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## **Incantation in Hausa Culture: An Example of Syntactic Reduplication**

### **Resumé**

L'article porte sur la reduplication dans la langue haoussa, suivant une approche pragmatique. Il y est question de la reduplication de mots et de phrases dans les formules incantatoires magiques. Du point de vue linguistique, ce genre de reduplication est considéré comme un procédé syntactique. Or, les énoncés à caractère magique, dans lesquels on a souvent recours à la reduplication, ont un pouvoir performatif et doivent augmenter l'effectivité des procédés visant p.ex. à se protéger contre les moustiques, à rendre quelqu'un invisible, ou à faciliter l'accouchement. La répétition des mots et des phrases a généralement pour but d'augmenter l'effectivité de l'action ou la rendre immédiate, mais elle peut simplement exprimer l'impatience. L'article contient des exemples d'incantations en haoussa et en poular, accompagnés d'indications sur les fonctions pragmatiques des reduplications.

### **1. Introduction**

Reduplication as universal phenomenon operates within lexical units and a clausal structure. In a number of languages, reduplication within lexical units is used to express or to build pluractional verbs, augmentative and diminutive adjectives, simple adjectives, intensives of adverbs, numbers, among others. This type of reduplication operates within a morpheme, and it could be partial or complete, as argued in Kiyomi 1993, Rubino 2005, Inkelas and Zoll 2005, among others. On the other hand, reduplication that operates outside the lexical units involves repetition of a clause or part of a clause as dis-

cussed in Israeli 1997, Lindström 1999, Maas 2005, Yakasai 2005, among others. Most languages that exhibit reduplication within lexical units also undergo the clausal one. The productivity of the former implies the productivity of the latter.

Hausa is a Chadic language of Afro-Asiatic phylum that productively uses reduplication within lexical units and in a clausal structure. The morphological and semantic aspects of Hausa reduplicated forms became subject of many linguistic works such as Frajzyngier 1965, Pawlak 1975, Newman 1990, Schuh 2002, Al-Hassan 1998, Yakasai 2009, Gouffé 1975, Auwal 1998, Yakasai 2006a, Yakasai 2006b, among others, whereas pragmatic function of reduplication, and its possible cultural context still need research.

This paper discusses incantation in Hausa culture as an example of reduplicative construction that uses clauses or phrases. In Hausa culture, there are number of ways or practices that indicate reduplicative construction within clausal or phrasal domain; incantation is one of those cultural practices that expresses reduplication beyond one lexical unit and fills more than one syntactic slot. The scope of this paper is to lay emphasis on syntactic reduplication occurring within a sentence, clause or phrase. In view of this, the paper is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses nature and theoretical assumptions of syntactic reduplication. The second section focuses on incantation in Hausa culture and its classification. The third part presents incantation as an example of syntactic reduplication. The fourth section examines the pragmatic senses of syntactic reduplication in relation to incantation in Hausa culture.

## **2. Syntactic Reduplication: Its Nature and Theoretical Assumption**

The term syntactic reduplication (henceforth SR) covers reduplicative constructions that go beyond one lexical unit and fill more than one syntactic slot. In a number of works, SR is included in studies of reduplicated forms of particular language, for instance Wierzbicka 1991 in Italian, Israeli 1997 in Russian, Lindström 1999 in Swedish, Maas 2005 in Arabic, Gouffé 1975 and Yakasai 2005 in Hausa, among others. In contemporary linguistics, the subject is of more

general theoretical interest, since this phenomenon is regarded as one of the linguistic universals and icons. As Wierzbicka (1991: 260) argues “it seems likely that the pragmatic meanings associated with ‘clausal repetition’ have led, through wide use, to the emergence of new grammatical category, a language-specific grammatical device ‘syntactic reduplication’”. Wierzbicka (1991) distinguishes Italian syntactic reduplication from two seemingly similar phenomena as exemplified in (1a and 1b).

- (1)
- a. *adagio adagio* ‘slowly slowly’
  - b. *adagio, adagio* ‘slowly, slowly’

The reduplicated expression given in (1a) is distinguished from repetition in (1b). The former is a pauseless expression, while the latter is indicated by the use of a comma (which signals the presence of a pause).

Lindström (1999) exemplifies that two or more juxtaposed pronominal adjectives indicate this type of repetition (as in 2a), and it may form a unit by coordination (as in 2b).

- (2)
- a. *sme sme barn* ‘little little children’
  - b. *springer och springer* ‘I run and run’

Looking at the above examples, it is very clear that SR operates on words rather than a morpheme, and it forms a clause or part of a clause rather than lexical unit.

Lindström (1999) argues that SR “[...] have a pragmatic rather than a direct semantic motivation. Reduplication communicates most often the speakers emotional stance towards the subject matter. When one says *sma sma barn* there is no claim about extreme smallness, but rather the speaker expresses his or her feelings about ‘little little children’; this can, of course, relate to a cute, moving kind of smallness. In other words, this repetition has typical *diminutive* connota-

tions, not seldom universally expressed with a reduplicative construction” (taken from the English summary of the dissertation).

Moreover, Wierzbicka (1991: 264) points out that the communicative import of SR is to insist on the validity of what is said and it means that SR may have prosodic dimension. Gouffé (1975) has indicated that the effect of echo and symmetry play an important role in creating reduplicated forms in Hausa, for both stylistic device and harmony of the text. SR here indicates that a sentence or some elements in a sentence, a clause or a phrase that are repeated. Indeed, some aspects of reduplication that are based on repetition of the content not the form are taken into consideration, as well as reduplication understood as prosodic effect of symmetry or echo. SR operates on words and has the syntactic motivation, and the reduplication that operates within a word has the morphological motivation. The argument that SR has pragmatic rather than semantic motivation (as argued in Wierzbicka 1991, Lindström 1999, Yakasai 2005, among others) is adopted here for the analysis of Hausa incantation phrases.

### 2.1. Nature of SR in Hausa

The productivity of morphological reduplication in Hausa implies the productivity of SR in Hausa. It is this productivity that creates different typological patterns of SR. The typological patterns presented in (Yakasai 2005) are adopted here. These are:

(3) repeated phrases, i.e. *kai*<sup>1</sup>, *kai*, *kai* /you, you, you/ ‘stop, stop, stop’;

*zoo*, *zoo* ‘come, come’; *Koo dà mène*, *koo don mène* /or and what, or for what/ ‘all means’

(4) conjoined reduplicated phrases, i.e. *râi dà râi* /soul and soul / ‘always’;

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<sup>1</sup> For all Hausa examples, low tone is indicated with a grave accent (̀), falling tone by a circumflex (ˆ) and high tone is left unmarked. Long vowels are indicated by doubling the affected vowel, hence -aa ‘long’ versus -a ‘short’.

*idòo dà idòo* / eye and eye / ‘meeting each other’; *koomai yanàa tàfiyàa daidai wà daidà* ‘everything goes well’

(5) reduplicated clauses (verbal phrases), i.e. *yà cika, yà cika* / let him be filled, let him be filled / (idiomatic sense: ‘he is angry’); *yà kai, yà kaawoo* / let him take, let him bring / (idiomatic sense: ‘going back and forth’);

(6) disjoined clauses with a sense of reduplication, e.g. *Mù jee zuwàa, mahàukàcìi yaa hau kuuraa* / let us go /, / madman rode hye a / (common sense: ‘we are in a hurry’).

For other detail explanation and more examples see (Yakasai 2005: 11-16).

### **3.0. Incantation in Hausa Culture**

“Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways” (Kramersch 2009: 3). The concept of culture is becoming an important aspect in linguistic and pragmatic studies. Taylor’s (1871) famous definition of culture reads: “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.

Gamble and Gamble (2002: 35) see culture as “a system of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifacts that are acquired, shared and used by members during daily living”. Most sociologists conceive culture as a design for living. Each culture constitutes a unique lifestyle – a unique combination of values, rules, roles and relationship that provide a guide for socially defined appropriate behaviour (Ogunbameru and Rotimi 2006: 235). It is very clear that culture is an attribute not of individuals *per se* but of individuals as members of groups, it is learned and transmitted in society. It is one of the capabilities acquired by man as a member of a society. In most societies, traditional medical beliefs are integrated

into a complex network of beliefs and values that are part of their culture. Incantation is one of such beliefs. Incantation is very popular in Hausa culture and is still being practiced in contemporary Hausa society. Culture determines the words to be used and usages vary from culture to culture.

Incantation is defined as an act of magic which involves using words of one or more languages that may not have a direct meaning or even are meaningless in order to satisfy the needs of people (Bunza 2006, Abubakar 2006, Doguwa 2002, among others). Therefore, incantation is a collection or combination of special words that are uttered or sung to have magic effect. Kabir (1991: 181) describes incantation as having “a poetic quality and rhythm and powerful striking words are used. In reciting it, sometimes one uses a high piercing sound and sometimes slow and soft sounds to punctuate and emphasize whatever is being said”. Incantation involves not only the special words, but also doing some kind of activity. For example, Kabir (1991: 181) states that in Fulbe culture incantation for correction of dislocation involves breathing on a knife and gently massage onto the affected part, for seven days or until cured. This could be done either by the native doctors, followers of *tsibbù*<sup>2</sup> and people that are traditionally involved in putting bones in place. Below is the example:

(7)

a. Bismillahi Murgut, fi mata murgut

‘In the name of God *Murgut*<sup>3</sup>, from what has died *murgut*’

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<sup>2</sup> The word *tsibbù* originated from Arabic word *dibb* meaning ‘medicine’. It is a way of giving medicine to the sick or somebody in need of help or protection. *Tsibbù* has come to Hausaland after the coming of Islam. The followers of *tsibbù* also practice incantation (Abubakar 2006: 26).

<sup>3</sup> Bunza (2006), Doguwa (2002), Abubakar (2006), among others, have stated that there are certain expressions in the incantation that sound like a native words of a language but do not have any meaning. Thus, the meaning of *murgut* could not be identified; the Fulfulde native speakers contacted informed that *murgut* does not have any meaning. I would like here to express my gratitude to Malam Musa Muhammad Dinga, the President of Fulfulde Association at Baye-

- b. Mi itti murgut, mi wati murgut  
‘I have removed *murgut*, I have put *murgut*’
- c. To manga baroji, Allah jeyi jam  
‘Where is the main killer, It is God that provides health/recovery’
- d. Min jeyi ‘yi’ yam  
‘Blood is mine’.

Incantation is very popular in African cultures (such as Fulfulde, Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, Kanuri, among others) and in other cultures far away from Africa (Bunza 2006: 228). As far as Hausa culture is concerned incantation is classified into two, namely:

- a. traditional
- b. modern

Traditional incantation involves purely Hausa words and no any assimilation or influence of a foreign culture. Modern incantation contains or involves assimilation or influence of a religion, a language and/or foreign culture. This type of incantation consists of borrowed words from another language, such as Arabic, Fulfulde, among others (Bunza 2006: 228). Because of the influence of Arabic and Fulfulde languages on Hausa culture, a number of incantations have included Arabic or Fulfulde word(s). Both types are being practiced in the contemporary Hausa society. In Hausa society, the following people are prominent in practicing and promoting incantation:

- a. Women
- b. Native doctors (*bookàayee*)
- c. Followers of cult (*'yan bòorii*)
- d. Followers of *tsibbù* medicine (*màalàman tsibbù*)
- e. People in need of help or something

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### 3.1. Purpose of Incantation

In Hausa culture incantation is the secret of all ways of giving or practicing traditional medicine. It is used for a number of purposes. There is incantation for the purpose of love as could be seen below in the Fulfulde language:

(8)

- a. Bismillahi **takkam makkam**  
'In the name of God, come closer, come closer to me'
- b. **Hafam nafam**, huuram ba juɓe  
'Hold me, come to my aid, and cover me just like the jujube tree'
- c. Taaram ba delɓi, dakkam ba nyakkabre  
'Surround me like the ebony tree'
- d. Biila'am, a nyaamataa, **a dawrataa a dawrintaa**  
'Be with me like prickly grass, my beloved you will not eat'  
(You would not contact somebody for advice and nobody to contact you for an advice)
- e. Say ko **dawrumi** haa abada  
'You abide only with what I have decided forever'.  
(Kabir 1991: 181)

Kabir (1991: 181) states that in Fulɓe culture, the example given in (8) should be used when a person wants another to love him. It should be breathed on the place the beloved will sit or sleep. Example of SR could be seen in (8a, b, d and e) indicating that some words are repeated or semi-repeated in Fulfulde. Similarly, the example given in (9) has the purpose of love, and it is used or recited when holding the hand of a beloved (see also Doguwa 2002: 18).

(9)

- a. **Kar kɪ bii nì kâanaa kɪ bii nì, wà iyyaakɪ kɪ bii ni**  
'Do not follow me then you follow me, I call on you to follow me'

b. **Kar kù bii nì làkad kù bii nì, màhihi kù bii nì**

‘Do not follow me, you must follow me, forget about everything and follow me’

c. **yaa kàmaata kù bii nì”**

‘You should follow me’.

(Doguwa 2002: 26)

Incantation has the purpose of seeking protection from anything as exemplified in (10 and 11). The example in (10) is recited when somebody is seeking protection from all angles either in the home or at any place.

(10)

a. **Àllaahumà fil kà tsarìi ,**

‘Protection is from God’

b. **Kà tsarìi, kà tsarìi**

‘You protect, you protect’

c. **Kà tsarìn gidaa, kà tsarìn daajii**

‘Protect at home; protect in the forest or outside home’

d. **Kà tsarìn gabàs**

‘Protect me at the east’

e. **Kà tsarìn yâmmaa**

‘You protect me at the west’

f. **Kà tsarìn àbîn dà kai kadai kà tsarèewaa**

‘Protect me from everything that only you protect’.

(Doguwa 2002: 22)

There is incantation in the Fulbe culture which is built for the purpose of imprisoning all mosquitoes and stop them from biting the one who has recited it. It should be breathed on the place where the mosquitoes are (Kabir 1991: 181). Here is the example:

(11)

a. **Bismillahi cufu ‘yugu, ‘yugu ‘yurgu**

‘In the name of God, mosquito, biting ant, biting ant that flies’

- b. **Ko yani bo yana**, honduko foode maɓɓe  
‘What has died, has died, just keep quite’
- c. **Si ngad, ngad, ngad**, haa fajiri.  
‘Just biting, biting, biting, even in the morning’

Incantation is used for the purpose of becoming invisible. When somebody recites the incantation or holds its charm nobody will see him. This type of incantation has both merit and demerit in Hausa culture. Many people use it for good sake, while others use it for bad sake, particularly thieves. Below is the example:

(12)

- a. **Nii bakii, nii bakii, bakin sâ**,  
‘I am black, I am black, the black he-cow’
- b. In na wucè **bâa su ganii**,  
‘If I passed they would not see’
- c. **Bà sù ganii baa**,  
‘They did not see’
- d. **Kàmat kafàa, kàmak kafàt** àlluuràa,  
‘Like a leg, like a leg of a needle’
- e. Arnaa duf  
‘Enemies could not see’  
(Bunza 2006: 247)

Incantation is also done for the purpose of easy delivery. A pregnant woman recites the following incantation for easy delivery:

(13)

- a. **Girdin bâa girdin**,  
‘Difficulty no difficulty’
- b. **Yaa kî tàhoo huràiratù**,  
‘Come, come hurairatu’
- c. **Tàhoo** maza-maza  
‘Come quickly’
- d. **Tàhoo anàa neemanki**,  
‘Come, you have been looked for’

e. **Yànzù-yànzù dà gaggaawaa**  
'Just now and quickly'  
(Bunza 2006: 246)

Incantation is used for many purposes, and it controls the life of the society and its activities (for further explanation on this and other issues relating to incantation in Hausa and Fulfulde cultures, see Kabir 1991, Bunza 2006, Abubakar 2006, Doguwa 2002, among others).

#### 4.0. Pragmatic Senses

In view of the aforementioned purposes, incantation as an example of SR has been identified with the following pragmatic senses:

- a. Urgency - the repetition of certain elements signals a directive urging the addressees to act immediately, like the examples given in (11 and 13).
- b. Calling for attention – SR refers to calling or drawing the attention of the addressee.
- c. Insistence – this communicative import indicates that SR insists on the validity of what is said as exemplified in (9 and 12).
- d. Impatience – SR has the meaning of lack of patience as shown in (13).

Most of the examples of incantation that have qualified as SR have the general sense of urgency, insistence and attention. This is because incantation is being practiced in order to get what is needed instantly. Indeed, incantation in most cultures involves calling of jinn and *ràuhaani*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The *Hausa to Hausa Dictionary* published by Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University Kano, Nigeria (2006) sees *ràuhaani* as jinn who accepted Islam. Bargery (1934: 846) defines *ràuhaani* as supernatural beings between angels and devils, whose prerogative it is to assist human beings in obtaining answers to their prayers.

### 5.0. Incantation as an example of SR

As mentioned earlier, incantations in Hausa culture contain an example of SR or are expressed in the form of SR and each incantation has its own purpose. Below are some examples of incantations (each example is presented in the sequence of a, b, c for easy reference and explanation):

(14)

a. **Kar k̀i bii ǹi k̀aanaa k̀i bii ǹi, wà iyaaki k̀i bii ni**

‘Do not follow me then you follow me, I call on you to follow me’

b. **Kar k̀i bii ǹi làkad k̀i bii ǹi, màhihi k̀i bii ǹi**

‘Do not follow me, you must follow me, forget about everything and follow me’

c. **yaa k̀amaatà k̀i bii ǹi**

‘You should follow me’

(Doguwa 2002: 26)

(15)

a. **Yaa naarù akèe ỳi**

‘It is fire making’

b. **Yaa naarù f̀au**

‘Fire starts on’

c. **Naarù k̀unnu**

‘Fire starts on’

d. **Naarù k̀aamaa balbalbal**

‘Fire starts on rapidly’

e. **Yi jaa, yi haskee**

‘Become red and lighten’

f. **Ir̀in na raanaa j̀anj̀anj̀an**

‘Like that red of a sun’

(Bunza 2006: 244)

(16)

- a. **Kaa zàaburàa, naa zaaburoo** ðan gàjeeree  
‘You have sprung up, I have sprung up too, you the short’
- b. Bà kâ daakàtaa ìn wucè ba?  
‘Could you stop and let me pass’  
(Doguwa 2002: 23)

Having looked at the above examples, we could see that examples given in (9, 10, and 15) are instances of modern incantation. In (9), *wà iyaakì* ‘(for female) calling her to abide’ and *làkad* ‘showing emphasis or trueness of something’ are Arabic words. So also examples (10 and 15) contain Arabic words *Àllaahummà* ‘God’ *fil* ‘in’ and *naarù* ‘fire’ respectively. Examples shown in (12, 13, and 16) are clear examples of traditional incantations. Incantation as an example of SR is identified in repeated phrases; conjoined reduplicated phrases, reduplicated clauses (verbal) and disjoined clauses with a sense of reduplication. SR in (10, 15, 12a, d, and 13b, c and d) exemplifies repeated phrases, where one or two lexical items functioning as phrases are repeated. Here, the repeated phrases are nouns or other nominal phrases. If they are verbs, they occur in imperative form (as indicated in 10). Conjoined reduplicated phrases are identified in (10a and b), with *kàanaa* ‘then’ *làkad* and *wà iyaakì*. In (10a-b and 12b-c) SR contains verbs in their finite form and operates with negative markers. The reduplicated clause resembles unit formed by coordination in which one or other components are repeated (as expressed in 15e and 16a). Incantation expresses SR in the form of disjoined clauses with a sense of reduplication. This could be seen in (13b) *yaa kì* ‘come’ has the same meaning with *tàhoo*. Similarly, (13d) *tàhoo* ‘come’ and *anàa neemankì* ‘you are wanted / you have been looking for’ are disjoined clauses that share the same semantic content (13e). SR within incantation is expressed either as full or modified.

## 6.0. Conclusion

Hausa productively employs the use of reduplication in both morphological and syntactic domains. The productivity of SR covers not only incantation, but also related issues such as praise-epithet, traditional boxing, among others. SR as seen above is based on the contextual meaning rather than abstract meaning. Thus, it is pragmatically motivated. The identified communicative imports of SR in relation to incantation is neither long nor complete. The paper supports the claims in Yakasai (2005) that “the nature and pragmatic function of syntactic reduplication reveals that the process bears some kind of idiomatic property where the meaning cannot be deduced solely from the form of the constructions. This is really the case of SR in relation to incantation. By and large, incantation in Hausa culture involves calling of jinn or *ràuhaani* and this has caused that most but not the real name of a person. It is in the light of this that the pragmatic senses established are related. The paper shares the view with Gouffé (1975) and Yakasai (2005) that SR functions as a device which is recognizable at the prosodic level. In this respect, an effect of symmetry or echo is observed in the reduplicated phrases or clauses.

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