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# Inflectional markers of sentential parsing

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## Abstract

The present study demonstrates the existence in Wandala (Central Chadic) of two inflectional markers which, although they change the form of the word, are not word-formation means but rather sentence-formation means. While neither of the forms indicates any specific semantic relation, they both enable the listener to parse the sentence into units that can undergo further analysis and allow for inferences about a large number of semantic relations within the clause and within the sentence. The types of inflectional marking described in this study are unrelated to the dichotomy of head marking and dependent marking. Although this study is based on data from a single language, it has implications for the typology of coding means and for theories of clausal structures.

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**Keywords:** Sentential parsing; Inflection; Vowel deletion; Vowel addition; Head marking; Dependent marking; Grammatical relations

## 1. Aim of the study

The present study demonstrates the existence in Wandala (Central Chadic) of two inflectional markers whose functions involve sentence formation only and which have no function in word formation, in that they do not change the meaning of the word or encode any single semantic relationship within the utterance. One marker is the ending *á*, which can occur with any lexical category, grammatical marker, or suffix. The other is final vowel deletion, which also can be applied to any lexical category or suffix and to most free grammatical markers. The two markers allow the listener to infer a large variety of functions in many functional domains encoded in the grammatical system of the language, including the modification of nouns by determiners, adjectives, quantifiers, and numerals, and the coding of grammatical relations between the predicate and noun phrases.

The present study makes a distinction between two ways of inferring the function(s) coded in an utterance: One type of inference is made by the use of dedicated means for a specific function within one of the domains coded in the grammatical system of the language, while the other is made through computation of other coding means deployed in the utterance. A dedicated coding means implies a specific function, such that a specific type of marking is associated with a specific relationship. When a function is inferred from the computation of other formal means deployed in the utterance,

**Abbreviations:** 1, first-person; 2, second-person; 3, third-person; AFF, affected; AR, Arabic; ASSC, associative; C.FOC, contrastive focus; COL, collective; COM, comment marker; COMP, complementizer; CONJ, conjunction; CONT, continuation of (speech act); DEF, definite; DEM, demonstrative; DOF, determiner of a function; EX, existential; EXCL, exclusive; FOC, focus marker; FUT, future; GEN, marker indicating genitive connection, not genitive case; GO, goal; HL, human locative; HYP, hypothetical; IMP, imperative; IN, inner space; INCL, inclusive; INTENS, intensifier; L.A, locative anaphor; M, masculine; NEG, negative; NF, feminine noun; NP, noun phrase; O, object; ON, extension 'on'; PNCT, punctual; POV, point of view; PRED, locative predicator; PRES, presentative; PRO, pronoun; PREP, preposition; S, source; T, target; TEMP, temporal; TO, destinative preposition; VENT, ventive.

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there is no means that serves as the dedicated marker of the function. The importance of the two markers is that neither marker is a dedicated coding means for any of the functions that can be inferred.

The ending *à* (later shown to be a suffix; section 4.2), added to the constituent X indicates that X is a determiner of a function and that the following constituent Y is a part of the same function. ‘Determiner of a function’ means that the categorial or grammatical property of the lexical item to which the marker is added determines the function being deployed in the utterance and that the constituent Y is a part of the same function. Thus, the suffixation of *à* to adjectives, numerals, and quantifiers, indicates that the utterance involves modification by the adjective, the numeral, or the quantifier. Without the marker *à*, the lexical items are not determiners of the function deployed.

Final vowel deletion indicates that the following constituent belongs to the same sentence as the constituent from which the final vowel was deleted. Final vowel deletion contrasts with the addition of the suffix *à* and with final vowel retention, which marks sentential boundaries and topicalization of fronted constituents. While final vowel deletion and the addition of the suffix *-à* change the form of the word as represented by the citation form of the word, the two are not means of word formation but are instead means of sentence formation. While neither of the forms indicates any specific semantic relation, they both lead to inferences about a large number of semantic relations within the clause and within the sentence. The types of inflectional marking described in this study provide one more formal system of coding, in addition to the dichotomy of head marking and dependent marking and linear orders (Frajzyngier, 2011). Hence the study has implications for the typology of coding means and for theories of clausal structures.

## 2. The problem

In sentence-final position, any word in Wandala must end in a vowel, which could be *a*, *e*, *u*, or *i*, with low or high tone. Any of these vowels, followed by a pause, is a marker of sentential boundary:

Sentence ending in *e*:

- (1) a. *kà pàká wàrè*  
2<sub>SG</sub> wait who  
‘Who are you waiting for?’

Sentence ending in *i*:

- (1) b. *ègdzágdzàmmùrwá yò, bání*  
*ègdz-á gdzà mmù-rwà yò à b-ání*  
child-GEN child mother-1<sub>SG</sub> well 3<sub>SG</sub> say-3<sub>SG</sub>  
‘It is the child of my brother, he said.’ (lit. ‘it is the child of the child of my mother’.) The form *yò* is most likely borrowed from the Hausa exclamation *yawwa* ‘well!’ and represents the product of final vowel reduction and the rule *a + w* becoming *o*.<sup>1</sup>

Sentence ending in *a*:

- (1) c. *bèzábèzicánà ánzánàṅà*  
*bèzá-bèz ic-á-ṅà án zàn-á-ṅà*  
dry-dry:Ø eye-GEN-2<sub>SG</sub> ASSC gown-GEN-2<sub>SG</sub>  
‘Dry up your eyes with your gown.’

Sentence ending in *u*:

- (1) d. *yé šà-krù*  
1<sub>SG</sub> tell-2<sub>PL</sub>  
‘I will tell you (pl).’ (elicited)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The full presentation of a typical example in the present study consists of four lines: (1) a broad phonetic transcription reflecting vowel deletions, epenthetic vowels, and audible pauses marked by spaces. This line reflects the rhythmic structure of the utterance. Often, the rhythmic structure does not overlap with the word or morpheme divisions; (2) the underlying structure of the morphemes for the given context, with hyphens separating affixes and spaces separating words; (3) glosses; and (4) free translations. Some examples do not contain the broad phonetic transcription and consequently consist of three lines only. Wandala morphemes within the text are represented in either citation or underlying form, depending on whether or not the underlying form is relevant for the purpose of the given paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> Most examples in the study are culled from natural texts gathered by the author during fieldwork seasons in the years 2012–2013. Some examples come from Frajzyngier (2011). Elicited sentences are marked as (elicited).

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