Lexical aspect classes in Goemai (West Chadic)

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses lexical aspect or *aktionsart* in Goemai, a West Chadic language of Nigeria.[1] It is concerned with the possibilities of classifying verbs on the basis of their semantics, and more specifically, on the basis of their inherent temporal-aspectual structures. In Goemai – as in many other languages – these classes are not overtly marked on the verb, but instead reveal themselves through their combinatorics, e.g., through the verb's ability or inability to participate in certain aspectual constructions. These verb classes are thus of morphosyntactic relevance. The paper reports preliminary findings from the study of Goemai (section 2), and concludes by placing the Goemai findings into a West Chadic perspective (section 3).

2. Case study: Lexical aspect in Goemai

Goemai is a West Chadic language of Nigeria. The approximately 200,000 Goemai live in the southern part of the Jos Plateau *sprachbund*, a region that is "noted for its linguistic diversity" (GREENBERG 1956: 115; see also BALLARD 1971) and that is characterized by long-lasting contact between speakers of non-related Chadic and Benue-Congo languages. As a result of this contact, these languages now share numerous linguistic features, including similarities in their lexicon (GERHARDT 1983; HOFFMANN 1970), but also convergences in their phonology and grammar (JUNGRAITHMAYR 1963b; 1980; JUNGRAITHMAYR and LEGER 1993; WOLFF and GERHARDT 1977; ZIMA 2009). Over the past decades, the pattern of contact has changed, and the Chadic language Hausa has emerged as the dominant *lingua franca* in this area.

This section is a case study of lexical aspect in Goemai. It first focuses on methodological issues (section 2.1), and then presents the results of the study (section 2.2) and summarizes the derivational possibilities (section 2.3).

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2.1. Methodology: Determining lexical aspect in Goemai

The literature proposes a number of diagnostics and test frames for the study of lexical aspect (e.g., DOWTY 1979; 1991; FOLEY and VAN VALIN 1984; LEVIN 1995; RAPPAPORT HOVAV and LEVIN 1998; VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA 1997; VENDLER 1967). These tests were modified and adapted to be used in the study of Goemai, where they serve to distinguish four lexical aspect classes: stative, activity, inchoative and result (as summarized in table 1).

Table 1: Goemai lexical aspect classes and their diagnostics

			State change	
	Stative	Activity	Inchoative	Result
Interpretation in the progressive aspect:	habitual	on-going	on-going	on-going / iterative
Progressive entails that the event has happened:	n/a	yes	yes / no	no
Time adverbs express:	duration	duration	duration / completion	completion
Interpretation of unmarked form:	present	past	past	past
Degree adverb can modify state change:	no	no	yes	yes
Resultative aspect:	no	no	continued	completed

The distribution and interpretation of the progressive aspect construction constitutes an important diagnostic, as it serves to single out all stative verbs as well as the subset of punctual result verbs. This fact is well known from the literature on lexical aspect. But in order to apply this diagnostic to a specific language, it is necessary to first understand the language-internal semantics of the progressive construction: even if its core meaning is progressive, its meaning range may differ across languages, thus resulting in different patterns of distribution. For example, stative verbs cannot occur in the English progressive (e.g., DOWTY 1979; VENDLER 1967) or in the Hausa continuative (ABDOULAYE 1992: 179-184), but they can occur in the Goemai progressive – albeit only ever with a habitual interpretation (as *t'óng* 'sit' in 1a).[2] Conversely, punctual verbs receive an iterative interpretation in

2 I use an adapted version of the practical orthography developed by SIRLINGER (1937). The following symbols may not be self-explanatory: *p'*, *t'*, *k'*, *f'*, *s'*, *sh'* = non-aspirated obstruents; *b'*, *d'* = implosives; *oe* = /ə/; *u̲* = /ʉ/, *o̲* = /ɔ/. When quoting data from other authors, I use their orthographic conventions and add plain English glosses. The following abbreviations are used in the interlinear glosses: ADV = adverb, COMIT = comitative, COND = conditional, CONJ =

the English progressive, but either an iterative or a habitual interpretation in the Hausa continuative. In Goemai, they receive an iterative interpretation (as *p'yárám* 'break' in 1b). Note that I subsume punctual verbs under result verbs. The reason is that punctual verbs – under the right conditions – can also receive a durative interpretation, i.e., I do not consider the feature of punctuality to be necessarily coded in the lexical item itself. Finally, all other verb classes receive a progressive interpretation in this construction, as illustrated by means of the activity verb *b'ụ́én* 'watch' (in 1c), the inchoative verb *b'áng* 'become red' (in 1d), and the durative result verb *sh'è* 'learn/teach' (in 1e).

(1a) *tún* *sóe* *gòe-sék,* *fụ́án* *d'è* *t'óng*
since time NMLZ(SG)-body rabbit exist(PROG) PROG

t'óng *yì* *ǹ-gòedè* *yím.*
sit(SG) PROG LOC-bottom:GEN leaf
'From that time on, the rabbit was (always) sitting under the leaves.' (F00CFUAN)

(1b) *p'yárám* *ụ́és,* *k'áu k'áu k'áu.* *Gòepé* *ní*
break(PL) bone <QUOTE> THAT/WHEN 3SG.S

k'óelếng *d'ụ́òe* *ụ́és* *góe-d'è* *t'óng*
hear/smell voice:GEN bone NMLZ-exist(PROG) PROG

p'yárám *yì (...).*
break(PL) PROG
'(He_1) broke the bone (repeatedly), *k'au k'au k'au*. When he_2 heard the sound of the bone that was breaking (repeatedly) (…).'
(F00CAAS)

(1c) *Gòe-pèp* *lú* *múk* *t'ò̀ng*
NMLZ(SG)-master:GEN settlement 3SG.POSS sit(PROG)

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conjunction, CONS = consequence clause, DEF = definite article, EMPH = emphasis, F = feminine, FOC = focus, FUT.DEF = definite future, GEN = genitive, I = independent pronoun, INTERR = interrogative, IRR = irrealis, LOC = locative, LOC.ANAPH = locative anaphor, LOG.SP = speaker logophoric, M = masculine, NEG = negation, NMLZ = nominalizer, NP = noun phrase, O = object, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PROG = progressive, REDUP = reduplication, S = subject, SG = singular, SEQ = sequential, SVC = serial verb construction. The free translation is followed by an identifier that links the example to the Goemai corpus archived with the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.

t'óng ***b'uén*** *nì* *yì.*
PROG watch 3SG.O PROG
'His master sat watching him.' (F00CAAS)

(1d) *hàngòed'è=hók* *d'è* *t'óng* ***b'áng*** *yì.*
water=DEF exist(PROG) PROG become.red PROG
'The water is turning red.' (= said while witnessing water turning from clear to red) (B01NDPPROG-083)

(1e) *d'è* *t'óng* ***sh'è*** *réép* *múk* *yì*
exist(PROG) PROG learn/teach girl(SG) 3SG.POSS PROG
'(He) is teaching his girl.' (R00ABUSY)

Activity, inchoative and durative result verbs thus all receive an on-going activity or state change interpretation when occurring in the progressive construction. But they differ in their entailments. Activity verbs are atelic, i.e., they do not move towards an inherent endpoint. This means that a progressively expressed event entails that the event has already happened. For example, even if this event is interrupted for some reason, it is still considered to have taken place. These verbs therefore allow for a continuation such as in (2a). This is not the case with result verbs: they are telic, i.e., they culminate in an endpoint (the point when something is 'broken' in 1b, 'learned' in 1e, or 'seized' in 2b). In the progressively coded event, this endpoint is not yet reached. Hence, they only allow for a continuation such as in (2b). Finally, inchoative verbs show variation. They usually behave like activity verbs, as something can redden and then continue to redden a bit further (in 2c). However, it is also possible to specify or imply an endpoint, and in this case, they pattern with result verbs. For example, *f'yér* 'become big' receives a default interpretation of 'become grown up' whenever it is predicated of humans (as in 2d).

(2a) *d'è* *t'óng* *b'uén* *jáp* *yì,* *à* *bì*
exist(PROG) PROG watch children(PL) PROG FOC thing

gòe-sá *tóe* *ní* *b'uén* *muèp* *d'èmt'éi*
NMLZ-make EMPH 3SG.S watch 3PL.O already
'(She) is watching the children – that's the reason (why) she has already watched them.' (A-23/04/04)

(2b) *d'è* *t'óng* *b'áám* *sóól* *yì,* *àmmá*
exist(PROG) PROG seize metal/money PROG but

b'áám *t'éi* *bá*
seize yet NEG
'(He) is seizing the money, but (he) hasn't seized (it) yet.' (A-20/04/04)

(2c) *d'è* *t'óng* *b'áng* *yì,* *só* *b'áng*
exist(PROG) PROG become.red PROG so become.red

d'èmt'éi
already
'(It) is turning red, that means (it) has already turned red.' (A-25/05/04)

(2d) *là* *múk* *d'è* *t'óng* *f'yér* *yì,*
child(SG) 3SG.POSS exist(PROG) PROG become.big(SG) PROG

àmmá *f'yér* *t'éi* *bá*
but become.big(SG) yet NEG
'Her son is growing, but (he) hasn't grown up yet.' (A-25/05/04)

A similar kind of distribution is attested in the environment of time adverbs. Depending on the lexical aspect class, the verb can co-occur with adverbial phrases that express either duration (as the atelic activity expression in 3a) or completion (as the telic result verb in 3b).

(3a) *mụààn* *mụààn* *áwà* *gòemé*
go(SG) going(SG) hour one
'(He) traveled for one hour.' (A-18/02/00)

(3b) *sh'è* *bì=hòk* *ǹd'ùùn* *áwà* *gòemé*
learn/teach thing=DEF INSIDE:GEN hour one
'(She) learned the thing in one hour.' (A-18/02/00)

Another diagnostic is the interpretation of verbs unmarked for tense, aspect or modality. For Niger-Congo languages, WELMERS (1973: 346-347) has already noted that the interpretation of such unmarked verb forms depends on their lexical aspect. Similarly in Goemai, where stative verbs receive a default present tense interpretation under these conditions (as *d'yám* 'stand' in 4a), while all other verbs receive a default past tense interpretation (as *b'áng* 'become red' in 4b).

(4a) *Ńdè d'yám pu̱ánáng ǹk'óng mén (...).*
one/other stand(PL) there/yonder BACK 1PL.POSS
'Others stand over there behind us (…).' (D01NTREE)

(4b) *Kàt là góe=ná lá-t'éng=hók*
maybe COND 2SGM.S=see child(SG):GEN-tree=DEF
b'áng ńt'ìt (...).
become.red well
'If you see (that) the fruit has become thoroughly red (…).'
(P00DCROPS)

Finally, there are two diagnostics that serve to single out state-change verbs. First, only state-change verbs can be modified by a degree adverb (as in 5).

(5) *Àmmá kán ǹdùní bá.*
but become.inclined much/many NEG
'But (it) didn't incline much.' (M00ANDISPOS5)

And second, only state-change verbs can be marked for resultative aspect. The resultative is sensitive to different phases of the state-change event: the inchoative phase and the result state. When an inchoative verb occurs in it (such as *sù* 'start to run' in 6a) the resulting interpretation is a continuation of the state. Since inchoative verbs lexicalize the initial boundary of an event (i.e., getting into a state), the resultative particle codes the termination of this initial boundary. With result verbs (as *páár* 'send' in 6b), by contrast, the resulting interpretation is a completion of the event. Since these verbs lexicalize the final boundary, the resultative particle expresses the termination of this boundary.

(6a) *Yár=hók zák sù kàm*
bird=DEF also/however run(SG) RESULT
'And the bird also runs (i.e., it has started to run and is now in the state of running).' (R99DFROG)

(6b) *mu̱èp páár nì kàm ǹ-Jôs*
3PL.S send 3SG.O RESULT LOC-<PLACE.NAME>
'They have sent her to Jos (i.e., the sending event is over, and she is in Jos now).' (A-14/02/00)

To summarize, the discussion above has shown that verbs pattern differently under the different diagnostics. These diagnostics thus serve to single out certain verbs from other verbs, and a combination of all diagnostics allows us to classify Goemai verbs into four distinct lexical aspect classes: stative, activity, inchoative and result.

2.2. Results: Lexical aspect classes

The diagnostics introduced in section 2.1 were used in elicitation sessions with two Goemai speakers to systematically test 176 verbs for their lexical aspect. This elicited data was cross-checked and supplemented with data from the corpus of natural texts, taking into account information on another 300 verbs. Table 2 summarizes the results: it presents each of the four classes, and illustrates their distribution over various lexical fields. The most striking result here is that Goemai predominantly lexicalizes verbal concepts as state-change verbs – there are only very few stative and (unambiguous) activity verbs.

Table 2: Distribution of lexical aspect classes across the verbal lexicon

Stative (exhaustive list)	
• evaluation, fitting, comparison	*byèt* 'be too weak (for)', *d'óng* 'be good (for)', *k'è* 'be sufficient (for)', *mà* 'be better than', *mì* 'be related to', *nyán* 'be bad (for)', *sén* 'be taboo (for)', *sh'áng* 'be pleasant (for)', *sh'ín* 'be pitiful (for)', *wán* 'be lacking (for)'
• internal experience	*fén* 'be surprised', *lúút* 'be afraid (of)', *nyáng* 'hate, disagree', *zèm* 'like, agree'
• natural property	*d'álám* 'be prone to sickness', *d'wám* 'be prone to craving', *màlàk* 'be a troublesome character', *mèèn* 'be raw', *móór* 'be patient', *nyààl* 'be naturally thin'
• location	*láng* 'hang/move', *t'óng* 'sit', *d'yém* 'stand', *t'ó* 'lie', (*ń*)*d'ě* 'exist'
Activity	
• doing	*shín* 'do'
• attention & perception	*b'uén* 'watch'
Ambiguous result / activity (= receive activity reading under specific conditions only)	
• experiencing	*k'óelèng* 'hear/smell'
• speaking	*t'ém* 'tell'
• consuming & cooking	*táp* 'brew'
• emission & bodily processes	*kèn* 'excrete'
• attending & presenting	*nín* 'point at/show'
• contact	*dàp* 'slap'
• taking	*màng* 'take'
• motion	*muààn* 'go'

Result	
• transfer	*s'éét* 'buy/sell'
• putting & throwing	*d'ú* 'cause to sit'
• impact	*tù* 'kill'
• transforming	*p'yán* 'break'
• starting & stopping	*lát* 'finish'
• cognition	*màn* 'get to know'
Inchoative	
• position:	
- posture	*shùùr* 'get/put into a squatting posture'
- orientation	*k'óón* 'get/put face down'
- disposition	*shòòt* 'get/put coiled'
- distribution	*f'ú* 'get/put scattered'
• property:	
- dimension	*f'yér* 'become/make big'
- physical properties	*zòòm* 'become/make cold'
- color	*b'áng* 'become/make red'
- age	*gyá* 'become old'
- human propensity	*pís* 'become stingy'
• motion:	
- non-translocational	*d'ààr* 'start to tremble'
- directed	*rú* 'start to enter'
- manner	*sù* 'start to run'
• internal experience	*rèng* 'become/make astonished'

2.3. Changing lexical aspect

Section 2.2 has shown that Goemai verbs generally do not conflate different lexical aspects, e.g., a verb is either stative or inchoative, but not both. There is only one exception to this generalization: many verbs occur in both result and activity contexts (see below). To overtly change the lexical aspect of an expression, Goemai uses one of the morphological or syntactic strategies summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Derivational strategies

Strategy	Input	Output
Nominalization Adverbialization Configurational SVC	inchoative (& some result) verbs	stative expression
Inchoative SVC	stative verbs	inchoative expression
Cognate object Light verb	ambiguous result / activity verbs	activity expression

First, Goemai has three distinct constructions that create stative expressions from state-change verbs, including from all inchoative verbs as well as from some result verbs (especially from those coding a transformation). The most common mechanism is the nominalization of verbs by means of the prefixes *gòe-* (SG) or *mòe-* (PL), and the subsequent occurrence of these nominalized verbs as complements in equational clauses. Goemai has two types of equational clauses: a verbless and a verbal clause. Example (7a) illustrates the occurrence of the derived expression *gòe-tép* 'black one' in the verbless clause. And example (7b) shows the same expression in the verbal clause, as complement of the stative locative verb (*ń*)*d'ĕ* 'exist'. Both are stative contexts: the derived forms lack temporal boundaries and describe current states.

(7a) *Ní* *zák* *à* [*gòe-tép*]$_{NP}$.
3SG.I also/however FOC NMLZ(SG)-become.black
'He, however, is a black one.' (= he is black) (D00JANIMAL8)

(7b) *Yím* *d'è* [*góe-tép*]$_{NP}$ *mú?*
leaf exist NMLZ(SG)-become.black INTERR
'The leaf exists (as) a black one, right?' (= the leaf is black)
(M00ANCOMP1)

Another strategy is much less frequent: partial reduplication derives adverbs from the same types of state-change verbs as above; and these adverbs then occur as complements in stative verbless clauses (as in 8).

(8) *shík=hók* *póenóe* [*hòe-hòòs*]$_{ADV}$
knife=DEF thus REDUP-become.sharp
'The knife is sharp like this.' (D-10/02/00)

Aside from these two changes in word class, Goemai has a distinct type of serial verb construction,[3] termed configurational serial verb construction, which is formed by means of a state-change verb as the first verb and a stative locative verb as the second (as in 9a and 9b). The resulting expression is a stative expression, i.e., it behaves like a stative verb under all the lexical aspect diagnostics discussed in section 2.1. Like nominalization, this strategy is very frequent.

3 Goemai has four distinct serial verb constructions that differ formally and semantically from each other (see HELLWIG 2006 for details).

(9a) *Wáng* *k'óón* *t'óng* *k'à*
pot become.face.down(SG) sit(SG) HEAD(SG):GEN

kùk *sh'ép.*
stump:GEN wood
'The pot sits face down on the tree stump.' (B99APSPV)

(9b) *Sh'é=hók* *rás* *d'yám* *b'ák.*
foot/leg=DEF become.thin(PL) stand(PL) here
'The legs stand (= are) thin here.' (R00JUGLY3)

Second, Goemai has another serial verb construction, termed inchoative serial verb construction. This construction is formed by means of an inchoative verb (usually *t'á* 'fall' or *yóól* 'rise') plus a stative verb (usually a stative locative verb such as *t'óng* 'sit') (as in 10). It serves to create an inchoative expression from these stative verbs, i.e., this construction patterns like an inchoative verb under all lexical aspect diagnostics.

(10) *Sái* *t'á* *t'óng* *d'ì,* *nyè-pé*
then/only fall(SG) sit(SG) LOC.ANAPH because-THAT/WHEN

ní *né* *p'ùùr (...).*
3SG.S become.tired very
'Then (he) sat down there, because he had become very tired (…).'
(F99ANTI)

Third, Goemai has two constructions that allow verbs to occur in activity expressions. The more common one is the cognate object construction. Almost all verbs can form cognate nouns – but only those that are ambiguous between result and activity readings can also occur with their cognate nouns as direct objects, i.e., they can occur in the cognate object construction. This includes basic intransitive verbs (as *múút* 'die' in 11a) as well as basic transitive verbs (as *mú<u>ú</u>r* 'steal' in 11b). In all cases, the cognate objects are non-referential and cannot be modified by, e.g., nominal modifiers. Speakers always interpret such sentences as emphasizing the verb action, venturing free translations such as 'be fond of doing' or 'do always'. In fact, when submitting this construction to the lexical aspect diagnostics of section 2.1, this construction behaves like an underived activity verb.

(11a) *t'òng* *jí=góe* *múút* [*múút*]$_O$
IRR SGM.LOG.SP.S=FUT.DEF die(SG) death(SG)

góe *góelóng (...).*
COMIT useless
'He will surely die uselessly (…).' (F99ATYAKLANG)

(11b) *Wái* *ú* *múúr* [*múúr*]$_O$.
SAY goat steal stealing
'(He said) that the goat has stolen.' (F00JFUAN)

The other construction is similar to the cognate object construction: it consists of the semantically general or 'light' verb *shín* 'do' plus the cognate noun of a verb that is ambiguous between result and activity readings (as *k'wál* 'talk' in 12). Again, it creates an activity reading. This construction is much less frequent, and it is not clear whether there is a semantic difference to the cognate object construction above.

(12) *Póe* *nì* *gòe* *wá* *dóe* *dé*
give 3SG.O SEQ return.home(SG) come SO.THAT
móe =shín [*k'wál*]$_O$ *yì.*
1PL.S:CONS=do talking CONS
'Let her come back, so that we talk.' (F99DREEP)

Looking at the available derivational strategies, it seems that their existence is motivated by the predominant lexicalization patterns of Goemai. Most verbal concepts are lexicalized as state-change verbs (see section 2.2). By contrast, Goemai has a scarcity of underived stative and activity verbs – and most of the strategies discussed in this section serve to create exactly these stative and activity expressions that are missing from the lexicon.

3. Conclusion: Goemai lexical aspect in a West Chadic perspective

The case study of section 2 has shown that Goemai predominantly lexicalizes verbal concepts as state-change verbs – there are only very few stative and unambiguous activity verbs. Conversely, the derivational possibilities of Goemai focus almost exclusively on creating stative and activity expressions.

It is difficult to assess how common the above pattern is across (West) Chadic languages: with the exception of ABDOULAYE (1992), there are no studies dedicated to lexical aspect in Chadic, and grammars usually contain only sketchy information on this aspect of language. It is true that descriptions of Chadic languages do not indicate any shortage of either stative or activity expressions, but in the absence of detailed lexical aspect studies, such information has to be treated with some caution. For Hausa, such a study exists, and ABDOULAYE (1992: 185-187) does not comment on any shortage of stative verbs either (see also JAGGAR 2001; NEWMAN 2000; WOLFF 1993). But with regard to activity verbs, ABDOULAYE (1992: 203) remarks explicitly that "the activity class of verbs is very restricted in Hausa." He goes on to show that many concepts that are cross-linguistically typically coded in activity verbs are instead lexicalized in Hausa nouns such

as *hiiraa* ‘conversation’ or *aikìì* ‘work’. These nouns then need a support verb such as *yi* ‘do’ to appear in a verbal context (similar to the Goemai construction in example 12). Other typical activities are coded in Hausa inchoative verbs, e.g., motion verbs such as *ruugàà* ‘start to run away’ (compare Goemai *sù* ‘start to run’ in example 6a). This information points to Hausa and Goemai sharing a common lexicalization pattern: both have a scarcity of activity verbs, and both code typical activity concepts in state-change verbs instead (and Hausa additionally in activity nouns). Therefore, one promising avenue of future comparative research would be to investigate if other Chadic languages, too, have a preference for state-change verbs over activity verbs.

A second avenue of research would be to compare specific lexical fields. One such field is that of property-denoting or adjectival expressions. We know that present-day West Chadic languages tend to lexicalize such concepts in nouns or nouny adjectives (Stassen 1997) – not in verbs as in Goemai and in the closely-related languages of the Angas-Goemai group (BURQUEST 1973; FOULKES 1915; FRAJZYNGIER 1993; GOCHAL 1994; JUNGRAITHMAYR 1963a; 1964; JUNGRAITHMAYR and DIYAKAL 2008: 29-30), as well as in the Ron group languages (JUNGRAITHMAYR 1970; Seibert 1997). The available descriptions show that all these languages lexicalize property concepts in verbs. Their lexical aspect, however, is not entirely clear: the different sources tend to translate them as stative verbs, but their distribution in text collections suggests that they either additionally or exclusively code a state change. For example, JUNGRAITHMAYR’S (1964) excellent text collection of Angas contains many examples where the context and/or the translation indicate a state-change meaning (as in 13a). In other cases, they occur in some form of progressive or continuative aspect construction where they receive an on-going state-change interpretation (as in 13b). And in yet other cases, they are marked for some form of perfective or completive aspect. This marking suggests a state-change semantics plus a stative pragmatic implicature, i.e., the past completed action results in the present state. For example, if something “has become ripe” (as in 13c), then it usually “is ripe” now, thus accounting for the stative translation.

(13a)

kó	*mwá*	*pán*	*’gyǎm*	*kó*	***kun***	*ɗə.*
CONJ	3PL.IMPERFECT	keep	child	CONJ	**big**	there

‘(…) und sie zogen das Kind auf (‘und es ***wurde groß***’).’
= ‘(…) and they raised the child (‘and he ***became big***’).’
(JUNGRAITHMAYR 1964: 32)

(13b) *mwá* *née* *nyi* ***pɔ̀*** ***lóom***
3PL.IMPERFECT see 3SG.CONTINUOUS CONTINUOUS **thin**

pɔ̀ ***lóom.***
CONTINUOUS **thin**
'(…) (sie) bemerkten (…), dass sie ***dünner*** und ***dünner wurde***.'
= '(…) (they) saw (…) that she ***became thinner*** and ***thinner***.'
(JUNGRAITHMAYR 1964: 117)

(13c) *"Kafwăn* *ʾhą̆ą́* *bɛ* *laŋkaŋ* *funu* *dà*
rabbit ?? then groundnut 1PL.POSS DETERMINER

kə̀ ***nùŋ*** *kàa?*
3SG.PERFECT **ripe** NEG:INTERR
'"Nun, Hase, ***sind*** unsere Erdnüsse nicht schon ***reif***?"'
= '"Now, rabbit, ***are***n't our groundnuts ***ripe*** yet?"'
(JUNGRAITHMAYR 1964: 114)

The above lexicalization of property concepts is not very common within Chadic languages. This raises the question as to its origins. And one promising avenue here is to investigate the possibility of contact-induced change. The information that is available on the neighboring Benue-Congo languages suggests that the above lexicalization pattern is shared with Jukun (SHIMIZU 1980: 158-159, 182-184, 200-214; STORCH 1999: 117-119, 160-161, 242-244; WELMERS 1949: 47-48), Tarok (LONGTAU 2009) and Fyem (NETTLE 1998: 21-22, 45-47). We know that language contact within the Jos Plateau *sprachbund* has shaped the lexicon and grammar of Chadic languages such as Goemai to the extent that they can be considered fairly atypical Chadic languages. They have lost much of their inherited Chadic morphology, and have developed isolating structures instead. There is also evidence for the presence of a number of features that characterize the *sprachbund* as a whole, including lexical borrowings, and similarities in phonotactics, non-productive morphology and syntactic structures (see section 2 for references). It is an empirical question as to whether or not these languages also show a comparable convergence in meaning structures – e.g., in lexical aspect.

Due to a lack of data, it is currently not possible to systematically compare the Goemai lexical aspect structures with the structures of neighboring Benue-Congo languages and of related Chadic languages. It is hoped that others will be inspired to study lexical aspect in individual languages, thus enabling us to eventually compare lexical aspect across Chadic languages, to determine characteristic Chadic lexicalizations patterns, and to investigate the role of language contact in this domain.

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