



VERB HAUSA

TENSES

- Hausa tenses: overview, meaning, and Marking
 - Meaning
 - Marking
- "Active" vs. "stative" verbs
- Completive
- Continuative
- Future
- Subjunctive
- "Indefinite" future
- Habitual
- Imperative

Meaning and Marking of Hausa Tenses



- Links to information on verb tenses

Overview

- **Seven "tense" distinctions plus imperative**
 - Completive
 - Continuative
 - Future
 - Subjunctive
 - "Indefinite" Future
 - Habitual
 - Imperative
- **The primary marking of "tense" distinctions resides in subject pronouns, NOT verbs**
- **Two "tenses"--Completive and Continuative--distinguish a "plain" and a "relative" form: a major factor determining this distinction is whether or not something preceding the verb is questioned, emphasized, or relativized**



Meaning of Tenses

English and most other European languages have what is called **absolute tense**. This means that simply by knowing the tense form of a verb, you know the basic time of the



event. If you use a verb in past tense, the action already took place (it is past with respect to the time of speaking). Likewise, future tense means that the action has not begun at the time you are speaking, and present means the action is happening at the time you are speaking.

In the absence of any context to the contrary, Hausa tenses can have similar meanings to those of English, e.g.

Past	They entered.	Sun shiga.
Future	They will enter.	Za su shiga.
Present	They are entering.	Suna shiga.

But Hausa has what is called **relative tense**. This means that the tense form tells you about the time of the event relative to some time of reference. If no time context is mentioned, the assumption is that the time of reference is the moment of speaking, as in the examples in the table above. However, if the time of reference is displaced to the past or the future, English (which has **absolute tense**) must change the tense marking, whereas Hausa continues to use the same forms as in the table above.

Past (past context)	Yesterday by 3:00 they had entered.	Jiya da 3:00 sun shiga.
Past (future context)	Tomorrow at 3:00 they will have entered.	Gobe da 3:00 sun shiga.
Future (past context)	Yesterday at 3:00 they were about to enter.	Jiya da 3:00 za su shiga.
Future (future context)	Tomorrow at 3:00 they will enter.*	Gobe da 3:00 za su shiga.
Present (past context)	Yesterday at 3:00 they were entering.	Jiya da 3:00 suna shiga.
Present (future context)	Tomorrow at 3:00 they will be entering.	Gobe da 3:00 suna shiga.

*English continues to use the simple future since the event is in the future regardless of whether a future context is expressed or not.



Marking of Tenses

English marks tense by changes in the verb form (enter vs. entered vs. entering) and/or addition of auxiliary verbs (have, had, will, are, were, etc.). In Hausa, for the most part, the verb itself does not change to mark tense differences. Hausa marks tense differences by different sets of **subject pronouns**, sometimes with the pronoun combined with some additional particle, such as preceding *za*, which marks future (see the table above). For this reason, a subject pronoun must accompany every verb in Hausa, regardless of whether the subject is known from previous context or is expressed by a noun subject. Here are some examples:

Na shiga na zauna.	I entered and sat down. ("I entered I sat down.")
Yara sun shiga sun zauna.	The children entered and sat down. ("Children they entered they sat down.")
Muna hira muna dariya	We are chatting and laughing. ("We are chatting we are laughing.")
Yara suna hira suna dariya.	The children are chatting and laughing. ("Children they are chatting they are laughing.")

(Notice that although Hausa requires a subject pronoun with every verb, it does NOT have a word like "and" between consecutive verbs.)

"Active" vs. "Stative" verbs



- [Links to information on verb tenses](#)

"Active" verbs represent some kind of action, such as run, enter, eat, take--in fact the large majority of verbs.

"Stative" verbs represent a state of being, a mental state, or a static relationship, such as be-nice, know, see, be-older-than.

In English, using an active or a stative verb has an effect on choice of tense.

Active verb	Stative verb
John is drinking tea.	John sees the tea.
John is doing something--he is engaged in an ongoing activity.	The tea is in John's line of sight and is registering in his brain--he is not "doing" anything.
English uses the present progressive (a form of 'be' + the -ing form of the verb).	English uses the simple present form of the verb.

In Hausa, the "active" vs. "stative" sense also determines choice of tense.

Active verb referring to present time	Stative verb referring to present time
Bashir yana shan shayi. 'Bashir is drinking the tea.'	Bashir ya ga shayi. 'Bashir sees the tea.'
Bashir is doing an action.	The tea is in Bashir's line of sight and is registering in his brain--he is

	not "doing" anything.
Hausa uses the Continuative , which shows an event that is unfolding over time.	Hausa uses the Completive , which shows that the event is viewed as a "unit", i.e. the effects of the event are complete.

English and Hausa differ, however. The Hausa **Completive** with a stative verb translates as English **Present**, but the **Completive** with an active verb usually translates as English **Past** tense. This is because the base meaning of the Completive is that the event is viewed as "complete", i.e. its effects are no longer in a state of flux.

Active verb with Completive	Stative verb with Completive
Bashir ya sha shayi. 'Bashir drank the tea.'	Bashir ya ga shayi. 'Bashir sees the tea.'
Bashir has completed the tea drinking.	Bashir's mental picture of the tea is complete --it is not evolving from one moment to the next.
The translation into English uses a Past tense, showing that the event came to an end at an earlier time.	The translation into English uses a Present tense, showing that the seeing is in effect at the present moment.

- [Back to top](#)



VERB HAUSA

FORMS

- Verb classes
 - Variable Vowel Verbs
 - Regular verbs other than Variable Vowel Verbs
 - Minor verb classes of verbs and irregular verbs
- Derived verbs
 - -o verbs: "action toward the speaker"
 - -u verbs: intransitive or "passive"
 - Causative verbs
 - Pluractional verbs (verbs showing reiterated action)
- Verbal nouns
 - -wa verbal nouns
 - non-wa verbal nouns
- Technical: the "Grade System" as a way of classifying verbs

Verb Classes General Remarks



- Links to information on verb forms

Factors influencing the forms that verbs take

Unlike most European languages, differences in Hausa verbs do **not** usually relate to marking verb tense. However, Hausa has several verb classes that differ primarily in the forms that verbs take depending on their objects or lack of objects. The factors that affect the forms of verbs are the following:

- **No object following:** There may be no object present in the sentence at all, the object may be someplace other than after the verb, or the word following the verb may not be considered an "object" in Hausa.

No object at all:

Ka saya?

'Did you buy (it)?'

(the object is understood,

perhaps from the context)

Object not after verb:

Shinkafa na
saya.

'It is **rice** that I
bought.
(‘rice’ is the object, but it is
at the beginning of the
sentence for emphasis)

Word after verb not an
"object":

Sun shiga gida.

'They entered the
house.'

(with most verbs of
motion, the goal of the
motion is a "locative"
rather than an object)

- **Noun object following:** In Hausa, any object which is not one of the special direct object pronouns counts as a "noun" object.

Na sayi akwiya.
Ka sayi wannan?

'I bought a goat.'
'Did you buy this?'
(though **wannan** 'this' is a "pronoun"-
-it stands for a noun--it is not one of
the special direct object pronouns)

- **Pronoun object following:** In Hausa, "pronoun object" refers only to an object expressed as one of the special direct object pronouns.

Na saye **ta**.

'I bought **it**.'

- **Indirect object following:** This may be either a pronoun indirect object or a noun indirect object (in Hausa, indirect object **always** come immediately after the verb).

Na saya **miki** akwiya.
Na saya **wa matata** ita.

'I have bought a goat **for you**.'
'I bought it **for my wife**.'

Variable Vowel Verbs



- Links to information on verb forms
- See a list of representative Variable Vowel Verbs

Variable Vowel Verbs ("VVV's"), called Grade 2 in the Hausa Grade System, change their final vowel depending on the type of object which follows the verb. This is true for all verb tenses other than the Continuative (which uses the verbal noun rather than the base verb). The vowel variants of VVV's are as follows:

No object or direct object following verb (see below for indirect object)

No object following	-a	Sun sàya. 'They bought (it).' Zàn tàmàyà. 'I will ask.'
Pronoun object following	-e	Sun sàye tà. 'They bought it.' Zàn tàmàyè shì. 'I will ask him.'
Noun object following	-i	Sun sàyi kufèwà. 'They bought okra.' Zàn tàmàyi Mùsà. 'I will ask Musa.'

Tone--Note the following tonal features of VVV's:

1. **All transitive verbs which begin in Low tone are Variable Vowel Verbs.**
2. **All but 3-5 VVV's begin in Low tone.** In the Kano dialect, the VVV's which do not begin in Low tone are **d'auka** 'take', **d'iba** 'dip out', and **samu** 'get'. Even these verbs begin in Low tone when a pronoun or noun object follows. (See list of representative VVV's with their tones marked.)
3. **Two-syllable VVV's** always have Low-High tones (see **saya** 'buy' in the examples above).
4. **Three-syllable VVV's** have Low-High-Low tones when no object follows and Low-Low-High when there is an object (see **tambaya** 'ask' in the examples above). (Verbs with more than three syllables add additional Low tones at the beginning.)

Indirect objects with VVV's

Before indirect objects, VVV's take one of two patterns. One must simply learn which pattern applies to a particular verb. Some verbs can use either (as with **tambaya** 'ask' below).

Reversed tone pattern: Hi-Lo(-Hi) instead of Lo-Hi(-Lo)
Sun sayà wà màtansu kufèwà. 'They bought okra for their wives.' Zàn tàmàyà masà. 'I will ask on his behalf.'
All High tones with final -ar (becomes -am before m)

<p>Sun nēmar wà mātansu kufēwā. 'They sought okra for their wives.'</p> <p>Zān tambayam masà. 'I will ask on his behalf.'</p>

For more information on Variable Vowel Verbs, see discussion of verbal nouns for Variable Vowel Verbs.

Regular Verbs



other than Variable Vowel Verbs

- Links to information on verb forms
- See a list of representative "regular" verbs

By "regular" we mean verbs which follow predictable patterns of the majority of the basic verbs of Hausa. Here, we will consider only verbs which begin in High-Tone and end in **-a** or **-e**. (In the technical terminology of the Hausa Grade System, these are Grades 1 & 4.) These verbs have the following forms:

1. **Base form final vowel:** Long **-a** or long **-e**.
2. **Base form tone:** Two-syllable verbs have High-Low tones. Three-syllable verbs have High-Low-High tones. (Verbs of more than three syllables have additional High tone syllables at the beginning.) (See note on tone of pronoun objects.)
3. **Noun object following:** The final vowel shortens for all verbs; three-syllable verbs have final Low tone. (See note on vowel length of final **-e**.)
4. **Everywhere else,** regular verbs take their base form.

No object following	Sun fīgā.	'They counted (them).'
	Zān kařants.	'I will read (it).'
Pronoun object following	Sun gānē.	'They understand.'
	Zān ajiyē.	'I will deposit (it).'
Noun object following	Sun fīgā su.	'They counted them.'
	Zān kařants shi.	'I will read it.'
Noun object following	Sun gānē ta.	'They recognized her.'
	Zān ajiyē shi.	'I will deposit it.'

	<p>Sun kirgá. 'They counted (them).'</p> <p>Zân katântá. 'I will read (it).'</p>
	<p>Sun gané. 'They understand.'</p> <p>Zân ajiyé. 'I will deposit (it).'</p>
Indirect object following	<p>Sun kirgá mi. 'They counted (them) for me.'</p> <p>Zân katântá wà yára. 'I will read (it) to the children.'</p> <p>Sun gané mata. 'They saw through her.'</p> <p>Zân ajiyé wà shúgáhana. 'I will deposit (it) for my boss.'</p>

Minor Verb Classes and irregular verbs



- [Links to information on verb forms](#)

By far the largest classes of underived verbs in Hausa are Variable Vowel Verbs and "regular" verbs ending in **-a** or **-e**. There are a few verbs in Hausa which do not follow the patterns of these verbs. We divide them into five groups here:

1. **Intransitive verbs:** A number of intransitive verbs end in **-i** or **-u**. These final vowels not found with the common verb classes. A fairly large group of intransitives resemble Variable Vowel Verbs in that they end in **-a** and have Low-High tones, but unlike VVV's, they have short final vowels. Some intransitive verbs also have High-High tones with final short **-a**. Since intransitive verbs, by definition, cannot take objects, they do not undergo the types of variations that transitive verbs can undergo. (See a list of representative intransitive verbs.)
2. **Monosyllabic verbs:** All but two monosyllabic verbs have High tone (the two exceptions are **sa** 'put on; cause' and **ce** 'say', which have falling tones and pattern with regular verbs in **-a** or **-e**). Monosyllabic verbs are invariant except that those that end in a short vowel lengthen their vowel before a pronoun direct object. (See a list of monosyllabic verbs.)
3. **The verbs *biya* 'pay' *jira* 'wait for', *kira* 'call', *riga* 'precede':** These four verbs have High-High tones and long final **-a** everywhere. They are "irregular" in the sense that there are only four of them and they have unusual verbal nouns. (See a list of "irregular" verbs, including *biya*, *jira*, *kira*.)
4. **The verbs *bari* 'leave', *sani* 'know', *gani* 'see':** These three verbs drop the final **-i** before any object. **Gani** drops the final **-ni** before noun objects. (See a list of

"irregular" verbs, including **bari**, **sani**, **gani**.)

5. **The verb *ba/bayar*** 'give': This is the most irregular verb in Hausa. See a table with **ba** 'give' in all forms.

The table illustrates group (2) with **bi** 'follow' and **ja** 'pull' (monosyllabic verbs with short and long vowels respectively), (3) **kira** 'call' (representing also **jira** 'wait for' and **biya** 'pay'), and (4) **bari** 'leave' (also representing **sani** 'know') and **gani** 'see'.

No object following	Sum bi.	'They followed (her).'
	Zàn shà.	'I will drink (it).'
	Sum kirà.	'They called (them).'
	Tà bari. Zà sù gani.	'She left off.' 'They will see.'
Pronoun object following	Sum bi tà.	'They followed her.'
	Zàn shà shì.	'I will drink it.'
	Sum kirà sù.	'They called them.'
	Tà bar shì. Zà sù gan tà.	'She left it.' 'They will see her.'
Noun object following	Sum bi Làmi.	'They followed Lami.'
	Zàn shà shàyì.	'I will drink tea.'
	Sum kirà yàrà.	'They called the children.'
	Tà bar àbincintà. Zà sù ga Làmi.	'She left her food.' 'They will see Lami.'
Indirect object following	Sum bi mimi awakima.	'They followed my goats for me.'
	Zàn shà musù kai.	'I will outwit them.'
	Sum kirà wà Làmi yàrà.	'They called the children for Lami.'
	Tà bar manà kufi.	'She left us money.'

Some commonly used causative verbs

Base		"Long" form Causative		"Short" form	"Pre-pronoun" form
fita	'go out'	fitaf	'take out, remove'	fid dà	fisshe
gayà	'tell'	gayaɓ	'greet'	gai dà	gaishè
kôyà	'learn'	kôyaɓ	'teach (a subject)'	----	----
kwântà	'lie down'	kwantaɓ	'lay, lay out'	----	----
sanì	'know'	sanaɓ	'inform'	----	sanašhè
shiga	'enter'	shigaɓ	'put in, insert'	----	----
tàfi	'go'	tafiyaɓ	'move along, administer'	tafi dà	----
tsayà	'stop'	tsayaɓ	'stop, bring to a halt'	tsai dà	tsaishè
wàhalà	'have trouble'	wahalaɓ	'cause trouble for'	wahal dà	wahalašhè
ci	'eat'	ciyaɓ	'feed'	ci dà	cishè
shà	'drink'	shayaɓ	'water, irrigate'	shà dà	shāshè

Some verbs without clear non-Causative bases

?kai	'take, carry'	kāyaɓ	'throw down'	kā dà	kāshè
(mayà)	'go back'	mayayɓ	'replace, return (thing)'	mai dà	maishè
?āshì	'get up'	tāyaɓ	'raise, get (someone) up'	tā dà	tāshè

kai/kayar: The meaning relation is not clear, and the absence of -y- in the "short" form is unexplained, if in fact these verbs are related.

maya/mayar: The verb maya is in the large Hausa dictionaries, but it is rarely, if ever used in modern Hausa.

Variable Vowel Verbs

Verb	Verbal Noun	VN class	
àurà	aurè	HH-è	'marry' 60
cìzà	cizò	HL-ò	'bite' 62
cùtā	cùtā	= verb	'cheat, injure' 61
dāmā	dāmù	HL-ù	'bother' 63
ɗaukā	ɗaukā	= verb	'take, pick up' 61
ɗibā	ɗibā	= verb	'dip out' 61
dùbā	dùbā	HH-ā	'look at' 64
fāɗā	fāɗi	HL-ì	'say' 65
fāhimtā	fāhimtā	= verb	'understand' 61
gāɗā	gāɗò	HL-ò	'inherit' 62
gāyyatā	gāyyatā	= verb	'invite' 61
hāifā	hāifūwā	feminine suf.	'give birth to' → 32
hāngā	hāngē	LH-è	'spot, see' 66
kāllā	kāllò	HH-ò	'watch' 71
kārɓā	kārɓā	= verb	'accept, take' 61
kòrā	kòrā	= verb	'chase off' 61
kòyā	kòyò	LH-ò	'learn' 67
mārā	māri	HL-ì	'slap' 65
nēmā	nēmā	HH-ā	'look for' 64
sākā	sakì	HL-ì	'release' 65
sāmù	sāmù	= verb	'get, receive' 61
sārā	sārā	HH-ā	'chop' 64
sāurārā	sāurārò	LLH-ò	'listen; wait' 68
sàyā	sàye	LH-è	'buy' 66
tāimakā	tāimako	LHH-ò	'help' 69
tāmbayā	tāmbayā	= verb	'ask' 69
tsintā	tsintuwā	feminine suf.	'come across' 64
yānkā	yankā	HH-ā	'cut off' 64
zāɓā	zāɓe	LH-è	'choose' 66
zāgā	zāgi	HL-ì	'abuse, insult' 65
zārgā	zārgi	LH-ì	'blame, accuse' 70

Regular verb classes with -wa Verbal Nouns

	Verb	Verbal noun	Verb class	
-a/-e	sà	sàwà	Grade 1	'put on' 3
	hùtá	hùtáwà	Grade 1	'rest' 3
	jàr̀r̀àbà	jàr̀r̀àbàwà	Grade 1	'test, try out' 4
	cé	céwà	Grade 4	'say' 7
	dadè	dadèwà	Grade 4	'last a long time' 7
	ajiyè	ajiyèwà	Grade 4	'put away, put down' 7
-a	fitàr̀	fitàr̀wà	Grade 5	'remove' 5
	sayàr̀	sayàr̀wà	Grade 5	'sell' 7
-o	kàwò	kàwòwà	Grade 6	'bring' 8
	tambayò	tambayòwà	Grade 6	'ask and come' 6
)	kàru	kàruwà	Grade 7	'be improved' 9
	tàru	tàruwà	Grade 7	'gather' 9

Irregular Verbs and their Verbal Nouns

Intransitive verbs with feminine verbal nouns

fad̩	fad̩rwa	'fall' 31
gàji	gàjijà	'be tired' 30
haifù	haifùwa	'give birth' 32
mutù	mutuwà	'die' 33
tàfi	tàfiyà	'go, travel' 30

Transitive verbs with High-High tones ending in -a

biya	biyà	'pay'	} 50
jirà	jirà	'wait for'	
kirà	kirà	'call'	

'leave', 'know', 'see'

barì	barì	'leave' 1
sani	sani	'know' 1
gani	gani	'see' 1

Irregular monosyllabic verbs

jè	zuwà	'go' 40
zò	zuwà	'come' 41
bà	bayàrwa	'give' 42

Some verbs with both -wa and non-wa Verbal Nouns

Verb	non-wa VN	VN Class	
dakà	dakà	= verb	'pound grain'
gòdè	gòdiya	feminine suf.	'thank'
gyàrà	gyàrà	HH-a	'fix'
hùtà	hùtà	HH-ù	'rest'
kàmà	kàmù	HL-ù	'catch'
karàntà	karàtù	LLH-ù	'read'
kwántà	kwànciya	feminine suf.	'lie down'
karà	kari	HL-ì	'increase'
mántà	mantuwà	feminine suf.	'forget'
mòtsà	mòtsi	LH-i	'move'
rabà	ràbò	LH-ò	'separate'
rùbùtà	rùbùtù	LLH-ù	'write'
shiryà	shiri	HL-ì	'prepare'
shukà	shukà	= verb	'plant'
wankè	wanki	HL-ì	'wash'
zanà	zàné	LH-é	'draw'

Intransitive Verbs with long final vowel for Verbal Noun

Verb	Verbal noun		
būya	būyā	'hide'	10
fita	fītā	'go out'	10
isa	isā	'arrive; suffice'	10
kāmātā	kāmātā	'be fitting'	11
kūmburā	kūmburā	'swell up'	11
kwāna	kwānā	'spend the night'	10
lūra	lūrā	'watch over'	10
nūna	nūnā	'ripen; get done (cooking)'	10
sāuka	sāukā	'descend'	10
shiga	shigā	'enter'	10
yārda	yārdā	'agree'	10
ƙaci	ƙaci	'be spoiled or ruined'	12

Monosyllabic Verbs with Falling tone Verbal Nouns

Verb	Verbal noun		
bi	bī	'follow'	20
ci	cī	'eat'	} 20
fi	fī	'surpass, be better'	
ji	jī	'hear, feel, taste, smell'	
ki	kī	'refuse, dislike'	
yi	yī	'do, make'	
jā	jā	'pull'	} 21
shā	shā	'drink; experience'	
sō	sō	'want, like, love'	22