

THE METER OF *IMFIRAJI*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background. *Imfiraji* is a long and continually developing poem in Hausa by Alhaji Aliyu Namangi. The theme is Islam, and the poem covers a huge variety of social issues from an Islamic point of view. Blind mendicants memorize and sing large portions of the poem. Two volumes have been published (Namangi 1972a, 1972b), and performances by various singers are available on cassette tapes.

Imfiraji derives its popularity and its power not only from its vivid and concrete portrayal of Hausa life events but also from its metrical form. The verses are quintains, with the first four lines of each verse in what appears to be the Arabic meter RAMAL (but see §2.1) and the last line in a traditional oral meter called CAJI (Yusuf 1979).¹ The use of this latter meter is surprising in religious

* I would like to thank Dr. Abba Rufa'i, Acting Director of the Centre for the Study of Nigerian languages, for inviting me to attend the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Centre and to present a paper. I was unable to attend the celebration, but I offer this paper as an expression of my appreciation. In addition, my thanks go to A. Neil Skinner for extensive discussion and correspondence on Hausa poetry and to Professor Kabir Galadanci for introducing me to the blind singers at K'ofar Wambai, Kano where I was able to record them performing parts of *Imfiraji*. Professor Galadanci may disagree with some or all of my analysis, but his work on Hausa meter has stimulated my own research by the precision with which he has presented a theory which can be tested against the data, a mark of all good science.

¹ Alhaji Aliyu explicitly acknowledges the influence of CAJI:

Wanga taaliifii da naa ji,
Waak'e-waak'en maasu caaji,
Nai wa 'yaataa cee Ajuuji,
Sai na saa mata "Imfiraaji",
Mai yinta ba zai bak'in cikii ba.
(*Imfiraji*, Book 1, Verse 66)

'This composition which I have heard
The songs of "caji" singers,
I recited it to my daughter, Ajuji,
And I put to it (the name) "Imfiraji",
He who sings it will not be unhappy.'

This verse suggests that the entire form is that of CAJI, not just the final line. Yusuf (1979:20-21) claims that the CAJI style *is* RAMAL. However, neither his analysis nor his examples sustain this claim. CAJI songs are typically in couplets, the first line of which resembles RAMAL, but usually with irregularities, unlike Alhaji Aliyu's absolutely regular meter. (Recordings of CAJI songs, along with the instrumental accompaniment which they always have, may clear up the apparent

poetry because the Islamic reformers of the 19th century considered traditional oral poetry to be profane and heretical, being devoted as it was (and still is) to worldly themes such as praise of rulers or other powerful figures, inspiration for occupational and performing groups such as butchers or boxers, bawdy compliments to prostitutes, etc. Indeed, the Islamic reformers consciously adopted Arabic meters for their poems, and almost all religious poetry continues to be composed in meters of Arabic origin.

I raise two questions about the meter of *Imfiraji* in this paper: (1) Is Alhaji Aliyu really using the Arabic RAMAL meter? (2) What structural characteristics of the RAMAL (if indeed this is RAMAL) and CAJI meters allow them to be successfully combined?

1.2. Example verses and scansion. Before proceeding with the analysis, I present a few verses of "Imfiraji", with their scansion to the right. Doubled vowels represent long vowels, letters followed by apostrophes are glottalized. In the scansion, v = short syllable and - = long syllable. The traditional Arabic foot boundaries for RAMAL are represented by slashes:

- | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) a. | Saadik'in maganaa na saamuu, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| b. | Nii ga Mansur Mallamimmu, | - v - - / - v - - ² |
| c. | Naa had'aa shi a gargad'immu, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| d. | Allah k'addara saaduwammu, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| e. | A gidan da ba zaa mu rarrabaa ba. | vv - vv - v - v - - |
| | | |
| (2) a. | Shii ya cee, "Koomee halinka, | - v - - / - v - - |
| b. | Inda an nufi zaa ka taaka, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| c. | In ya k'aaree, koo rabonka, | - v - - / - v - - |
| d. | Cii da shanka da arzikinka, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| e. | Baa aa dad'a koo rabin tak'ii ba. | - - vv - v - v - - |
| | | |
| (3) a. | Baa ka kaasa isaa rabonka, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| b. | Baa ka k'eetare arzikinka, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| c. | In da sauran raayuwarka, | - v - - / - v - - |
| d. | Sai a saa cuutaa jikinka, | - v - - / - v - - |
| e. | Ba ka waayi garii da laafiyaa ba. | vv - vv - v - v - - |

irregularities of the written text alone—I have been unable to obtain any such recordings.) The second line of each couplet is what I have called CAJI. This second line, which is a distinguishing feature of CAJI, is definitely *not* RAMAL, hence my terminology.

² The final metrical position is shown here as long even though the final syllable of this, and many other lines is phonologically short. In scansion, length of line final position is neutralized in both Arabic and Hausa, though for a number of reasons, it is desirable always to treat this position as metrically long in both languages.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| (4) a. 'Yan'uwanka su keewayee ka, | - v - vv / - v - - |
| b. Jin jikii yaa lullub'ee ka, | - v - - / - v - - |
| c. Maasu jinyaa naa ta kuukaa, | - v - - / - v - - |
| d. Gaa mutum yaa kaasa harkaa, | - v - - / - v - - |
| e. Sai wanda jikii ba yan rasaa ba. | - - vv - v - v - - |
- (Imfiraji, Book 3, Verses 9-12)

Translation:

- (1) a. The reliable testimony which I got,
 b. Myself, from Mansur, our teacher,
 c. I have put it together with our admonition.
 d. May Allah ordain our reunion,
 e. In the home from which we will never separate.
- (2) a. It was he who said, "Whatever your character may be,
 b. Wherever it is intended that you will go to your (ultimate fate),
 c. When it's over, regardless of your share (of the world's goods),
 d. Your food, your drink, your wealth,
 e. It will not be increased by even half a handful.
- (3) a. You will not fail to arrive at your final reward,
 b. You will not take your wealth across.
 c. If there is something remaining of your life,
 d. Then your body will be afflicted with disease,
 e. You will not see the next day in good health.
- (4) a. Your friends and family will surround you,
 b. A feeling of sickness will enfold you,
 c. Those caring for you will be crying,
 d. There's the person, incapable of activity,
 e. Except that which any (living) body would not lack."

2. Hausa Poetic Meter: the Arabic System and an Alternative

2.1. Arabic meters and RAMAL. According to the traditional system of Arabic scansion formalized in the 8th century by al-Xaliil ibn Ahmad, there are sixteen poetic meters (see Weil (1960) and Maling (1973) for a full summary of these meters). This system has been applied to Hausa meters, with only slight modification, in Galadanci (1975). A meter is defined by a recurring pattern of long and short syllables, where a *long* syllable is CVC or CVV (VV = long vowel) and a *short* syllable is CV (V = short vowel). As it happens, this is the exhaustive syllable inventory of both Classical Arabic and Hausa.

Meters are grouped into one of five "Circles", where a *Circle* is defined by an infinitely recurring pattern, and the meters within a Circle are defined by where *foot* boundaries are placed in this pattern. Thus, the *Circle II* meters have the pattern in (5a), with the meter WAAFIR having the foot boundary placement in (5b) and the meter KAAMIL that in (5c). The *Circle III* meters have the pattern in (6a), with the meter HAZAJ having the foot boundary placement in (6b), the meter RAJAZ that in (6c), and the meter RAMAL that in (6d):³

- (5) a. Circle II: v - vv - v - vv - v - vv - v - vv - v - vv -
 b. WAAFIR: /v - vv - /v - vv - /v - vv - /v - vv - /v - vv - /
 c. KAAMIL: /vv - v - /vv - v - /vv - v - /vv - v - /
- (6) a. Circle III: v - - - v - - - v - - - v - - - v - - -
 b. HAZAJ: /v - - - /v - - - /v - - - /v - - - /v - - - /
 c. RAJAZ: /- - v - /- - v - /- - v - /- - v - /
 d. RAMAL: /- v - - /- v - - /- v - - /- v - - /

Looking back now at lines (a-d) in the verses from *Imfiraji* numbered (1-4), we can see that some of the feet clearly scan as RAMAL, viz. the second foot of every line (making the adjustment noted in fn. 2) and the initial feet in lines 1b, 2a, 2c, 3c, 3d, 4b, 4c, 4d. However, of the sixteen initial feet in these lines, half have the scansion /- v - vv/, viz. 1a, 1c, 1d, 2b, 2d, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4a. The equivalence of these two scansions for the first foot in lines (a-d) is true throughout the whole of *Imfiraji*, i.e. it is not an aberration particular to these sample verses.

The Xalilian system of Arabic scansion allows for a number of "deviations" from the underlying forms for the meters illustrated in (5-6). The way these deviations have been traditionally described is hopelessly complex and misses many obvious generalizations. Maling (1973) attempts to make some sense out of the system, and Schuh (1988:223) suggests a rather simple system combining just six rules together with output filters which accounts for nearly all the facts. Actually, only one "deviation" need occupy us here, namely "/vv/" may always be replaced by "-". In both the Circle II meters, this resolution for the /vv/ position is frequent in both Arabic and Hausa. On the other hand, the opposite resolution, i.e. substituting vv in place of / - /, is not allowed in the Arabic system. At the very least, then, Alhaji Aliyu has deviated from the Arabic system by introducing this latter resolution for / - / in at least one position in the first foot of a RAMAL line.

³ These are the only Circles of interest for this paper. See Weil (1960) or Maling (1973) for full discussion of the meters in Arabic, Galadanci (1975) for an adaptation to Hausa, and Schuh (1988) for a summary.

However, I propose a more general explanation for Alhaji Aliyu's "deviation" from Arabic RAMAL. I claim that in twentieth century practice, Hausa poets make no distinction between Circle II and Circle III meters. For modern Hausa poets there is a single pattern, shown in (7), from which meters can be constructed corresponding historically to both Arabic Circle II and Circle III ($\underline{vv} = vv$ or $-$):

(7) $v - \underline{vv} - v - \underline{vv} - v - \underline{vv} - v - \underline{vv} - v - \underline{vv} - \dots$ etc.

This claim entails the *equivalence* in Hausa poetry of vv and $-$ in at least some positions, unlike the Arabic system, which allows $/vv/ \rightarrow -$, but not the reverse. This equivalence is part of the metrical system of Hausa traditional song, and there is evidence that it applies elsewhere in Hausa meters of Arabic origin (see, for example, Schuh 1987). Note that the alternating positions filled by $-$ do not permit substitution of vv . I will return to this in §2.2.

I mentioned above that the resolution of $/vv/$ by $-$ is common in the Circle II meters, WAAFIR and KAAMIL. One can look at this in either of two ways: (i) it is the substitution of $-$ for underlying $/vv/$, as the Arabic system would have it, or (ii) it is free use of either vv or $-$ in this position. To claim (ii) is the same thing as claiming that there is no distinction between Circle II and Circle III meters, since there would be no more reason to say that $-$ replaced vv in Circle II than to say that vv replaced $-$ in Circle III. If (ii) is correct, a prediction that arises is that there will be no Hausa poems where the positions in question are obligatorily filled by $-$, as in the Arabic Circle III meters.

This, in fact, seems to be the case. In an inventory of the meters of about 400 Hausa poems (see Schuh (1988:228) for counts of the various meters), I found 105 poems in KAAMIL and 26 in WAAFIR.

I found no examples of HAZAJ, the Circle III counterpart of WAAFIR. (Schuh (1988:228) shows two examples of HAZAJ and 24 of WAAFIR; subsequent examination showed those categorized as HAZAJ both to be WAAFIR.)

I found 24 poems in what could be categorized as RAJAZ, the Circle III counterpart of KAAMIL, but nearly all these have feet which resolve the first position as v , i.e. $/v - v -/$, a possible resolution in Arabic as well. None, as far as I can tell, resolve this position as vv , and only one requires $-$ throughout.⁴

I found 18 poems which I categorized as "RAMAL". The influence of Alhaji Aliyu's innovative meter is evident in that seven of these, one of which is *Imfiraji*

⁴ This is Said (1973), a poem composed by a student of Hausa poetry who was performing in part an exercise in writing a poem without "deviations" (Bello Said, personal communication).

itself, use his combination of several lines of "RAMAL"⁵ with the "vv" resolution in the first foot and a final line of CAJI. Six use "RAMAL" with the "vv" resolution but with no CAJI line. Three are equivocal as being RAMAL at all, having many "deviant" lines which prevent a clear description of the scansion. Only two have apparently "pure" Arabic RAMAL, as outlined in (6d). These are both 19th century Islamic reform poems, composed at a time when Hausa poets were consciously imitating Arabic models.

In summary, HAZAJ and RAMAL in the Arabic sense are essentially non-existent in Hausa. Rather, Hausa uses meters derived from the pattern in (7), which collapses the Arabic Circles II and III in (5a) and (6a) respectively. HAZAJ and WAAFIR, whose foot boundary placements coincide in the Arabic Circles, thus fall together. One is led to call all Hausa poems composed in this meter "WAAFIR" rather than "HAZAJ" because of the appearance of vv in the third foot position.⁶ For the same reasons, RAJAZ should fall together with KAAMIL, and poems in this meter should be called "KAAMIL". This may well be the case, but there is a significant number of poems in unambiguous RAJAZ. However, this meter can be identified by the distinctive /v - v -/ foot, which removes it from the meters associated by patterns 5a, 6a, and 7.

Hausa does have a unique meter which may be called "RAMAL", but which differs from Arabic RAMAL in allowing feet of the type /- v - vv/. If we replace Arabic Circles II and III with the single pattern in (7), this meter falls out naturally by placing the foot boundaries two positions to the right of "WAAFIR" (the combination of Arabic WAAFIR and HAZAJ) or one position to the right of "KAAMIL" (the combination of Arabic KAAMIL and RAJAZ).

By this technique, the pattern in (7) should allow a fourth meter, viz. one with feet of the type /- vv - v/. However, this meter would be impossible in Hausa, as it is in Arabic, because neither language allows a meter with an obligatory final short syllable. Or, perhaps it would be better to say that neither language allows any two meters to be distinguished on the basis of the length of the final position

⁵ *Imfiraji* and four of the other poems examined have quintains, with four lines of "RAMAL" and one of CAJI. One has quatrains with three lines of "RAMAL", and one has triplets with two lines of "RAMAL".

⁶ Galadanci (1975:12) gives the following example of HAZAJ (referred to as "Hajaz" in his article):

Habaa ai naa sanii harkaa ta kirkii,	v - - - / v - - - / v - -	'Hey, I know kind actions,
Munaa nan ai ba zaa ai ban da muu ba.	v - - - / v - - - / v - -	We are present, it won't be done without us.'

Galadanci does not give the source of this example, but I suspect that if the full poem were examined, it would turn out to be WAAFIR. As pointed out, resolution of vv by - in Circle III meters is common, so that one expects lines like these in WAAFIR. Moreover, the final foot is truncated to /v - -/. This is a characteristic of nearly all Hausa poems in WAAFIR. According to Wright (1967, Vol. II, p. 363) it was obligatory in Arabic for WAAFIR lines with three feet. The account in Wright suggests that lines in HAZAJ consisted only of two feet in Arabic.

of a line, from which it would follow that the foot final position should always be long. This restriction explains why the line final feet of *Imfiraji* are always /- v - -/, never */- v - vv/, viz. the final "v" here would be metrically "-", resulting in the impossible foot type */- v - v-/.⁷

At the end of §1.1, I proposed to answer two questions about the meter of *Imfiraji*, the first of which was whether Alhaji Aliyu is using RAMAL in the first four lines of each verse. The answer is "yes" and "no". If by "RAMAL", we mean the pattern derived from the Hausa adaptation of Arabic meters outlined above, the answer is "yes". If, on the other hand, we mean by "RAMAL" the meter described in the Xalilian system for Arabic, the answer is "no".

2.2. An alternative account of Hausa meters. Up to this point, I have tacitly assumed the basic correctness of the Xalilian approach to metrical analysis, i.e. the concept of an infinitely recurring pattern with the location of foot boundaries in that pattern being the defining feature of a particular meter. Moreover, I have been tacitly assuming the correctness of the basic Arabic foot shapes, i.e. "WAAFIR/HAZAJ" /v - vv -/, "KAAMIL/RAJAZ" /vv - v -/, and "RAMAL" /- v - vv/.

In this section I will briefly outline the application of an alternative theory of metrical analysis to Hausa verse. This theory had its origin in work by Halle & Keyser (1966). I refer to a recent version of the theory presented in Prince (1989). For convenience, I will call this the "modern" theory. In this theory, a line of poetry comprises a series of alternating *strong* (S) and *weak* (W) *Metrical Positions* (MP). These MP's are combined pairwise into *feet* (F), themselves alternating S and W. The feet are combined pairwise into *Metrons* (M), and the metrons into a line. The result is a binary branching tree. As an example, we may take line (1a):

⁷ The restriction against requiring a syllable to be short in line final position is overwhelming observed in Hausa poetry. One does, however, occasionally find instances where line final short is required. It is fairly common in poems by Alhaji Ak'ilu Aliyu in a meter which I call "Anti-MUTADAARIK" in Schuh (1987). This meter has feet of the type /- vv/, and Alhaji Ak'ilu not infrequently uses a /- vv/ foot in non-final lines of a verse, though never verse final, e.g.

Kin ban haushii, tsaawaa zan miki, - - / - - / - - / - v v	'You frustrate me, I'll scold you,
Doomin kin mini zancen k'aryaa. - - / - v v / - - / - -	Because you've told me nothing
("Yar Gagara", Verse 30 in Aliyu (1976))	but lies.'

METRON:	S				W			
	/		\		/		\	
FOOT:	S		W		S		W	
	/	\	/	\	/	\	/	\
MP:	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
	-	v	-	vv	-	v	-	-

(1) a. Saa-di-k'in ma-ga-naa na saa-muu

We may note that the Xalilian and the "modern" theory are comparable at one level, viz. *feet* in the Xalilian theory correspond to *metrons* of the modern theory. Below this level, however, the two theories are fundamentally different and make different predictions. In Schuh (1987), I argued that the modern theory allows a simple, unified account of a number of facts for the meter MUTADAARIK which the Xalilian analysis fails to account for in a coherent way. The differences between the accounts of the two theories for "RAMAL" (at least in its typical Hausa realization) are not as radical as those for MUTADAARIK, but I point out a couple of differences where I believe the modern theory provides the more perspicuous analysis. First, we have a simple account of why *vv* and *-* are equivalent in Hausa in some positions but not others, viz. this equivalence holds in just *weak* MP's which are not line final (for some meters for some poets, it even holds line final within a verse—see fn. 7). In *strong* MP's, *-* and only *-* is permitted.⁸ The Xalilian system, which does not use the concept of Metrical Position, but rather has a complex system referring to "cords" and "pegs", must describe resolutions through a combination of reference to specific meters, contiguity to pegs, and other factors.

A second feature of the modern theory brings us to the next section of the paper.

3. Why are RAMAL and CAJI Compatible?

The second question posed at the end of §1.1 is what structural features of RAMAL and CAJI allow them to be combined—combined so successfully, in fact, that a number of other poets have composed poems with this pattern, as noted above. Under the traditional Arabic analysis, there is no reason to expect this combination to work and certainly no principled way to derive it—the CAJI line is simply tacked on at the end of each verse. The fundamental building block in the Arabic system is the foot, and since the combinations of foot types are defined by the recurrent patterns which define the circles, only certain combina-

⁸ At least some Hausa poets occasionally use *vv* in a S MP (see Schuh (1987) for a couple of examples), but this is rare indeed.

tions of feet are possible. The CAJI line cannot even have an analysis under this system.

The "modern" system takes the MP as its fundamental building block and defines feet and higher units by successive binary combinations of elements from the next lower level. Using this system, we can not only arrive at an analysis which makes the RAMAL and CAJI lines comparable and compatible, but we can provide a reason for the rhythmic appeal of this metrical combination. I have already hinted at the analysis by the way I laid out the scansion of the lines in (1-4). To provide a more graphic display, I repeat the RAMAL line (1d) and the CAJI line (1e) with a shared metrical tree up to the foot level:

(1) d.	Al	-la	k'ad-	<u>da-ra</u>	saa-du-	wam-	mu		
MP:	S ₁	W ₂	S ₃	W ₄	S ₅ W ₆	S ₇	W ₈		
	\	/	\	/	\	/	\		
FOOT:	S	W	S	W					
	/	\	/	\	/	\	/		
MP:	W	S ₁	W ₂	S ₃	W ₄	S ₅ W ₆	S ₇	W ₈	
	}								
	e.	<u>A gi</u> -dan	<u>da</u>	ba	zaa	mu	rar-ra	-baa	ba

By comparing the lines in this way, we can see three differences between them: (1) CAJI has an initial W absent in RAMAL; (2) the second MP (marked with subscript "2") is filled by a single short syllable in RAMAL but by vv in CAJI; (3) the fourth MP is filled by a single short syllable in CAJI but by vv in RAMAL.

The modern theory provides for "extrametrical" positions at the extremities of lines, i.e. W positions not part of the meter proper and hence not attached to higher levels of the metrical structure. When in line initial position as in the CAJI lines, the extrametrical W corresponds to an "upbeat" in music. In sung performances of *Imfiraji* (and presumably other poems in the same meter), a device that performers typically use is to "link" lines d and e using this extrametrical position. Thus, there will be a pause after lines a-c, but line d will lead directly into line e with no pause. This practice corresponds in music to some phrases ending in a rest before continuing with the next phrase on the downbeat, while other phrases will fill the position corresponding to the rest with an upbeat leading into the next phrase.⁹

⁹ I should point out that this "canonical" style of performance is not rigidly followed in extended recitation. Religious poetry is never performed with instrumental accompaniment, so performers are not bound by an externally imposed rhythm. To avoid monotony, they often vary the performance pattern when the sense of the text suggests it, sometimes connecting lines a-d or pausing before line e.

Once we have removed the extrametrical W in the CAJI line from consideration, the other two differences in the RAMAL and CAJI lines can be seen as a simple reversal of the syllable types which fill the first two W's of a line. The effect is to provide rhythmic variety while maintaining the overall metrical structure. The change in rhythm in the last line serves to signal the end of a verse much as a musical cadence signals the end of a phrase.

4. Conclusion

In composing *Imfiraji*, Alhaji Aliyu Namangi has not only created a poetic work which itself is performed by hundreds of singers, he has also crafted a metrical pattern which other poets have adapted to their original works.¹⁰

In this paper I have shown how he has taken a meter of Arabic origin, but adapted to a Hausa system, and has combined this in both an artistically and linguistically interesting way with a native Hausa meter with which it is rhythmically compatible. Moreover, I have shown that although the RAMAL meter is indisputably of Arabic origin, use of the Xalilian system devised for scansion of Arabic meters fails to account for the way RAMAL is realized in Hausa practice, it fails to provide a coherent overall system which accounts for *Hausa* practice in the use of meters of Arabic origin, and it obscures the clear relationship between RAMAL and CAJI which has allowed Alhaji Aliyu to combine them. As an alternative to the Xalilian system, I briefly outlined a system based on principles of modern metrical phonology which I believe goes far toward an integrated account of Hausa meters from both Arabic and native origins.

¹⁰ Inasmuch as Alhaji Aliyu bases his form on the style of CAJI singers, one could say that it is they who have influenced these other poets. However, the direct influence is clearly from Alhaji Aliyu for most of these poets, both through the publication of his works and from the widespread public performances of *Imfiraji* itself. See Yusuf (1979:26-27) for an account of Alhaji Aliyu's use of the CAJI meter.

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