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Friendship requires visits: Hausa *zumunci* from a cognitive semantic point of view

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1 Introduction

Since 2004 (Baba & Ibrizimow 2004) we have been working on cognitive semantic aspects of Hausa using an approach based on Eleanor Rosch's classic studies published in the 1970s (for a bibliography of her works, see Ungerer & Schmid (2006: 347f.)). We started with data collected for the project "Contrastive Cognitive Semantics. Conceptual Structures of Everyday Lexemes in Regional Nigerian Languages and Nigerian English in Relation to Language and Social Context" within the framework of the Humanities Collaborative Research Centre (SFB/FK 560) "Local Action in Africa in the Context of Global Influences" of the University of Bayreuth¹. We analysed a number of conceptual categories represented by everyday lexemes, i.e. lexemes which are supposed to be less ambiguous than e.g., abstract nouns. Our project was the first empirical attempt to apply Rosch's methodology to African languages. We described in detail our theoretical approach and methods among others in Ibrizimow and Zulyadaini (2005, 2009). The development of our general theoretical insights may be followed in Ibrizimow and Zulyadaini (2005, 2006, 2011) as well as in Schmid et al. (2008). From the very beginning, the analytical part of our studies had comparative and contrastive objectives. We elaborated on differences and similarities between the conceptualisations of Hausa speakers for whom Hausa was their first language (L1) or their further language (L2). We analysed concepts from the semantic fields 'food and foodstuff' (Ibrizimow & Zulyadaini 2005), 'make-up and good appearance' (Ibrizimow & Zulyadaini 2006) and 'relatives' (Ibrizimow & Zulyadaini 2011, 2014). Furthermore, two master theses dealt with the semantic fields of 'house' (Wießner 2005) and 'vehicles' (Schubert 2009, 2011). Our approach was also applied in a dissertation, which treated HIV/AIDS in North-eastern Nigeria (Bello 2015).

¹ We are deeply grateful to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for its financial support of the project.

Beside Hausa, we studied aspects of cognitive semantics in Yoruba and English in the context of two African Christian churches with Yoruba speaking and English speaking parishes. These were the Aladura Cherubim and Seraphim church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Ibrizimow & Odidi 2008; Odiomomo 2011). Currently, we are preparing a project in which we are going to analyse ‘essentially contested concepts’ (Gallie 1956; Collier et al. 2006) in Hausa, Bambara, Arabic, English and French. Some examples of these concepts are (cognitive categories are usually written in small capitals) JUSTICE, (SOCIAL) CLASS, ELECTION, GOVERNMENT, DEMOCRACY, LEADER, GUILT AND RECONCILIATION.

2 Some FAQ and frequently expressed statements (FES)

After a number of conference presentations and other oral contributions on our topic, we came across the following FAQ and FES:

- The respondents must be wrong in their answers.

This FES is based on the fact that very often people treat language in a normative manner. Meanings of words are expected to reflect a dictionary definition; if they do not do this, they are labelled “wrong”. Our study reveals meanings which mirror the speakers’ experience of the world, i.e. their perceptions and conceptualisations encoded in their subconscious knowledge. Whereas individuals might be “wrong” in the sense that their perceptions do not fit those of a certain group or that they are not shared by the others, the answers given by a group of people cannot be “wrong”. These conceptualisations exist and need an explanation without evaluating them as “right” or “wrong”.

Our studies also pointed to language dynamics in the field of semantic change. In Ibrizimow et al. (2005) we unveiled how the word *sitira* narrowed its meaning from ‘wealth’ to ‘clothes/clothing’. In Ibrizimow and Zulyadaini (2011) we showed that a semantic widening in the category IYALI ‘family’ and DANGI ‘relative(s)’ is taking place: in the former case the ‘parents’ are becoming part of the ‘family’, in the latter case the ‘offspring’. In other words, the reason for having unexpected (“wrong”) meanings is often due to semantic change, a process absolutely “normal” in the development of each language.

- The L2 speakers do not know Hausa.

This FES may be seen as a follow-up of the previous one. Hausa has been used widely as a well-known lingua franca throughout the whole of West Africa. In terms of number of speakers, it is next only to Swahili in the whole of the African continent. Hausa, along with Arabic and Swahili, has the potentiality of becoming a metropolitan language in Africa. About 50 million speakers use it as first or second language. This includes the varieties of L1 Hausa spoken in Niger and Ghana as well as Hausa in the diaspora (the various communities from Ghana to the Sudan). Certainly, Northern Nigeria, where we conducted our research, is the

cradle and core region of the Hausa speakers. There, the Hausa language is used as medium of instruction in primary schools. Hausa as a language of wider communication is very vital and powerful and enjoys great popularity among the speakers of Northern Nigeria. This means that the speakers of different languages have been shaping Hausa for a long time and have participated in its development (which is the fate of every lingua franca). We must underline that in our data we did not come across radically different conceptualisations between the L1 and L2 speakers. The differences rather concern the promotion of different semantic aspects of the concept. For a possible reason for these differences, see our hypothesis in Ibrizimow and Zulyadaini (2009).

- How do you cope with the possible ambiguity of the Hausa orthography in the answers of the respondents?

Indeed, there are some cases of orthographic ambiguities in the written answers. In the standard orthography of Hausa used by the majority of the informants, there is neither marking of tone, nor of vowel length; the notation of the glottalised consonants was also not consistent. For example, an attribute written as *baba* can mean either *bàabá* ‘father’ or *báabà* ‘mother’. The context in which the individual informants mention the attributes, i.e. their place in a sequence of attributes, helps in clarifying orthographic ambiguity. Thus, for example, a sequence of attributes *namiji* ‘male’, *baba* and *maigida* ‘householder’ would be a very strong hint that the respondent meant *bàabá* ‘father’.

- Is there a practical application of the results of your studies?

The best examples as an answer to this FAQ are the results of the study on HIV/AIDS at the University of Maiduguri (Bello 2015). The author worked with 316 respondents, 151 male and 165 female. He analysed the attributes for a number of Hausa and English concepts connected with the disease according to the gender of the respondents. The study shows that the campaigns against AIDS have to be based on different approaches when targeted to men or to women because these groups differ considerably regarding their conceptualisations of certain aspects of the disease and the strategies of how to protect oneself against it (pp. 265-266).

3 The conceptual structure of the cognitive category *ZUMUNCI*

The word *zumunci* is translated in the three main Hausa dictionaries as follows: Bargery (1993: 1146) (< Ar. *zimma*): 1. Relationship by blood or marriage; 2. Clan feeling; Abraham (1962: 979) (< Ar. *dhimma*): 1. relationship by blood or marriage; clan feeling; 2. *zumunci a kafa take*² – the maintenance of good relation

² It is obviously a mistake. *Zumunci* is masculine and requires the verb form *yake*. Abraham definitely meant *zumunta a kafa take* (see below).

between people requires visit; Newman & Newman (1977: 141): 1. Blood relationship; 2. Friendship, fellowship, friendly relations.

The respondents offered the following main attributes for the stimulus *zumunci* (in brackets are the so-called minor attributes, i.e. attributes named by less than 20% of the respondents):

Table 1: Main attributes for the stimulus *zumunci*

zumunci	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
<i>ziyara, ...</i>	visit	71	54
<i>abokai, ...</i>	friends	43	(17) ³
<i>'yan uwa, ...</i>	brother(hood)	38	(13)
<i>kauna</i>	deep love	33	(13)
<i>dangantaka</i>	relationship	29	(13)
<i>gaisuwa, ...</i>	greeting	29	(17)
<i>soyayya, ...</i>	mutual love	29	—
<i>zaman lafiya da mutane, ...</i>	peaceful coexistence among people	—	25
<i>tafiya,...</i>	going to (render a visit), journey	(14)	21

ZUMUNCI in the Hausa culture is one of the strong elements that bind people together. It strengthens the links among relatives, friends, and colleagues, and plays a very important role in the society. The most obvious attribute of ZUMUNCI mentioned by 71% of L1 and 54% of L2 speakers is *ziyara*, i.e. ‘paying visit’. These percentages mirror the attitude of the Hausa people towards ZUMUNCI, an attitude that is also reflected in Hausa sayings. For example, the proverb *zumunta a kafa take*, literally ‘relation(ship) is on foot’, states clearly that relationship requires visits. The saying *ka taho, na taho, shi ne zumunta?* lit. ‘you come and I come, is that a relation(ship)?’, underlines that a coincidental meeting does not fulfil the parameter of a visit on purpose in order to strengthen the relationship.

Paying visits to family members and friends is the basis for maintaining good relations. Traditionally the visit is connected with *gaisuwa* ‘greeting’ (an attribute mentioned by almost one third of the L1 speakers). This “greeting” includes greeting, sitting together for some time, informing each other about the news in the life of the family, casually discussing also important matters. These visits to “greet” are “unexpected”, i.e. the visitor is not purposely invited by the host. The visits are a sign of respect. This is what ZUMUNCI is all about in Hausa society.

For L1 speakers further attributes of ZUMUNCI are friendship, deep and mutual love as well as brotherhood and relationship (*dangantaka*, cf. the analysis of DANGI in Ibriszimow & Zulyadaini 2011). In Hausa society *zumunta* ‘relation (ship)’ is seen as an act among *dangi* ‘relatives’ as expressed in the following proverb: *zumunta ya 'ya 'yan dangi*, lit. ‘relation(ship) is like the children of rela-

³ L2 use the abstract noun *abokantaka* or *abota*.

tives'. It means that a real relationship (in more general sense) between people makes them become blood relatives.

For the L2 speakers, although less detailed in their major attributes, the most important one for more than half of them is also 'visit'. Regarding the remaining attributes, they seem to consider the physical process connected with ZUMUNCI or rather with its main attribute 'visit': 21% mention *tafiya*, i.e. 'journey'. It may also well be that the L2 speakers thought of the Hausa saying *hanya mai hadin zumuntar dole*, i.e. 'a road forces one to relate'. A *zumunci* on the road may either last long or even continue forever; or it terminates immediately after the journey. In opposition to L1, the L2 speakers seem to express in a more explicit way the attribute of *zumunci* connected with peaceful human (inter)relations outside the closest family, the relatives.

We based our analysis above on the major attributes given by the respondents. If we consider also the minor attributes, i.e. those offered by less than 20% of the respondents, we might achieve a fuller picture of the conceptualisation of the word. Examples of these among the L1 speakers are *zumunci abokan arziki*, what may be translated as 'people with whom one shares common interest', the literal translation is 'friends of richness', *fahintar juna* 'mutual understanding', *sa da zumunta* or *sa da zumunci* 'coming into contact with' and *alaka* 'contact'. Although a negligible number of test persons have mentioned each of these attributes, they all have something in common, a common conceptual field.

When we bring together the attributes given by both L1 and L2 speakers, we get the following picture: The major attributes are 'paying visit'; 'relatives', 'family members' in the sense of the extended family, including marriage relationships; 'feeling of deep love'; 'friends' and 'friendship'. For both L1 & L2 the minor attributes are 'neighbours'; 'mates', be it class- or playmates; 'people of the same religion'; 'help', mutual help among family members and neighbours; 'mutuality'; chatting together and advising each other.

4 Conclusion

It often happens that European colleagues and/or students not conversant with the Hausa culture feel confused when Nigerian friends drop in at home or in the office without being purposely invited. The guests would greet the host spending some time chatting about different more or less important topics.

We hope that this contribution explains the reason why these visits should not be treated as a burden. As we now all know how to express correctly our respect in the Hausa way, we shall continue paying spontaneous visits to our friends irrespective of whether they are still active in their offices or are retired as our dear friend, Rainer Vossen, to whom we dedicate this small contribution wishing him many years to come.

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