From body to space and time: Hausa gaba and baya
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From body to space and time

Hausa gaba and baya.

It is common in languages of the world to have grammatical words deriving from lexical words, and more precisely adverbs and prepositions deriving from names of body parts.

Hausa is no exception. If we have a look at prepositions, Hausa has few « true » prepositions: à (in, at on), i/yë/wà (relatively to), gà (at), dà (with), dàgà (from), bisà (on).² Pseudo-prepositions are then derived from names of body parts, like gàbànn (in front of), bàyan (behind), cìkin (inside), à gìndìn (at the bottom of), derived respectively from gàbà (the chest); bàyà (the back); cìkì (the inside, the stomach) and the gìndì (the buttocks).

In this paper, we will study the semantic variations that characterize and account for the use of two lexical notions (bàyà, the back and gàbà, (i) the chest, the front of body of person or animal, or (ii)(euphemism) male or female genital organs) in different parts of Hausa grammar, and will link those observations with cognitive considerations.

From bàyà (m.) are derived bàya (adv.) : behind, backwards. bàyan (prép. & conj.) (i) : afterÜ; (ii) behind.

From gàbà (m.) are derived : gàba (adv.) : in front, forward, ahead ; gàbànn (prép.) : (i) in front of, before (ii) beyond, on the other side of.

1. Body parts

Let us see a few examples of the use of those notions naming body parts. ³

1.1 bàyà

1. Da safiyà ta yi sai ya karbe ni daga bàyan uwata ya aza ni a kwacciyar sird insa, domìn ya ji tausayin uwata da ta ke goye da nì. [S.U., 25]

In the morning, he took me from my mother's back and put me on the pommel of his saddle, because he was having pity of my mother who was carrying me on her back.

2. Tun da ya kama hanya bai waiwaya ma ya dubi garin ba, sai da ya tabbata a ransa cewa ya ba shi baya da gaské. [S.U., 9]

When he left, he did not even turn back to look at the town, but he only thought about leaving the town for good. (lit : bá shì báyà = give it (the) back)

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2 May be we can include zuwà (towards) although it is derived from the verb zuʃjè (venir/partir).

3 The Hausa examples are taken from a short story, Shëhu Ùmar (hence S.U.), written by Sir Aëbëkër Tafawa Balewa. It relates the story of a small Hausa boy who, captured and sold a slave to the Arabs, becomes a renowned marabout.
1.2 gàbà

3. Iyalinsa duk sai suka amsa gaba dая suka ce [...] [S.U., 4]
   All his parents answered together and said [...] (lit. gàbà dая = one front)

4. Gàbànsà ya fàfì. (Abraham, 277b)
   He lost heart. (lit. his front fell)

5. Sun ñà gàbà gàbàs. (id.)
   They turned eastward. (lit. they put front eastward)

1.3 báya = adverb

When preceded by the preposition à (at), báya can be used in a locative sense meaning on the back. The final vowel is shortened and the final result is the adverbial phrase à báya.

6. [...] sai kowace mace ta dauki danta ta sàfà a baya. [S.U., 15]
   [...] then each woman took her child and put [it] on [her] back (à báya : at back)

2. Space

2.1 Adverbs

The first use of báya and gàbà with a meaning that no longer refers to body parts but to space only is in the adverbial derivation. This derivation is characterized by a shortening of the final vowel: báya > báya; gàbà > gàba.

   [...] we took the way home. Our chief was behind carrying his bow and arrow, his two younger brothers were in front with their own weapons. We, children and women, we were between them.

8. Suka ce, "Wuce mu tafi."
   Suka sa shì a gaba suna ta ingizarsa har suka taho da shì kan iyaka. [S.U., 7]
   They said "Let’s go."
   They put him in front, they pushed him until they took him to the limit [of the village].

   There, they said good-bye again, Makau went forward, the hunter went back to the place where he had met Makau.

10. na gaba ya yi gaba, na baya sai labari. [S.U., 5]
   The one who is in front goes on; those left behind can only comment. (proverb)

2.2 Prepositions

The prepositions are formed by adding the genitive link to the name of the body part, thus forming a noun phrase with its complement.

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4 Remarquons que dans les exemples (3) et (5), les emplois métaphoriques du nom des parties du corps s’appuient sur l’orientation intrinsèque du corps humain.
2.2.1 gāban
11. Na zo na durkusa gaban ba kon nan, na mika masa ya karba ya sha. [S.U., 29]
I went and kneeled in front of the guest, gave him [the drink], he took [it] and drank.

12. Da za a tashi sai maigidana ya kira ni ya dauke ni ya dora ni a gaban a b isakan rakuminsa. [S.U., 33]
As we were leaving, the master called me, took me and put me before him on his camel.

2.2.2 bāyan
13. Ba a jima ba sai na fara jin gurnanin wani abu mai ban tsoro a bāyan daki . [S.U., 21]
Soon I heard a frightful growling behind the hut.

14. "A’a, ya tafe bāyan gari, amma zai dawo gobe."
"No, he went to some villages (lit. behind town), but he will come back tomorrow."

15. Da ya saka ni a bāyansa yayin da zai kwanta, amma da ya fara gwartin na n tsoro ya kama ni [...] [S.U., 21]
He had put me behind him before lying down, but when he started to snore, I was frightened [...] [S.U., 21]

2.2.3 Orientation
The spatial orientation at work here is obvious, from the orientation of the human body itself, with the face and the eyes giving a direction. Nevertheless, a difference between Hausa and European languages like French of English as regards spatial orientation is worth noticing here. If a speaker (S) is looking at two objects (A and B) which he wants to locate, whereas a European speaker would say (a) « B is behind A », or « B est derrière A » (which lexically corresponds to bāyan in Hausa), a Hausa speaker would rather use (b) « B nā gāban A » (lit. « B. is in front of A », « B est devant A »):

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
S & A & B \\
(a) & \longrightarrow & \text{English : « B is behind A » (a)} \\
(b) & \text{French : « B est derrière A » (a)} & \text{Hausa : « B nā gāban A » (b)} \\
\end{array}
\]

This means that, whereas in European languages, this type of spacial location is speaker-centered, in Hausa it is object-centered.

3. Time
The spatial orientation given by the body is reproduced in the representation of time. The orientation of visual perception is paralleled in the representation of time, which is oriented from the "back" to the "front", with « past » in the back of the speaker and « future » ahead.\(^6\)

\(^5\) See (HILL 1982) for more details.
\(^6\) If this is the case for French, English and Hausa, it is not necessarily so for all languages.
We will thus find a rough equivalence between the chest (gàbà) and the future on the one hand, and the back (bàyà) and the past on the other hand.

3.1 Adverbs

3.1.1 dàgà gàba = nan gàba = in the future
16. Nan gàba, kù ri’à shàrè dàkinkù!
   In the future, you should sweep your room!

3.1.2 à báyà = in the past, previously
17. àbìn dà mukà gayà à báyà ... (Gouffé 79)
   What we said previously...

3.1.3 à gàba = dàgà báyà = later on
However, this general symmetry is blurred with the expression of "later on". Both notions can be used, but with different prepositions : à, at in the case of dàgà, from in the case of báyà.
18. To, sai fa ki dauki hankuri, kin san halin yaron, kullum abin da ya ke so y a yì in ba a bar shì ba sai ya yi kuka, amma idan ana barinsa ya yi abin da ya so a gàba ba zai ji dadi ba. [S.U., 18]
   Well, be patient, you know how a child is, the thing he wants to do, if you don't let him do it, he will cry, but if you let him do the thing that he wants to do, later he won't be happy.

19. Ina so ka yì masa halin arziki, ka lura da shì, ka ba shì gona da wurin da z aì yi gìda, dòmin yana da iyàli suna zuwa dàga baya. [S.U., 10]
   I want you to treat him well, to take care of him, to give him a place to farm and build a house, because he has a family that will come later.

3.2 Prepositions

3.2.1 gàban
This use of gàbà is not common. No example is to be found in S.U. One example is found in Abraham’s dictionary. (ABRAHAM 1962)
20. Bà à san àbìn dà ya fàrù à gàban ràn nan ba. (Abraham 62 : 279b)
   It is not known what happened after that day. (lit. in front of that day)
   NB. dàgà ràn nan, or can gàba (cf. ex. n°16) is preferred to à gàban ràn nan.

3.2.2 báyan
21. Bayan wannan suka zauna suka yi ta didi har [...] [S.U., 18]
   After this, they sat down and chatted until [...]

22. "Bayan gaisuwa, ga wannan mutum sunansa Makau [...] [S.U., 15]
   After greetings, here is somebody called Makau [...] (beginning of a letter)
23. Sai inna ta fara tsammani a ranta ko Allah ya kiraye ni ne **bayan** tashinsu daga Kagara. [S.U., 26]
Then, mother started thinking to herself that maybe god had called me back (e.g. I had died) after their departure from Kagara.

24. Yaron nan dai **bayan** tashinki da kwana tara, wani dan sane ya sace shi. [S .U., 27]
This boy, nine days after you had left, a sorcerer kidnapped him.
In the following example, notice the translation of **bāyan** by « before » instead of the usual « after ».

25. Ban sake ganinta ba sai **bayan** shekaru da yawa ! [S.U., 18]
I did not see her again before many years.

3.3 Conjunctions
In conjunctions, there is no equivalent to **gàbã**, and instead, the word **kàfin** is borrowed from Arabic :

3.3.1 *gàban = kàfin*

26. **Kàfin** su shirya maharan sun yi nisa. [S.U., 5]
**Before** they got ready, the raiders had gone far.

27. **Tun kàfin** safiya ta yi Makau ya rigaya ya shirya sarai [...] [S.U., 10]
**Before** the morning had arrived, Makau was already well prepared [...]

3.3.2 **bāyan**

**bāyan** appears regularly as a conjunction meaning « after (that)... », and is used to locate a chronological succession of events. The locating event, or locator (following **bāyan**), is in the non-relative tenses (Perfect and Continuous). The located events are in the relative tenses (Relative Perfect and Relative Continuous).

28. **Bayan** an gama washe-washen nan duka, sai aka hada kayan aka kawo wu rin Sarki. [S.U., 8]
**After** they had finished ransacking [the house], they gathered the goods and brought them to the emir.

29. [...] amma manzon Sarki bai tashi zo masa ba sai **bayan** an yi sallar azahar . [S.U., 10]
[...] but the messenger of the emir did not come to his place until (after) they had done the afternoon prayer.

30. **Bayan** ta fita kadan sai kakata ta cika, [...] [**bāyan** ta fita ...]
**Not long after** she had gone, her grand-mother died, [...]

31. **Wata rana wajen goshin la’asar** bayan Shaihu Umar ya ba da karatu ga al majiransa, , sai wani almajirinsa ya tambaye shi cewa, [...] [S.U., 1]
**One day, in the afternoon, after** S.U. had taught his pupils, , one pupil asked him, [...]

5
32. **Bayan wannan ya kare, cikin kyakkyawan hali tare da uwata a gidan Makau, sai ran nan [...] [S.U., 3]**  
*After this was finished, peacefully with mother in Makau’s house, when one day [...]*

báyan dá is a variant of báyan. The locator (following báyan dá) is in the relative tenses (Relative Perfect and Relative Imperfect)

33. **Bayan da aka gama hira duka Makau shiga gida domin kwanta. [S.U., 9]**  
*After they had finished talking, Makau went home to his bed.*

34. **Bayan da aka jima amsa mata, [...] [S.U., 10]**  
*After a while, then he answered her, [...]*

35. **Bayan da mutanen nan suka gama tafi suka huta, tashi, [...] [S.U., 14]**  
*After those people had finished talking and had rested, they got up, [...]*

This use may nevertheless look strange if we consider that a « natural » derivation from body parts, would be for gába(n) to refer to the future and báya(n) to the past, if we follow the anthropomorphic orientation. For this type of chronological succession, where one is, as it were, « facing the future », gában is the only choice in so far as conjunctions are concerned. This means that this anthropomorphic explanation does not hold here.

4. **Cognitive considerations**

An explanation may be found if we examine a metaphorical use of the word báyá, *(back)* meaning in this case the *end, the completion.*

36. **Nà ga báyan aiké. (Abraham, 92a)**  
*I've finished the work (lit. I've seen the back of work)*

So, the point of view is not anthropomorphic, but objective. What is considered here is the completion of the event, and the other events are located in relation to that completion. The point of view is aspectual, and not temporal.

Now, we can explain what happens in (18) and (19) where à gába and dågà báya are both translated as *later on:*

18.  
*To, sai fa ki dauki hankuri, kin san halin yaron, kullum abin da ya ke so y a yi in ba a bar shi ba sai ya yi kuka, amma idan ana barinsa ya yi abin da ya so a gaba ba zai ji dadi ba. [S.U., 18]*

Well, be patient, you know how a child is, the thing he wants to do, if you don't let him do it, he will cry, but if you let him do the thing that he wants to do, later he won't be happy.

19.  
*Ina so ka yi masa halin arziki, ka lura da shi, ka ba shi gona da wurin da z ai yi gida, domin yana da iyali suna zuwa daga baya. [S.U., 10]*

I want you to treat him well, to take care of him, to give him a place to farm and build a house, because he has a family that will come later.

In (19), the point of view is objective and aspectual. The arrival of the family is located in relation to the actions of the father (farm, build a house). Whereas in (18), « he won’t be happy » is located in relation to the speaker. The point of view is anthropomorphic and temporal, which explains the use of à gaba.
5. Summary

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