1. Introduction

Despite rich inflectional and derivational morphology (Puglielli 1981), Somali\(^1\) does not display typical evaluative constructions.\(^2\) As a matter of fact, Somali lacks productive morpho-syntactic processes expressing evaluation, such as the suffixation of -ino in Italian, e.g. tavol-ino /table-DIM/ ‘small table’. Quantitative evaluation is performed by using the adjectives yär ‘small’ / wéyn ‘big’ as modifiers of a noun, e.g. miis yär ‘small table’. Qualitative evaluation, in turn, is extremely restricted. The reduplication of the stem expresses approximation, reduction and/or attenuation, but this process applies only to a few verbs and adjectives (nouns are excluded). In this chapter, first I introduce a few interesting features of Somali morphology, then I survey evaluative strategies in nouns, verbs and adjectives.

2. Generalities on Somali

Somali is a Lowland East-Cushitic language spoken by roughly 13 million people in Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland, Djibouti, Ethiopia (Ogaden) and Kenya (Northeastern Province). Northern Somali dialects, spoken North of the Wadi Shabeel, represent the Standard variety of the language (cf. Banti 2011).

Somali, as Cushitic languages in general, is an accentual tone language. Somali has distinctive pitch contrasts, although mainly in nouns (Andrzejewski 1964, Banti 1988a, Hyman 1981, Puglielli & Siyaad 1984).\(^3\) Tone can distinguish lexical items, as well as gender, number and case. This is illustrated below:

(1) Accentual tone contrasts
   a. qáan ‘young camels’ vs. qaáñ ‘debt’ (two distinct lexical items)
   b. inán ‘boy’ vs. ináñ ‘girl’ (gender)
   c. mádax ‘head’ vs. madáx ‘heads’ (number)
   d. géri ‘house.ABS’ vs. gerí ‘house.GEN’ (case)

As for morphology, Cushitic languages display rich noun and verb inflectional systems. The main inflectional features include: a two-gender distinction, overt syntactic case morphology, complex pluralisation patterns, accentual tone contrasts used for gender/number/case oppositions, strong/weak verb oppositions, the presence of reduced verb paradigms. Somali is considered to be extremely conservative with respect to these features, as it displays all of them. Pluralisation, in particular, involves three different kinds of strategies: suffixation, prosodic shift and reduplication (Andrzejewski 1964, 1979, Banti 1988a, Puglielli and Siyaad 1984).\(^4\)

The three first strategies imply the change of gender in the plural:

(2) Pluralisation patterns in Somali
   a. naág (F) => naagó (M) ‘wom-an/en’ (suffixation & gender change)
   b. albaáb (M) => albaabbó (F) ‘door(s)’ (suffixation & gender change)
   c. mádax (M) => madáx (F) ‘head(s)’ (prosodic shift & gender change)
   d. miis (M) => miisás (M) ‘table(s)’ (reduplication)
Adjectives, in turn, do not belong to a clearly defined category in Somali. Items such as yár ‘small’ and wéyn ‘big’ are best interpreted as state verbs displaying a particular defective paradigm (Andrzejewski 1969, Banti 1988b, Mansuur 1988: 95-96, Mous 2012). The adjectival paradigm is formed by an adjectival root and the inflected forms of the reduced paradigm of the verb yahay ‘to be’. A reduced paradigm is characterized by reduced distinctions in subject marking. Reduced present forms are identical to the root, whereas past forms display distinct inflectional endings.\(^5\)

Saeed (1993: 185-202) claims that there two sorts of adjectives: ‘basic adjectives’ (a small number), such as yár ‘small’ and wéyn ‘big’ and those formed from nouns and verbs by addition of lexical suffixes, such as caan-sán ‘famous’ (cf. caán ‘fame’), wanaag-sán ‘good’ (cf. wanáag ‘goodness’) and jär-án ‘chopped’ (cf. jär ‘to break’). All types follow the head noun and form a relative clause:

(3) Adjectives
a. shalay baa ri-dii caddayd la qashay yesterday FOC goat-DEF.NOM white.PAST.3F IMPERS killed ‘YESTERDAY, the white goat (the goat which was white) was killed.’ (Banti 1988b: 209)

b. áqal-ka cåd house-DEF.ABS white ‘The white house (a house which is white)’ (Saeed 1993: 189)

In (3.a), the adjective is inflected at the 3F past form, whereas in (3.a) the same adjective takes the reduced present form.

As a general feature of Lowland East Cushitic, NPs are head-initial and the unmarked clause order is SOV; in addition, main clauses display obligatory focus marking.\(^6\) It is worth illustrating an example of this peculiarity, as it is useful to understand the behaviour of evaluative morphology on nouns:

(4) Obligatory focus marking
a. Gaadhí cusúb b-ãan sóo iibsaday car.ABS new FOC-PRO.1S VbPart buy.PAST.1S ‘I bought A NEW CAR’


As in (3.a) above, the adjective cusúb ‘new’ is inflected in the past and is syntactically rendered by the following relative clause: ‘the car which was new (at time of driving)’ (cf. 4.b).

Adjectives are pluralised only through reduplication.\(^7\) The reduplicated plural is formed by prefixing a copy of the first syllable to the stem. Only the second syllable bears the high tone. A few examples are shown below:\(^8\)

(5) Pluralisation of adjectives
a. cåd => cadcåd ‘white’

b. cusúb => cususcusúb ‘new’
c. fudúd $\Rightarrow$ fufudúd ‘easy, light’
d. yár $\Rightarrow$ yaryár ‘small’
e. wéyn $\Rightarrow$ waawéyn ‘big’

Finally, plural agreement is not mandatory in adjectives, as the following examples show:

(6) Plural agreement in adjectives
a. nimán-ka wanaagsán
   man.PL-DET.ABS good
b. nimán-ka wanwanaagsán
   man.PL-DET.ABS PL.good

In the next section, I present evaluative morphology in nouns.

3. Evaluative morphology in nouns

As mentioned in the introduction, evaluative morphology in nouns consists of a syntactic configuration implying a noun followed by an adjective. This is shown below:

(7) Evaluation in nouns
a. gúri yár
   house.ABS small
   ‘a small house’
b. gúri wéyn
   house.ABS big
   ‘a big house’

These constructions are extremely productive and are used to express quantitative evaluation. More precisely, yár-constructions express diminution and, in a few cases, age variation, whereas wéyn-constructions are used for augmentation although not for age variation. I show three additional examples of diminution / age variation below:

(8) Diminution / age variation
a. sán yár ‘a small nose’
b. búug yár ‘a small book / exercise book’
c. wiil/inan yár ‘a young boy’

As for augmentation, additional examples are shown below:

(9) Augmentation
a. sán wéyn ‘a big nose’
b. búug wéyn ‘big book’
c. waddó wéyn ‘big road’

In addition to diminution, augmentation and age variation, a lexical interpretation can occur in a very few cases. This happens, for instance, in the example (9.c), which can correspond to ‘highway’ (that is ‘a big road’). Further examples are illustrated below:’
Lexical interpretation

a. macalgád yár ‘teaspoon’
b. macalgád wéyn ‘tablespoon’

As far as evaluative morphology in nouns is involved, qualitative interpretation is limited to the following examples:

Approximation/reduction/attenuation

a. wáx yár ‘instant-DIM, about an instant’
b. wákhti yár ‘moment-DIM, about a moment’
c. daqiq yár ‘minute-DIM, about an hour’

These examples correspond roughly to Spanish hor-it-a ‘hour-DIM-F’, moment-it-o ‘moment-DIM-M’, and so on. According to my informants, however, they are used quite rarely.

To conclude, Somali has a productive quantitative strategy on nouns involving two functions: diminutivisation and augmentation. Instead of using typical evaluative morphological processes, Somali quantitative evaluation is formed syntactically as shown below:

Evaluative strategies in nouns

a. Diminutive: N + yár ‘small’
b. Augmentative: N + wéyn ‘big’

The adjectives yár and wéyn behave as shown in section 2.

In the next section, I deal with evaluative morphology in verbs and adjectives.

4. Evaluative morphology in verbs and adjectives

Verbs and adjectives display, although in a limited way, a specific process for evaluative morphology. Unlike nouns, both verbs and adjectives undergo reduplication to express qualitative evaluation. The use of yár ‘small’ and wéyn ‘big’ as we have shown for nouns is excluded.

An example for each category is shown below:

Evaluation on verbs and adjectives

a. V: cun-cún (cf. cún ‘to eat’)
   eat-eat
   ‘to nibble’
b. A: cad-cád (cf. cád ‘white’)
   white-white
   ‘whitish’

In (13.a), the reduplicated verb form indicates a repeated action of eating. This action involves small portions of food. In other words, forms such as that in (13.a) have a pluractional interpretation (Cusic 1981, Tovena 2011). Other examples are proposed below (cf. Saeed 1999: 49-50):
Pluractional reduplicated verbs

a. *boodbóod* ‘to jump repeatedly (small little jumps)’ (cf. *bóod* ‘to jump’)
b. *dirdír* ‘to send repeatedly’ (cf. *sír* ‘to send’)
c. *jarjár* ‘to mince’ (cf. *jár* ‘to cut off’)

The verbal forms in (14), as pluractional forms cross-linguistically, indicate approximation, reduction and/or attenuation of the meaning expressed by each basic verb. Evaluation in verbs is restricted to pluractional patterns and does not seem productive.

The same morpho-phonological process, reduplication, occurs in adjectives, too. In the same way, it is used to express approximation, reduction and/or attenuation of the meaning the basic adjective refers to. This applies generally to adjectives expressing a colour and those expressing either a discrete quality or state, such as *yár* ‘small’ and *jarán* ‘chopped’, respectively:

Approximation, reduction and attenuation in adjectives

a. *yaryár* ‘tiny, thin’ (cf. *yár* ‘small’)
b. *cascás* ‘reddish’ (cf. *cás* ‘red’)
c. *jarjarán* ‘chopped up’ (cf. *jarán* ‘chopped’)

The reduplicated form *yaryár* in (15.a) can be used to express evaluation of nouns denoting humans, such as *gabádh* ‘girl’, *wíil* ‘boy’, etc.. As a consequence, the following contrast arises:

Forms such as that in (15.b) are not productive. According to my informants, only a few colour-related adjectives undergo reduplication. For instance, *hurúud* ‘yellow’ cannot be reduplicated: *huhurúud*.

Finally, observe the form in (15.c), *jarjarán* ‘chopped up’. It is built on *jár* ‘to cut off’. Interestingly, both the verb and the adjective have a corresponding evaluative form (14.c vs. 15.c). In both cases, evaluation is performed through the same morpho-phonological process and involves a similar qualitative nuance.

Before concluding, two clarifications deserve attention. Both concern the reduplication process. First, consider the following fact. The evaluative strategies I described above differ each other with respect to the category. Nouns use a syntactic construction, whereas verbs and adjectives a morphological one. Interestingly, however, adjectives do not behave like nouns. This situation is an additional argument in favour of the hypothesis according to which adjectives are state verbs, as discussed in section 2. Adjectives and verbs are the same category in Somali.

Second, note that, in adjectives, plural and evaluative forms are formally identical. Both strategies require reduplication. Thus, a reduplicated adjective is both the plural form of the corresponding basic form and the evaluative form of the same basic form. The context is necessary to disambiguate either interpretation.
5. Conclusions

In this short survey, I showed the general pattern of evaluation in Somali. This process involves primarily nouns, although not through a morphological strategy. Rather, we showed that nouns are evaluated by using the adjectives yár ‘small’ and wéyn ‘big’ as modifiers.

Besides nouns, evaluation concerns verbs and adjectives. Due to the particular status of the latter category in Somali, verbs and adjectives behave in the same manner with respect to evaluative morphology. Reduplication expresses approximation, reduction and/or attenuation. We observed that this process is restricted to a list of verbs and adjectives.

To conclude, Somali displays typical evaluative processes only in verbs and adjectives. These processes, however, are not productive.

References


Grandi, N. and L. Körtvélyessy (this volume), ‘Introduction’.


Mansuur, A. (ed.) (1988), Le lingue Cuscitiche e il Somalo (Studi Somali 8), Rome: MAE, Dipartimento per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo.


Notes

1 I adopt Somali official spelling based on Latin alphabet. The following specific conventions apply: c [ʕ], q [q], sh [ʃ], kh [x], dh [d], x [h], ʔ [ʔ], j [ʤ] and y [j]. High tones are marked by accents.

2 As far as I know, some words of different categories are distinguished by tone alone, e.g. ku ‘in, on’ (PREP) vs. ku ‘you’ (PRO), là ‘with’ (PREP) vs. la ‘one’ (PRO) (examples from Saeed 1993, 23). Verbs, in turn, are never distinguished on the basis of pitch contrast alone.

3 Recent work on spoken Djibouti Somali (Northern Somali branch) shows that speakers tend to generalize the use of suffixation in pluralisation. For instance, given miis ‘table’, possible plural forms are: miis-yáal ‘table-PL’ or miis-ó ‘table-PL’ instead of the standard reduplicated form miisás ‘tables’ (cf. Lampitelli 2012).

4 The complete paradigm of two adjectival verbs, adág ‘strong’ and fiicán ‘good’, are illustrated in Puglielli and Mansuur (2012, 931-933).


6 Reduplication in adjectives does not work as reduplication in nouns, cf. miis vs. miisás (2.d).

7 There are two irregular forms: waawéyn (cf. S.e) and dhaadhéer (cf. dhéer ‘long, tall’).

8 Other typical lexical diminutives/augmentatives, however, do not exist: rí ‘goat’ vs. waxár ‘kid’ (cf. Italian: capra ‘goat’ vs. capr-etto ‘goat-DIM’).