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Préalable to a Theory of Hausa Poetic Meter

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1. Introduction

Hausa poetry follows two main traditions, 'oral' and 'written'. The metrical structure of 'written' poetry has been fairly extensively discussed, using the framework of Arabic prosody. There is little published literature on the metrical structure of 'oral' poetry, however, and there have been virtually no attempts to relate the metrical systems of the two traditions (but see Muhammad, 1979, 1980). This paper does not claim to present a 'theory' of Hausa meters since it makes no explicit proposals as to what may or may not constitute a valid Hausa poetical meter. However, it does present facts about Hausa poetic practice which a theory of Hausa meter will have to account for. In section 2, I outline the metrical bases of oral poetry. In section 3, I briefly describe the Arabic system that a number of writers have used to analyze Hausa written poetry. The remaining sections show how the Arabic system alone is inadequate to account for certain aspects of Hausa meters, and they propose an alternative method for describing meters.

2. The Metrics of Oral Poetry/Song¹

Oral poetry dates from prehistoric times, being reported by the earliest Arab chroniclers (Hiskett 1975: Chapter 1). Traditionally, the main theme of oral poetry was praise, but in modern poetry, the themes have been greatly expanded. It is always performed to instrumental accompaniment.

Examination of just the linguistic text of oral poetry would suggest that no rules govern its scansion. 'Lines' and 'stanzas' vary in length; more often than not, there are no obvious recurrent patterns of syllable types; rhyme, if it exists at all, is sporadic. The key to 'scanning' oral poetry is in its instrumental accompaniment, with which the linguistic text must align.

Hausa has two kinds of syllables, 'short' and 'long' (or 'light' and 'heavy'). 'Short' syllables consist of a consonant (C) plus a short vowel (V); 'long' syllables consist of a consonant plus a long vowel (VV) or a consonant followed by a vowel and another consonant:

- (1) Short syllable: CV e.g. *mace* 'woman'
(with 2 short syllables)
- Long syllables: CVV e.g. *daakii* 'hut'
(with 2 CVV syllables)
- CVC e.g. *samfur* 'sample'
(with 2 CVC syllables)

In Western musical terms, Hausa oral meters can be analyzed in terms of the number of eighth notes per measure, i.e. we can speak of a '5 meter' with 5 eighth notes per measure, a '6 meter', an '8 meter', etc.²

Basically, the alignment of the linguistic feet with the instrumental accompaniment equates a short syllable with an eighth note and a long syllable with a quarter note (= two eighth notes). As examples, consider the following refrains from oral poems of three different meters.³ Note the following equivalences: v = short syllable or eighth note; - = long syllable or quarter note (= 2 eighth notes in length); | = division between measures.

- (2) '5 meter': Sarkin Tabshin Katsina, *Wakar Indefenda* (Richards 1972)

sung rhythm: - | - v - | - v - | - v - |
 syllable lengths: - - v - - v - - v -
 text: *Bab-bar ka-sar Shee-hu dan Hoo-di-yoo*

sung rhythm: (-v) - | - v - | - v - | - v - |
 syllable lengths: - - v - - v - - v -
 text: *Naa-jee-ri-yaa taa tsa-ree gas-ki-yaa*
 'The great land of shehu dan Hodiyo,
 Nigeria upholds the truth.'

(3) '6 meter': Mamman Shata, *Mata Ku Yi Aure*, 2nd line (CSNL archive)

sung rhythm: - v - v | v v v v - |
 syllable lengths: - - - - - v v - -
 text: *Don Al-lah maa-taa ku yi au-ree*
 'For the sake of God, women, get
 married.'

(4) '8 meter': Dan Lami Nasarawa, *Birnin Tarayaa* (Radio Kaduna 19 February 1983)

sung rhythm: - - - - | -- (--) |
 syllable lengths: - - - - -
 text: *Bir-nin Taa-ray-yaa,*
 'Capital of the Federation,

sung rhythm: - - - - | - (v) v - - |
 syllable lengths: - - - - - v - -
 text: *Bir-nin Taa-ray-yaa A-buu-jaa*
 Capital of the Federation, Abuja'

Looking at the sung rhythm, we find the metrical equivalent of 5, 6, and 8 eighth notes respectively occurring between the measure lines. Though the syllable lengths correlate closely with the sung rhythm, three factors make it crucial that one hear the performance to understand the meter:

(a) *Silence has metrical value.* In the '5 meter' of (2), the singers are silent for the equivalent of 3 eighth notes (the parenthesized (-v) at the beginning of the second line), making the measure containing the first syllable of *Naajeeriyaa* total the requisite equivalent of | - v -|. In (4) silence accounts for half of the second measure and one eighth note in the third.

(b) *Long syllables may be sung as short.* There are several examples of this in (3). Just looking at syllable lengths without hearing the performance would suggest that this should be an '8 meter' rather than a '6 meter'!

(c) *Syllables may be lengthened.* In (4), the final syllable of *Taarayyaa* is given the equivalent of 4 eighth notes rather than the expected 2. This, combined with the silence, makes the second and fourth measures metrically equivalent, though in terms of the text alone they are incomparable.

3. The Scansion of Written Poetry

The Hausa written poetic tradition dates from the early 19th century, when vernacular poetry began to be used as a vehicle for religious reform. This remained its only theme throughout the 19th century (Hiskett 1975), but like oral poetry, themes of 20th century written poetry are unlimited.

Because 19th century Hausa poetry was composed for religious purposes, poets chose Arabic prosody as their model. There is some question as to how much explicit knowledge Hausa poets have ever had of the Arabic prosodic system (see 4.1), and in many respects Hausa meters do not 'behave' like the corresponding Arabic meters. But the fact that many Hausa meters derive from Arabic models, at least historically, makes it worthwhile to describe the Arabic system briefly.

The classical Arabic system was first formalized in the 8th century by al-Xaliil ibn Ahmad.⁴ In this system, there are 16 possible meters classified into five 'circles'. A 'meter' consists of a line of 'feet', the feet consisting of fixed patterns of syllables. The syllables of a foot belong either to a 'peg' (Arabic *watid*) or to 'cords' (Arabic *sabab*). 'Pegs' are either iambic (v-) or trochaic (-v) and are invariable in most positions. 'Cords' consist of a single syllable, taken as underlyingly long, but subject to shortening. The meters of a given 'circle'

are viewed as variants of a single meter type, with the foot boundaries, and hence the relative positions of the pegs and cords, shifted around the 'circle' to give the individual meters of a circle.

The underlying structure of lines in the 16 Arabic meters, with the Arabic names for the meters, are given in (5). The peg of each foot is underlined; syllable types in Arabic are essentially identical to those of Hausa shown in (1) above; / = foot boundary:

(5) Classical Arabic meters

Circle I	TAWIIL:	<u>v</u> ---/v---/v---/v---
	BASIIṬ:	-- <u>v</u> -/-v-/--v-/-v-
	MADIID:	- <u>v</u> ---/-v-/-v---
Circle II	WAAFIR:	<u>v</u> -vv-/v-vv-/v-vv-
	KAAMIL:	vv- <u>v</u> -/vv-v- /vv-v-
Circle III	HAZAJ:	<u>v</u> ---/v---/v---
	RAJAZ:	-- <u>v</u> -/-v-/--v-
	RAMAL:	- <u>v</u> ---/-v-/-v---
Circle IV	SARIIḥ:	-- <u>v</u> -/--v-/--v-
	MUNSARIḥ:	-- <u>v</u> -/---v-/---v-
	XAFIIF:	- <u>v</u> ---/--v-/-v---
	MUḌAARIḥ:	<u>v</u> ---/-v---
	MUQTADAB:	--- <u>v</u> -/--v-
	MUJTAḥḥ:	-- <u>v</u> -/-v---
Circle V	MUTAQAARIB:	<u>v</u> ---/v---/v---/v---
	MUTADAARIK:	- <u>v</u> -/-v-/-v-/-v-

These underlying meters are subject to a variety of alterations, called *zihaafaat* and '*ilal*'. Essentially, *zihaafaat* are rules which shorten cords to v, and '*ilal*' are rules which shorten pegs to -. We

can roughly summarize the variations on underlying meters as a set of constraints, seen in (6), and a set of 'correspondence rules' (see Maling (1973) for a complete set of generative rules and a summary of al-Xalil's system):

(6) Impossible sequences in Arabic meters

- a. *v v v v
- b. *-----
- c. *v # (# = end of a line)⁵

The correspondence rules in (7) cannot apply where application would lead to a violation of any of the constraints in (6):

(7) Summary of correspondence rules (*zihaafaat* and '*ilal*')

- a. A cord may be shortened, e.g. --v- may become v-v- or -vv-
- b. Line final cords may be deleted following an iambic peg, i.e. -v--# may become -v-#; v--- may become v-- or even v-
- c. A peg may be shortened to - in a line final foot, e.g. vv-v-# may become vv--#
- d. A line initial iambic peg may be shortened to -, e.g. #v-- may become #-
- e. An extra - may be added at the end of a line following an iambic peg, e.g. --v-# may become --v--#
- f. vv may be resolved as -, e.g. vv-v- may become --v-

4. 'Beat' and 'Measure' or 'Foot' and 'Syllable'?

Most analyses of Hausa prosody have used the Xalilian system. The most extensive discussion is Galadanci (1975), a study which has been influential, though not without its critics, e.g. Muhammad (1973: 62-65), Sipikin (1978), Junaidu (n.d.). Because of the multiple influences on Hausa poetic practice, there is probably no single

4.1. Oral sources, non-Arabic meters, and statements by poets

Muhammad (1979, 1980) lists 30–40 written poems which are based on specific oral poems. 'Based on' usually means that the metrical structure of the two is the same. In the few cases where I have recordings of both in performance, the tunes are usually impressionistically the same, though what defines a 'tune' is far from clear, so I leave this aspect of poetics for future research. We will examine one example here:

(11)

- a. ORAL: Muhamman Sarkin Tabshi Katsina, *Wakar Mulkin Kai* (ODU archive)

- | - v - | - v - | - v - | -
 Mur-naa mu-kai duu-ni-yaa taa yi daa-dii
 'Happy we are, the world gives pleasure'

- b. WRITTEN: Umaru Nasarawa, *Wakar Addu'a* (line 2a) (CSNL archive)

- / - v - / - v - / - v - / -
 Kai ad da-dai fii-la-zal kai a-kwai ka
 'You always and from time immemorial have existed'

Though the written poem could be analyzed as MUTADAARIK, with known *zhaafa* or 'ilal accounting for the initial and final -, a number of facts argue against this poem being in an Arabic meter at all. First, the poet explicitly states that his source is the oral poem in (11a), even interjecting this line of the refrain here and there in the written poem. Second, every line of the written poem scans perfectly like that in (11b). Not only does this scansion match that of the oral model, including the initial and final - syllables, but it is atypical of MUTADAARIK in Hausa practice, where the overwhelmingly most common foot types are /vv- / or /-- /, not the 'underlying' Xalilian /-v- / (see 4.2.2). On the other hand, the oral '5 meter', with measures scanning |-v- |, is one of the commonest among traditional praise singers.

In addition to written poems which have borrowed meters from oral poems, other written poems do not scan according to any Xalilian meter. An interesting example is Akilu Aliyu's *Wakar Kalubale*. Following is the second verse:

- (12) v - v v - / - - v -
 Ka cin-ci ka-cii mii yee a-bin

'Here's a riddle, what is a thing

v - - - / v v - v -
 Da kee yaa-doo ku-ma dun-ku-le?

Which is spread out but compact?'

This poem has /v-vv- /, the basic foot type of the meter WAAFIR, as the first foot in a line, but it has /vv-v- /, the basic foot type of the meter KAAMIL, as the second foot. In the Xalilian system, these meters belong to the same circle, and it would therefore be impossible for a single meter to combine the two foot types. In the Beat & Measure system, on the other hand, both foot types have the equivalent of 7 half-beats, meaning that the two measures are metrically equal. Interestingly, in the recorded oral performance by the poet, the rhythmic 'feel' is as follows:

- (13) /v-vv-v /v-vv(-v) /

i.e. there is a feel of 8 half-beats per measure, with the silence between lines equal to exactly the beats necessary to make the second measure equivalent to the first. The performed meter thus conforms to the Beat & Measure principles, though it is not that predicted from the written text (see 4.3).

A piece of evidence that poets do not arrive at their prosody by a direct application of the Xalilian system is what poets themselves say. A clear, if somewhat hyperbolic, statement is the following by Alhaji Mudi Sipikin, a prolific poet, who is himself at least conversant about Arabic meters:

A ganina babu abin da ya hada ma'aunan wakar Larabci da ta Hausa rubutacciya. Mafiya yawa daga mawaƙan rubutacciyar wakar Hausa babu wanda ya san ARULI ma'aunin Wakar Larabci balle a ce ta Larabci ya kwaikwaya ko kuma ta yi tasiri a kansa. (Sipikin 1978:63)

'In my opinion there is no relation between the meters of Arabic poetry and Hausa written poetry. For the most part among composers of Hausa written poetry no one knows anything about 'ARUD, the scansion of Arabic poetry, much less have they imitated the Arabic or has it had an influence on them.'

Though there is an obvious and documentable *historical* connection between classical Arabic meters and many of the meters modern Hausa poets use, comments by many poets in interviews recorded by Neil Skinner, and in discussion reported by Hiskett (1975:180) confirm the second part of Alhaji Mudi's claim that few poets know much about Arabic prosody.

4.2. Meters and 'deviations'

4.2.1. Arabic meters that Hausa poets use

In order to discover which Arabic-based meters Hausa poets have actually used, I worked out the meters of 396 poems from a variety of published and unpublished sources, dating from the early 19th century to the present. Sa'id (1978) made a similar count of just 19th century poems. To compare Hausa practice with Arabic practice, the table in (14) includes the figures of Vadet (1955) for pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, i.e. the poetic period upon which the Xalilian system is mainly based. Prosodists after al-Xaliil introduced meters missing from Vadet's counts.

(14)		Schuh	Sa'id (1978)	Arabic (Vadet 1955)
Circle I	ṬAWIIL	17 (4.3%)	16 (19.5%)	1701 (34.7%)
	BASIIT	27 (6.8%)	7 (8.5%)	587 (12.0%)
	MADIID	0	0	48 (1.0%)
Circle II	WAAFIR	24 (6.1%)	8 (9.8%)	561 (11.5%)
	KAAMIL	105 (26.5%)	17 (20.7%)	878 (17.9%)
Circle III	HAZAJ	2 (0.5%)	0	42 (0.9%)
	RAJAZ	24 (6.1%)	13 (15.9%)	121 (2.5%)
	RAMAL	18 (4.6%)	2 (2.4%)	154 (3.1%)
Circle IV	SARI ^c	0	0	226 (3.5%)
	MUNSARIH	1 (0.3%)	0	173 (3.5%)
	XAFIIF	9 (2.3%)	10 (12.2%)	282 (5.8%)
	MUDARI ^c	0	0	0
	MUQTADAB	8 (2.0%)	0	0
	MUJTA ⁰⁰	4 (1.0%)	0	33 (0.7%)
Circle V	MUTAQAARIB	45 (11.4%)	4 (3.9%)	90 (1.8%)
	MUTADAARIK	56 (13.9%)	5 (6.1%)	0
Known oral source		32 (8.1%)		
Unidentified		24 (6.1%)		
TOTAL		396	82	4896

Though the meters of most Hausa written poems show close similarity to Arabic meters, the frequency distributions are quite

different. The most striking fact is that Hausa poets have overwhelmingly chosen what Weil (1960:675) calls the 'simple' meters, i.e. the meters of Circles II, III, and V, where lines comprise 2-4 repetitions of identical feet. The Beat & Measure system predicts this preference since each measure should have the same number of beats, and strong and weak positions should be the same in each measure.

There are a substantial number of Hausa poems in ṬAWIIL and BASIIT from Circle I, a circle of meters which alternate feet of unequal length, though compared to Arabic, Hausa poems in these meters comprise a far smaller proportion of the total. My only explanation for the use of these meters in Hausa is that their great popularity in Arabic must have had, and probably continues to have an influence on Hausa. Note that Sa'id's figures for poetry of the 19th century, when the direct influence of Arabic was greater than it is today, reveals a proportionately greater use by Hausa poets of ṬAWIIL, the overwhelmingly most popular Arabic meter.

Circle IV meters are not 'simple' in that they alternate feet with iambic and trochaic pegs. Though the figures in (14) reveal a few poems in Circle IV meters, and Galadanci (1975) and Zaria (1978) argue that Hausa poets have used some of these meters, the only one for which there is a substantial number of unequivocal examples is XAFIIF.⁸ In Hausa, XAFIIF was essentially a 19th century meter. All Sa'id's examples are from that period, and of the 9 that I found, only two are from the 20th century. These few examples hardly qualify XAFIIF as being a meter in the mainstream of modern Hausa prosody.

In contrast to the 'non-simple' Circle I and Circle IV meters, which have been popular with Arab but not Hausa poets, the 'simple' Circle V meters have been heavily exploited by modern Hausa poets, though they were used very little (MUTADAARIK not at all) by Arabic poets in the classical tradition.

One would expect the Circle III meters, inasmuch as they are 'simple', to be more popular among Hausa poets. Interestingly, Hausa RAMAL appears to fit better as a Circle II meter than Circle III. Feet in Hausa RAMAL are virtually always realized as /-v-v-v^v/ (cf. 8), i.e. with an iambic peg in the middle and v^v or - as the cord following the peg (cf. WAAFIR, with initial peg, and KAAMIL, with final peg). HAZAJ was a rare meter in Arabic, which may account for its rarity in Hausa. Another possibility is

that, parallel to RAMAL, HAZAJ has been treated as a Circle II meter, where it would be neutralized with WAAFIR. There are many poems in RAJAZ, the remaining Circle III meter, but Hausa RAJAZ seems to differ in underlying conception from Xalilian RAJAZ. Though the underlying foot for classical RAJAZ is /-v-/, feet in Hausa RAJAZ are usually realized as either /v-v-/ or /vv-/, the two foot types most common in the popular oral '6 meter' (cf. (3) and (16) below).

In summary, most Hausa meters recognizable as having Arabic counterparts fall into the following types: those with 7 half-beats per measure (the Circle II meters plus the Hausa realizations of RAMAL and perhaps HAZAJ), one with 6 half-beats per measure (RAJAZ), those with 5 half-beats per measure (the Circle V meters), and one with 4 half-beats per measure (MUTADAARIK in its most common Hausa realization—see 4.2.2).

4.2.2. Hausa 'deviations'

The 'correspondence rules' outlined in (7) would appear to account for many of the surface forms of various Xalilian meters used in Hausa. However, close examination of Hausa prosodic practice suggests that these rules are not the best way to account for the facts. I have mentioned above the virtual equivalence of vv and - in Hausa (cf. (8) and discussion), an equivalence not provided for in the Xalilian system but predicted by a system which seeks to retain beat equivalence between measures.

The most common 'deviation' in Arabic poetry is cord shortening. In Hausa, the 'shortened' cords appear to be basic. An interesting case is Hausa MUTADAARIK, which Arnott (1975:25) notes as scanning, in its most common Hausa realization, /vv- / vv- / vv- / vv-.⁹ Consider the following example from Abubakar Ladan's *Wakar Hada Kan Al 'ummar Afirka* (verse 3):

- (15) - - / v v - / - - / - -
 a. *Sun bin-ci-ka sir-rin koo-gin-mu,*
 'They investigated the secret of our river,
 v v - / v v - / v v - / - -
 b. *Da a-bin da ka boo-ye a daa-zun-mu,*
 And what was hidden in our forests,

- v v - / v v - / v v - / - -
 c. *Da wa-dan-da ka bis-ne du-waa-tsun-mu,*
 And what was buried in our rocks,
 - - / v v - / v v v v / - -
 d. *Can kas su-ka gaa-ne ma-'a-di-nam-mu,*
 There in the ground they recognized our resources,
 v v - / v v - / - - / - -
 e. *Ha-ka sun na-za-rin dab-boo-bin-mu.*
 Likewise they studied our animals.'

By taking /vv- / as the basic foot type combined with the Hausa equivalence vv = -, we can analyze this as a '4 meter', with the 'strong' position being the second in the measure. In a Xalilian analysis, /-v- / would be the underlying foot, requiring that every foot in the poem undergo cord shortening (cf. 7a). Moreover, there is no straightforward way in the Xalilian system to account for the equivalence of /- - / and /vv- /.

This verse illustrates two further impossibilities for the classical system, viz. series of more than three long or three short syllables (cf. 6). Series of up to eight -'s are not uncommon in the version of MUTADAARIK illustrated in (15), and examples of four v's in a row are common in Hausa poetry, e.g. line (15d). Since the Beat & Measure system seeks to assure beat equivalence between measures rather than sequences of particular syllable types, there is nothing in principle to exclude long series of syllables of a single type. Sequences of five or more shorts are rare, probably in part because the underlying 'weak' and 'strong' positions would be obscured by such sequences, in part because uninterrupted sequences of short syllables are not common in Hausa in general.

4.3. Oral performance

Hausa poets write their poetry with the intention that it be sung, and Hausa poetry in oral performance generally has a palpable rhythm. The examples in (9) and (10) show that the length of syllables can be altered in performance where the meter demands it. This alone does not demonstrate that a Beat & Measure principle governs scansion, since Arab poets occasionally used the same licence (Wright 1967: Vol. 2, 382-83). However, there are features of performance that cannot be predicted from the basic meter in the way the lengthenings and shortenings in (9) and (10) can. These are the same features

5. Constraint (6c), which holds for both Arabic and Hausa, applies to the *metrical* value of a syllable; the *linguistic* value of line final syllables is necessarily neutralized to long. SARIIC, with final foot /---v/, appears to contradict this constraint, but in practice the final foot is always modified to either /-v- / or /-- /.
6. I first got the idea of using 'beat' as a unit of analysis different from 'syllable' from Hayes (1979).
7. This idea corresponds roughly to Weil's (1960: 675) concept of 'rhythmic stress' playing a role, along with syllabic pattern, in determining meter. I am using the terms 'strong' and 'weak' in a more informal way than they are used by Weil or in recent generative phonological work on metrics e.g., Kiparsky (1977), Prince (1984). A true *theory* of Hausa prosody will incorporate the strong and weak positions within feet as well as number of beats.
8. In (14), my counts show eight examples of MUQTADAB, only one less than the figure for XAFIIF. All these putative examples of MUQTADAB have non-Xalilian irregularities or other problems. The examples of XAFIIF, on the other hand, are virtually identical to that meter in its Arabic form.
9. Another common Hausa variant of MUTADAARIK scans as follows (Hiskett 1975: 177):

(v) { \overline{v} } - / \overline{v} - / \overline{v} - / v -

I discuss the relation between these two types of Hausa MUTADAARIK in Schuh (forthcoming).

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