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## **Of direction, will, and intention: An analysis of Hausa *nufa***

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### **Introduction**

This article deals with the polysemic nature of the Hausa verb *nufa* [nùfaa]. *Nufa* falls within that particular group of verbs whose primary meaning has been reconceptualised into a secondary meaning through a process of metaphorical extension. The two meanings of *nufa* – 1) ‘head towards a place’ and 2) ‘intend to mean something’ – mirror the defining characteristic of metaphorical extension, i.e. a very concrete reality is reconceptualised into something less tangible and more abstract. However, apart from respecting this general principle, *nufa* can also be grouped in a relatively small sub-class of verbs sharing another salient property: the target of the reconceptualisation is an inner-mental experience or a psychological reality. The reference reality encompassed in the extended meaning is not, so to say, ‘external’ and ‘objective’, but rather ‘internal’ and ‘subjective’ – and perhaps this is exactly the reason why languages make such a use of metaphorical extension: inner realities are too intangible and out of reach to be described through label terms.

Members of this sub-class are verbs like *dama* [daamàaa] ‘mix’ (reconceptualised into ‘confuse’) and *damu* [dàamu] ‘be fully mixed’ (reconceptualised into ‘be worried’), *latsa* [laatsàa] ‘squeeze, squash’ (reconceptualised into ‘put pressure on somebody’), *narke* [narkèe] ‘melt’ (reconceptualised into ‘be drunk or high on drugs’), and *sha* [shaa] ‘drink’ (reconceptualised into ‘undergo difficulty or loss’). The primary meanings of all these verbs are anchored to a physical, tangible reality, whereas the extended meanings refer to ‘a state of things’ requiring a metaphorical encoding.

### **The lexico-grammatical and semantic framing**

*Nufa* is a 2 grade verb, that is a verb belonging to the class that changes the ending vowel according to the syntactic environment in which the verb is found (see Newman 2000, 637). The canonical dictionaries describe *nufa* as a two-fold item displaying two complementary meanings: ‘head towards a place’ and ‘intend to mean’

(cf. Abraham 1962, Bargery 1951). The two meanings are exemplified in the following sentences:

- (1) a. *kafin daga bisani su dauke shi a mota*  
 before afterwords 3pl.Subj take him in car  
*su nufi gida*<sup>27</sup>  
 3pl.Subj head towards house  
 afterwards they took him into the car and headed towards [their] home
- b. *da yawan masu tsaron gidan sarki sun nufe shi*  
 many defenders house.of King 3pl.Compl head towards him  
 many guards of the King's dwelling headed towards him (Rice 2015)
- (2) a. *ban san abin da ya nufa ba*  
 1sg.Compl.Neg know thing Rel 3sg.Compl intend Neg  
 I don't know what he intended to do (Abraham 1962, 707)
- b. *in Allah ya nufa, na ba ka ta*  
 if God 3sg.Compl intend 1sg.Compl give you her  
 if God wills it, I'll give it to you

Depending on the context, the secondary meaning of *nufa* encode the notions of 'intend to mean', 'desire', 'wish', and 'want'. It is not interchangeable with *so*, [*soo*] the default verb for 'want', which lacks the 'intention' value.

A characteristic of grade 2 verbs is that they are essentially transitive: even if it is possible to find the verb in a zero object environment (e.g. *ya nufa* 'he intended'), an object argument should always be understood (*ya nufe shi* 'he intended it'). The special semantics of this class of verb has been analysed by Claude Gouffé in terms of 'voice' (1988). Gouffé postulated the existence of a voice system where grade 2 verbs present a *diathèse interne* (or middle voice), as opposed, for example, to the *diathèse neutre* of grade 1 verbs.<sup>28</sup> The defining feature of the *diathèse interne* is the double nature of the subject argument: the subject is the initiator of the experience – the agent – and, at the same time, the affected entity of the action – the patient.

<sup>27</sup> <[http://www.bbc.com/hausa/news/2013/07/130723\\_royal\\_baby\\_william](http://www.bbc.com/hausa/news/2013/07/130723_royal_baby_william)>.

<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Gouffé rejects the opposition between 'active' (*active*) and 'middle' (*moyen*): he prefers instead to distinguish between *formes non-moyennes* (e.g. grade 1 verbs) and *formes moyennes* (e.g. grade 2 verbs) (Gouffé 1988, 37).

### The metaphorical reading

The polysemic nature of *nufa* stands on the extension of the primary meaning ‘head towards a place’ into the secondary meaning ‘intend to mean’. However, terms such as extension, primary and secondary meaning do not illustrate what really happens with *nufa*: they simply describe it from a semantic point of view. The two meanings are the outcome of a metaphorical relation where a target domain (in this case, the mental activity of intending something) is rendered in terms of a source domain (the physical activity of heading towards a place). The cross-domain mapping embodied in the metaphor (i.e. a mental activity rendered in terms of a physical one) is controlled by the conceptual metaphor INTEND TO MEAN SOMETHING IS HEAD TOWARDS A PLACE.

The frame implied by this conceptual metaphor involves only two elements: Agent and Goal. The agential nature of the experiencer overtakes the necessity of a trigger element.

It is the conceptual metaphor that activates the second meaning of *nufa*. However, the idea of ‘intention’ and ‘willingness’ – which is overtly expressed when the metaphor is fully operational – is already contained in the primary meaning of the verb. The inner properties of *nufa*, in fact, do not need a fully operational metaphorical structure to become manifest. Before analysing in detail what this really means, let’s stress the following:

A. The conceptual metaphor upon which the metaphorical reading is built is made possible by some salient properties of the source item (the notion of ‘will’ and ‘intention’ contained in the verb);

B. The semantic realisations of *nufa* – controlled, as we have seen, by a conceptual metaphor – cover a spectrum of renderings ranging from pure congruence (non-metaphorical reading) to metaphor (non-congruent reading), including some readings that are metonymically constructed.

A congruent reading is defined here as the use of a term (or a multi-word expression) without any metaphorical conceptualisation at work. Such a realisation requires an alignment of the Place (the object argument of the verb) with the primary property of the Action (the verb ‘head to, move towards, go to’). Consistently with the primary semantics of the verb, the Place slot of a verb of movement is occupied by a mere physical place.

Consider the following examples:

- (3) a. *Yarinyar da ta nufi jami'a.*  
The girl who headed towards the university.

- b. *Ban san inda ya nufa ba.*  
I don't know where he has gone.

In both sentences, the verb and its object argument do not have any metaphorical value. Provided that the context is neutral (that is, without a figurative background), the readings of these examples tell us that the girl in (a) headed towards the university and that the subject of the complement clause in (b) headed towards an unspecified place.

If we add a metonymical value to the Place of the frame, then we will obtain a less congruent reading. In the following example, taken from the online magazine *Deutsche Welle* (April 2014), the Place slot is occupied by the word *kotu* 'court':

- (4) *Matar da aka zarga da yin lalata da Hollande ta nufi kotu.*<sup>29</sup>  
The woman accused of extramarital sex with Holland has taken the case to court.

The sentence above refers to Julie Gayet, the woman who had a love affair with François Hollande. As explained in the article, Gayet intends to press charges against the reporter who took the famous pictures that brought into the open the relationship between the actress and the French president. The title revolves around the expression *nufi kotu* 'head towards the court'. Although the semantics of the verb and its object are aligned (the court is a place where you can head to), the reading is not as linear as it appears. The 'court' is intended here as the place where a certain activity takes place, and not as the actual place where the woman headed to. The metonymical reading of *kotu* 'court' is based on the relation of contiguity binding an activity to the place where such activity is performed or occurs. The ACTIVITY-in terms of-PLACE relation – which is a particular form of *pars pro toto* relation – does not activate the extended meaning(s) of the verb: *nufa* is still understood in terms of 'head to', but integrated in a metonymical reading governed by the Place/Goal of the frame.

In the following example, the historian Bukar Usman is stressing the importance of studying local history. To do so, the scholar makes use of a figurative construction involving terms such as 'the place of return', '[the place] where you stood up', and 'head towards' (lit. head ahead).

- (5) *Mutane suka ce in ba ka san makomarka ba, ba ka san inda ka tashi ba, ina za ka san inda za ka nufa a gaba?*  
People say that if you don't know the place where to go back to, if you don't know the place you left, how will you know where to head to?

<sup>29</sup> <<http://www.dw.com/ha/matar-da-aka-zarga-da-yin-lalata-da-hollande-ta-nufi-kotu/a-17368770>>.



The ‘place to go back to’, *makoma* (a locative noun formed from the verb *koma* ‘go back’), refers here to the place where one was born and/or has grown up as well as to the relations and ties that such place implies. The implicit notion is that everybody has only one home, i.e. the place where one comes from. The verb *tashi* ‘stand up, leave’ is used in the next locative clause to reinforce this notion: ‘the place where you stood up (to leave)’ is the place of origin (e.g. your homeland). Hence, if somebody ignores the history of her or his homeland, then how – the historian asks – will she or he find the right direction?

### When the supernatural takes over

The use of *nufa* with the meaning of ‘intend to mean’ or ‘intend to’ is very productive when the action refers to God, that is when the agential slot is occupied by (or, in case of a pronominal subject, refers to) a noun phrase designating God. Conceived as the highest expression of will and power, the maximum supernatural entity appears to be the ideal agent for an experience based on the notion of ‘intention’.

- (6) a. *Na ji a jikina cewa idan Allah ya nufi Janar Muhammadu Buhari zai sake mulkar kasarmu Nijeriya to lokaci ya yi.*<sup>30</sup>  
I felt in my body that if Allah wants General Muhammadu Buhari to change the rule of our country, well, the time has come.
- b. *Da Allah ya nufi saukar ruwa, sai ya aiko iskar da za ta kintsa kasa don karban ruwan da ke tafe.*  
When Allah wants the rain to fall, then he sends the wind that will prepare the soil to accept the rain that has come.
- c. *Abin da Allah ya nufa ke nan?*<sup>31</sup>  
What does Allah intend?

The verbal noun *nufi* [nufii] covers the meanings of ‘intention’ and ‘will’. Its semantics is usually attached to the metaphorical reading of *nufa*.

- (7) a. *Ka roke Allah ya sa ka san nufe-nufen zuciyarka.*<sup>32</sup>  
Beg Allah to make you aware of your heart’s intentions.
- b. *[...] nufinsa shi ne a ingiza kasar ta yi yaki da Syria.*<sup>33</sup>  
[...] his intention is this, to push the country to declare war on Syria.

<sup>30</sup> <<http://dandalinbashir.blogspot.it/2015/03/>>.

<sup>31</sup> <<https://www.jw.org/ha/littattafai/littattafai/bible-teach/abin-da-allah-ya-nufa-ke-nan/>>.

<sup>32</sup> <<https://wol.jw.org/ha/wol/d/r220/lp-ha/2013127>>.

<sup>33</sup> <[http://www.bbc.com/hausa/news/2013/05/130512\\_turkey\\_syria\\_war](http://www.bbc.com/hausa/news/2013/05/130512_turkey_syria_war)>.

Consider the following Hausa translations of an evangelical episode set in the Garden of Gethsemane where a notorious reference to the notion of will is present. The episode is found in Mark, Matthew, and Luke:

- (8) a. *Sa'an nan ya ce, "Ya Abba, Uba, kowane abu mai yiwuwa ne a gare ka. Ka dauke mini kokon wahalar nan. Duk da haka dai ba nufina ba, sai naka".*<sup>34</sup>  
He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will".<sup>35</sup> (Mark 14, 36)
- b. *Har wa yau a komawa ta biyu, sai ya je ya yi addu'a, ya ce, "Ya Ubana, in wannan ba zai wuce ba sai na sha shi, to, a aikata nufinka".*  
Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" (Matthew 26, 42)
- c. *Ya ce, "Ya Uba, in dai ka yarda, ka dauke mini kokon wahalar nan. Duk da haka dai, ba nufina ba, sai naka za a bi".*  
He said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done". (Luke 22, 42)

### From concrete to abstract

The manifold semantics of *nufa* can be described as a *continuum* going from a maximum degree of concreteness to a maximum degree of abstraction. The shift from the 'physical' dimension to the 'abstract' one is not as discrete as the two meanings given in the dictionaries might lead us to think. While it is clear that 'head to' is quite different from 'intend to mean', the spectrum of use of *nufa*, rather than offering a clear line of separation between one reading and the other, indicates a complex semantics where different degrees of concreteness and different degrees of abstraction can be at play. Therefore, the notion of *continuum* itself is useful as it tries to avoid a step-by-step representation of the process.

The semantic and conceptual shifting mirrored in the nature of the thematic roles assigned to the arguments of the verb change accordingly. For example, we have seen that the object slot can be occupied by roles of different kinds, each type of role aligning itself with a different semantics (and conceptualisation) of *nufa* within the unidirectional shifting process. Therefore, the most concrete reading of *nufa* requires a physical object (i.e. a place), a less concrete reading a physical object functioning in a metonymical relation (i.e. ACTIVITY-in terms of-PLACE), an even less concrete reading a simple direction, and so on. Figure 1 below exemplifies the process on the basis of the nature of the thematic role:

<sup>34</sup> The Hausa translations of the three verses are taken from: <<https://hausonline.wordpress.com/2009/11/23/reading-the-bible-in-hausa-online/>>.

<sup>35</sup> The English translations of the three verses are taken from: <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/>>.

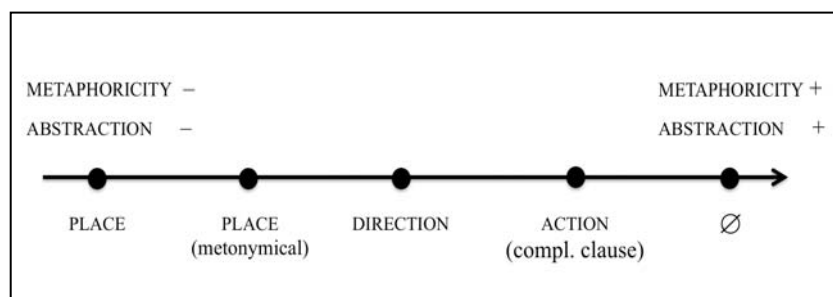


Figure 1 – From place to intention

The less abstract reading of *nufa* is associated with the meaning of ‘head to’. As we have already seen, it requires a place-object that can be either expressed or implied. On the other side of the spectrum, where the experience reaches its maximum degree of abstraction (and the conceptual metaphor is fully operative), the purest (or highest) form of ‘intention’ is encoded through a noun, namely the deverbative *nufi*. But *nufi* can be interpreted not just in terms of intention (which could be seen as ‘potential will’), but also as an actual, effective will. In a sense, the highest expression of ‘intention’ – that is proper ‘will’ – does not require an object, because an object would tie this faculty to a specific target. We could proceed along this speculative line by saying that *stricto sensu* this ‘highest will’ would be incompatible with an agent-patient, because the entity capable of exert pure will can’t ‘*effectue en s’affectant*’ (Benveniste 1966, 173, quoted in Gouffé 1988, 36).

### Conclusions

In this paper, I outlined the main characteristics of the Hausa verb *nufa* within a cognitive semantic framework. The starting point of my analysis has been the observation that the two meanings of *nufa* relate to experiences of different order: the primary meaning denotes a physical action, whereas the secondary meaning denotes an inner experience. Then, this semantic extension has been framed under a cognitive perspective, namely by postulating the existence of a conceptual metaphor INTEND TO MEAN SOMETHING IS HEAD TOWARDS A PLACE. If we accept the idea for which this metaphor is made possible by some salient property shared by the way the two experiences are conceived, then we should feel compelled to look for 1) a set of correspondences existing between the source (physical) and the target (abstract) domain, and 2) a nuclear property linking the two meanings. The most promising place to look for such correspondences and properties is the semantics of the secondary (or extended) meaning, for the simple reason that the target domain makes manifest some properties that the source does not express in an

overt manner. Hence, we could say that 1) the ‘salient’ property enabling the re-conceptualisation of a specific physical domain into a specific abstract domain is the notion of ‘intention’ and that 2) this very notion is present in the source domain as a pre-existing assumption, i.e. it exists as a set of ideas the speaker has about the experience of heading towards a place. Traces of this notion might be located in the inner semantics of grade 2 verbs, namely in the agentivity of the subject.

Apart from respecting the principle of unidirectionality (i.e. metaphors reconceptualise concrete into abstract, and note *vice versa*, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the verb *nufa* works within a semantico-conceptual *continuum* where the shift towards abstraction is gradual and overlapping. From this point of view, it is in the nature of the thematic roles that the different conceptual realisations of *nufa* can be detected and analysed.

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