

## One way of becoming a ‘dative subject’

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### Abstract

Dative subjects have been studied in many languages and in a wide variety of linguistic theories. They have been explained as being idiosyncratic instances of case assignment within some versions of Case Theory; as having a specific set of semantic properties assigned by the dative case marker (Smith 2001); as being associated with specific types of verbs (the most frequent explanation, invoked for a large number of languages); and as coding the speaker’s attitude toward a proposition (Barðdal 2004). For some languages, e.g. Icelandic, several motivations contribute simultaneously to the presence of dative subjects (Barðdal 2001, 2004). All these explanations consider the dative (like other case markings) as belonging to the formal domain of the clause. The aim of this study is a first ever analysis of the coding of subjects through the same preposition that codes the dative/benefactive nominal argument in Wandala (Central Chadic). Such a coding has not been reported in any other Chadic language, not even in closely related Malgwa (Löhr 2002), or slightly more remote Hdi (Frajzyngier with Shay 2001) and Lamang (Wolff 1983). The study demonstrates that the use of the ‘dative/benefactive’ preposition is motivated by the need to include a nominal subject in a clause that marks an event as the background for subsequent discourse and that does not topicalize or focalize the subject. The dative preposition, thus, does not assign any semantic role to the subject. A more interesting issue is the coding of a clause as the background for subsequent discourse.

## 1 The problem

In an independent, pragmatically neutral clause in Wandala,<sup>1</sup> pronominal subject precedes the verb, and the nominal subject follows the verb in either the simple or in the reduplicated form:

- (1) ɛ́óɛ̀è      lʋá      hɛ̀rdá,  
       ɛ́-á-ú-ɛ̀-è                      lʋ-á              hɛ̀rdá  
 finish-GO-APPL-finish-ABL business-GEN farm  
 ‘When the farming finished, . . .’

- (2) tátsámdá    žílé  
       tá      tsá      md-á              žílé  
 3PL    get-up people-GEN    man  
 ‘People of the groom get up,’

- tásə̀bə̀dya    mdámùksé  
       tá      sə̀      bə̀dya    md-á              mùksé  
 3PL    come meet    people-GEN    woman  
 ‘they come to find the people of the bride.’

Yet in clauses with the verb having the punctual suffix *hè* (phrase-final form) or *hə* (phrase-internal), the single nominal argument following the verb is marked by the preposition *gə̀*. That the argument so coded is the subject is proven by the fact that the verb must be preceded by subject pronouns *a* ‘3SG’ if the nominal argument following the verb is singular or *ta* ‘3PL’ if the nominal argument following the verb and preceded by the preposition *gə̀* is plural:

(3) à sǎ-m-hè gè víyà  
 3SG come-IN-PNCT TO rainy season  
 ‘There came the rainy season.’

(4) tà njí-hè gè tàr mà̀m ántà̀r gdz-rè  
 3PL remain-PNCT TO 3PL mother CONJ small-NOMIN  
 ‘There remained mother and child.’

The preposition *gè* also precedes nominal recipients, beneficiaries, and addressees of verbs of saying. The recipient or the addressee, whether represented by a noun phrase or not, must be also coded by pronominal subject object suffixed to the verb:

(5) yó mà̀mà ávántǎkà sàwàri šágrà gègdzrè  
 yó mà̀mà á v-à-n-tó kà sàwàri  
 well mother 3SG give-GO-3SG-T NEG advice (F)  
 šágrà gè gdzrè  
 good TO child  
 ‘The mother does not give good advice to her child (daughter).’

(6) tàlvàngèłǎksè dègìyá nó nó nó  
 tà lv-à-n gè łǎksé dègìyá nó nó nó  
 3PL say-GO-3SG TO chief COMP here here here  
 ‘They say to the chief, here, here, here, . . .’

The marking of the single nominal argument by the preposition *gè* is not conditioned by the semantic properties of the verb (a proposal advanced in Onishi’s Introduction to Aikhenvald et al. 2001 and in many other papers on dative subjects). This is shown by the fact that the same verb can occur with the subject coded by the position after the verb as well as by the preposition *gè*:

(7) s-á-m-sà                      víyà  
 come-GO-IN-come:GO    rainy season  
 ‘there came the rainy season’ (elicited)

Compare also the following pair:

(8) à                      mtsè              dādà  
 3SG                      die                      father  
 ‘The father dies.’ (elicited)

à              nábà              mtsé-hè              gè              dādà  
 3SG    then              die-PNCT              TO              father  
 ‘The father died.’

The presence of the preposition before the nominal subject is required by the punctual aspect as coded by the suffix *hè* and by the fact that the subject occurs after the verb. In natural discourse, if there is no suffix *hè*, subjects are marked by the preposition *gè* only with a few verbs which are inherently punctual and only when the subject follows the verb. Subjects are never marked for their grammatical role by any other preposition.<sup>2</sup>

The main question of the present study is: What is the function of the construction of the verb with the suffix *hè* and why the post-verbal subjects with such vwrbs are marked by the preposition *gè*:

## 2 Approaches to dative subjects

The term ‘dative subject’ refers in the literature to an argument that instead of being coded as a canonical subject in a given language is coded in the same way as a recipient, beneficiary, or indirectly affected object. Behind this definition lie the following tacit assumptions: (1) every clause has to have a subject; (2) there exists some entity called

‘logical subject’; (3) if an intransitive verb has only one noun phrase, that phrase is the subject; (4) there exists a default, or canonical way, to mark the subject. Each of these assumptions is quite controversial, given the fact that the category ‘subject’ is not universal (Mithun 1991); the term ‘logical subject’ has no universally valid set of characteristics; crosslinguistically not every clause has to have a subject; and in many languages the coding of the single argument may indeed indicate a semantic relationship between this argument and the predicate, rather than the grammatical relation ‘subject’.

The importance of the issue of dative subjects is that it has been reported in a number of unrelated languages (Moore and Perlmutter 2000, papers in Aikhenvald et al. 2001, Barðdal 2001, 2004, Maling 2001, Smith 2001, Eythórsson 2002, papers in Bhaskararao and Subbarao 2004, Lazard 2005, and for older studies numerous references in these works, and Givón in this volume). These reports imply the existence of a cluster of semantic and pragmatic phenomena associated with dative subjects crosslinguistically. If one could understand the functions of dative subjects, and if it turned out that these functions were similar across unrelated languages, one could understand some cause-effect relationships between the form and function that transcend one language or one language family.

In this paper I shall use the term ‘dative subjects’ to refer to categories so labeled in the literature and to the arguments in Wandala marked by the preposition *gə̀*, without however, accepting the assumptions about or the implications of the category ‘subject’ as listed above. The reason I use the term ‘dative subject’ with respect to a grammatical construction in Wandala is that the preposition *gə̀* also precedes dative/benefactive nominal arguments. Since Wandala has a phenomenon that to some degree resembles dative subjects of other languages, its description not only enriches the existing body of data on the phenomenon in question but may also contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and hence the explanation of the cause-effect relationships responsible for it.



The nominal subject may occur in the clause-initial position in topicalization, focus, or switch reference constructions, which are also marked by other means:

- (11) ɬàkàtáà ɲánnà tàkídyèmá [pause]tá dɔ́ hɛ̀rdá  
 ɬàkàt-hà ɲánnà tà kídyè má **tà** dɔ́ hɛ̀rdá  
 friend-PL DEM 3PL three AND 3PL go farm  
 ‘And these three friends went to farm.’

The object occurs in the postverbal position:

- (12) tà hɛ̀rdɔ́s fátàrè  
 3PL hɛ̀rdɔ́-s fé-á-tà-[má added in analysis by the speaker]  
 3PL farm-S field-GEN-3PL-AND  
 ‘And they finished farming.’

In pragmatically neutral clauses, the verb may have only one nominal argument, either subject or object. The second nominal argument may be introduced in the clause-initial position for one of the three pragmatically marked constructions. Pronominal objects are suffixed to the simple form of the verb and inserted between the reduplicated form of the verb:

- (13) yó ɔ́lv wándàl ɲánnà á fyàr màlrùwà [error]  
 yó ɔ́lv wándàl ɲánnà á f-y-àr màl-rùwà  
 well talk Wandala DEM 3SG put-1SG-ON elder-1SG  
 ‘This Wandala talk is authorized/asked of me by my boss.’

Noun phrases in the roles other than the subject or the object, and complements other than inherently locative nouns, are coded by prepositions.

In order to explain the construction with the nominal subject marked by the preposition *gə̀*, one must understand the function of the preposition *gə̀* and the function of the suffix *hè*.

#### 4 Functions of the preposition *gə̀*

The preposition *gə̀*, glossed as TO, precedes the nominal and the independent pronominal benefactive argument. The preposition *gə̀*, however, is not the sole coding means of the dative/benefactive relation that obtains between the noun and the verb. The dative/benefactive function is coded by object pronouns suffixed to the verb (in the examples that follow, object pronouns and the preposition are bolded). When the argument marked by the preposition *gə̀* is an independent pronoun, the dative function is coded by the third-person singular object suffix *n* added to the verb:

- (14) má    žžàr    án    gdzàr-á-mì                    ɲánnà  
 HYP   look   ASSC   child:PL-GEN-1PL.INCL   DEM  
 ‘When one looks at our children [girls],

kíntà    pùstwánà    wá    èm    tánkè    gèmíyá  
 kín    tà    pù    st-wá-nà                    wá    èmtá-**n**    kè  
 as    3PL    loaf    DEM-DEM-DEF    COM    good-3SG NEG  
**gə̀**    míyá  
 TO    1.INCL  
 as they so loaf around, it is not good for us.’

The nominal addressee of the verb of saying is preceded by the preposition *gə̀*, and its semantic role is again coded by the object pronoun suffixed to the verb:

- (15) yà    šà-**tr**-ú                    **gè**    ɓàamá  
 1SG    speak-3PL-APPL TO    population  
 ‘I speak to the people.’
- (16) tàndà    vànú    gè    dàdà    kínnì  
 tà    ndàvà-**n**-ú                    **gè**    dàdà    kínnì  
 3PL    ask-3SG-APPL    TO    father BCKG  
 ‘They ask the father.’
- (17) èskè    žílé    ándànè gèmdátàrè gèní  
 èskè    žílé    á    ndà-**nè**    **gè**    md-á-tàrè                    gèní  
 like    man    3SG    tell-3SG    TO    people-GEN-3PL COMP  
 ‘And then the man (groom) says to the members of his family ...’

The nominal complements of reason and purpose are preceded by the preposition *gè*:

- (18) àbàṅánnè    kòndàṅgù    kòbúunà  
 à    bà ṅánnè kò    ndàh-à-**n**                    **gè**    wè  
 3SG    say 3SG    2PL    say-GO-3SG                    TO    what  
 kò    búu    nà  
 2PL    two    DEF  
 ‘He says, “Why do you say ‘you two’”’

The purpose and reason clausal adjuncts are not coded by pronouns on the matrix clause verb, and the preposition *gə* is the sole marker of their role:

- (19) yò cáamànkínnì nàzù àkátánórwá  
 yò cáamàn kínnì nàzù à kátá-n úr wá  
 well first of all BCKG what 3SG want-3SG person COM  
 bà **gə** nj-à-rí-njà án hèer-àn klàpì-rè  
 FOC TO stay-GO-3PL-stay ASSC peace (Ar)-ASSC healthy-NOM  
 ‘First of all, what one wants is for them to remain in peace and good health.’

- (20) tá pwámbà ñánnà gəbákìrà žíłmtú  
 tá pw á-m mbà ñánnà **gə** bák ìr-á  
 3PL pour PRED-IN house DEM TO NEG.EX head-GEN  
 žíl mtú  
 man or  
 ‘They [the girls] loaf around the house because of the lack of man or . . .’

The preposition *gə* codes the target of a comparative construction:

- (21) má bàní lisáfi-á dùksə bəđómè  
 má bàní lisáfi-á dùksə bəđómè  
 HYP concern calculation(F)-GEN thing all  
 ‘If it concerns any kind of calculation,’

- (22) bá kùr tátátáyà à jóg-ìyì bákà  
 bákà ùrà tà á tátáyà à j-à-ú  
 NEG.EX person NEG PRED search 3SG surpass-GO-APPL  
**g-ìyà** bákà

PREP-1SG NEG.EX

‘no person can surpass me.’

The preposition *gə̀* codes kinship relations ‘parent of . . .’, ‘father of . . .’, and ‘mother of . . .’ but not ‘child of the mother’ or ‘child of the father’:

- (23) cáamàn kìnì ɲá dàrgə̀ gdzrè  
 cáa màn kìní ɲà dàr **gə̀** gdzrè  
 before/past BCKG 1PL.EXCL parent TO child  
 ‘First of all, we are the parents of the daughter.’

The range of functions of the preposition *gə̀* resembles that of some of the dative case markers and dative/benefactive prepositions of Indo-European languages, such as English ‘for’ and ‘to’, and the recipient/benefactive functions of the dative case in Latin, French (for pronouns), Germanic (Maling 2001), and Slavic languages.

## 5 The function of the form *hè*

In order to understand the construction with the nominal subject marked by the preposition *gə̀* one must understand the function of the suffix *hè*. This suffix has been noticed in previous studies of Wandala and related languages. Mirt 1969/1970 does not describe the function of this marker, saying only that it appears to be a particle. In the closely related Malgwa, Löhr 2002 postulates the existence of the high-tone suffix *hé* as one of three suffixes that nominalize verbs. She provides a list of verbs that take this suffix, a list that includes intransitive verbs, transitive verbs, and derived transitive verbs. She does not offer an explicit description of the function of this suffix as opposed to other nominalizing suffixes.

The evidence that *hè* in Wandala is a grammatical marker is provided by the fact that its presence cannot be predicted from the other elements in the clause, and the same clause can occur with or without the marker *hè*:

- (24) tànà bə̀ptsə́há dóm fə̀ŋánnà ʒàbàdàlyé  
 tà nàb ə̀ptsə́-**hè** á dóm fə̀ ŋánnà ʒàbà dàlyé  
 3PL then return-PNCT PRED go:IN field DEM again  
 ‘They returned to the field again.’

- (25) tànà bə̀ptsá dóm fə̀ŋánnà ʒàbàdàlyé  
 tà nàb ə̀ptsá á dóm fə̀ ŋánnà ʒàbà dàlyé  
 3PL then return PRED go-IN field DEM again  
 ‘They returned to the field again.’

I analyze the form *-hè* in Wandala is a marker of the punctual and completed aspect. As such, it always has past time reference. The evidence that the suffix *hè* is an aspectual category is provided by the fact that it cannot co-occur with other marked aspectual categories, viz. the imperfect marked by the form PRO R1R2 (PRO represents the subject pronoun, R represents the root, and R1R2 represent the first and the second parts of the reduplicated root), the perfect R1PROR2, stative, habitual, or progressive:

- (26) á tírè sá-wá ʔə̀ksé  
 3SG PROG come-VENT Sultan  
 ‘when the Sultan was coming’

Compare the ungrammatical usage with the suffix *hè*:

- (27) \*á tírè sóm-hə̀ ʔə̀ksé  
 3SG PROG come-IN-PNCT Sultan  
 for ‘when the Sultan was arriving’

Additional evidence of the punctual function of the form *hè* is provided by the fact that the marker *hè* cannot be used with verbs that are inherently unbounded, such as the verb *tàtàyà* ‘search’. Such a coding would have been an instantiation of an internal contradiction within one proposition:

- (28) \*à      tàtàyà-myá-hè  
           3SG    search-1PL-PNCT  
           for ‘he searched for us’

Another piece of lexical evidence for the punctual nature of the marker *hè* is provided by the fact that this marker cannot co-occur with verbs that are inherently punctual. The use of such a marker would have been an instantiation of tautology within one proposition. Here is an example with the verb *kyá* ‘split’, which in propositions involving human affected arguments is translated as ‘disperse’:

- (29) à      kyá      mdè  
           3SG    disperse    people  
           ‘he dispersed people’
- tà      kyá      mdè  
           3PL    disperse    people  
           ‘they dispersed people’
- \*tà      kyá-hè  
           3PL    disperse  
           for ‘they dispersed’

In natural discourse the punctual always codes the end-point of an event. After the punctual aspect, another event must begin:

- (30) tà ycə-s háyè  
 3PL cut-S river  
 ‘they crossed the river’

tà tsáhá tùwá hàynànnà

tà tsá-h á tù w-á hàynànnà  
 3PL stop-PNCT PRED before mouth-GEN river DEM  
 ‘they stopped at the river shore.’

tà tsáhá tùwá hàynànnà

tà tsá-h á t w-á hàynànnà  
 3PL stop-PNCT PRED before mouth-GEN river DEM  
 ‘they stopped at the river shore.’

- (31) à bə pállé ddá ðimà  
 à bə pállé dd-á ðimà  
 3SG say one man-GEN listening  
 ‘The one who listens said, . . .’

With verbs of movement the punctual aspect codes the inception of the movement:

- (32) tàdúhè dúmtàtàyà óvgèñánnà tàtsáhè  
 tà dú-hè dɔ-m tàtàyà óvgè ñánnà tà  
 3PL go-PNCT go-IN search grave DEM 3PL  
 ts-á-hè  
 stop-GO-PNCT  
 ‘They got going in search of that grave, [and] they stopped [at the grave]’

With verbs of posture, the punctual aspect codes a change of posture:

- (33) tàtsóthê tãnábêdómhùdákse  
 tà **tsó-t-hè** tà nábê dóm hùd-á ksè  
 3PL stand-T-PNCT3PL then go:IN belly-GEN town  
 ‘They got up and they went inside the town.’

## 6 Argument coding in the punctual aspect

As in all other aspects, the verb in the punctual aspect can occur without a nominal argument following it in transitive and intransitive constructions:

- (34) tãnábèyíshè  
 tà nábà yí-s-hè  
 3PL THEN dig-S-PNCT  
 ‘Then they dug it up.’

- (35) tãnàbùpúmhá dúmhúdà hàye [not in the recording]  
 tà nábà pú-m-hè á dú-m hùd-á hàye  
 3PL THEN fell-IN-PNCT PRED go-IN belly-GEN river  
 ‘Then they threw themselves into the river.’

In natural discourse the nominal subject in the punctual aspect is coded by the preposition *gə̀*, the same preposition that codes purpose phrases and clauses, nominal beneficiaries of dative predication, and a host of other functions:

- (36) dàcí ànàbê bǝ́í-f-hè gə̀šíilyá zàrvá tàré  
 dàcí à nábê **bǝ́í-v-hè** gə̀ šíili-á zàrv-á-tàré  
 then 3SG THEN fall-AFF-PNCT TO sand-GEN sesame-GEN-3PL  
 ‘Then, one of their sesame seeds fell down.’

- (37) àná bùm̀tsógh gə̀ d̀d̀d̀  
 à náb̀à m̀tsó-h̀è g̀ə̀ d̀d̀d̀  
 3SG then die-PNCT TO father  
 ‘The father died.’

- (38) àd̀ə̀sóm̀h́ g̀ə̀l̀ə̀ksé  
 à d̀ə̀ ś-m-h́ g̀ə̀ l̀ə̀ksé  
 3SG SEQ come-IN-PNCT TO Sultan  
 ‘When the Sultan came, . . .’

The characteristics responsible for the way the subject is coded in the punctual aspect may well be semantic and may be linked to the punctual function itself. The following co-occurrences of the preposition *gə̀* obtain:

Verb-h̀è g̀ə̀ Nominal subject  
 [-punctual]

Verb g̀ə̀ Nominal subject  
 [+punctual]

The support for this hypothesis is provided by verbs that cannot occur with the punctual aspect because of their inherent punctual characteristics. Subjects of such verbs are also marked by the preposition *gə̀*. The nominal argument that undergoes change cannot occur in the position immediately following the verb *kyá* ‘split, disperse’:

- (39) \*t̀à náb̀à kyá md̀è  
 3PL THEN disperse people  
 for ‘and then people dispersed’

The only way that the nominal argument that follows the verb can be interpreted as the affected subject is by marking it with the destinative preposition *gè*:

- (40)    *tà*    *nábà*    *kyá*    *gè*    *mdè*  
          3PL    then    disperse    TO    people  
          ‘the people dispersed’

In natural discourse, the punctual aspect can be used in transitive predications, on the condition that there is no nominal object, i.e. the second argument of a transitive verb:

- (41)    *tà**nábèyíshè*  
          *tà*    *nábà*    *yí-s-hè*  
          3PL    then    dig-S-PNCT  
          ‘Then they dug it up.’

The punctual aspect may occur with verbs having indirect object pronouns:

- (42)    *yò jìbámdèná*    *tànjàmbá*    *žílnà*  
          *yò*    *jìb-á*    *mdè*    *ná*    *tá*    *njà*    *mb-á*    *žíl*    *nà*  
          well    type-GEN    people    DEF    3PL    stay    house-GEN    man    DEF  
          ‘Well, the type of people who remain at the husband’s
- tántàrè* *gdzàgyálnà*    *óskè*    *máfárɲàrà*  
          *tá*    *ántàrè* *gdz-á*    *gyál*    *nà*    *óskè*    *máfàrè* *ɲàrà*  
          3PL    CONJ    young    girl    DEF    like    aunt    3SG  
          ‘who are with the young girl, are like her aunt

óskè gdzámóɲàrà tǎnjǎnnúhè  
 óskè gdzà mó ɲàrà tá nj-á-n-n-ú-hè  
 like young mother 3PL 3PL stay-3SG-3SG-APPL-PNCT  
 támlǎnnú mágàɪrà  
 tá mlá-n-n-ú-wà mágà ɪrà  
 3PL help-3SG-3SG-VENT do work  
 ‘like her sister, they remain with her to help her with the work.’

In natural discourse, there are no instantiations of the nominal object occurring with the punctual aspect. That might be a result of the limited number of natural discourse data, especially since elicited sentences do have nominal objects:

(43) tà nábà yí-s-hè ddó tàrè  
 3PL THEN dig-S-PNCT father 3PL  
 ‘Then they dug up their father.’

There is, however, systematic evidence that the nominal object cannot occur in the punctual aspect. The suffix *hè* can be used with the affected, pronominal subject:

(44) à šbè-v-hé  
 3SG hide-AFF-PNCT  
 ‘she hid [herself]’

The addition of the nominal object to this verb, with the same temporal and aspectual characteristics, does not allow the use of the punctual suffix *hè*:

(45) à šb-í-v-á nǎlmàn-á-rwà  
 3SG hide-1SG-AFF-GO goods-GEN-1SG  
 ‘she hid my goods’

## 7 Discourse function of the marker *hè*

Although the suffix *hè* codes the punctual aspect, it is not always used when the event is punctual, regardless of whether the verb is inherently non-punctual or punctual. That points to the possibility that the suffix *hè* has some other, more general, function. That other function could be to indicate that the described event constitutes necessary background for the understanding of the events in the subsequent discourse. The support for the proposed hypothesis is provided by the structure of sentences, by the structure of discourse, and by a number of distributional facts that the hypothesis can explain. Each of the explanations constitutes **part of the** evidence for the hypothesis.

### 7.1 Evidence from the sentence structure

In sequential clauses in isolation, the first clause provides background for the events in the second clause. Consequently, the first clause has the marker *hè* and the second clause does not, because it is not expected to be followed by anything else in discourse. In the following example the predicates of both clauses may be inherently punctual:

- (46)   ám à    ɬ̀rdàk-**há**   náb̀mb̀d̀f̀ã  
           á-m       à       ɬ̀rdàk-**hé**    à       náb̀   mb̀d̀f̀ã  
           PRED-IN 3SG   slip-PNCT   3SG   then   fall  
           ‘when he slipped he fell’ (elicited)

A clause ending in *hè* cannot be the last clause in the discourse, as it does not provide background for anything. In the following example, neither predicate is punctual, and yet the first one receives the suffix *hè* but the second does not:

- (47)   à       dá-h       á       d́-m   mb̀à-rà   ántàrà à       bárf̀è  
           3SG   go-PNCT   PRED   go-IN   home-3SG   CONJ   3SG   wash  
           ‘he returned home and washed’ (elicited)

- (48)   à       dá-h       á       d́-m   mb̀à-rà

3SG go-PNCT PRED go-IN home-3SG  
 ‘he returned home’ (Cannot be the last sentence of a discourse)

## 7.2 Systemic evidence

The grammatical system of Wandala provides additional evidence for the discourse function of the punctual aspect. The suffix *hè* cannot occur in negative clauses. This is perhaps conditioned by the fact that the punctual aspect has the feature ‘completed’. Perfective aspects in Chadic languages, which are also [+completive], cannot co-occur with negative polarity. But perhaps there is a better explanation, viz, that the absence of an event is less likely to constitute necessary background for the understanding of the ensuing discourse than the presence of an event.

The suffix *hè* cannot occur in content-interrogative clauses. Asking a specific question cannot serve as background for the interpretation of subsequent events in discourse.

The data gathered contain one elicited example of the marker *hè* with the polar interrogative clause. Even this example constitutes background for the subsequent discourse, as evidenced by the counter-expectational rather than straight interrogative meaning of the clause:

(49) à j-í-hè hè  
 3SG hit-1SG-PNCT Q  
 ‘But did he hit me?’ (elicited)

## 7.3 Evidence from the discourse structure

The event-backgrounding function of the marker *hè* explains why it occurs in the first of the verbs and not with the second verb in the following example. The first verb constitutes the background for the second verb. The second verb does not constitute background for the subsequent event:

- (50) tàtsóthè t ànábèdómhùdák s è  
 tà tsó-t-hè tà nábè d ó-m hùd-á ks è  
 3PL rise-ON-PNCT 3PL then go-IN belly-GEN town  
 ‘They got up and went to the town.’

- (51) tàdèmbá l èks é  
 tà d è mb-á l èks é  
 3PL go house-GEN Sultan  
 ‘They are going to the Sultan’s.’

In the following example, the first sentence has the punctual marker *hè* providing the background for the second sentence, so that the place where people arrived would be known:

- (52) tàná b èptsá há d ómf è n ànn l àb àd àly é  
 tà náb èpts-á-h è á d ó-m f è n ànnà l àb à d àly é  
 3PL THEN return-GO-PNCT PRED go-IN field DEM again  
 ‘They returned to the field again.’

- (53) émmà l àr à s àr èms àmd èn à  
 é m à l àr à s á-r è-m-s-à m d è n à  
 well now come-3PL-IN-come-GO people DEF  
 ‘And now, those people came.’ (the ones whom the Sultan sent)

The backgrounding of the event helps to understand the subsequent event. In the following fragment of a narrative sentence (55) provides the background for sentence (56)

- (54) séi bà mèy cì-cì kùmú mà màgánástàrà  
 séi bà mè yìcìcà kùmú mà màgà-n èstá-rà  
 then, FOC 1.INCL cut-cut if not 1.INCL do-3SG how-Q  
 ‘We have to cross [the river], otherwise, what can we do.’

- (55) tànàbùpúmhá dúmhúfà hàye [not in the recording]  
 tà nába pú-m-hè á dú-m hùf-á hàye  
 3PL THEN fell-IN-PNCT PRED go-IN belly-GEN river  
 ‘Then they threw themselves into the river.’

- (56) gágógógógógó yàwà dègdzám hùfá háye  
 gágógógógógó yàw à dègdz á-m hùf-á háye  
 gul, gul, gul, water 3SG run PRED-IN belly-GEN river  
 ‘gul, gul, gul, the water runs within the river.’

The use of the punctual aspect may provide the necessary background for an event that comes much later in discourse. In the first sentence of the following fragment, the suffix *hè* provides the background for the rest of the narrative but not for the immediately ensuing sentences:

- (57) dàcí ànábè bvǰíf-hé gǎsílyá zàrvá tàr pàllé  
 dàcí à nába bvǰív-hè gǎ sílì-á zàrv-á-tàr pàllé  
 then 3SG THEN fall-PNCT TO sand-GEN sesame-GEN-3PL one  
 ‘Then, one grain of their sesame seeds fell down.’

- [(58) tèycàs háye tànàbàtsá twáhè ɲánnà [not on the recording]]  
 tà ìc-s háye tà nába ts á-t wá háye ɲánnà  
 3PL cut-S river 3PL THEN stop PRED-T mouth river DEM  
 ‘They crossed the river, then they stopped at the shore of the river.’

- (59) tàycós      hàyé  
 tà ycó-s      hàyé  
 3Pl cut-S      river  
 ‘They crossed the river’

A discourse fragment may have several events backgrounded, so that they all contribute to the understanding of the ensuing discourse. The first sentence in the following fragment provides the necessary background for the second sentence:

- (60) àná bùm̀tsógh gè d̀d̀d̀d̀  
 à      nábà      m̀tsó-hè      gè      d̀d̀d̀d̀  
 3SG      then      die-PNCT      TO      father  
 ‘The father died.’

- (61) àd̀yátàr      mà̀m̀m̀      àntàrgdzrè [àntàrógdzrè]  
 à      d̀y-á      tàr      mà̀m̀m̀      àntàr      gdz-rè  
 3SG      leave-GO      3PL      mother CONJ      child-NOMIN  
 ‘He left the mother and the child.’

The information about the coming of the rainy season is crucially important for the understanding of the subsequent discourse where the participants are involved in the farmwork. The rainy season does not make an appearance in the discourse again:

- (62) àsómhè      gè̀v́yà  
 à      só-m-hè      gè      v́yà  
 3SG      come-IN-PNCT      TO      rainy season  
 ‘There came the rainy season.’

- (63) t à n j í h è g è t à r m à m à n t á r g d z r è  
 t à n j í - h è g è t à r m à m á n t à r g d z - r è  
 3PL remain-PNCT TO 3PL mother CONJ small-NOMIN  
 ‘There remained mother and child.’

- (64) t à h è r d è f á a t à r è  
 t à h è r d è f - á a - t à r è  
 3PL farm field-GEN-3PL  
 ‘They worked on their field.’

Here is another fragment of discourse, where the punctual marker *hè* provides the necessary background, including time, place, and the participant, for the ensuing sentence:

- (65) à d è s ó m h è g è t è k s é  
 à d è s ó - m - h è g è t è k s é  
 3SG SEQ come-IN-PNCT TO Sultan  
 ‘And/when the Sultan came,’

- (66) t à l v á n g ó g d z è n à b ó l l à h á n à r w à r à  
 t à l v - á - n g è g d z è n á b ó l l à h - á - n - á  
 3PL say-GO-3SG TO child DEF sing song-GEN-2SG-GEN  
 r w à r à  
 REM.DEM  
 ‘they told the child, “Sing that song of yours again!”.’

The evidence that the discourse function of the dative coding of the subject is backgrounding is provided by the fact that arguments so introduced do not have to

reappear in the ensuing discourse. The information provided by such arguments is, however, necessary to understand the ensuing discourse. Thus after the sentence:

- (67) à sǎ-m-hè gè víyà  
 3SG come-IN-PNCT TO rainy season  
 ‘There came the rainy season.’

there follows the text about the beginning of agricultural work. The rainy season is not mentioned again anywhere in the narrative.

In sentence (68) the single argument ‘one grain of their sesame seeds’ is marked by the preposition *gè*. What follows this sentence in the text is a description of the activities in which the grain appears much later, and only as an object:

- (68) dàcí ànábè bvǎí-f-hé gèšǐilyá zàrvá tàr pàllé  
 dàcí à nábè bvǎí-f-hè gè šǐli-á zàrv-á-tàr pàllé  
 then 3SG THEN fall-PNCT TO sand-GEN sesame-GEN-3PL one  
 ‘Then, one grain of their sesame seeds fell down.’

### **The preposition *gè* coding the nominal (or pronominal) subject**

We can attempt now an explanation of why the nominal subject is coded by a preposition when the verb has the suffix *hè*, and why that preposition is *gè* rather than another preposition. Such an explanation will contribute to the understanding of the emergence of ‘dative subjects’. It is important to note that nominal subjects coded by the preposition *gè* are always subjects of intransitive verbs, whether controlling the event or not. In natural discourse (unlike in elicited sentences) there is not a single case of a nominal subject of a transitive verb coded by the preposition *gè*. The preposition *gè* is obligatory if the nominal subject is to follow the verb in the punctual aspect:

- (69) dàcí ànàbè v-à-ǰí-f-hè gəšílyáà zàrvá tàré  
 dàcí à nàbè v-à-ǰí-f-hè gə šílyá-hà á  
 then 3SG THEN fall-PL-AFF-PNCT TO sand-PL GEN  
 zàrv-á tàré  
 sesame-GEN 3PL  
 ‘Then, one of their sesame seeds fell down.’

The preposition *gə* cannot be omitted from the above clauses:

- (70) \*dàcí ànàbè bvǰí-f-hè šílyá zàrvá tàré  
 dàcí à nàbè bvǰí-f-hè šíli á  
 then 3SG THEN fall-AFF-PNCT sand GEN  
 zàrv-á tàré  
 sesame-GEN 3PL  
 for ‘Then, one of their sesame seeds fell down.’

The hypothesis: The scope of the punctual aspect is the entire predication, including the participants. The addition of any other participant must be marked by an additional grammatical means in addition to the position after the verb. Addition of nominal arguments to verbs in other aspects does not require a preposition. The grammatical and semantic function of the unmarked noun phrase following the verb is uninterpretable (as in example (70), thus violating the principle of functional transparency, which says that the role of every element of the utterance must be transparent to the hearer (Frajzyngier and Shay 2003). The various locative complements, even those that follow inherently locative predicates, must be preceded not only by a preposition but also by the locative predicator *á*:

- (71) tà tsáhá tùwá hàynànnà  
 tà tsá-**h** á tù w-á hàynà ñànnà  
 3PL stop-PNCT PRED before mouth-GEN river DEM  
 ‘They stopped at the river shore.’
- (72) tàná bə̀ptsáhá dómfə̀ñánn ñàbàdàlyé  
 tà náb ə̀ptsá-**hə̀** á dóm fə̀ ñànnà ñàbà dàlyé  
 3PL then return-PNCT PRED go-IN field DEM again  
 ‘They returned to the field again.’
- (73) tàdúhè dúmtàtàyà óvgə̀ñánnà tàtsàhé  
 tà dú-**hè** dóm tətàyà óvgə̀ ñànnà tà ts-á-**hè**  
 3PL go-PNCT go-IN search grave DEM 3PL stop-GO-PNCT  
 ‘They got going in search of that grave, and they stopped.’

The position after the verb can be occupied by another clause, which is so marked by subject pronouns:

- (74) tàtsóthə̀ tànábədómhùdáksè  
 tà tsó-t-**hə̀** **tà** nábə̀ dóm hùd-á ksè  
 3PL stand-ON-PNCT 3PL then go:PREP belly-GEN town  
 ‘They got up and they went to the town.’

The preposition *gə̀* is the least semantically marked preposition in Wandala, and it is used as a default preposition when an additional noun phrase has to be added to a clause. The preposition *gə̀* does not impart any specific meaning on the nominal argument that follows it. The occurrence of the preposition is motivated only by the principle of functional transparency, so that the noun phrase that follows the verb is not interpreted in any function other than that of the subject. Additional evidence for the lack of semantic

function associated with the preposition *gə* is provided by the fact that if the nominal subject is fronted for any pragmatic function, it is not preceded by the preposition *gə* or by another preposition, because as an argument of an intransitive verb, it is interpreted as the subject:

- (75) *dàcí màlà-há ɲrè tà dè sò-hè*  
 then parent-PL:GEN 1.EXCL 3PL SEQ come:VENT-PNCT  
*tà bér zàhó nà*  
 3PL find snake DEF  
 ‘When our parents came there, they found the snake.’

### 9 Why are nominal subjects used with the form *hè*?

Nominal subjects are used with the form *hè* for the same reason they are used in any other construction, viz. when they represent a new participant or when the speaker wants to single out one of the participants mentioned in the preceding discourse. The evidence for the proposed hypothesis is provided through an analysis of the discourse. In the following fragment, a number of participants are introduced in sentences 76-79. In sentence 80, one of the participants is selected in the clause providing the background for the ensuing discourse:

- (76) *yò tà s-á lv-á mdè kídýè*  
 well 3PL come-GO story-GEN people three  
 ‘They brought a story of three people.’

- (77) *mdè kídýè ɲánnà mdàrà*  
 mdè kídýè ɲánnà mdà-rà  
 people three DEM people-Q

‘Those three people, who are they?’

- (78) tàrdádámámá ántàrgdzá tàřílé  
 tà dádá mámá ántàr gdz-á-tàř žílé  
 3PL father mother CONJ child-GEN-3PL male  
 ‘They are the father, the mother, and their son.’

- (79) tàbànjátàrè ánhéerànkłàpírè  
 tà bà nj-á-tàrè án héeràn klàpí-rè  
 3PL FOC live-GO-3PL ASSC peace healthy-NOM  
 ‘They lived together in peace and good health.’

If one of the participants is to be mentioned, it is coded by the nominal form:

- (80) àná bùm̀tsógh **gè** dádà  
 à nábà m̀tsó-hè gè dádà  
 3SG then die-PNCT TO father  
 ‘The father died.’

A new participant that has not been mentioned yet must be introduced as a noun, and it is preceded by the preposition *gè*. Again, the sentence provides background that allows the hearer to understand the subsequent discourse that involves work in the field, for which the beginning of the rainy season is a prerequisite:

- (81) àsómhè gèvíyà  
 à só-m-hè **gè** víyà  
 3SG come-IN-PNCT TO rainy season  
 ‘There came the rainy season.’

In the next line there is a switch to another subject, and although these subjects were already mentioned in the discourse, they must be marked by the preposition *gə̀*:

- (82) *tànjíhè gətà̀r mà̀màntárgdzrè*  
*tà ní-hè gə̀ tà̀r mà̀m ántà̀r gdz-rè*  
 3PL remain-PNCT TO 3PL mother CONJ small-NOMIN  
 ‘There remained mother and child.’

## 10 Conclusions about Wandala

In the punctual aspect only intransitive nominal subjects can follow the verb. Such subjects are marked by the destinative preposition *gə̀*, the same preposition that codes the nominal dative/recipient, the target of comparative constructions, the purpose adjuncts, and a host of other relations. The conditions for the use of nominal subjects are: (1) the punctual aspect; (2) an intransitive verb; and (3) the position of the subject after verb. The punctual aspect codes event backgrounding, whereby the whole event, rather than its separate components, is presented for the understanding of the ensuing discourse. The ultimate motivation for coding the postverbal subject through the preposition *gə̀* is thus event backgrounding.

## 11 Implications

The first question that emerges from this study is whether subjects marked by *gə̀* in Wandala are in some way equivalent to dative subjects reported for other languages. The preposition *gə̀* does code the dative function of the nominal argument, but it is not the only marker of this function, as the verb must have the third-person pronominal object marker *tà* as well. Thus the ‘dative’ part of the pairing is not exactly the same as dative

subjects reported for other languages. The nominal arguments coded by the preposition are subjects; thus the ‘subject’ part of the pair is the same.

There is another correlation between the functions of the preposition *gð* in Wandala and the means to code the dative relationship in IE languages, which reinforces the possibility of a functional commonality between the two sets of markers. The preposition *gð* codes the parent-to-child relationship and not the child-to-parent relationship.

One of the languages that has engendered much discussion of dative subjects in the past 25 years is Icelandic, where the phenomenon is called *águfallsþyki* ‘dative sickness’ (cf. Smith 2001, who also reviews some of the scholarship regarding dative subjects in Icelandic). Smith 2001, writing within the Cognitive Grammar model, offers a semantically based explanation for dative subjects: ‘Prototypically, the dative case marks experiencer entity in the event that is construed as simultaneously affected by the event and in turn reacting to that event (bilateral involvement)’ (Smith 2001: 155). Barðdal 2001, working within the Construction Grammar/Usage based model, describes dative subject construction as a ‘verb-class-specific construction, assigned only to verbs of that particular semantic class’. She does accept thematic case assignment, whereby the dative is assigned to experiencer subjects (and also to beneficiaries). All nominal subjects that follow the verb in punctual aspects are indeed experiencers, in the sense that they undergo movement or change. The pronominal subjects, however, do not share this property, and can be controllers of transitive verbs.

So, on the face of it, nominal subjects marked by the preposition *gð* are similar to some dative subjects in Icelandic, in that under some very vague interpretation they are ‘experiencers’. But, are we really dealing with the same phenomenon? Unlike in Icelandic, where dative subjects are associated with some classes of verbs, nominal dative subjects in Wandala are associated with the punctual aspect, rather than with specific characteristics of verbs. The semantic similarity between the experiencer function of the dative coded nouns in Wandala and their equivalents in Icelandic is a similar outcome of different functions. The choice of the preposition *gð* with nominal subjects is an outcome of this preposition being the least semantically marked preposition rather than of its dative/benefactive function. Finally, an argument against the semantic relationship

between the argument and the verb is provided by the fact that verbs with the marker *hè* can have a dative/benefactive argument that is different from the subject. Consider again an example whose part was quoted earlier, which has a third-person singular dative/benefactive pronoun *n*. The semantic role of the pronoun is coded through the use of another third-person object pronoun:

- (83) yò jìbámdèná tǎnjàmbá žílnà  
 yò jìb-á mdè ná tá njà mb-á žíl-nà  
 well variety-GEN people DEM 3PL remain house-GEN man-DEF  
 ‘Well, the type of people who remain at the husband’s
- tántàrè gdzàgyálnà óskè máfárǵàrà  
 tá ántàrè gdzá gyál-nà óskè **máfáre** **ǵàrà**  
 3PL CONJ young girl-DEF like aunt 3SG  
 ‘who are with the young girl, are like her aunt
- óskè gdzámóǵàrà tǎnjànnúhè támlànnú mágàfrà  
 óskè **gdz-á** **mó** **ǵàrà** tá **nj-á-n-n-ú-hè**  
 like child-GEN mother 3PL 3PL remain-GO-3SG-3SG-APPL-PNCT
- tá ml-á-n-n-ú mágà frà  
 3PL help-GO-3SG-3SG-APPL do work  
 ‘like her sister, they remain with her to help her with the work.’

The dative/benefactive experiencer is the participant other than the subject. The subject is not marked by the preposition *gə* because it occurs before rather than after the verb.

There is another interesting parallel between dative subjects and subjects marked by the preposition in Wandala. This time it is the case of Polish. For several types of verbs, a single argument, whether nominal or pronominal can be marked by the dative case. The

verb has the third-person singular neutral subject inflection regardless of the person, number, or gender of the argument marked by the dative case. Such verbs also require the ‘reflexive’ marker *sie*:

(84) zmarlo            mu/jej                                    sie  
 die:3SG:N        3SG:M:DAT/3SGF:DAT        REFL  
 ‘he/she died’

yà        łrdàká-hé  
 1SG    slip-PNCT  
 ‘I slipped down’ (Wandala)

Polish: poslizgnalem            sie  
 slip:PAST:1SG:M        REFL  
 ‘I slipped’

One should not automatically generalize findings regarding a form-function pairing in one language with the form-functions pairings in other languages. Nevertheless, one should not ignore such pairings when they occur across many languages, and especially across unrelated languages. The form-function comparison cannot be complete unless all functions have been examined. While the present study has demonstrated clause internal similarities between subjects marked by the preposition *gə̀* and dative subjects of some Indo-European languages, it did not demonstrate the identity of functions. For that one would need to have the information about the discourse function of dative subjects in Indo-European languages.

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## Abbreviations

IN	Extension coding inner space
S	Source

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<sup>1</sup> Wandala (Mandara) is a Central Chadic language, spoken in the Extreme North province of Cameroon and in North Eastern Nigeria. The present work on Wandala is supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation to Zygmunt Frajzyngier and Erin Shay, and by Jane and Charles Butcher award. Most of the data were gathered in Cameroon where I was hosted over many years by the Institut de Recherche Agricole pour le Développement in Maroua, which also provided me with much-needed institutional and logistic support. I am most grateful to its current director, Dr. Noé Woin, for the support during the years 2004-2006. Erin Shay read an earlier version of this paper and made many important comments on the substance and form of the paper. I am grateful to Joan Maling for comments on the substance of the paper and for pointing me to relevant literature on Icelandic. I am most grateful to Marian Safran for editorial work on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In elicited sentences, a transitive verb with the suffix *hè* can be followed by a noun phrase without any preposition preceding it. Such a noun phrase can be interpreted as the subject or object, depending on the inflectional coding on the verb. If the verb has the affected argument extension *v* without any pronominal object marker the noun phrase following the suffix *hè* is interpreted as the object:

à-ùk c-ú-hè ndàlè  
 3SG- cut-APPL-PNCT hyena  
 ‘Hyena cut a part of it.’

yà-ùk cì-v-á-hè ɬùwá  
 1SG cut-AFF-GO-PNCT meat  
 ‘I cut a part of the meat.’

à-ùk cì-v-á-hè ɬùwá  
 1SG cut-AFF-GO-PNCT meat  
 ‘He cut a part of the meat.’

Although elicited examples are not a reliable source in the investigation of function of a form, the systematic distinction displayed by these examples requires an explanation. Such an explanation, however, lies outside of the scope of the present paper, as it involves an analysis of the speakers’ behavior under the conditions of elicitation.