



Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

University of Vienna
georg.ziegelmeier@univie.ac.at

ABSTRACT

A first examination of patterns expressing attenuated qualities in Hausa and some other mainly West Chadic languages reveals that reduplication is the most wide-spread morphological process to reduce the degree of a quality. For instance, in Hausa full reduplication and shortening of the final vowel on each component derives denominal “*X-like*”-expressions, or “*X-y*” and “*X-ish*” adjectives, i.e. concrete nouns may form adjectives with the meaning “*characterized by*”, sometimes retaining nominal status with an attenuated meaning, e.g. **gishirī** ‘salt’ > **gishiri-gishiri** ‘salty’, but **barcī** ‘sleep(ing)’ > **barci-barci** ‘a nap’. In a similar manner abstract nouns of sensory quality (ANSQs) allow reduplicated forms, with a detensified “*X-ish*” meaning, e.g. **zāki** ‘sweetness’ > **zāki-zāki** ‘sweetishness’ (**lēmō mại zāki-zāki** ‘a sweetish soft drink’). According to SCHUH, GOGUE and DOLE (n.d.) Ngamo employs partial reduplication to express the concept “*NOUN-like*”, “*NOUN-ish*”. Apart from this, some other Chadic languages allow reduplication of simple or derived adjectives, usually denoting colours or physical attributes, in order to get a detensified/attenuated meaning of a quality, e.g. Hausa: **bàbba** ‘big’ > **bàbba-bàbba** ‘biggish’ (cf. JAGGAR 2001); Bade: **ḡuwā** ‘red’ > **ḡuwā-ḡuwā** ‘reddish’ (cf. ZIEGELMEYER 2015); Bole: **dài** ‘red’ > **dài-dài** ‘reddish’ (cf. GIMBA and SCHUH Ms.); Malgwa: **dzáyye** ‘white’ > **dzáy-dzáyye** ‘whitish’ (cf. LÖHR 2002). Our survey of something like 45 Chadic languages from all branches reveals that if we find information on attenuation processes, then either full or partial reduplication is involved.

KEY WORDS: attenuation, Chadic, Hausa, reduplication, semantic weakening





GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

1. Introduction

In this paper we illustrate morphologic attenuation (reduced degree of a quality) in Hausa and some other mainly West Chadic languages. It has been shown in typological studies of derivational morphology that attenuation is among the most frequent adjectival derivational categories in the languages world-wide (see e.g. BAUER 2002: 42). While some languages have specific suffixes which derive attenuated adjectives (e.g. English: **-ish** as in **green-ish**; French: **-âtre** as in **blanch-âtre**; Kanuri: **-àrà̀m** as in **cimê-àrà̀m** 'reddish'), Hausa and at least some related West Chadic languages use full or partial reduplication for the expression of attenuated qualities.

A certain fly in the ointment is that attenuation processes are scarcely described in many grammars on Chadic languages. In our survey of something like 45 Chadic languages from all branches only for eight languages, i.e. Hausa, (Gashua) Bade, Bole, Ngamo, Zaar, Kwami, Malgwa, and Margi, some information on attenuation processes was found. While in Hausa, which is probably one of the best described languages of the African continent, morphologic attenuation is well documented, in most other Chadic languages information is rather scanty. Our scrutiny, nevertheless, shows a certain tendency, i.e. if processes that produce semantic attenuation are documented for a Chadic language then morphological reduplication is involved.

In paragraph 2 we will briefly outline how qualities are expressed in Chadic languages before we draw our attention to Hausa in paragraph 3. Paragraph 4 illustrates attenuation processes in some other Chadic languages, followed by our conclusions in paragraph 5.

2. A note on expressing qualities in Chadic

Generally Chadic languages show a great variety in their possibilities to express a quality, e.g. some languages have a class of adjectives defined by morphosyntactic criteria (e.g. Hausa), others are said to lack a class of adjectives (e.g. Sakun (Sukur)). Some Chadic languages basically employ verbs to express qualities (e.g. Goemai), and others also have a robust class of quality nouns often called abstract nouns of sensory quality (e.g. Hausa). According to FRAJZYNGIER and SHAY (2012: 270)

“not all Chadic grammars state explicitly how the lexical class of adjectives differs from that of verbs, nouns, or other lexical items. Some Chadic languages are reported to have many adjectives and others are reported to have only a few.”



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

Often a language also has various means to express quality concepts, e.g. Hausa whose most common constructions are illustrated in Table 1.

adjectives	noun + adjective	zābì nagàrì ¹	'good choice'
	adjective-linker ² + noun	sābuwā-ř mōtā	'new car'
quality nouns	"being with" + quality noun	tanā dà kyāu	'she is beautiful'
	mài + quality noun	mōtā mài tsādā	'an expensive car'

Table 1 – Common constructions expressing qualities in Hausa

Basically Hausa employs either adjectives, or nouns (often called abstract nouns of sensory quality) in specific constructions to express qualification. While in Hausa adjectives morphologically behave like nominals, according to NEWMAN (2000: 22) they

"can, nevertheless, be distinguished from nouns. First, there are some derivations whose sole function is to create adjectives, not nouns. Second, adjectives have syntactic properties that set them apart from nouns [...] Functionally, adjectives serve as noun modifiers rather than head words [...] Moreover, gender and number in adjectives are agreement features determined by the category of the head noun rather than being intrinsic properties, as is the case with nouns."

3. Expressing attenuated qualities in Hausa

In Hausa full reduplication accompanied by shortening of the final vowel in each component is a morphological process which derives attenuated qualities. Simple and derived adjectives, certain nouns, as well as some adverbs undergo semantic attenuation by means of this process.

3.1 Attenuated adjectives in Hausa

According to JAGGAR (2001: 144)

"Some adjectives, both simple and derived, and typically denoting colours or physical attributes, allow fully-reduplicated forms with a short final vowel on each component, including the inflected feminine and plural forms. These fully reduplicated adjectives have a detensified/attenuated meaning, equivalent to English "X-ish"."

¹ Transcription: **ā**, **ī**, etc. = long vowel; **a**, **i**, etc. = short vowel; **ə** = high central vowel; **à** = low tone; **á** = high tone; **â** = falling tone; **ǎ** rising tone; **ɓ**, **ɗ** = laryngeal implosives; **y** = glottalized palatal glide; **ɬ** = voiceless lateral fricative, **ř** = apical tap/roll, **c** and **j** = palato-alveolar affricates.

² Singular masculine adjectives, as well as plurals take the linker **-n**, while singular feminine adjectives are linked with **-ř**.



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

Following NEWMAN (2000: 27) this process “produces forms that are semantically “attenuated”, i.e., have the quality of the simple adjective but to a lesser extent, e.g. *tsanwā* ‘green’, *tsanwa-tsanwa* ‘light green, greenish’”. The example *yalò-yalò* ‘yellowish’ from *yalò* ‘yellow’, which is a recent loanword from English, shows that the process is still active in the Hausa language. Further examples³ are given in Table 2 where we can see that many attenuated adjectives form also feminine and plural forms. The examples also show that the processes of feminine and plural inflection precede the attenuation derivation.

MASCULINE	FEMININE	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>bàbba-bàbba</i>	<i>bàbba-bàbba</i>	<i>mànya-mànya</i>	‘biggish’
<i>bàbba</i>	<i>bàbba</i>	<i>mànyā</i>	‘big’
<i>baki-baki</i>	<i>baka-baka</i>	<i>bakàke-bakàke</i>	‘blackish, grey’
<i>bakī</i>	<i>bakā</i>	<i>bakàkē</i>	‘black’
<i>dōgo-dōgo</i>	<i>dōguwa-dōguwa</i>	<i>dōgwàye-dōgwàye</i>	‘tallish’
<i>dōgō</i>	<i>dōguwā</i>	<i>dōgwàyē</i>	‘tall’
<i>ɗanye-ɗanye</i>	<i>ɗanya-ɗanya</i>	<i>ɗanyu-ɗanyu</i>	‘rawish’
<i>ɗanyē</i>	<i>ɗanyā</i>	<i>ɗanyū</i>	‘raw’
<i>fari-fari</i>	<i>fara-fara</i>	<i>faràre-faràre</i>	‘whitish, off-white’
<i>farī</i>	<i>farā</i>	<i>faràrē</i>	‘white’
<i>gàjère-gàjère</i>	<i>gàjèra-gàjèra</i>	<i>gàjèru-gàjèru</i>	‘shortish’
<i>gàjērē</i>	<i>gàjērā</i>	<i>gàjèrū</i>	‘short’
<i>jāja-jāja</i>	<i>jāja-jāja</i>	<i>jājàye-jājàye</i>	‘reddish’
<i>jā</i>	<i>jā</i>	<i>jājàyē</i>	‘red’
<i>shūdī-shūdī</i>	<i>shūdīya-shūdīya</i>	<i>shūdā-shūdā</i>	‘light blue, bluish’
<i>shūdī</i>	<i>shūdīyā</i>	<i>shūdā</i>	‘(dark) blue’

Table 2 – Attenuated adjectives derived from primary adjectives

While the above outlined attenuation process most often applies to primary adjectives, it is sometimes also encountered with various derived adjectives, e.g. adjectival past participles (adj.pp), derived adjectives of sensory quality (DASQs), ethnonymic adjectives (ethn.adj), and agential adjectives (agent.adj), cf. NEWMAN (2000), and JAGGAR (2001). In Table 3 some examples are given. As with primary adjectives this process applies also to feminine and plural forms of derived or secondary adjectives.

³ All Hausa examples in this paper come from NEWMAN (2000) and JAGGAR (2001).



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

dàfaffē m.	'cooked'	>	dàfaffe-dàfaffe	'somewhat cooked'	adj.pp
sòyayyiā f.	'roasted'	>	sòyayyiya-sòyayyiya	'slightly roasted'	adj.pp
tsàttsāmā sg.	'very sour'	>	tsàttsāma-tsàttsāma	'somewhat sour'	DASQ
kàkkaurā sg.	'very strong, hefty'	>	kàkkaura-kàkkaura	'somewhat stout'	DASQ
mahàukàtā pl.	'mad'	>	mahàukàta-mahàukàta	'a bit mad'	agent.adj
malàlātā pl.	'lazy'	>	malàlāta-malàlāta	'lazyish'	agent.adj
bàhagò m.	'left-handed'	>	bàhagò-bàhagò	'semi-left-handed'	ethn.adj
bàgidājiyā f.	'naive'	>	bàgidājiya-bàgidājiya	'a bit naive'	ethn.adj

Table 3 – Attenuated adjectives derived from secondary adjectives

Syntactically attenuated adjectives, like other heavy reduplicated adjectives, generally follow the noun they modify (see examples 1-5), and according to JAGGAR (2001: 145) “speakers will often insert an additional diminutive modifier (m./f./pl.) **ɗan/’yaɾ/’yan** in position before the attenuated adjective” (see examples 6-8). Some attenuated, phonologically short and masculine adjectives, however, may also modify a noun in pre-head position with the linker **-n**, cf. NEWMAN (2000), (see example 9). This is not possible with heavy reduplicated adjectives (see example 10).

- (1) **mōtā jāja-jāja**
car reddish
'reddish car'
- (2) **wani dōkì baki-baki**
SID horse blackish
'a blackish horse'
- (3) **nāmā ɗanye-ɗanye**
meat rawish
'rawish meat'
- (4) **wata màcè mahaukaciya-mahaukaciya**
SID woman slightly crazy
'a slightly crazy woman'
- (5) **wata màcè bàgidājiya-bàgidājiya**
SID woman somewhat naive
'a somewhat naïve, dim-witted girl'
- (6) **wasu rīgunā (’yan) jājàye-jājāye**
SID gowns DIM reddish
'some reddish gowns'



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

- (7) **sōjà** (ɗan) **dōgo-dōgo**
soldier DIM tallish
'medium-height soldier'
- (8) **wani** **mùtùm** (ɗan) **mahàukàci-mahàukàci**
SID man DIM somewhat.crazy
'a somewhat crazy man'
- (9) **wani** **fari-fari-n** **kèkè** = **wani** **kèkè** **fari-fari**
SID whitish-LNK bicycle SID bicycle whitish
'some off-white bicycle'
- (10) ***mahaukaciya-mahaukaciya-ř** **màcè**
slightly.crazy-LNK woman
'a slightly mad woman'

3.2 Attenuated abstract nouns of sensory quality in Hausa

In addition to the above illustrated attenuated adjectives, Hausa has also a set of abstract nouns of sensory quality (ANSQs) which, probably on semantic grounds, also may undergo the same attenuation process, i.e. full reduplication accompanied by shortening of the final vowel on each component, cf. (NEWMAN 2000), and JAGGAR (2001). According to NEWMAN (2000: 28) "this is also true in the case of a few other semantically appropriate words that are not ANSQs in the strict morphological sense". In this group we find a few semantically attenuated colour terms derived from source nominals, e.g. **ƙasa-ƙasa** 'brownish' < **ƙasā** 'earth, land', **tòka-tòka** 'greyish' < **tòkà** 'ashes', cf. JAGGAR (2001). Note also that compound colour adjectives with the structure **ruwan** 'lit. water of' + colour simply copy the second member of the compound to create the corresponding attenuated form, e.g. **ruwan hòdà** 'pink' > **ruwan hòdà-hòdà** 'pinkish'. Table 4 illustrates some attenuated ANSQs.

ɗācī	'bitterness'	>	ɗāci-ɗāci	'somewhat bitter'
sanyī	'cold'	>	sanyi-sanyi	'coldish'
kaurī	'thickness'	>	kauri-kauri	'slightly thick'
zāfi	'heat'	>	zāfi-zāfi	'warmish'
tsāmī	'sourness'	>	tsami-tsami	'sourish'
taurī	'toughness'	>	tauri-tauri	'kind of tough'
zāki	'sweetness'	>	zāki-zāki	'sweetish'
ɗūmī	'warmth'	>	ɗūmi-ɗūmi	'lukewarm'

Table 4 – Attenuated abstract nouns of sensory quality (ANSQs)

It is important to note that the outputs are grammatically still nouns, i.e. syntactically they behave like nouns, and not like adjectives. For instance, when modifying a noun attenuated abstract nouns of sensory quality do not follow the



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

noun immediately but insert the particle **màì** sg./**mà̀su** pl. 'being characterized by'. When used in predicative functions attenuated abstract nouns of sensory quality take HAVE sentences.

- (11) **àbinci yā yi sanyi-sanyi**
food 3M.COMP do coldishness
'the food has gone a little bit cold'
- (12) **dà zāfi-zāfi yāu**
with warmishness today
'it's warmish today'
- (13) **māgānī mài dāci-dāci**
medicine characterized.by bitterness
'kind of bitter medicine'
- (14) **kàtīfà tanà dà laushi-laushi**
mattress 3F.CONT with softness
'the mattress is somewhat soft'

Consider the syntactic use of attenuated adjectives in examples 15, and 16.

- (15) **kàtīfà-ř tsàgaggiya-tsàgaggiya cè**
mattress-PRM somewhat.ripped SATB.F
'the mattress is somewhat soft'
- (16) **bàbùř shūdī-shūdī**
motorcycle bluish
'a light blue motorcycle'

Last but not least, we can observe that the same morphological process, i.e. reduplication and final vowel shortening, also applies to mainly singular concrete nouns to derive adjectives with the meaning "X-like, X-y, X-ish" (where X represents the source noun), cf. NEWMAN (2000), and JAGGAR (2001), e.g. **gishirī** 'salt' > **gishiri-gishiri** 'salty', **ruwā** 'water' > **ruwa-ruwa** 'watery', **yàshī** 'sand' > **yàshi-yàshi** 'sandy'. Like other reduplicated adjectives they are generally employed in post-head position, i.e. after the noun they modify, e.g. **madařā ruwa-ruwa** 'watery/skimmed milk'. However, some typically eventive-dynamic nouns also retain their nominal status after application of this morphological process, e.g. **barcī** 'sleep(ing)' > **barci-barci** 'a nap', **māgānā** 'discussion' > **māgānā-māgānā** 'a brief discussion'. According to JAGGAR (2001: 144) "semantically, this subset could be viewed as similar to either reduplicated ("type of") nouns ..., or compared to the attenuated "X-ish" adjectives ...", or as NEWMAN (2022: 133) puts it:



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

“what really seems to tie the two manifestations together [i.e. reduplication of adjectives or abstract nouns of sensory quality and reduplication of concrete nouns G.Z.] is the notion of ‘-ish’ or ‘-like’. Given that adjectives in Hausa are very noun-like, the essence of the process appears to be converting independent nominals into adjective-like or adverb-like modifiers, a use of reduplication that typologically fits nicely into the Chadic mould. Beyond that, there is not much more that we can say at the moment. There is clearly an interesting historical story or stories waiting to be told regarding these phenomena, but this remains a task for future investigation”.

3.3 Attenuated adverbs in Hausa

Finally we can observe that in Hausa reduplication of adverbs basically has two functions. While reduplicated simple adverbs of time, place, and manner typically intensify the meaning, e.g. **dàbam** ‘differently’ > **dàbam-dàbam** ‘very differently’, some denominal adverbs (typically locative) undergo semantic weakening when fully reduplicated. According to NEWMAN (2000: 42) “this is the same attenuation process found with adjectives”. As denominal adverbs already have a short final vowel the shortening rule observed with adjectives and ANSQs does not apply, and “in some cases, the nonreduplicated adverb does not exist, i.e., one has only the noun and the reduplicated adverb [...]” (NEWMAN 2000: 42). According to JAGGAR (2001: 657) “these detensified reduplicates can combine with the downscaling adverb **kàɗan** ‘a little, slightly’, e.g. **gàba-gàba kàɗan** ‘just slightly in front’ (cf. **gàba** ‘in front’ < **gàbā** ‘front of body’)”. Some more examples are given in Table 5.

bāyā	‘back’	>	bāya	‘behind’	>	bāya-bāya	‘slightly behind’
ƙasā	‘earth, ground’	>	ƙasà	‘below’	>	ƙasà-ƙasà	‘a bit lower’
samà	‘sky, heavens’	>	samà	‘above’	>	samà-samà	‘a bit higher’
			nēsà	‘far away’	>	nēsà-nēsà	‘a bit far away’
tsakiyà	‘middle, centre’	>				tsakiyà-tsakiyà	‘around the centre’
dāmā	‘chance’	>	dà dāmā	‘quite a lot’	>	dà dāma-dāma	‘moderately’

Table 5 – Attenuated (locative) adverbs in Hausa

4. Expressing attenuated qualities in other Chadic languages

Our scrutiny reveals that some Chadic languages other than Hausa express attenuated qualities by reduplication. As already stated above information on attenuation processes in many languages is scanty, nevertheless, examples from Gashua Bade, Bole, Ngamo, Zaar, Kwami, Malgwa, and Margi show that full, or in the case of Ngamo, partial reduplication is at hand.



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

4.1 Bade

In Gashua Bade the morphological process of reduplication may derive attenuated qualities amongst others (cf. ZIEGELMEYER 2015). Examples recorded in my data comprise colour terms which are semantically attenuated by reduplication shown in Table 6.

buwâ-buwâ	'reddish'	<	buwâ	'red'
peetâ-peetâ	'whitish'	<	peetâ	'white'
palkâ-palkâ	'blackish'	<	palkâ	'black'
tlortâ-tlortâ	'greenish'	<	tlortâ	'green'

Table 6 – Attenuated colour terms in Gashua Bade

Note that Bade varieties are diverse to the extent that one is tempted to speak of different languages (cf. SCHUH 2007). Quite surprisingly, in Western Bade reduplication is not attested as a process which derives attenuated qualities, instead we find a few examples where reduplication of colour terms intensify their meaning, e.g. **hêta** 'white' > **hethêtân** 'very white', **palka** 'black' > **pâlek-pâlekà** 'very black'.

4.2 Bole

Bole adjectives are discussed in a draft chapter of a reference grammar by Russell G. Schuh, which unfortunately could not appear.⁴ Again we find that reduplication of adjectives may give them an attenuated meaning, like English "-ish", although not all adjectives allow reduplication, e.g. ***dòle-dòle** "smallish", ***gòn-gòn** "niceish" seem unacceptable. Bole usually employs full reduplication in this attenuation process, but there are also some adjectives which undergo partial, rather than full reduplication, e.g. **a'algàji** 'greenish' < **algàji** 'green'. The adjective **pètìlâ** 'white' allows full reduplication (see below), but the partially reduplicated form **pèpètìlâ** 'whitish' is also attested, and according to SCHUH (2005/Adjectives: 8) "the adjective root **bul** 'yellow', which is usually used in the reduplicated form **bulbul** in the base meaning 'yellow', has a reduplicated form **bulbulbul**". In Bole all formally plural adjectives also allow reduplication, however, unlike what we have seen in Hausa, reduplicated plural adjectives in Bole "distributes the base quality over the members of a group, with the additional implication of there being many such referents. Thus, **dāndēn dōlle-dōllè** means 'a large number of children, each of whom is small, not 'children who are smallish'" (SCHUH 2005/Adjectives: 8).

⁴ Glottolog 4.5 dates the draft chapters with 2005 (cf. HAMMARSTRÖM et al. 2021).



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

dài	'red'	>	dài-dài	'reddish'
bù'ùm	'black'	>	bù'ùm-bù'ùm	'blackish'
zòi	'pleasant, nice, tasty'	>	zòi-zòi	'rather pleasant'
ḡènèm	'sour, fermented'	>	ḡènèm-ḡènèm	'sourish'
pètìlà	'white'	>	pètìlà-pètìlà	'whitish'

Table 7 – Attenuated adjectives in Bole

4.3 Ngamo

SCHUH with Umaru MAMU Goge and Jibir Audu Janga DOLE (n.d.)⁵ devote a whole manuscript to “-ish” reduplication in the Gudi variety of Ngamo. According to them (n.d.: 1) “the Gudi dialect of Ngamo has a productive nominal reduplication process that expresses the concept ‘like a NOUN’, ‘NOUN-like’, ‘NOUNish’”. Note that the same process also exists in the Yaya dialect of Ngamo, however, it is not described systematically in the manuscript because of insufficient data. In their manuscript the authors provide tables with reduplicated “-ish” forms without translation into English, i.e. the focus is not on the semantics of the reduplicated forms but rather on syllable weight principles which apply. Interestingly, in Gudi Ngamo it is reduplication of the first syllable the word, not full reduplication as observed in other languages discussed here. According to SCHUH, GOGÉ and DOLE (n.d.: 2)

“the most striking feature of the “-ish” reduplicants is the consistent application of SYLLABLE WEIGHT POLARITY: if the first syllable is light, the reduplicated syllable copies the first CV but lengthens the vowel; if the first syllable is heavy (either CVC or CVV), the reduplicated syllable copies the first CV with the short counterpart of the vowel”.

Table 8 repeats some of the examples given in SCHUH, GOGÉ and DOLE (n.d.: 2).

	BASE FORM	“-ISH” FORM	GLOSS
light syllable	dàhù	dàdahù	‘cornstalk door panel’
	mèrì	mèmerì	‘thatching needle’
	rùdù	rùrudù	‘charcoal’
	kùrì	kùkùrì	‘red clay’
	ìdò	ì'idò	‘eye’
heavy syllable	rèndì	rèrendì	‘spear’
	kèrwò	kèkerwò	‘fish’
	lànjà	làlanjà	‘yellow clay’
	hetrè	hèhetrè	‘white’
	ūnù	?u'ūnù	‘black’

Table 8 – “-ish” reduplication in Gudi Ngamo

⁵ Glottolog 4.5 dates the manuscript with 2009 (cf. HAMMARSTRÖM et al. 2021).



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

4.4 Zaar

According to CARON (2005: 227) in Zaar four adjectives are attested which “have a reduplicated form with a diminutive meaning, which can be translated into English by a [sic!] «-ish» suffix”. The examples given in CARON (2005) are repeated in Table 9 and suggest that rather semantic attenuation than diminution is at place.

jì:	‘black’	>	jì:-jì:	‘blackish’
fyà:li	‘white’	>	fyà:li-fyà:li	‘whitish’
zhèlì	‘red’	>	zhèlì-zhèlì	‘reddish’
mbóci	‘variegated’	>	mbóci-mbóci	‘somewhat variegated’

Table 9 – Attenuated colour terms in Zaar

4.5 Kwami

Following LEGER (1994) adjectives in Kwami, which are formed by reduplication from nouns, semantically usually get a “X-like, X-y, X-ish” meaning, e.g. ʔàm(i) ‘water’ > ʔàm(i)-ʔàm(i) ‘watery’, mór(i) ‘oil, fat, grease’ > mór(i)-mór(i) ‘greasy, fatty’. Furthermore, colour terms in Kwami, if fully reduplicated, have a detensified/attenuated meaning. In Table 10 examples from LEGER (1994: 132) are replicated.

tín	‘black’	>	tín-tín	‘blackish’
púr(i)	‘white’	>	púr(i)-púr(i)	‘whitish’
táy	‘red’	>	táy-táy	‘reddish’
shúdí	‘blue’	>	shúdí-shúdí	‘bluish’

Table 10 – Attenuated colour terms in Kwami

4.6 Malgwa

According to LÖHR (2002) Malgwa has a class of quality nouns which nevertheless may be distinguished syntactically from nouns and adverbs. Full reduplication accompanied by apocope of the final vowel in the first component derives attenuated meanings. LÖHR (2002) gives only examples of colour terms recapitulated in Table 11, and states that loanwords as well as “describing expressions” [beschreibende Ausdrücke] do not undergo reduplication. While it is not totally clear what is meant with “describing expression”, the fact that loanwords are excluded might be a hint that the process is not productive anymore.



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

dzáyye	'white'	>	dzáy-dzáyye	'whitish'
lórəkə	'green'	>	lórək-lórəkə	'greenish'
kyáŋe	'red'	>	kyáŋ-kyáŋe	'reddish'
dónwe	'black'	>	dón-dónwe	'blackish'

Table 11 – Attenuated colour terms in Malgwa

Like in Hausa reduplication in Malgwa applies to mainly singular concrete nouns to derive adjectives with the meaning “X-like, X-y, X-ish” (where X represents the source noun), e.g. **yáwe** ‘water’ > **yáwyáwe** ‘watery’, **ʔííze** ‘salt’ > **ʔííʔííze** ‘salty’ (LÖHR 2002: 101).

4.7 Margi

According to HOFFMANN (1963: 67) “in Margi the adjectives are fairly numerous and must be considered a special part of speech, which is often characterized by the possibility of forming a plural by reduplication”. While he does not provide examples of attenuated adjectives, we nevertheless observe again that adjectives may be derived from nouns typically meaning “X-like, X-y, X-ish”, e.g. **màl** ‘oil’ > **màlmàl** ‘fat, oily’, **éntəbù** ‘rubber’ > **éntəbéntəbù** ‘rubber-like, sticky’, **màlà** ‘woman’ > **màlàlà** ‘of the kind of a woman’ (HOFFMANN 1963: 68).

5. Conclusions

In this paper we illustrated attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and some other Chadic languages. We have seen that the process of full reduplication often accompanied by shortening or apocope of the final vowel produce forms that are semantically attenuated, i.e. they have the quality of the simple adjective but to a lesser extent. Attenuation by full reduplication is found basically in West Chadic languages like Hausa, Gashua Bade, Bole, Zaar, and in Margi, while West Chadic Ngamo shows reduplication of the first syllable of a word to the left. Attenuation by full reduplication with apocope of the final vowel in the first component is also attested in the Central Chadic language Malgwa.

As Hausa is probably one of the best documented languages of the African continent, it is not surprising that also attenuation processes are well described in various grammars (e.g. NEWMAN (2000), and JAGGAR (2001)). Apart from that our survey of something like 45 Chadic languages from all branches yields that information on processes that produce semantic attenuation is very scarce. Needless to say that attenuation probably is not the first and most important phenomenon one looks at when documenting a language. However, what becomes apparent from our scrutiny is that if we find information on attenuation



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

in a Chadic language, then it is full reduplication which is employed, or in the case of Gudi Ngamo reduplication of the first syllable.

Full and partial reduplication are very common processes in Chadic languages, see e.g. AL-HASSAN (1998). While various reduplication processes most often are associated with pluractional verbs, nominal plurality, and functions like intensification, distributiveness, etc., it is still puzzling how semantic attenuation may be linked to these processes.



GEORG ZIEGELMEYER

Attenuation by reduplication in Hausa and beyond

References

- AL-HASSAN, Bello S.Y. (1998). *Reduplication in the Chadic Languages – A Study of form and function*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris & Wien: Peter Lang.
- BAUER, Laurie (2002). "What you can do with derivational morphology", in Sabrina BENDJABALLAH, Wolfgang U. DRESSLER, Oskar E. PFEIFFER and Maria D. VOEIKOVA (eds.). *Morphology 2000. Selected Papers from the 9th Morphology Meeting, Vienna, 24-28 February 2000*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins, 37-48.
- CARON, Bernard (2005). *Za:r – Dictionary, Grammar, Texts*, Ibadan: IFRA.
- FRAJZYNGIER, Zygmunt and Erin SHAY (2012). "Chadic", in Zygmunt FRAJZYNGIER and Erin SHAY (eds.), *The Afroasiatic Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 236-341.
- GIMBA, Alhaji Maina and Russell G. SCHUH (n.d.). Ms. "Adjectives", in Draft chapters of a Bole reference grammar.
- HAMMARSTRÖM, Harald, Robert FORKEL, Martin HASPELMATH and Sebastian BANK (2021). *Glottolog 4.5*, Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5772642>>
- HOFFMANN, Carl (1963). *A Grammar of the Margi Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- JAGGAR, Philip J. (2001). *Hausa*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- LEGER, Rudolf (1994). *Eine Grammatik der Kwami-Sprache (Nordostnigeria)*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- LÖHR, Doris (2002). *Die Sprache der Malgwa (Nárá Málgwa)*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- NEWMAN, Paul (1990). *Nominal and Verbal Plurality in Chadic*, Dordrecht & Providence: Foris.
- NEWMAN, Paul (2000). *The Hausa Language – An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- NEWMAN, Paul (2022). *A History of the Hausa Language – Reconstruction and Pathways to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SCHUH, Russell G. with Umaru Mamu Goge and Jibir Audu Janga Dole (n.d.). "ish" Reduplication in Gudi Ngamo (Ms).
- SCHUH, Russell G. (2005). Draft Forthcoming Bole Reference Grammar (Ms).
- ZIEGELMEYER, Georg (2015). "On the adjective class in Gashua Bade", *Afrikanistik-Aegyptologie online* 2015.