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‘Fathers’ and ‘Mothers’ in Hausa from a Cognitive Semantic Point of View

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1. Introduction

This paper follows Ibriszimow & Zulyadaini (2011) in which we presented the results of attribute listing tests carried out with L1 and L2 Hausa speakers in Nigeria on lexemes connected with the semantic field of kinship.

In a series of articles published since 2005 (Ibriszimow *et al.*) we have described in detail our theoretical approach and methods. For details of these the reader is invited to consult Ibriszimow & Zulyadaini 2008 and 2009. The development of our general theoretical insights may be followed in Ibriszimow & Zulyadaini 2006, 2008, 2011 as well as in Schmid *et al.* (2008). The data for our studies was 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.

The tables below show the percentage of informants from the L1 (native speakers of Hausa) and L2 (Hausa as a second language speakers) test groups who mentioned the same attribute. Attributes mentioned by more than 20% are treated as major, i.e. very relevant attributes, those mentioned by between 10% and 20% (but by not less than three persons in absolute numbers) as minor attributes. They are given in the tables in brackets. Attributes below 10% are not relevant for our study. These, as well as attributes not mentioned at all by one of the groups, are marked with a dash (—).

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

2. 'Fathers'

2.1. *uba*

<i>uba</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
mahaifi	father	83	29
baba	father	39	—
maigida	householder	39	—
namiji	male	33	57
mai 'ya'ya,...	who has children	22	46
mutum,...	person	22	38
mai iyali,...	who has a family	22	(13)
miji,...	husband	—	33
aure,...	marriage	—	25
wanda ya haifi wani,...	who gave birth to s.o.	—	25
yana da mata,...	he has a wife	—	21

According to 83% of the L1 speakers *uba* and *mahaifi* seem to be quasi synonymous. The word *mahaifi* is grammatically an agent noun built from the verb *haifa* 'to give birth'. Within L2 only 29% mention *mahaifi*, while a further 25% give a description of the type 'one who gave birth to someone', which is close to the meaning of the agent noun. Therefore it seems that for the L2 speakers the word *mahaifi* is not fully lexicalised; cf. also the answers to the stimulus *mahaifi* below.

39% of L1 mention the term of address *baba* as well as the function that a father plays in the society, i.e. *maigida*, a 'householder', a person who is responsible for a household. The latter includes the 'children' (22%) and the whole remaining 'family' (22%). The L2 speakers do not mention either the term of address (which is surely known to them; cf. the stimulus *baba* below) or the term *maigida* (cf. in this respect also *baba* and *mahaifi* below) in their answers.

The main attributes for the L2 speakers are the superordinate 'male' (57%) and 'person' (38%), and the fact that a father has 'children' (46%). The superordinate terms are also given by L1, but only by one third or one fifth of the informants.

Only 13% of L2 use the cover term 'family' (as L1 in *mai iyali* 'who has a family'); rather, they give attributes that explain what a family is: 'husband', 'marriage', 'wife' (besides the children of course, see above).

2.2. *baba*²

<i>baba</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
mahaifi	father	71	29
uba	father	52	29
namiji	male	33	58
tsoho,...	old man	33	(17)
maigida,...	householder	24	—
yana da yara,...	he has children	(14)	38
mutum,...	person	—	46
babba,...	big, elderly (person)	—	25

As in the responses to the stimulus *uba*, the answer given by the majority (71%) of L1 speakers to the stimulus *baba* is *mahaifi*. This is followed by *uba*, mentioned by 52%. The superordinate term ‘male’ and the social function of *baba* as a ‘householder’ are also comparable to the results for *uba* shown above.

The difference is in the attribute *tsoho* ‘old person’ given by 33% of L1. We assume that this attribute has a different value in the set of attributes for the stimulus *baba*, in comparison with its value in the set for the stimulus *mahaifi* (see below). In Hausa culture, any ‘old person’, or *tsoho*, should be addressed in a respectful way by using the term *baba*.

This fact seems to be present also in the perception of L2, 17% of whom mention *tsoho* as a minor attribute (while *mahaifi* is not mentioned at all). We also place the attribute *babba* in this context. This word may mean ‘big’ or ‘elderly’ person, as well as a ‘respected’ person. It is worthy to note that this attribute is mentioned only by the L2 speakers.

Regarding the other attributes given by L2, the answers are very similar to the ones shown under *uba*: a ‘male’ ‘person’ who ‘has children’. He is *mahaifi* and *uba*.

2.3. *mahaifi*

<i>mahaifi</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
uba,...	father	78	38

² The procedure for the attribute-listing task was such that a native speaker presented a word to the informants in the spoken medium and in the written medium (i.e. on the blackboard) at the same time. The spoken version was very important to guard against misinterpretation of the standard way of writing words like *baba*: this written form may stand for either *bàabaa* ‘father’ (low-high tone) or *baabàa* ‘mother’ (high-low tone). In this article, we use the standard Hausa orthography, i.e. we do not mark tone and vowel length.

baba	father	44	(17)
Ãawainiya,...	taking responsibility	28	(13)
mutum	person	28	33
namiji	male	28	58
tsoho,...	old man	28	—
maigida,...	householder	22	—
miji,...	husband	—	21
wanda ya haife ka,...	who gave birth to you	—	38

The basic difference in the responses of L1 to the stimulus *mahaifi*, in comparison to the responses to the stimuli *uba* and *baba*, is the attribute *Ãawainiya* 'taking responsibility'. This attribute seems to be a key to understanding the difference between the concept *mahaifi* and the other two concepts. *Mahaifi* is one's own father of the same flesh and blood. He is expected to take care of his own children's needs, irrespective of whether he and his children live together or not.

Among the L1 responses, *tsoho* 'old man' is also mentioned, as in the answers given for the stimulus *baba*. Here we assume that the meaning of *tsoho* needs to be seen in another context: when speaking about one's father, the polite form would be *tsoho*. This word expresses the respect of the speaker towards his own father or the father of the person he is speaking with.

This Hausa cultural specific seems not to be considered by the L2 speakers. They appear to analyse the etymology of the word *mahaifi*, which is an agent noun from the verb 'to give birth', as meaning 'who gave birth to you'. The attribute 'husband' should probably be seen as part of the family, as in the answers given for the stimulus *uba*.

It seems that for the L2 speakers the word *mahaifi* is not fully lexicalised. 38% give an "etymological" explanation of the type 'who gave birth to you', which is the meaning of this agent noun. Cf. also the responses to the stimulus *uba* where 29% mention *mahaifi* as an attribute, and a further 25% 'who gave birth to s.o.'.

2.4. Summary of the results for the 'father' stimuli

A comparison of the answers to the three stimuli unveils clear differences in the speakers' perceptions.

Regarding L1 these are:

- L1 generally react to the stimuli by noting *mahaifi*: 83% for *uba* and 71% for *baba*. It seems that for them *mahaifi* clearly carries the notion of 'father'.

- *Mahaifi* is the progenitor who has the moral obligation to take responsibility for his children. Ideally he is also the householder.
- *Uba* is the father who heads the family and the house. Ideally he is also the progenitor³.
- *Baba* means father in both senses, and is also a polite term of address for any elderly person of at least one's father's age.
- The attribute *tsoho* seems to appear in the answers with two different functions: for *mahaifi* it substitutes the stimulus for reasons of politeness. For *baba* it has to be substituted by the stimulus for reasons of politeness.

Regarding L2, the perceptions of *uba* and *mahaifi* seem to be much closer than is the case with L1. Still there are differences: *uba* has children, is a husband, is married, and has a wife; *mahaifi* is “only” a husband.

Baba is also perceived by L2 not only as a ‘father’ but more generally as ‘an elderly person’. It is worth noting that L2 do not give *baba* as an attribute of the stimulus *uba*, and for the stimulus *mahaifi* it is only a minor attribute. The reason for this might be

- (1) either that the word *baba* is not part of the active lexicon of L2,
- (2) or that they use it actively in the more general sense of an ‘elderly person’.

A hypothesis: If we consider that a word like *baba* in the meaning of a ‘parent’ is fairly universal, and that there is a high probability that the L2 informants have a similar word in their respective languages, the question arises whether they do not react to the Hausa stimulus in the more general sense, “keeping” the meaning ‘parent/father’ for their own *baba* word. The emotional attitude towards words of the same or very similar form and meaning in two languages appears to be stronger in the context of one’s own language than in the context of one’s second (or further) language. The speakers highlight different attributes in their first and their second language, and thus cognitively “create” a difference that apparently does not exist for native speakers of the second language.

3. ‘Mothers’

3.1. *uwa*

<i>uwa</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
mahaifiya	mother	67	42
mace	woman	33	92

³ We are grateful for the interesting observation by Professor Herrmann Jungrathmayr: our analysis explains why the word for ‘God’ in Hausa is *Ubangiji* and not *Babangiji*.

haifu	give birth	24	—
yara,...	children	24	42
mutum	person	(14)	42
mama	mother	—	25
tana da aure,...	she is married	—	25
tana da miji,...	she has a husband	—	21

For 67% of the L1 speakers *uwa* and *mahaifiya* are quasi synonymous. She is the woman (*mace*) who has given birth (*haifu*) to children (*yara*). Grammatically, the word *mahaifiya* is the female form of the agent noun *mahaifi* (see 2.1. above). The L2 speakers react in a similar way to the L1 speakers, although they do not mention the attribute *haifu*.

The L2 speakers note further attributes which are connected with *uwa* as a married person, i.e. with a husband. Furthermore, she is *mama*, a word that is not mentioned by L1.

3.2. *mahaifiya*

<i>mahaifiya</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
<i>uwa</i> ,...	mother	83	38
<i>haihuwa</i> ,...	giving birth	56	58
<i>mace</i>	woman	50	75
<i>tsohuwa</i> ,...	old woman	28	—
<i>mama</i> ,...	mother	—	21
<i>mutum</i>	person	—	25

The first three attributes for both L1 and L2 seem to confirm the findings for *uwa* as shown above: a woman who gives birth; *mahaifiya* is *uwa*. But one attribute is “missing” here in comparison to the attributes given under the stimulus *uwa*: neither L1 nor L2 mention ‘children’ here. Is this an indication that *mahaifiya* is one’s own mother, and that *uwa* can be a general term of address for any woman who is an age-mate of one’s own mother, as a mark of respect? I.e. for a woman who has children? Or for the woman who is performing the role of *mahaifiya*?

Only the L1 speakers mention the attribute ‘old woman’ *tsohuwa*, a term used to indicate social respect, politeness and closeness in Hausa culture (cf. the usage of the male form *tsoho* above, 2.3.).

As in the results for *uwa*, only the L2 speakers mention *mama* as an attribute for *mahaifiya*.

3.3. *mama*

<i>mama</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
uwa	mother	100	29
nono,...	breast/milk	61	25
mace	woman	44	46
mahaifiya	mother	39	50
shayarwa,...	breast feeding	22	25
yaro	son	—	21

According to all L1 speakers *mama* is synonymous with *uwa*. At first glance this is quite astonishing because the L1 speakers did not attribute *mama* to the stimulus *uwa* at all (nor to *mahaifiya*). The reason for this is probably connected with the fact that the word *mama* is polysemous: besides ‘mother’ it may also mean ‘female breast’. This explains why 61% of L1 mention *nono* ‘breast/milk’ as an attribute which was not mentioned under the other ‘mother’ stimuli at all. The same concerns the attribute *shayarwa* ‘breast feeding’. The perception of *mama* as a ‘female breast’ is shared by 25% of L2.

There is a cultural stigma associated with the breast as a body part, one of the major focal points of attraction in a woman’s body. It is absolutely taboo for the ‘breast’ in this sense to be associated with ‘mother’. Therefore the word *mama* is used primarily by children; adults would usually use *uwa*.

3.4. *inna*

<i>inna</i>	translation	L1 in %	L2 in %
mace	woman	61	58
uwa,...	mother	61	21
tsohuwa	old woman	56	25
mahaifiya,...	mother	39	25
mutum	person	22	(17)

The term *inna* is a loanword from Fulfulde. There is a Hausa saying which explains this word: *inna uwa mai ba da mama* ‘*inna*, the mother (*uwa*) who gives the breast (i.e. breast feeds)’. For both groups of Hausa speakers, the word is perceived as ‘mother’ and ‘old/elderly woman’. *Inna* is used as a mark of respect, when addressing an elderly woman in Hausa and in Fulfulde.

A very interesting attribute is *mutum* ‘person’, mentioned by 22% of L1: it was not given as a major attribute for any of the other ‘mother’ stimuli. The reason is probably connected with the other meaning of *inna* – in Hausa it is the name of a spirit responsible for poliomyelitis or any disease that causes paralysis. In order to avoid

misunderstanding, L1 qualify the stimulus *inna* as a 'person' i.e. as a human being and not as a spirit. This is probably also the reason for having the highest percentage of informants (61%) who mention the attribute 'woman' (*mace*) in comparison to the other 'mother' stimuli.

Whether the 'mother' vs. 'spirit' issue is also the reason why 17% of L2 speakers note *mutum* as an attribute, is not clear. L2 tend to mention superordinate terms regularly in their answers.

4. Summary

Below we compare the pairs of words for 'father' and 'mother' which are formally parallel. We shall consider these words with regard to their appearance as attributes for the other stimuli. It should be borne in mind that the L2 speakers tend to regularly mention superordinates like 'male', 'person', 'woman', etc., as attributes; the L1 speakers do this to a much lesser extent. This fact may be connected with what we have observed in semantic fields other than kinship: the attributes given by L2 speakers point to a view "from the outside" and the attributes of L1 to a view "from the inside" (for more details, see for instance Ibrizimow & Zulyadaini 2009).

4.1. *mahaifi* and *mahaifiya*

Both words refer to the biological parents. This is clearly observable in the results for *mahaifi*; for the female form *mahaifiya* we have good reasons for this assumption (see 3.2.).

The table below shows that L1 seem to conceive both forms in a similar way: *mahaifi* and *mahaifiya* are first on the attribute lists for the other stimuli. (The difference in the case of *mama* and *inna* is connected with the polysemy of the stimuli themselves.)

The L2 speakers seem to conceive the male and the female forms differently. If we leave the stimulus *inna* apart for obvious reasons (see 3.4.), *mahaifiya* is mentioned much more often as an attribute than *mahaifi*. This may be connected with the non-lexicalised, etymological perception of these words which are agent nouns: "the one who gives birth" in the direct sense of the verb 'to give birth' is the 'mother'. L1 do not perceive the grammatical origin of the two words – for them *mahaifi* and *mahaifiya* are fully lexicalised.

attribute	for the stimulus	position according to number of mentions by L1 (in %)	position according to number of mentions by L2 (in %)
<i>mahaifi</i>	<i>uba</i>	1 (83%)	5 (29%)
	<i>baba</i>	1 (71%)	4 (29%)

<i>mahaifiya</i>	<i>uwa</i>	1 (67%)	2-4 (42%)
	<i>mama</i>	4 (39%)	1 (50%)
	<i>inna</i>	4 (39%)	2-3 (25%)

4.2. *uba* and *uwa*

Both words are the most general ones that carry the notion of ‘father’ and ‘mother’ respectively. In Balarabe Zulyadaini’s rich collection of Hausa proverbs, we could not find any proverb in which the other ‘father’ or ‘mother’ words appear; in all proverbs *uba* and/or *uwa* are used, e.g. *uwa ma fi uba ko da uban sarki ne* ‘mother is greater than father even if the father is a king’.

The results for L1 and L2 in the table below are very similar. The “worse” positioning of *uba* and *uwa* in the L2 answers is due to the mentioning of superordinates in the first line, followed by *uba* and *uwa*.

attribute	for the stimulus	position according to number of mentions by L1 (in %)	position according to number of mentions by L2 (in %)
<i>uba</i>	<i>baba</i>	2 (52%)	4-5 (29%)
	<i>mahaifi</i>	1 (78%)	2-3 (38%)
<i>uwa</i>	<i>mahaifiya</i>	1 (83%)	3 (38%)
	<i>mama</i>	1 (100%)	3 (29%)
	<i>inna</i>	2 (61%)	4 (21%)

4.3. *baba* and *mama*

These words seem to be diametrically opposed in the perception of the L1 and the L2 speakers.

Whereas for L1 *baba* is not only the ‘father’ but also a polite term of address for any elderly person, the word *mama* is primarily connected with the meaning ‘female breast’, seems to be taboo, and is therefore not used in the attribute lists.

This view is not shared by the L2 speakers. For them it is *baba* that is not actively mentioned in the attribute lists. For an explanatory hypothesis, see 2.4. *Mama* is the ‘mother’, one’s own ‘mother’: *mama* is the first attribute for the stimulus *mahaifiya*, a very rare case where a superordinate word does not lead the list. The meaning ‘female breast’ seems to come up in the perception of the L2 speakers only when *mama* is a stimulus. Used freely and actively as an attribute, *mama* is clearly ‘mother’.

attribute	for the stimulus	position according to number of mentions by L1 (in %)	position according to number of mentions by L2 (in %)
<i>baba</i>	<i>uba</i>	2-3 (39%)	—
	<i>mahaifi</i>	2 (44%)	(minor attr. 17%)
<i>mama</i>	<i>uwa</i>	—	5-6 (25%)
	<i>mahaifiya</i>	—	5 (21%)
	<i>inna</i>	—	—

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