

Evaluative morphology in Fungwa and cross-linguistic comparison

Samuel Akinbo

1. Abstract

Evaluative morphology involves linguistic objects that express concepts such as quantity (e.g. SMALL vs. BIG), quality (e.g. GOOD vs. BAD) and affection (e.g. NEUTRAL, POSITIVE or NEGATIVE) (Jurafsky, 1996; Déchaine et al., 2014; Körtvélyessy, 2015; Déchaine and Gambarage, 2016). In addition to these semantic properties, cross-linguistic tendencies have emerged about the features of evaluative morphology at other levels of linguistic analysis. At the phonetic level, diminutive and augmentative forms tend to contain front and back features respectively (e.g. bémbé ‘small’ lànlà ‘big’ in Yorùbá) (Sapir, 1929; Jespersen, 1933; French, 1977; Awoyale, 1989; Stump, 1993; Körtvélyessy, 2014; Alderete and Kochetov, 2017; Shih et al., 2018). Evaluatives form tend to attach to nouns than other words and involve reduplication (Bauer, 1997; Urbanczyk, 1996). In Benue-Congo languages, evaluative morphology interacts with noun-class affixes (Maho, 1999; Déchaine et al., 2014; Déchaine and Gambarage, 2016).

This work explores how the evaluative morphology in Fungwa fits into the cross-linguistic features of evaluative morphology. Like other Kainji languages, Fungwa is an endangered and low resourced language with about 1000 speakers in Niger State, Nigeria (McGill, 2007; Smith, 2007; Blench, 2018). Fungwa marks number with class prefixes which form singular-plural pairs. The number prefixes on a noun in Fungwa depends on the descriptive semantics of the noun: C1/C2 on humans and kinship, C5/C6 on paired items, C6a on mass and liquid, C9/C10 on diminutive and C11/C13 on augmentative (1a). Unlike the other classes, the diminutive and augmentative classes are not strictly based on the semantic description on the nouns.

In Fungwa, diminution can be expressed by fronting non-high vowels of nominal roots (1b). To express augmentation, non-high vowels of nominal roots are realised as back (1c). Considering that DIMINUTIVE and AUGMENTATIVE are the prototypical meaning of evaluative morphology, the root-vowel mutation can be considered an evaluative formation.

(1) Diminutive and augmentative on all noun classes

	C1-Root	C5-Root	C6a-Root	C9-Root	C11-Root	
	‘follower’	‘water melon’	‘maize’	‘housefly’	‘stone’	
a.	bù-dùègè	nú-kákáná	mù-sòlò	bú-wójè	í-tájà	‘X’
b. DIM	bù-dùègè	ní-kékéné	mì-sèlé	bí-wéjè	í-téjè	‘small X’
c. AUG	bù-dùògá	nú-kákáná	mù-sòlò	bú-wójò	í-tájà	‘big X’

When a noun undergoes diminutive formation, the noun can optionally bear diminutive-class prefixes. Similarly, when a noun undergoes augmentative formation, the noun can optionally bear augmentative-class prefixes. Consider the examples in (2).

- (2) Paired noun: Diminutive and augmentative formations
- | | SG-Noun | PL-Noun | |
|----|---------|----------|-------------|
| a. | ní-jíjò | á-jíjò | ‘eye’ |
| b. | bí-jíjè | jí-jíjè | ‘small eye’ |
| c. | í-jíjò | tjí-jíjò | ‘big eye’ |

Diminutive and augmentative formations can be intensified via a pattern of reduplication. In this case, the reduplicant is a CV prefix, where C is a base-initial consonant and V is [i] or [u] depending on the base-initial vowel.

- (3) Intensity of evaluative
- | | | | |
|----|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| | | ‘tailor’ | |
| a. | CV-Root | bì-télà | ‘X’ |
| b. | CV-Root.Y | bù-tólà | ‘big X’ |
| | CV-Root.Y | bì-télè | ‘small X’ |
| c. | C13-REDRoot.Y | bì-títélè | ‘very small X’ |
| | REDC13-Root.Y | bì-títélè | ‘very small X’ |

It is rare for a language to possess all the cross-linguistic features of evaluative morphology. Comparing the features of evaluative forms in Fungwa to the cross-linguistic features of evaluative forms (4) shows that Fungwa has all the cross-linguistic properties of evaluative morphology (Maho, 1999; Hinton et al., 2006).

- (4) Evaluative in Fungwa and cross-linguistically

	CROSSLINGUISTIC FEATURES	FUNGWA
Semantics/Pragmatics	quantity: big vs. small; intensity; etc.	✓
Syntax/Morphology	attaches to noun; reduplication or iterative; interact with noun class	✓
Phonetics	synesthetic sound symbolism: small [–back] and back[+back]	✓

The evaluative morphology in Fungwa presents evidence which support the cross-linguistic features of evaluative morphemes. The features have not been reported in other Kainji languages (see McGill, 2007; Smith, 2007; Blench, 2012; Aliero, 2013; Dettweiler, 2015; Blench, 2018). Considering that most Kainji languages are endangered and low resourced, it would interesting to investigate whether the properties of evaluative morphology in Fungwa are a family-wide phenomena or innovative features of Fungwa.

References

- Alderete, John and Alexei Kochetov. 2017. Integrating sound symbolism with core grammar: The case of expressive palatalization. *Language* 93(4): 731–766.
- Aliero, Muhammad A. 2013. *Aspects of the morphology of C'lela*. MA Thesis, University of Ghana.
- Awoyale, Yiwola. 1989. Reduplication and the status of ideophones in Yoruba. *Journal of West African Languages* 19(1): 15–34.
- Bauer, Laurie. 1997. Evaluative morphology: In search of universals. *Studies in Language* 21(3): 533–575.
- Blench, Roger. 2012. A Dictionary of the Basa language with an English – Basa reverse. URL <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language/Niger-Congo/BC/Kainji/Basa/Basa%20Dictionary%202019%20complete.pdf>.
- Blench, Roger M. 2018. Nominal affixes and number marking in the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria. In *East Benue-Congo: Nouns, pronouns, and verbs*, ed. John R Watters, vol. 1. Berlin: Language Science Press, 59–106.
- Déchainé, Rose-Marie and Joash Gambarage. 2016. Evaluatives in Bantu. *6th International Conference on Bantu Languages, University of Helsinki*.
- Déchainé, Rose-Marie, Raphaël Girard, Calisto Mudzingwa, and Martina Wiltschko. 2014. The Internal syntax of Shona class prefixes. *Language Sciences* 43: 18–46.
- Dettweiler, Stephen. 2015. *C'lela grammar portrait*. Jos: SIL Nigeria.
- French, Patrice L. 1977. Toward an explanation of phonetic symbolism. *Word* 28(3): 305–322.
- Hinton, Leanne, Johanna Nichols, and John J Ohala. 2006. Sound symbolism. In *Introduction: Sound-symbolic processes*, ed. Leanne Hinton, Johanna Nichols, and John J Ohala. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–14.
- Jespersen, Otto. 1933. Symbolic value of the vowel i. In *Linguistica: Selected papers in English, French and German*, ed. Otto Jespersen, vol. 1.
- Jurafsky, Daniel. 1996. Universal tendencies in the semantics of the diminutive. *Language* : 533–578.
- Körtvélyessy, Livia. 2014. Evaluative derivation. In *The Oxford handbook of derivational morphology*, ed. Rochelle Lieber and Pavol Štekauer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 296–316.
- Körtvélyessy, Livia. 2015. *Evaluative morphology from a cross-linguistic perspective*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Maho, Jouni Filip. 1999. *A Comparative study of Bantu noun classes*. Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.
- McGill, Stuart John. 2007. The Cicipu noun class system. *Journal of West African Languages* 34(2): 51–90.
- Sapir, Edward. 1929. A Study in experimental symbolism. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 12: 225–239.
- Shih, Stephanie S, Jordan Ackerman, Noah Hermalin, Sharon Inkelas, and Darya Kavitskaya. 2018. Pokémonikers: A study of sound symbolism and Pokémon names. *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* (43): 1–6.
- Smith, Rebecca Dow. 2007. *The Noun class system of u-Ma'in, a West Kainji language of Nigeria*. MA Thesis, University of North Dakota.
- Stump, Gregory T. 1993. How Peculiar is evaluative morphology? *Journal of Linguistics* 29(1): 1–36.

Urbanczyk, Suzanne Claire. 1996. *Patterns of reduplication in Lushootseed*. PhD Thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.