

Colexification across the Sahara: In what sense is Hausa West African?
Lameen Souag

The identification of genetic relationship relies above all on form-form correspondences supported by meaning. However, if the headwords of a bilingual dictionary were illegible, the distribution of meanings expressed with a common form (colexifications, in the terminology of François 2008) would still serve to help identify where the language was spoken. Examination of the principal languages of the Sahel reveals a number of colexification patterns shared across the region and absent in North Africa proper. These areal patterns cut across genetic boundaries, grouping together Chadic, Songhay, and Mande languages in spite of their disparate origins. Languages recently moving into or out of this area show signs of adjustment to these patterns. Counting shared colexifications turns out to provide an indicative measure of the extent to which Chadic languages have been reshaped by intra-Sahelian contact.