The Grammar of Knowledge in Maaka (Western Chadic, Nigeria)

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Knowledges or knowledge traditions should be imagined in the plural [...] Knowledges may be divided into explicit and implicit (or tacit), pure and applied, local and universal. Although histories of skills are rarely written, ‘Knowing how’ clearly deserves a place alongside ‘knowing that’. In similar fashion, dominated or subjugated knowledges (saviors asujettis) deserve a place alongside rather than underneath dominant ones. There is a political aspect to the question, ‘what is knowledge?’ Who has the authority to decide what is knowledge? – Burke (2012: 5)

1 Introduction

In Maaka, a language of north-eastern Nigeria, the notions of knowledge and truth can be expressed in various ways, depending on the context. Indeed, the very concept of knowledge is rather complex in Maaka, and requires that we appropriately define and describe several principles first of all. For example, KNOW could be framed as volitional and agentive, and may have semantic extensions into the domain of control and possession. Other possibilities include the conceptualization of KNOW as being correlated to a perceptual process, which needs to be further specified in terms of how and under which circumstances knowledge was achieved and information gathered. This specification is articulated by means of evidential markers and epistemic and modal verbs, which help to estimate the reliability of the reported event, of the informant, or of one’s own cognitive potential in terms of grasping inherent contextual information.

There are various types of evidential and epistemic markers in Maaka, which either relate to a speaker’s knowledge and general attitude towards the truth of a proposition and
refer to the source of information – highlighting eye-witness, intuition, and so on –, or express the speaker’s certainty or doubt about the reliability of the information, regardless of the information source. Other epistemic markers encode modality and type of information, such as inferential predictability of an event or action, indirect evidence for a completed action, or joint perception.

Those constructions that refer to perception and the source of information stand in a kind of binary opposition to those that highlight certainty or doubt about the reliability of information, and that express cognition rather than perception. This opposition is also found in the predicative expression of perception and cognition, where a specialized verb expressing KNOW can be distinguished in terms of its evidential semantics from a set of verbs encoding various modalities of perception.

Table (1) illustrates how Maaka articulates the grammar of knowledge:

< place Table 1 about here >

Maaka stands out somewhat among Chadic languages in having such a complex and developed repertoire of evidential markers and epistemic modalities. These have not been described for other languages in the group, with the exception of the rather common doubt-in-truth modality (Frajzyngier 1996: 180 ff.). However, explaining the emergence of the varied system in Maaka remains problematic, as its formatives don’t derive from a common source, but have developed out of a variety of grammatical morphemes and lexical items. Still, there is no doubt that the indication of information source is particularly important in Maaka and that, at the same time, speakers tend to highlight certainty of truth and type of knowledge in other contexts.
The present contribution presents a detailed analysis of the semantics and construction types of the individual epistemic expressions in Maaka, and provides contextual information about the social history and cultural context of the grammar of knowledge in this language. All data stems from in-depth fieldwork and extensive text corpora that have been collected in the frame of a four-year interdisciplinary documentation project by the present authors and their team members.¹

1.1 Classification, location and sociolinguistic context

Maaka is a West Chadic (Afroasiatic) language of the Bole-Tangale subgroup. The Maaka are a community of some 10,000 people living in northern Nigeria not far from the town of Gombe. They inhabit two main villages, Bara and Gulani, and several hamlets around these. In principle, their ethnolinguistic identity is based on their shared Maaka language. However, many speakers are not very competent in Maaka and rather speak other Chadic languages such as Bole, Bura, Hausa or Kanuri, an unrelated Saharan language. Hence, Maaka is not the specific language of an ethnic group, but the socio-culturally marked part of a highly multilingual community’s repertoire: using Kopytoff’s (1987) model, we can characterize Maaka as the official language of a hybrid and fragile frontier society, whose various segmental groups, such as kin-groups for example, also speak several other languages. This particular pattern of multilingualism is widespread in the area. The two main dialects, Maaka and Maha, serve as markers of local identity and speakers’ association with the respective hegemonies of Bara and Gulani. In our contribution, we will focus on the language of Bara.

¹ place Map (1) about here
Most families in the village of Bara are mixed, with family members stemming from various ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Very often, people claim different ethnic and linguistic identities in different contexts, so that ‘being Maaka’ is a fluid and constantly negotiated concept. This situation is characteristic of societies who dwell at the margins of large empires, where such multi-ethnic and multi-lingual groups emerge (Kopytoff 1987). They represent part of the ‘African Frontier’, whereby they distinguish themselves from adjacent polities, while at the same time copying their nation building strategies, for example the enthronement of sacred kings. Groups like the Maaka, who constituted themselves as marginal groups at the fringes of the large empires (namely the Sultanate of Borno, the Kingdom of Kororofa, and the Hausa Emirates), are precarious ethnolinguistic communities whose members have elusive and diverse cultural and linguistic identities. This extremely multilingual and fragile group is unified and made cohesive by a shared but imaginary political unity. This is important to consider in the context of our topic, since despite the pronounced multilingual practices of the Maaka, there are specific epistemic features that are unique to Maaka that are not shared by its neighbours and cohabitants.

1.2 Typological profile

Maaka is a tone language with two tone levels (high, low) and two contour tones (falling, rising), in which tone has salient lexical role, but also fulfills grammatical functions. Maaka can be characterized as a weakly agglutinating language, with a tendency to compensate the absence of Chadic morphology by innovative compounding strategies (Coly forthcoming). Very much like other languages of the Gongola-Benue linguistic area, Maaka makes use of syntactic structures in order to make grammatical relations discernible, as salient morphological devices such as case marking are absent. The constituent order AVO/SV consequently is rather inflexible.
In the noun morphology, the historical development of morphological simplification has resulted in gender leveling in favour of the feminine (Leger 1998). Besides such phenomena of areal convergence, there are various contact-induced innovations. For example, the strong influence of Kanuri can be seen in the use of derivational suffixes such as \textit{–kùr} (< Kanuri \textit{kər}-; note that there is no convergence in terms of the morpheme order), as illustrated in the following example:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\hline
Maaka & Kanuri \\
\hline
máy-kùr & kər-mài \\
chieftaincy & ‘kingship’ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The verbal morphology in turn exhibits much more conservative and typical Chadic features (Jungraithmayr 1970, Schuh 2003), such as the nominalizer -áayò, which constructs the citation forms of transitive verbs (cf. 2). Derivational morphology, such as the construction of pluractional verbs is quite productive as well: either by infixing -\textit{k}-, or by partial stem reduplication:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\hline
(2) & tèd-áayò, pl tè-k-dáayò \\
& ‘beat s.th.’ \\
lòb-áayò, pl lò-lòb-áayò & ‘beat with the help of s.th.’ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Verbs may be either transitive or intransitive, whereby intransitive constructions may be marked by an intransitive copy pronoun (ICP) in specific contexts. This pronoun then stands after the verb and has the same features for number, gender, and person as the subject-participant of the clause (as in example 35 below). ICP constructions are widely found in Chadic, but also in Benue-Congo contact languages. In Chadic, they seem to derive from
middle voice markers (Leger & Zoch 2011), which may also play a role in Maaka. In some verbs that have cognitive meanings, for example ‘forget’, the use of the ICP and the indication of middle semantics reveal that some domains of the grammar of knowledge have to do with middle, auto-benefactive semantics. This again seems to fit into the (areal) Chadic picture, where a similar situation has been observed in Mupun (Bole-Angas branch of Chadic) by Frajzyngier (1993), who mentions that the deponent verbs ‘forget about something’ and ‘ignore something’ obligatorily require a suffixed pronoun that encodes the fact that the subject-participant also has the role of a patient or experiencer.

The affectedness of the subject in cognitive experiences and perceptual actions generally plays a role in the grammar of knowledge in Maaka, which is exemplified in the next sections.

2 Evidentiality, information source and truth

As already indicated above, Maaka generally converges to neighbouring languages in terms of its morphological and syntactic structure. But in contrast to this tendency, it clearly exhibits considerable divergence in the domain of cognition and perception. In Maaka, and specifically not in other Chadic languages of the area, it is important to indicate the speaker’s own attitude about the certainty and probability of a proposition, and this is achieved by a stunning variety of means. The evaluation of truth usually entails an indication of the information source, and there is a tendency among speakers to correlate certainty with vision. This mode of perception indeed appears to be the most authoritative information source in Maaka, which also exhibits the means for describing a gradation of vision. Other evidential markers refer to non-visual sensory information sources, such as the speaker’s intuition, and to inferred information.
What makes the definition of the choice types within the system rather problematic is that evidential markers occur with different parts of speech. The means used for encoding information source and certainty of knowledge are nominal suffixes, verbal suffixes, verbs, complementizers, adverbial expressions, and reported speech markers (besides dedicated perception verbs and other means to which we will refer in more detail below). This implies that evidential markers can have various scopes, such as speaker, patient, action or place, and that they can frame both knowledge and perception.

2.1 Evidential markers coding information source

Maaka has a complex system of demonstratives, of which one modified sub-set has developed salient evidential meanings and has largely turned into a group of bound markers indicating information source. The perceptual meanings of these nominal suffixes basically cover the range of an evidential system with three choices (Aikhenvald 2004: 42 ff., 130 f.), whereby the use of the suffixes referring to information source does not correlate with the syntactic function of the NP. Moreover, this system is restricted to specific semantic roles and to topical NPs: these evidential markers specify what the speaker knows about a particular participant, whereby such participants are hardly core participants, but rather topicalized peripheral participants that motivate an action or event.

2.1.1 Vision

The suffix –mú occurs in indicative clauses where it marks topicalized participants. It implies certainty on the part of the speaker who is absolutely sure about the inclusion of the marked participant in the event, having eye-witnessed the occasion.

The suffix may be combined with a definite marker, as in (3), which refers to negotiations in which the speaker participated. In (4), the speaker has eye-witnessed the life-
story of the topicalized participant, and in (5) the speaker has already seen the butterfly to which the addressee is directed.

(3) tô báayà-à-mú minè-ʔákkó bà máy=ʔàŋgùwà
    TOP <NAME>-DEF-VIS 1pl-do:PERV CONJ chief=<TITLE>
    As for Baaye [eye-witnessed], we dealt with Mai Anguwa.

(4) yáayà círòmà-mú nín-ní gùu=bálbiyá
    <NAME> <TITLE>-VIS mother-POSS:3sg:MASC person=<TOPONYM>
    tà-lòwó gàamódì bòncéttí
    3sg:FEM-deliver:PERV once DEM.REF
    Yaaya Ciroma [eye-witnessed]: her mother is from Balbiya town, she once gave birth there.

(5) móy pàrpàr ním mákkà-mú
    see.IMP butterfly REL Mecca-VIS
    See the butterfly from Mecca!

2.1.2 Joint perception

Reliable knowledge and truth can also be expressed by means of the suffix –diyà which indicates that both speaker and hearer know or see the participant in question. Very similar to –mú, the suffix marks patients, but these are conceptualized as being even more reliably known because there are two witnesses to the event, namely speaker and hearer, as in (6, 7).
(6) làa nàmáa-\textit{-diyà} sáy mìnè-pódí-ní gè-gòrkù-wà

child this-\textit{JOINT:VIS} must 1pl-remove:TEL\textsuperscript{2}-OBJ:3sg:MASC LOC-village-DEF

This child [whom we can both see], we must chase him from the village.

(7) ?áa-kè-díbbò zùlúm-tò-\textit{diyà}

COND-2sg:MASC-crush:PERV anus-POSS:3sg:FEM-\textit{JOINT:VIS}

tà-kwáadà-ntí-mìnê gè-ʔámmà-à

3sg:FEM-throw:TR-\textit{ASSERT}-OBJ:1pl LOC-water-DEF

If you crush her anus [that we can both see] she will definitely throw us into the water.

Even though it has been integrated in a new context where it has developed slightly different semantics, -\textit{diyà} can be identified as a loan from Kanuri, stemming from the postpositional clausal conjunction \textit{diyé} ‘surely, entirely, only’ (Schuh 2011: 137 f.). See § 4.2 for more on Kanuri loans.

\textbf{2.1.3 Assumption}

In contrast to the two former suffixes, the evidential –\textit{kà} refers to the speaker’s intuition about an event and the location where it takes place. Even though the speaker may not have any first-hand information, s/he is sure that there is a specific place where, or a causator through whom, the action takes place. In (8), the speaker utters a strong supposition about the addressee’s intended action, and in (9), it is considered that a natural phenomenon will certainly affect the core participants at a given point.

(8) ?áa-kè-góm gè-gòmà-\textit{-kà} (…)
If you go to that very market I know you go there] (…) 

When there are those very clouds I know they will be there, we cannot see the moon.

2.2 Coding the certainty of truth

This section deals with various markers, including a quotative that carries overtones of certainty, a reported marker, and two epistemic markers.

2.2.1 Speech reports

In many Chadic languages, including Hausa, Mupun, and other members of the Western branch, embedded clauses may have epistemic modalities. The most common one expresses the speaker’s attitude towards the reliability of information given in the proposition. Frajzyngier (1996: 180 ff.) has explored this in some detail, remarking on the phenomenon: ‘The markers of doubt in the truth of the proposition have sometimes been included in the literature in the class of ‘evidentials’ […] Unlike most of the evidentials, however, doubt-in-truth markers in Chadic do not encode the source of knowledge or the mode of knowing. They simply indicate lack of certainty on the part of the speaker. The doubt-in-truth markers in Chadic languages do not constitute a homogeneous grammatical category, nor can they be traced to the same historical source. Instead they appear to be innovations in particular languages or language subgroups.’

In principle, this also holds true for Maaka. Like other Chadic languages, Maaka uses a grammaticalized speech act verb to introduce reported speech, which also introduces
indirect evidence. But unlike the examples provided by Frajzyngier (1996), in Maaka the reported speech marker *nà* expresses principled certainty on the part of the speaker. Consider the following examples:

(10) ?álfì  *nà*  sû-wókkó  múśá  kò  máytà
    <NAME> QUOT 3sg:MASC-see:PERV <NAME> do  vomit:INTR.VN
    Ali said he saw Musa vomiting.

(11) sû-pòró  *nà*  sû  kò  túná
    He mâ said that he is eating.

Doubt in truth can be expressed through the complementizer *kònò*, which indicates that the reported information relates to a rumour, but not to an event that had been reliably witnessed. Hence, the sentence in (10) can be reframed as a doubt-in-truth construction as follows:

(12) ?álfì  *kònò*  sû-wókkó  múśá  kò  máytà
    <NAME> QUOT REP 3sg:MASC-see:PERV <NAME> do  vomit:INTR:VN
    There is a rumour that Ali said he saw Musa vomiting.

The scope of *kònò* is reflected in its position in a clause: if it is placed in clause-initial position (but following *nà*), its scope is the whole clause (or sentence). But when it is placed after the NP, its scope is limited to that NP. Here, the complementizer can also be used in contexts other than reported speech. It stands after the respective phrase about which the
speaker expresses uncertainty in terms of correct information or a reliable witness. Hence, *kònò* may indicate unsure information concerning the agent or object, as in examples (13) and (14):

(13) sà-ndée ɓà lìmó-wà *kònò* ɓà láà-n-tò

3sg:MASC:come:NARR CONJ camel-DEF REP CONJ child-LINK-POSS:3sg:FEM

He came with the reported camel and with its calf.

(14) shèní ndókò-n-ni-yà sà-ngéró jàmmblàm

year arrival-LINK-POSS:3sg:MASC 3sg:MASC-tie:PERV bundle

dàbú *kònò*

thousand REP

In the year of his very arrival he tied a reported thousand millet bundles.

Standing at the beginning of a clause, *kònò* indicates doubt about the truth of the entire utterance, as in (15):

(15) *kònò* dóoshé mìnéé-gòm ?áshàakà

REP tomorrow 1pl:FUT-go <NAME>

Rumour has it that tomorrow we will go to the Ashaka cement factory.

Moreover, *kònò* can be used in questions in combination with the anti-potential evidential marker *râ*. Here, even without an interrogative morpheme, both rhetorical interrogation and
surprise are expressed. In this context, the speaker has more information about the reported,
repeated event which is framed as being unlikely to happen again.

(16) kònò-râ-zo
REP-EVID.NPOT-DUR

Again? (It’s impossible!)

2.2.2 Epistemic markers

A feeling of uncertainty, or weak doubt, is expressed by means of the adverbial expression
yàayé. It refers to information one hesitates to believe in confidently, and to the speaker’s
doubts in the validity of the utterance. In most cases, this doubt-in-truth marker occurs in
clauses with ṭálá ‘maybe’.

(16) ?à kùtà-gókkò kérwá-à ṭálá pàddù yàayé
then 3pl-find:PERV fish-DEF maybe four DUB

Then they found the fish, maybe four (of them), but I doubt this is correct.

(17) ṭálá sù-mòdò yàayé
maybe 3sg:MASC-return:PERV DUB

Maybe he has returned, but I have my doubts.

There is also a marker that expresses the opposite of doubt in truth, namely the
speaker’s explicit certainty about the truth of the proposition. This is the suffix –ntí, which
constructs inferential verb forms. It indicates that the speaker is absolutely sure about his/her
assumptions, whereby the source of information is irrelevant – similar to the egophoric
markers in Kurtöp (Hyslop, this volume). In most of the examples, -ntí constructions refer to logical reason and occur in consecutive constructions that denote a series of actions, e.g. (7) above and examples (18) and (19):

(18) ?inndá mmù ?à minè-ndéré báyà mòo-yá-diýà

stand:IMP 1du then 1pl-run:NARR otherwise people-DEF-JOINT:VIS

?à dûkà-ntí-mìnê
then kill:TR-ASSERT-OBJ:1pl

Stand up! We both then run, otherwise the people we both see/know will definitely kill us.

(19) ?à tá nà tày nàmá ?iŋŋé lée mày bà páadàa

then 3sg:FEM QUOT food DET.DEM today even chief CONJ cabinet

wáŋcè-n-ni tünà-ntí-rà
DEM:pl-LINK-POSS:3sg:MASC eat:TR-ASSERT-EVID.NPOT

Then she said that as for this food today, even the chief and his advisors will definitely not eat (it).

Such forms may also have overtones of control over information, as the inferential verb form highlights the speaker’s own knowledge of the context of the event. As we shall see in the following section, evidentials in Maaka may explicitly refer to control over knowledge and ownership of information.
2.3 Coding knowledge and control

The mode of perception is a peripheral meaning of evidential markers that specifically express one’s ownership and control of knowledge. Such usages of evidential markers indicate that the speaker has precious information, which he/she shares either with the addressee or with the person referred to in the utterance. Whether this information has been obtained through seeing, hearing, or hearsay, is not directly indicated. Such egophoric (or ‘ego-modal’) concepts of controlled information are indicated by means of anti-potential verb forms which are constructed with the suffix –râ. These forms express that an action cannot be performed or that an event has very little probability of happening, whereby the speaker possesses more, as yet undisclosed context information (e.g. in 19, where the narrator knows more than us about the chief’s food). Such meanings are related to those of mirativity pronouns in neighbouring Jukun languages (Storch 2011), which express that an agent miraculously performs an action in spite of an obstacle.

(20) si-gillà rìnà-râ

3sg:MASC-be_able::IMPERV enter::INTR:VN-EVID.NPOT

He will never ever be able to enter.

The complementizer kọ̀j encodes a similar egophoric concept, of the speaker’s control over information, albeit with a different view on the event. This marker expresses the completed transformation of a situation or a referent, and the speaker’s exclusive knowledge of this fact. The speaker implies that even though every participant in the speech act knows something about the discussed event or referent, only the speaker knows that their information is now outdated. In examples (21), (22) and (23), the speaker’s view of change and transition as well as the hearer’s unprepared mind are referred to:
(21) káànàm sà-ʔawákkó bòncé bòncé béggè nàmàa-mú bà
like_this 3sg:MASC-open:COMPL:PERV DEM DEM room DEM.DET-VIS CONJ

kéekée kò-s-sú ṣgàánù kóŋ
bicycle head-LINK-POSS:3pl seven EVID.MOD

As he opened this very room, here on this visible spot there were seven individual
bicycles [and this is no longer the case].

(22) mò nàmá kóŋ kútá gè-ʔagrik kálá ʔálá mà ʔúl-sú
people DEM EVID.MOD 3pl LOC-agric but maybe people take-OBJ:3pl
táshà
station/car.park

These people were in the Agricultural Department [and this is no longer the case],
maybe people took them to the car-park (‘fired them’).

(23) mà-yá pórm-ná-t-tò nà kóŋ zùtí-ni
chief-DEF say-OBJ:1sg-LINK-OBJ:3sg:FEM QUOT EVID.MOD heart-POSS:3sg:MASC
dàmmbikínà bà ʔínà bòktì kóŋ nì-bòó-búrì
spoil:PARTIC CONJ OBJ:1sg because EVID.MOD 1sg-HAB-lie:INTR

The chief told me it [the matter] that he was very angry with me [no longer the case]
because I used to lie [no longer the case].
Maaka has another evidential that encodes exclusiveness of knowledge possessed by the speaker, but in this case, there is no reference to the speaker advancing information, but rather to a particular skill or capability. This ability singles the speaker out among other participants in the speech act, whose inability to cope is emphasized. This is achieved by the middle verb *kn* ‘be unable’ as in example (24a) and (24b):

(24)(a) kéè-kínèy


You will be unable to open it [because I’ve set a password].

(24)(b) kè-kìnàkkó

2sg:MASC-be_unable:COMPL:PERV open:TR:VN

You were unable to open it [I saw that you tried, but I’ve set a password].

When this verb is used as a participle it can express a person’s control over mystical and taboo knowledge. This is not, however, the case when the S-participant is a child or a person still in the process of maturing and learning, as in examples (25a) and (25b):

(25)(a) ADULT S/CONTROLLED KNOWLEDGE

làatù-wà kinèykíà

person-DEF be_unable:TR:PARTIC

The person has mystical knowledge.

(25)(b) Puerile S/NO CONTROLLED KNOWLEDGE

làa-yà kinèykíà
The child is stubborn.

Example (26) refers to a blacksmith’s knowledge (which has to do with the transformation of substances and concepts, such as turning ore into iron, burying the dead, curing the sick, and so on; cf. Van Beek 1992, Storch 2011b). It demonstrates that inspiration and ownership of knowledge are conceptualized according to cultural practice and taboo.

(26) sà-kinèykìnà pátfi gisò
3sg:MASC-be_unable:TR:PARTIC toward blacksmithing

He is talented in blacksmithing.

In all examples (25) and (26), the verb is constructed as a participle. Such a form, with a resultative meaning that could develop non-firsthand overtones, is found as a secondary evidential in various languages cross-linguistically (Aikhenvald 2004: 112 ff.). Here, this aspect of the development of evidentials may be marginal. What is really interesting is that the verb now expresses ‘be talented, gifted, enlightened’ instead of incompetence. And this particular ability – talent and enlightenment – is framed as the type of knowledge one cannot acquire through simple learning and imitating, but that is rather an innate part of one’s character. This knowledge is an inalienable possession, either inborn or achieved through spiritual experience. In Maaka, a mystical, illuminated person is therefore called bòbònygrá ‘reversed/metamorphosed person’, that is a person within whom inability and ignorance turn into wisdom.

3 Transmission of knowledge
The achievement of wisdom and knowledge has changed considerably through the implementation of Islamic and Western education, which only happened a few generations ago. Since social change has been rather abrupt and rigid, most Maaka either no longer know much about how mystical knowledge and practical skills were formerly taught, or as modern citizens and Muslims, they do not want to disclose information that they now associate with paganism. The verbs of teaching and learning, however, reveal that there exist different concepts of the transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

Leger (1993) observes that in Bole-Tangale languages, the verb ‘learn’ is polysemic, also encoding ‘teach, fear, try, imitate’. (For this reason, a more adequate translation might be ‘participate in transmission of knowledge’). Moreover, there is no uniform root for this verb in these otherwise close languages, and none of the roots Leger gives for Kwami, Kupto, Widala, and Piya are cognate with the Maaka root. In all of these languages, ‘learn’ is a middle verb that in principle frames the agent as patient. However, in Maaka there are slight differences. This language has two verbs for ‘transmit knowledge’, whereby only one – bùd – has full semantic resemblance with the forms Leger describes. The verb bùd frames ‘learn’ as an agentive, active, explicitly volitional practice that could involve imitation and exposition, but not secret actions. In a clause with an animate transitive object, bùd translates as ‘teach’. Compare the following examples:

(27)(a) ní kó bùdàadí

1sg do learn:TEL:INTR:VN

I’m learning.

(27)(b) ní kó bùdàadà rùbù

1sg do learn:TEL:TR:VN writing
I’m learning to write.

(28)(a) ńí kó bùdàadà-n-nì
1sg do teach:TEL:TR:VN-LINK-OBJ:3sg:MASC
I’m teaching him.

(28)(b) ńí kó bùdàadà-n-nì krà
1sg do teach:TEL:TR:VN-LINK-OBJ:3sg:MASC reading
I’m teaching him to read.

The second verb is kér and refers to the transmission of a different type of knowledge, namely special skills, taboo knowledge and mystical insights. Here, knowledge is tantamount to an inalienably possessed capacity. Teaching is directed and planned, involving work and immersion, and may disclose secrets. Outside the contexts of ritual learning, in the sense of wrong register, kér translates as ‘guide; pretend, challenge to teach’. Compare examples (29), (30) and (31):

(29) sú kó kér gisò
3sg do teach blacksmithing
He is teaching blacksmithing.

(30) ké kérà-n-nó bòk=máakà?
2sg:MASC teach::TR-LINK-OBJ:1sg mouth=Maaka
Do you pretend to teach me Maaka?
I challenge you, I can teach you Maaka!

As we have seen, information source is explicitly referred to in only a few evidentials. At the same time, different types of knowledge and different ways of transferring that knowledge may also relate to different modes of perception playing a role in the respective cognitive processes. The next section will therefore present an analysis of the various predicative devices for expressing perceptual and cognitive actions and experiences.

4 Lexical expression of perception and cognition

In many languages, perception verbs such as ‘see’ and ‘hear’ develop salient evidential and cognitive overtones (see chapter 1). In Maaka, such verbs rarely refer to knowledge, while a specialized cognition verb is used to encode the source of information. This is interesting, because Maaka has borrowed this verb from Kanuri.

4.1 Perception

Maaka has a number of terms for see. Each of these terms covers a range of meanings: vision as observation, perception, fantasy, illusion, imagination, and so on. Some of these terms are well-attested Chadic roots, while others stem from different contexts. So far, we have recorded the following lexemes denoting see:

- móy, vision as a non-deliberate, non-telic action
- w’ɔk, vision as a volitional and more telic action
- yèt ‘discern, reason, deduce’
- kàal, volitional action that involves motion of the agent
- *gòkk* ‘spot, find’
- *jind* ‘unexpected sighting’

We have found only one more perception verb, namely *sòl* ‘perceive’ which encodes SMELL, HEAR, FEEL, EXPERIENCE, OBEY, depending on the object-participant and the context (examples 32-35):

**HEAR**

(32) nàsàrà-à sòlò làbrà

European-DEF perceive:PERV news

The Europeans hear news.

**EXPERIENCE, FEEL**

(33) kè-sòlò gè-kúzùm

2sg:MASC-perceive:PERV LOC-hunger

You experience a famine.

**SMELL**

(34) s’ə-sòlò dàŋ kwám-yà

3sg:MASC-perceive:PERV smell cow-DEF

He smells the cow.

**OBEY**

(35) kè-sòlò bà dàashí kè-dèyó-n-kò mbòkùm

2sg:MASC-perceive:PERV NEG alright 2sg:MASC-sit-LINK-ICP blind
You didn’t obey, so you went blind.

This contrasts to other languages of the area, which code auditory, olfactory and gustatory perception by means of specialized verbs. For example, the verb ‘hear’ tends to have semantic extensions into emotive experience, cognition, smell and taste (Jaggar & Buba 2009). The verb tünn, which encodes ‘touch’, is hardly used as a perception verb, but as an expression of proximity. However, when a particular dish or taste is used as a complement, ‘touch’ also expresses ‘taste’.

4.2 Cognition

Instead of preserving the widespread Chadic root pVn (e.g. Kwami fönd) for ‘know’ or using a polysemic perception verb to encode cognition, Maaka here uses nòn, which is borrowed from Kanuri nongìn ‘get to know’ (Cyffer 1994: 102). In Maaka, this verb encodes a wide range of cognitive meanings, such as ‘remember, be aware of, know, recognize, be able’ (examples 36-39):

(36) ni-nònóyà gàlà=yékkú gàlà=dálá mà
1sg-know:PERV:TR <TITLE> <TITLE> also

I recall them, Gala-Yeku and Gala-Dala.

(37) kè-nòn-ntì sháàní ngè mà=bàarà
2sg:MASC-know-ASSERT habit CONJ folks=<TOPONYM>

You surely are aware of the habit of the Bara people.

(38) s’a-wà-nònò bá kàu kè-nòn-ntì
màaká-n-cé
Maaka-LINK-PL

He didn’t know [them], [but] you then for sure recognized the Maaka folks.

(39) ni-wà-nònò krà bà
1sg-NEG-know:PERV reading NEG

I don’t know how to read.

This verb can also express common knowledge as source of information. In rhetorical questions, it evokes implied answers about shared wisdom. Such idiomatic constructions always indicate that the speaker is sure of what has happened. In examples (40) and (41), the speaker refers to a habit that is common knowledge and therefore true:

(40) wònjjì lái mà nònò njéďį màará wàí
formerly INTER folks [know:PERV pay:TEL]_svc farm:INTR:VN INTER

Formerly, who would know how to pay for farming? [implied answer: clearly none of us].

(41) wònjjì lái nònò kùnyènngį wàí
formerly INTER know:PERV measuring_bowl INTER

ʔáa-kè-sòltò ʔá mà pòró nà dèlá námáá sáa
COND-2sg:MASC-hear:CAUS:PERV then people say:PERV QUOT corn IMMED IDEO
Formerly, who knew measuring bowls? [implied answer: clearly none of us] When you listened, people said: corn is like [the sound] saa...

This is the only instance in Maaka where a cognition verb expresses the source of information. However, like most of the other devices to do with the grammar of knowledge, these constructions do not highlight a source of information, but rather emphasize possession and control of knowledge, exclusively shared insights, and the common experience of truth.

5 Conclusions
Epistemic systems of languages seem to be very flexible, and loans such as nòn probably reflect changes in how people perceive and explain the world. Despite the various socio-cultural influences that motivated change in its grammar of cognition and perception, the conceptualization of knowledge and truth in Maaka remains unique and doesn’t converge areally. In sociolinguistic terms, the multilingual speakers of Maaka are able to distinguish different ways and constructions of coding truth and wisdom, obviously keeping apart singular worldviews and epistemes. And even though areal convergence is characteristic of many properties of the languages shared by this multilingual community, the speakers of Maaka prefer to keep their distinctive grammar of knowledge.

In Maaka, knowledge and truth can be conceptualized as:

- result of direct observation and affectedness (vision, joint perception, intuition);
- belief and conviction;
- possession and ownership of epistemic resources;
- control over information;
- shared insight and common experience.
We have argued that the notion of control and ownership prevails over perceptual connotations. This is somewhat idiosyncratic with regards to the more widespread semantics and functions of evidential markers and epistemic grammar cross-linguistically. Why is this so, and why has the grammar of knowledge in Maaka developed in this direction?

We suggest that the answer lies in the profile of the Maaka as a multilingual and socio-culturally hybrid community. They inhabit a small part of a vast zone that has known centuries of convergence. Group identities and boundaries are retained through exclusive ideologies, secrecy of rituals and ritual language, and the conceptualization of wisdom (enshrined in language and cultural praxis) as POWER. Under circumstances of high social and economic pressure, the protection of potentially powerful knowledge and wisdom possessed by such a group guarantees internal social coherence and superiority over possible competitors. Therefore, the perpetuation of their unique epistemic grammar and their specific conceptualization of knowledge as a means of controlling and dominating other people is a salient, decisive strategy of being Maaka.

The other side of the coin may also be relevant. The Maaka live together with similar multilingual people from various ethnolinguistic backgrounds, and use the individual languages of their repertoire in specific contexts, so that truth or knowledge encoded in Maaka has a different status than knowledge expressed in Hausa or Bole (Lüpke & Storch 2013). These multilingual speakers in the villages of Bara and Gulani are not only rich in linguistic choices and means of expressing themselves in different environments and contexts, but they are also rich in ways of perceiving the world, mentally organizing knowledge, and evaluating truth: Multilingual people have several pairs of glasses through which they can look at life.

References


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1 We are grateful to Jibril Jatau Bara, Musa A. Baba, and the people of Bara for sharing their knowledge with us, and to Herrmann Jungraithmayr, Rudolf Leger, Johannes Harnischfeger, Alessandro Suzzi-Valli for their many insightful comments, as well as to two anonymous peer-reviewers. We owe heartfelt thanks to Sascha Aikhenvald and Bob Dixon for their inspiring comments and interest in our work. Research on Maaka has been generously funded by the German Research Foundation.
The derivational morpheme -(d)í constructs telic verbs in the imperfective aspect. This form also has directional semantics, compare the ‘Destinativ-Ventiv’ in Bole-Tangale, e.g. Kwami (Leger 1994: 212 ff.).
Table (1): Maaka evidential and epistemic markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Certainty in Truth</th>
<th>Control over Knowledge</th>
<th>Scope</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>noun suffixes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>-mú vision</td>
<td>speaker certain</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>topicalized NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-diyà joint perception</td>
<td>speaker/hearer certain</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>topicalized NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kà assumption</td>
<td>speaker certain</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>topicalized NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reported speech marker</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>nà heard</td>
<td>speaker certain</td>
<td>by speaker</td>
<td>clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reported speech marker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kònò reported</td>
<td>doubt-in-truth</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>clause or NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kòg witnessed</td>
<td>speaker certain</td>
<td>exclusively by speaker</td>
<td>sentence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>adverbial</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>yàayé inferred</td>
<td>doubt-in-truth</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>verb suffixes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-ntí inferred</td>
<td>doubt-in-truth</td>
<td>by speaker</td>
<td>VP</td>
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<tr>
<td>-rà intuition</td>
<td>speaker certain to be right</td>
<td>exclusively by speaker</td>
<td>sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>verbs</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>kìn ‘be unable, possess mystical knowledge’</td>
<td>speaker/hearer certain</td>
<td>by speaker or by third person</td>
<td>clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nòn ‘know’</td>
<td>speaker/hearer certain</td>
<td>by community</td>
<td>sentence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map 1: The Maaka area