The Structure of Evaluative Formations in Yoruba

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Abstract
The issue of the processes involved in the derivation of the following sets of Yoruba words: (a) beẹrẹrẹ/beẹrẹbẹ 'very many', tààràrà/tààràtà 'straight on', etc.; and (b) kóṅkóló 'minutely small', tínṅtínní 'very small portion', etc.; is far from being rested. Are they products of partial reduplication or unique examples of suffixation in the language? Added to the puzzle is the fact that though natural languages tend to be economical by disallowing redundancy, the two sets, with their different forms, appear to target the same semantic niche, which is intensification. This study investigates the structure and semantic interpretations of these sets of words with insights from evaluative morphology (Stump, 1993; Štekauer, 2015; Aronoff, 2016, 2019; etc.). It argues that the two sets are evaluative formations in which the language subtly divides its intensification features into diminution and augmentation. Therefore, the two sets and their subs co-exist without redundancy as each targets separate linguistic niches within the intensification grading in the language. The paper argues in favour of a combination of progressive reduplication and morphophonemic assimilation of features of the root/base as the processes employed in the evaluative formations.

Keywords: diminution and augmentation, reduplication, assimilation, niche, Yoruba

1.   Introduction

Yoruba has two sets of structurally related closed classes of derived nominal words which appear as instances of partial reduplication or, at best, affixation (see Ilọri, 2010:298; 2011:174; Taiwo, 2011:216). The two sets of words, as listed[1] in (1) and (2) below, are idiophonic in nature in that their phonemics tend to impact their semantic interpretations.

Set 1:
1A.	*Root*	*Affix I*		*Output*
i.	tààrà	-rà	→	tààràrà

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[1]   This list is not exhaustive, but representative. The fact, however, remains that the structural pattern of possible examples belonging to this set is one and the same. Note also that there are other evaluative formations in the language not discussed here because of exigencies of time and space.

	'straight'			'straight on'
ii.	wóọ́rọ́	-rọ́	→	wọ́ọ́rọ́rọ́
	'gently'			'very gently'
iii.	gbọọrọ	-rọ	→	gbọọrọrọ
	'straight'			'very straight'
iv.	geere	-re	→	geerere
	'smoothly'			'very smoothly'
v.	ṣòọ̀rọ̀	-rọ̀	→	ṣòọ̀rọ̀rọ̀
	'protrudingly'			'very protrudingly'
vi.	tóóró	-ró	→	tóóróró
	'thinly'			'very thinly'
vii.	bẹẹrẹ	-rẹ	→	bẹẹrẹrẹ
	'many'			'very many'
viii.	gaara	-ra	→	gaarara
	'clearly'			'very clearly'
ix.	tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́	-rẹ́	→	tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́rẹ́
	'slim'			'very slim'
x.	gbòn-ànnà	-nà	→	gbòn-ànnànà
	'straightly'			'very straightly'

1B.	***Root***	***Affix II***		***Output***
i.	tààrà	-tà	→	tààratà
	'straight'			'straight on'
ii.	wóọ́rọ́	-wọ́	→	wọ́ọ́rọ́wọ́
	'quietly'			'very quietly'
iii.	gbọọrọ	-gbọ	→	gbọọrọgbọ
	'straightened'			'very straightened'
iv.	geere	-ge	→	geerege
	'smoothly'			'very smoothly'
v.	ṣòọ̀rọ̀	-ṣọ̀	→	ṣòọ̀rọ̀ṣọ̀
	'protrudingly'			'very protrudingly'
vi.	tóóró	-tó	→	tóórótó
	'thinly'			'very thinly'
vii.	bẹẹrẹ	-bẹ	→	bẹẹrẹbẹ
	'many'			'very many'
viii.	gaara	-ga	→	gaaraga
	'clearly'			'very clearly'

| ix. | tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́ | -tẹ́ | → | tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́tẹ́ |
| | 'slim' | | | 'very slim' |

| x. | gbọ̀nànnà | -gbọ̀n | → | gbọ̀nànnàgbọ̀n |
| | 'straightly' | | | 'very straightly' |

In the subset 1A, the forms of the final syllables of the output are replicas of the last syllable of the roots. Similarly in 1B, the forms of the final syllables of the output replicate the first syllables of the roots. A good look at the second set in (2) below shows a similar pattern albeit with interestingly different phonological forms and modifications.

Set 2:
2. ***Root***   ***Affix***   ***Output***
i.   béńbé   -lé   →   béńbélé
ii. jáńjá   -lá   →   jáńjálá
iii. kíńkín   -ní   →   kíńkínní
iv. kéńké   -lé   →   kéńkélé
v.   kóńkó   -ló   →   kóńkóló
vi. kúńkú   -lú   →   kúńkúlú
vii. tóńtó   -ló   →   tóńtóló
viii. tíńtín   -ní   →   tíńtínní
ix. ṣíńṣín   -ní   →   ṣíńṣínní

The interesting thing about Set2 is that the semantic interpretation of all the root words appears to be one and the same, i.e. *small piece*, just like that of the outputs, *very small piece*. As we hope to show in section three, the semantics of these formations are not exactly the same, as each of them somehow has grading deviations from the default.

Following insights from works like Stump (1993), Körtvélyessy (2015), Štekauer (2015), Andreou (2017), Dyk & Vries (2020), and Yuka (2020), we assume that the outputs of the derivations in the two sets are evaluative in nature. This is evidently so given the fact that they convey some kind of grading or degree of the size denoted by their roots. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section two is devoted to the theoretical underpinning of the work; section three is a discussion of the semantic structure and interpretation of the formations; section four is a discussion of their morphophonemics; and section five is the conclusion.

2.   Theoretical Underpinning

We rely on expositions from the theory of evaluative morphology for the analyses carried out in this paper. Evaluative morphology embodies the various works (Scalise, 1984; Stump, 1993; Jurafsky, 1996; Bauer, 1997; Štekauer, 2015; Grandi and Körtvélyessy, 2015; Andreou, 2017; Martín Calvo, 2019; among many others) that attempt to model aspects of derivational morphology which express subjective evaluation such as diminution, augmentation (i.e. scale of SIZE - BIG or SMALL), affection (pejorative or meliorative), endearment, contempt (i.e. scale of QUALITY - GOOD or BAD), etc. via morphological adaptation of lexical units/items. These morphological formations are widely attested cross-linguistically and they are known to be usually inflectional in nature. According to Grandi and Körtvélyessy (2015:13),

> [...] a linguistic construction can be defined as evaluative if it has the function of assigning a value which is different from that of the standard or default (within the semantic scale to which it pertains) to a concept: this value usually coincides with a shift towards the negative or positive end of the scale and is assigned without resorting to any parameters of reference which are external to the concept itself. [...] For example, the Italian sentence questa é una casetta 'this is a small house (lit. house-DIM)' means that the house in question is small with respect to the standard size of Italian houses.

Andreou (2017) equally claims that evaluation assigns a value different from the default within a pertinent scale and propose that the semantics of evaluative morphology should be handled in line with advancements in the study of the semantics of scales.

These and other related theoretical modeling ideas are employed in this paper to discuss and analyse the objects of our study as presented in the sets of lexical units in (1) and (2) above.

3.   Their Semantics

The semantic interpretation of the affixed items in the two sets of words in examples 1 and 2 are closely related though in different forms and dimensions. They denote the evaluative feature of *intensity* but in two contrasting ways. While those of Set1 are used for augmentation in that they denote the grading of intensity of the BIGNESS/LARGENESS of the root; those in Set2 are employed for diminution

in that they denote the grading of the SMALLNESS of the root (Andreou, 2015, 2017; Štekauer, 2015; Dyk & Vries, 2020; etc.).

The affixed items in Set1 denote the *degree of intensity* of the root in a way that relates to the evaluative category of Quantity (SIZE) of the root. In line with Štekauer (2015:1), we assume this evaluative feature for this kind of formation in Yoruba is systematically distributed over three cognitive categories namely SUBSTANCE, ACTION, and QUALITY[2]. This assumption logically follows from the fact that instantiations of each of these cognitive categories can be identified in the roots thus:

SUBSTANCE: - Number: 3(a) bẹẹrẹ-*bẹ/-rẹ*
                   many-INTS
                   'very many'
          (b) wuuru-*wu/-ru*
                   countless-INTS
                   'so countless'

    - Mass/Width: 4(a) tẹẹrẹ-*rẹ/-tẹ*
                   slim-INTS
                   'very slim'
          (b) tínínrín-*tín/-rín*
                   tiny   -INTS
                   'very tiny'

    - Length/Height: 5(a) gbọọrọ-*gbọ/-rọ*
                   straightened-INTS
                   'very straightened'
          (b) gbọ̀nànnà-*nà/-gbọ̀n*
                   long   -INTS
                   'very long'

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[2]   We do not find evidence for the cognitive category of CIRCUMSTANCE, at least, in this set of words. That, however, does not imply that such a cognitive category is completely absent in the language. See Štekauer (2015) for the description of this category.

ACTION[3]: 6(a)   tààrà-*tà/-rà*
                   straight-INTS
                   'straight on'
           (b)   wọ́ọ́rọ́-*wọ́/-rọ́*
                   gently-INTS
                   'very qently'
           (c)   ṣòòrò̀-*ṣò/rò̀*
                   protrudingly-INTS
                   'very protrudingly'
           (d)   tóóró-*tó/-ró*
                   thinly-INTS
                   'very thinly'

QUALITY: 8(a)   gaara-*ra/-ga*
                   clearly-INTS
                   'very clearly'
           (b)   geere-*re/-ge*
                   smoothly-INTS
                   'very smoothly'

Given the fact that the intensifying evaluative meaning of the affixed items in these set of examples denotes the grading of the BIGNESS/LARGENESS of the root, we conclude that they are employed for augmentation with each of them representing possible sub-niches of that grading as allowed by the language[4]. This explains why all of them are able to co-exist in the language without any problem of redundancy. It is also pertinent to add that the alternation between the first or final syllable of the root in these formations does not have any serious semantic import. We assume that the choice is based purely on the contextual stylistic preferences of the user.

The affixed items in Set2 are intensifying diminutives meaning *very/extremely* in that they measure the degree of the SMALLNESS denoted by the roots. For instance, *-lé* in *béńbé-lé* marks the extreme degree of the smallness denoted by *béńbé*, just as *-ló* does to *kóńkó* in *kóńkó-ló*. Therefore, they have the same general semantic

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3   This, as used here, refers to the 'manner of the action' or otherwise denoted by the V that selects the item as complement, e.g. *tààratà* in *lọ tààràtà* references the manner in which the action denoted by *lọ* was carried out.

4   We suspect that the sub-niches of this grading may be more or deeper than what we have identified here. We however leave the unearthing of such details to future studies.
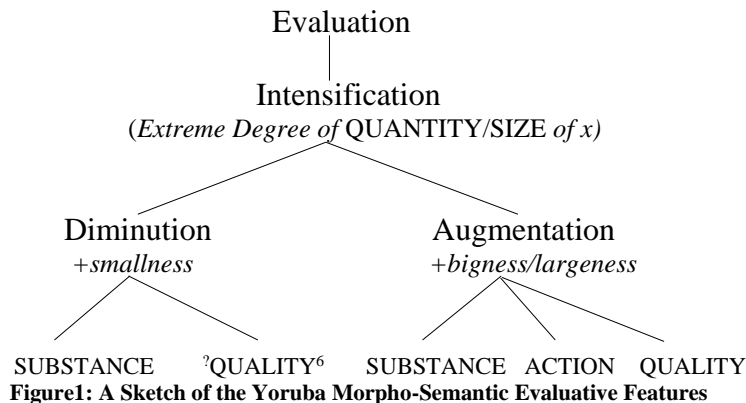
distinctiveness of *intensifying degree of x*, where *x* is a [+N+A] root/base that denotes SMALLNESS either attributively as in (9) or otherwise as in (10).

9a. ẹran   *jáńjá*   kan   báyìí
    meat small-piece certain/one   this
    'a certain small piece of meat'

 b. ẹran   *jáńjá-lá*   kan   báyìí
    meat   small-INTS   certain/one   this
    'a certain very small piece/portion of meat'

 c. Orí   *kóńkó* bí   orí   awó
    Head   small like   head   guinea-fowl
    'A small head like that of guinea-fowl.'

 d. Orí   *kóńkó-ló*   bí   orí   awó
    Head   small-INTS   like   head   guinea-fowl
    'A very small head like that of guinea-fowl'

10a. Ẹran   náà   rí   *jáńjá*
     Meat   DEF   look   small
     'The meat looks small.'

 b. Ẹran   náà   rí   *jáńjá-lá*
    meat   DEF   look   small-INTS
    'The meat looks very/minutely small.'

 c. Orí   rè̩   rí   *kóńkó*
    Head 3SG look small
    'His/her head looks small.'

 d. Orí   rè̩   rí   *kóńkó-ló*
    Head 3SG look small-INTS
    'His/her head looks very small.'

One question that we however still need to answer is why all members of Set2 are able to co-exist in the language despite seemingly having the same meaning. Just as it happens with Set1, we assume that the affixed items in Set2 represent sub-

niches of the degree of diminution denoted. We observe that the referent of each of them is restricted to some certain words to the exclusion of others. For instance, *kóńkó-ló* can refer to *orí* 'head', *ilé* 'house', *ọkọ̀* 'vehicle', *ọmọ* 'child', etc. but not *aṣọ* 'cloth', *oúnjẹ* 'food' *omi* 'water' (as *kínńkín-ní / tíńtínní* would be preferred for these two), *ìdùnnú* 'joy/happiness' (e.g. *ìdùnnú kínńkín-ní/tíńtín-ní/*kóńkó-ló*), *ọgbọ́n* 'wisdom' (e.g. *ọgbọ́n kínńkín-ní/tíńtín-ní/ *kóńkó-ló*), etc. Similarly, the reference of *jáńjá-lá* excludes *oúnjẹ* 'food' and *ilé* 'house' (e.g. **oúnjẹ jáńjá-lá, *ilé jáńjá-lá*). Evidently, liquids such as *ọtí* 'beer/hot-drink', *omi* 'water', *epo* 'palm-oil', *ọbẹ̀* 'soup' (e.g. **ọtí jáńjá-lá*, **omi jáńjá-lá*, **epo jáńjá-lá*, **ọbẹ̀ jáńjá-lá*, etc.) are also excluded from that list.[5]

Therefore, from the semantic point of view, we can conclude that what Yoruba language does with these two sets of evaluative formations is to separate her diminution features from those of augmentation using some sorts of internal feature grading. This is schematically captured and exemplified in figure 1.

Evaluation
|
Intensification
(*Extreme Degree of* QUANTITY/SIZE *of x*)

Diminution
+*smallness*

Augmentation
+*bigness/largeness*

SUBSTANCE   ?QUALITY[6]   SUBSTANCE   ACTION   QUALITY

Figure1: A Sketch of the Yoruba Morpho-Semantic Evaluative Features

The implication of figure 1 is that, though the sets of words somewhat have similar superficial semantic interpretations, each set targets separate evaluative niches. While Set1 is for augmentation, Set2 is reserved for diminution. The sketch also shows that there are at least three sub-niches within the augmentation niche such that the language distinguishes her evaluative augmentation in terms of *Quantity of* SUBSTANCE, *Quantity of* ACTION, and *Quantity of* QUALITY. These facts explain why the two main sets (1 and 2) and the subsets within the evaluative augmentation

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5   Fine-grained details of this semantic co-occurrence restrictions still have to be worked out in future studies.

6   This still requires further investigation.

niche exist side by side without redundancy in the language because they all have different niches which ensure their survival. Therefore, in line with Aronoff (2019:5), we conclude that Yoruba language does not present two sets of evaluative formations with the same semantic interpretation (i.e. intensification), rather the two sets have separate productive niches and sub-niches which made it possible for them to survive side by side without redundancy.

In formalizing the semantics, we assume following Andreou (2017), that evaluative features are relational in nature. This implies that

> The semantics of evaluative morphology involves a comparison between the derived lexeme and the set of things denoted by the base lexeme (i.e. the comparison class) with respect to a pertinent scale.
>
> (Andreou, 2017:7)

The pertinent scale in this instance is SIZE which is considered to be the core or the default value culturally or socially associated with the referent of the root/base in Yoruba. If we label the SIZE attribute of the root/base as α and that of the derived lexeme as β, we can capture the relational evaluative feature of the derived lexeme by setting up constraints that regulate the relation between α and β to derive diminutives or augmentatives, as the case may be. The constraints are presented in (11) and (12), and summed up in (13).

> 11. Diminution constraint: $\beta < \alpha$ (i.e. β is smaller than α)
> 12. Augmentation constraint: $\beta > \alpha$" (i.e. β is larger than α")
> 13. ... "smaller than X" < X < "bigger than X"...

While (11) derives the semantics *X is smaller on the scale of SIZE than the standard of its category*[7] where X= β; (12) produces *X is bigger on the scale of SIZE than the standard of its default*. Andreou (2017:19) summed it up thus:

> Based on (16 [our 13]), derived lexemes the referent of which is "smaller than X on the scale of SIZE", where X is the standard of comparison, are diminutives, whereas, derived lexemes the referent of which is "bigger than X on the scale of SIZE" are augmentatives.

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[7]   See Andreou (2017:15).

These constraints fix the relationship between the derived lexeme and the base lexeme as either one of diminution or augmentation and derive the desired semantics.

4.   Their Morpho-phonemics

Following Stump (1993), we are persuaded that the morphophonemic rules that derive the two sets of words being investigated in this study are evaluative in nature. This is so because their specifications are transparent as they persist/percolate from the base/root to the derivative without changing the syntactic category of the root. According to him (Stump, 1993:1),

> … for any two distinct syntactic categories *X* and *Y*, no rule which is transparent with respect to some morpho-syntactic feature *F* ever applies to a base of category *X* to produce a derivative of category *Y*, even if *F* is a feature for which members of both *X* and *Y* may in principle be specified ….

We, therefore, propose that the evaluative formations in sets 1 and 2 are derived via a combination of reduplication, affixation (suffixation[8] to be precise), and some phonemic manipulations or adjustments allowed by the language.

4.1.   The Augmentatives

Beginning with Set1, we propose a progressive partial reduplication process which copies either the first (as in 1A) or final (as in 1B) syllable of the root and suffixed it to the root to yield the output, as exemplified below in (14).

14a.   tàà<u>rà</u>   → tààrà-*<u>rà</u>*

　　　　　COPY and PASTE

14b.   <u>tà</u>àrà   → tààrà-*<u>tà</u>*

　　　　　COPY and PASTE

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[8]   While the claim about suffixation for evaluative formations in Yoruba may appear marked because prefixation is known to be the most productive in the language, the vast majority, 95%, of the world languages employ it to derive such formations. See Štekauer (2015:7).

While it is a well-documented fact in the literature that the affixation process mostly employed for word formation in Yoruba is prefixation (Awobuluyi, 1978, 2016; Bamgbose, 1990; Tinuoye, 1991; Owolabi, 1995; Oyebade, 1999; Ilori, 2010, 2011; Taiwo, 2011; etc.), considering the facts of the data, it would be superfluous to claim that the affixed items in this instance are prefixes. Even if we claim that the root/base is raised to the specifier position of the prefix to derive the output, one would have to claim that 1A and 1B are derived differently as the supposed prefix must have been contiguous to each of those two syllables (i.e. the first and the last syllable) at some point in the process of derivation. Therefore, we consider our position in this paper to be intuitively straightforward and economical. Interestingly, it also aligns with facts from recent cross-linguistic data on the issue (see footnote 7).

4.2. The Diminutives

The morpho-phonemics of the diminutives in Set2 is a bit different and interesting when compared to those in Set1. We propose that the diminutive morpheme in this context is an affix, a suffix to be precise, and its canonic form is *ní* /ní�̄/. This follows established claims in the literature that /n/ is the canonic phoneme in Yoruba which has /n/ and /l/ as allophonic variants. The phonemics of the diminutive formations in Set2 is, therefore, driven by this alternation. If the vowel of the root is [+nasal], the canonic-related form of the affix /ní̄/ is employed. On the other hand, if the vowel of the root is [-nasal] (i.e. [+oral]), the lateral variant /lv́/[9] is employed. In this second instance, v́ takes the exact form of the vowel found in the root. This assimilation is interesting in that it aligns with the /l/ and /n/ allophonic alternation in Standard Yoruba where /l/ regularly occurs with oral vowels and /n/ occurs with nasal vowels (Awobuluyi,1978; Owolabi, 1989). It, therefore, logically follows that the morphophonemic processes involved in the formations in Set2 is the suffixation of *ní* and the subsequent alternating assimilation of the [±nasal] vocalic feature of the root. This process is captured in (15a) while the phonological rule that drives it is presented in (15b).

15a. **_Input_**   **_/n/ →/l/_**   **_Output_**

kóńkó-ní	→ kóńkó-lv́	→ kóńkó-ló	⎤	+ *alternation*
jáńjá-ní	→ jáńjá- lv́	→ jáńjá-lá	⎦	
tínńtín-ní	→ tínńtín-ní	→ tínńtín-ní	⎤	- *alternation*
kínńkín-ní	→ kínńkín-ní	→ kínńkín-ní	⎦	

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9   v́ here stands for any high-toned oral vowel.

15b.

$$\text{ní} \rightarrow \begin{Bmatrix} \text{ní} & /\underline{\quad} & \text{[+nas]} \\ \text{lv́} & /\underline{\quad} & \text{[-nas]} \end{Bmatrix}$$

5.   Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the derivation of two uniquely related sets of Yoruba words. We argued that the two sets are evaluative formations employed by the language to subtly separate its augmentation features from those of its diminution. On the processes employed to derive them, we argued in favour of a progressive reduplication process which copies the first or final syllable of the root and subsequently suffixed it to the root/base to derive the items in Set1. We submitted that the choice of either the first or final syllable of the root is not for any serious semantic purpose but driven purely by stylistic preference. For Set2, we claimed *ní* to be the canonic shape of the diminutive morpheme which is suffixed to the root with subsequent alternating assimilation of the [±nasal] vocalic feature of the root, such that if the vowel of the root is [+nasal], the canonic-related form /ni᷄/ is employed but if the vowel of the root is [-nasal], the lateral variant /lv́/ is used. This position syncs with the well-established claim on the allophonic alternation of /n/ and /l/ in Standard Yoruba.

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