an emphatic pronoun in the function of an object, but this sequence involves changes in word order (SOV in regular verb clauses), therefore:

Songhay: *di* 'see' *a di agey* 'he saw me'

/3Sg-see-1Sg (emphatic)/

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[7]   The data included here concerning the Songhay language is mainly based on research conducted by Alain Prost (especially for the Gao variety), published in 1956, and on two modern descriptions of the Songhay varieties, i.e. Koyra Chiini (Timbuktu, Western Songhay, KC) and Koyraboro Senni (Gao, Eastern Songhay, KS) by Jeffrey Heath (1999a and 1999b) .

However, *di/dii* 'see' and some other verbs (also regular ones) undergo irregular stem changes when a pronominal object is attached as a verb suffix. As has been reported mainly for Koraboro Senni, the Eastern variety, these verbs have irregular object forms while taking 3Sg *–aa* and 3Pl *–ey* object suffixes, e.g. (Heath 1999b: 68):

Songhay:	'see'	*dii*	but	*diy-aa* 'see it/him'	*diy-ey*	'see them'
	'get'	*duu*	but	*duw-aa* 'get it'	*duw-ey*	'get them'
	'want'	*baa*	but	*bag-aa* 'want it'	*bag-ey*	'want them'
	'hear'	*maa*	but	*maar-aa* 'hear it'	*maar-ey*	'hear them'
	'reach'	*too*	but	*toor-aa* 'reach it'	*toor-ey*	'reach them'

Some phonological justifications for the irregularities have been proposed, but they are stated to be problematic for various specific cases (Heath 1999b: 69). What is common for the examples taken from Hausa and Songhay is the strategy of coding the relation ('agreement') between verb and object (rather than between verb and subject). As has been shown, the morphosyntactic properties of some irregular verbs in Hausa are not "endemic", and their peculiarities are also shared with Songhay. This strategy has a wider areal distribution that is connected with modifications of the verb when used with an object. As in the above examples, these structures are archaic in nature, the process is unproductive and affects only a limited part of the vocabulary.

Marking grammatical relations between verb and object provides information about some other features that are shared with various irregular verbs from other non-related languages. Hausa is an SVO language, whereas Songhay follows an SOV pattern. The sequence VO (Verb-Object), which is regular in Hausa, is restricted only to some verb phrases in Songhay. It should be noted that the largest group of irregular verbs in Songhay are those which place the object noun in the position following the verb. Among such VO verbs, there are those denoting the meaning 'see', 'be accustomed to', 'get', 'be able to', 'approach'. Within this pattern, the irregular verbs reveal structural similarities with other SVO languages of the area rather than with the regular verb phrases of this particular language.

Among other characteristic features of verbs, which are usually particular to the given word and difficult to predict from their classificatory attributes, is the use of the preposition 'with' to accompanie a verb. In Hausa, apart from verbs belonging to regular classes (efferential or causative verbs), there are also those to which '*dà*' is added but as an empty morpheme (*kusa dà* 'approach').

Hausa: *kusa* 'approach'   *mun kusa dà gàrii*
                                                    3Pl.PERF-approach-with-town
                                                    'we are near the town'

Verb + 'with' structures often represent metaphoric expressions. In Hausa and Songhay, the irregular verbs are used with a particle (preposition) that has

a basic instrumental or comitative function (*dà* in Hausa, *nda* in Songhay). In Hausa, the structures represent a syntactically defined subclass of verbs that are neither transitive nor intransitive (Newman 2000: 637), whereas in Songhay, they are interpreted in terms of verbal derivation (Heath 1999b: 168), e.g.:

Hausa: a)   *yā zō dà shī*
           /3Sg come with it/
           'he brought it'

     b)   *yā aik̀ā dà kuɗì*
           /3Sg send with money/
           'he sent the money'

Songhay (KS): a)   *A   koy-nda   agey   [hendi   ra]*
                     /3Sg.S go-with   1Sg   [over-there Loc]/
                     'he took me there'

              b)   *ay   goo-nda   [a   ga]   garow*
                     /1Sg.S be-with   [3Sg on]   credit/
                     'I have a credit with him' (=he owes my money)

As metaphoric expressions, these are instances of typological similarity between languages that realize the same conceptualization patterns, but this does not advocate their genetic affiliation. The similarities, however, may be motivated by language contact and due to the spread of dominant features. Verb + 'with' structures are common in West African languages, thus even the notion 'have' is commonly expressed in this way.

Another group of irregular predicates that lays the ground for structural comparison are those expressing the meaning 'to be'. It is common in many African languages throughout the whole continent that this notion in its various aspects is expressed by special kinds of lexical equivalents which are not classified among verbs, such as the copula or the quasi-verb. Usually they depart in some way from the canonical clause structure and do not co-occur with tense/aspect/mood (TAM) morphemes (Pawlak 2010b). Different forms of predicates differentiate locative meaning from some other notions of 'be' (e.g. expressing identification or equation). Both in Hausa and Songhay, the locative predicate 'be (in a place)' has a separate coding, i.e. *àkwai* and *go, goo* (KC,KS) respectively, e.g.:

Hausa: *àkwai ruwā [cikin gidā]*
                   /there is water [in a house]/
                   'there is water in a house'

Songhai (KS):   *hari goo?*
                   /water be/
                   'is there any water (here)?'

The non-verbal predicates of the locative function are also present in other Chadic languages, such as Kera (*yaŋ*) or Gude (*tə'i*).

Some other notions expressed using the verb 'be' have distinct lexical equivalents termed as a copula or stabilizer. Identification in Hausa is expressed by a copula which is gender sensitive: *ce /cē/* agrees with feminine singular nouns, *ne /nē/* otherwise (for masculine singular and plural forms), therefore *dōkī̀ nē* 'it is a horse', *rī̀gā cḕ* 'it is a gown'. In Songhay, the two regional varieties have slightly different forms, *no* for KS (Heath 1999b: 175), *nono* for KC (Heath, 1999a: 125), e.g.:

Songhay: (KS) *wala   ma-čin   **no***?
/Int   what it-is/
'What is (was) he/she/it'

 (KC) *ay   **nono***
/1Sg   it-is/
'it's me'

In Songhay, gender is not marked, but another form of the copula ((*či* in *KC, ti* in *KS*) is used in some other 'be' constructions, e.g.:
Songhay (KC): *čin   **ti**   [ni   anniy-aa]?*
/what be   [2Sg   intention-Def.Sg]/
'What is your intention?'

A variety of forms and differentiation of meanings for 'be' ('existential') predicates have also been confirmed within other West African languages. side from Chadic (in Margi, it is *na (ná)* in the singular form, but *ɗa (ɗu)* in the plural), stabilizers as defective verbs expressing different types of meanings of the verb 'to be' also exist in Mande (Zima 1986: 585).

"Suppletivity" of negative paradigms

Negation is commonly expressed by a separate morpheme added to a positive statement. Within the existential predicates of African languages, there are many instances of coding the negation through the use of a negative lexical counterpart. This feature is not restricted to a particular region or language family (e.g. Swahili: *kitabu **ni** kizuri* 'the book **is** good' vs. *kitabu **si** kizuri* 'the book **is not** good'), but suppletive forms used to express affirmative and negative meanings of 'to be' are very common in the languages of West Africa[8]. Expressing 'non-existence' through lexical equivalents is common in Chadic, especially in non-verbal predicates, such as *paapá* in Kera, *pooshi* in Gude which code the

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[8] The Amharic language also has an affirmative and negative paradigm of the verb 'to be', i.e. *näw* 'be, exist', *aydälläm* 'not be'; *allä* – 'be (in a place)', *yälläm* 'not be (in a place)' with full conjugation paradigms.

meaning 'not be'. In Hausa, the positive *àkwai* has its negative counterpart – *bābù*, therefore: **àkwai** *ruwā* 'is there (any) water (here)?', **bābù** *ruwā* 'there is no water (here)' ,

Similarly in Songhay (Koyra Chiini), the locational quasi-verb *goo* 'be' has its negative counterpart *sii* (*ši*) 'not be, be absent', e.g. *hari* **goo?** 'is there (any) water (here)?', *hari* **sii** 'there is no water (here)'.

A rich set of positive and negative counterparts among the equivalents of 'be' has been documented for the Bambara language (Konaré 1998), e.g.:

Bambara: a) *cɛ* ***don*** – 'it is a man' *cɛ* ***tɛ*** – 'it is not a man'
         b) *kini* ***ka*** *di* – 'rice is good' *kini* ***man*** *di* – 'rice is not good'

The question is whether such common archaisms might have been adopted into non-related languages at this earlier point in time. Such a question neglects the boundaries of grammatical systems of particular languages, but places stress on some common conceptual strategies in marking relations between clausal elements. In the case of the languages of West Africa, common strategies spread across the whole Sahel-Saharan area.

Areal features of TAM verbal paradigms

The conjugation systems of African languages have some predominant or exclusive patterns that are different from those of languages from most other parts of the world (cf. Heine & Nurse 2000: 238; Pawlak 2010a: 261). Some structural patterns of verbal inflection (such as prefixal conjugation) are widespread in many linguistic areas of Africa, but the verbal inflection in the West African Sahel region also has some striking characteristics that are worth mentioning due to their uniqueness and exceptionality.

Hausa verbal predicate patterns are part of this system and it should be noted that they are significantly different from those apparent in languages of Afro-Asiatic origin. As in many other languages of the Sahel-Saharan zone, TAM (tense, aspect, modality) distinctions are marked in such a way that involves fully and not fully grammaticalized structures used to express grammatical categories. In such a TAM paradigm, there is an obligatory occurrence of a pronominal subject in the pre-predicate position, even if the nominal subject is explicit. This can be shown on the basis of a comparative analysis of the sequence of morphemes in Hausa, a Chadic language and in Batombu, a Gur language (Schreiber 2009: 214), for both of which such double markings of the subject are a structural device, e.g.:

Hausa: mōtōcī   zā sù   zō   Kanò
            /motor-cars   FUT 3Pl come Kano/
            'the cars will come to Kano'

Batombu: kɛkɛbu   ko   n   naamo tobreyɔ
/ lorries   FUT 3Pl come Tobré/
'The lorries will come to Tobré'

TAM markers that synchronically are inflectional morphemes originated from other structures. In Hausa, the Future Tense marker (developed from the verb 'come') is the only one in a set of paradigms in which a pronominal element follows the tense marker; in the other paradigms, the pronominal element goes first and the development of the whole tense paradigm is interpreted differently. In some other languages, auxiliaries have been incorporated into the system of inflectional marking. In Bambara, the phrase *tun bɛ* functions as a marker of the past tense, which is derived from the modal particle *tun* and the auxiliary verb *bɛ*, e.g. (Konaré 1998: 78):

Bambara: A   tun bɛ   dɔlɔ   min
/3Sg Aux/PAST alcohol drink/
'he has drunk an alcoholic drink'

The process of grammaticalization and reanalysis of the original structures differentiates contemporary patterns of verbal predicates in West African languages that vary considerably from one language or language sub-group to another. A feature that is both unique for the region and very common for the languages within the area is the syntactic alternation of TAM paradigms. In Hausaist tradition, it is interpreted as an opposition between relative and non-relative forms. Therefore, the statements 'the students came' and 'the students who came' will occur with different inflectional marking with the verb (Eng. 'came' that replaces 'come' is here expressed by TAM markers *sun* and *sukà* respectively), e.g.:

Hausa: a)   dàlìbai **sun**   zō
boys 3Pl.COMPL come
'the students came'

        b)   dàlìbân dà **sukà**   zō
boys   who 3Pl.Rel.COMPL come
'the students who came'

Such structures of relative verbal forms function not only in Hausa, but have also been attested to in Songhay, as well as in some Mande languages (Zima 1986, Pawlak 1993). The existence of these structures in such diverse languages has been interpreted as a feature of grammatical interference between them as a result of extensive and relatively long-term contact. More advanced studies allow for an interpretation of the system of syntactically conditioned alternating TAM paradigms as an opposition between neutral and focalized

patterns rather than relative vs. non-relative verbal forms (Zima 1991; Caron & Zima 2006).

Summary remarks

The typological similarities of language structures of various genetic origin in West Africa have pan-areal and local dimensions. Common features may be studied cross-linguistically, however they can also be analyzed from the perspective of one language that has remained in permanent contact with various non-related languages. Hausa fulfils the requirements of such a language, as it shares some phonological units, morphological strategies and syntactic patterns with numerous non-related languages, encountered across a relatively vast area. This has created a situation, in which genetically unrelated languages that have coexisted in geographically close regions for centuries have changed their sociolinguistic status and mutual relations. Some of these languages, such as Songhay or Mande, played important sociolinguistic roles in the Saharan region in the past, but their status has become significantly reduced in modern times. In comparison, Hausa was historically used as a contact language between various linguistic groups of the Sahel-Saharan zone and, more importantly, continues to be so. Its sociolinguistic position as a dominant language of the area is reflected in various linguistic features. Hausa is the source of common innovations and newly developed structures that have been introduced in recent times in the languages of the Borno region, west of Lake Chad.

The West African contact area is not a single entity in terms of the *Sprachbund* criteria. It has many sub-areas that manifest distinctive features. With the intensive studies conducted on various aspects of structural similarities, especially on TAM paradigms, a new approach to the understanding of *Sprachbund* in West Africa has been established. It is seen as "a bundle of isoglosses running not only within given genetic confines (as it does in classical dialectology and «language geography») but also across the genetic language frontiers in the Lake Chad area and beyond its present limits into the major parts of the Sahel belt" (Zima 2006: 223).

Abbreviations:

Aux	Auxiliary	Loc	Locative
Caus	Causative	Neg	Negation
CONT	Continuous	Obj	Object
COMPL	Completive	PAST	Past (tense)
Def	Definite	PERF	Perfective
Det	Determiner	Pl	Plural
DO	Direct Object	POT	Potential

FUT	future	Rel	Relative
Infin	Infinitive	S	Subject
Imp	Imperative	Sg	Singular
IMPF	Imperfective	SVO	Subject-Verbal
			predicate-Object
Int	Interrogative (morpheme)		(sequence)
KC	Koyra Chiini (Timbuktu, Western Songhay)	TAM	Tense-Aspect-Mood
KS	Koyraboro Senni (Gao, Eastern Songhay)		

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