

EVALUATIVES IN THE EDO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper describes evaluation in Edo, a Niger Congo language indigenous to Nigeria. Evaluation is conceived here as an interpretation of the semantic primitives SMALL, BIG, GOOD and BAD. Previous studies (Omoruyi 1986 and Imasuen 2010) discuss the use of *ovbi* “child” as an expression of SMALL. However, researchers are yet to explore the range of evaluative values in the language, the morphological strategies for expressing evaluation, as well as the relationship between expressions and the values they encode. To address these concerns, we collected data from field notes, audio-visual materials and a textual corpus comprising research articles and reference books. For data analysis, the study adopted the unified radial model of evaluative morphology (Kortyvelyessy 2015). The results show formal expressions for four evaluative values: diminution (DIM = small), augmentation (AUG = big), intensification (INT = more of an attribute) and approximation (APR = resemblance). The functions of the diminutive and augmentative markers can be extended to express two other values: the pejorative (PEJ = negative evaluation) and appreciative (APP = positive evaluation) respectively. For all of these, the language uses three morphological strategies: affixation, compounding and reduplication. It also has words where the marker can be identified, but the base is a non-existent word. The study attributes these problems to the prototype effect (Schneider 2013), and suggests that the conditions on morphological evaluation (Grandi and Kortyvelyessy 2015) be redefined to accommodate the range of expressions evident in natural languages.

Keywords: augmentation, approximation, diminution, intensification, Edo language

Olikemwẹ

Ebe na gie izomwa vbe Edo, evbo Niger Congo ne o ke Enaigirria rre. Vbe ebe na, izomwa o re ota ne a ya khaa wẹ ọmwa KHERHE, KPOLO, MAA ra ere I MAA. Avbe iguṣe (Omoruyi 1986 and Imasuen 2010) kaa guan kaṣen *ovbi* ne Ebo tiere “child”. Iran gie vbene a loo ere ya khaa wẹ emwi kherhe. Sokpan, ebe ọkpa ne o zanzan ikpẹmwẹ hia ne a ya gie izomwa na i rro. Rhumwunda oni, a na ya nọọ ivbi Edo vbene iran guan kaṣen izomwa nekherhe hẹ. A vbe nọọ iran ikpẹmwẹ ne izomwan nikere loo. Debaa edata ne o ke ewannię iran ladian, ma viọ eso vbe ebe ne avbe iguṣe gbennere kevbe errekodu ẹkpẹtin ughe. Ezanzan lele aro ne a tiere “unified radial model of evaluative morphology” (Kortyvelyessy 2015). Ebe na miẹ wẹ Edo mwẹ ikpẹmwẹ ughughan ne izomwa ene: diminution (DIM = kherhe), augmentation (AUG = kpọlọ), intensification (INT = ne o tua sẹ vbene emwi ye) vbe approximation (APR = ne o ru vbe emwi). A khian khaa wee emwi yẹ ọmwa, a sẹtin loo ikpẹmwẹ izomwa nọkpọlọ. Adeghe emwi sọnnọ ọmwa, o ghi loo ikpẹmwẹ izomwa nekhere. Ode eha ere Edo laa kuun ikpẹmwẹ izomwa: orhiebaa, ofigba kevbe ikpẹmwẹ ne a loo igba eva. Eso vbe rro ne a ma sẹtin zanzan foo, rhumwunda a gha rrie ikpẹmwẹ izomwa hiin a reen emwi ne a ya enokerhe khaa. Idoboo na ere Ebo tiere “the prototype effect” (Schneider 2013). Ude ne ebe na buu ore wẹ na dọlọ ilele ikpẹmwẹ izomwa ne Ebo tiere “the conditions on morphological evaluation” (Grandi and Kortyvelyessy 2015). A gha dọlọ ore, a gha sẹtin guan kaṣen ikpẹmwẹ izomwa ne o rre domwande evbo.

Ikpẹmwẹ-kpataki: ikpẹmwẹ, ilele, izomwa, Edo, odun

1. Introduction

Evaluation is the quantitative (objective) or qualitative (subjective) appraisal of entities, contexts and events. Evaluative morphology refers to the expression of such appraisals through morphological processes (Fornasiero 2018:16 and Kortyvelyessy 2015:21). Evaluative morphology is concerned with the range of processes which enable a language to build lexemes which signify evaluation. Usually, the constructed lexeme belongs to the same category as its base, a property which is sometimes called homocategoriality (Amiot and Stosic 2014:17). As a field of study, evaluative morphology deals with “linguistic constructions which have the function of assigning to a concept one of four semantic values: BIG, SMALL, GOOD, BAD; such constructions must contain an overt, lexically independent exponent of the concept and

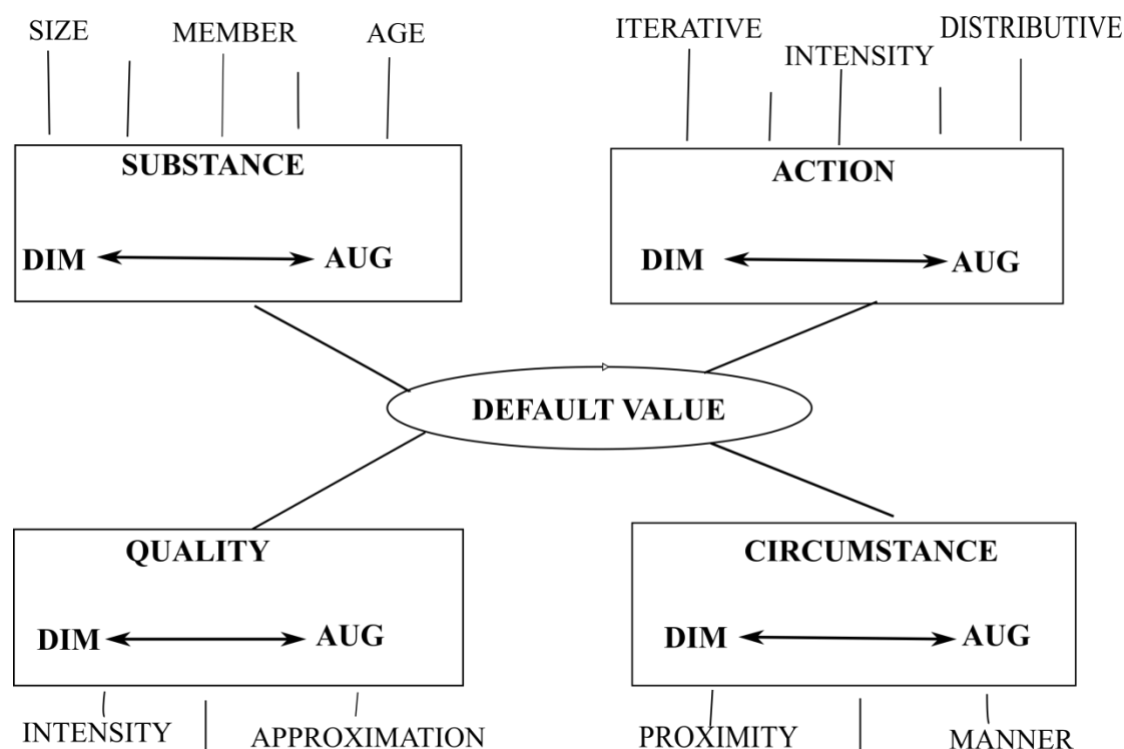
an evaluative marker which assigns it a value" (Grandi 2009:46). For example, in English adding the prefix *micro-* or the suffix *-let* to certain words assigns them the value SMALL as one finds in nouns like *micro-biology*, *micro-chip*, *micro-film*, *book-let*, *drop-let* and *pig-let*.

Evaluative morphology allows a wide range of meanings, as evident in languages like Italian and Spanish which express approval, disapproval, intensification and modesty using the same affixes which serve as SMALL and/or BIG markers (Bauer 1997:538). In such languages, evaluative expressions lend themselves to contextual interpretation. Using the earlier examples of the *-let* suffix, one will observe that all the constructed words are small-sized versions of the roots. However, one cannot extend the analysis to a word like *wife-let* where the suffix conveys a qualitative (BAD) rather than a quantitative (SMALL) appraisal. Observe that *wife-let* has the same internal structure as the other examples, but the term is not a judgement about the small size of wife but an expression of contempt for the referent (Schneider 2013:140). This negative appraisal is not based on the combined meanings of the root and the semantic value of the suffix, but on the language users' perception of the concept.

Following Scalise (1984) evaluation should be considered a branch of morphology distinct from inflection and derivation. Since that publication, there has been a considerable number of works on evaluative morphology. For instance, there is a handbook (Grandi & Kortyvelyessy 2015) which provides basic descriptions of evaluative morphology in different languages. Also, there are studies which adopt different theoretical frameworks approaching the subject from perspectives such as morphosyntax (Steriopolo, Markopoulos & Spyropoulos 2021 and Cinque 2015), morphopragmatics (Polak 2023 and Barbaresi & Dressler 2020), semantics and pragmatics (Prieto 2005 and Jurafsky 1996).

In spite of the growing research interest, there is a paucity of resources on the subject in African languages (Appah & Amfo 2011). There are no existent studies dedicated to evaluative morphology in the Edo language. This study, therefore, examines the language with the aim of describing its evaluative expressions. The study has two specific objectives. The first objective is to identify the range of evaluative values in the language. The second is to determine the morphological processes used for evaluation.

To address these concerns, the study collected data from a corpus comprising two dictionaries (Melzian 1937 and Agheyisi 1986), audiovisual materials (Ikpomwosa & Amadasun 2009, Edionwe 2016 and Edenazogie 2018), research articles (Omoruyi 1990, Omoruyi 1986) and textbooks approved for teaching at the secondary and tertiary levels of education (Imasuen 2010, Imasuen 1993 and Omoregie 1983). For data analysis, the study adopted the unified radial model (Kortyvelyessy 2015).



The model is based on four cognitive categories: SUBSTANCE, ACTION, QUALITY and CIRCUMSTANCE. Evaluation is analysed as a decrease (DIMinution) or an increase (AUGmentation) in the default value of each category. The default value refers to the acceptable standard for the concept under evaluation; Take the subscriber identity module cards (SIM card) issued by mobile network providers, for example. The default value is simply called a SIM. Moving towards DIM along the double ended arrow in the substance category, we get decreased sizes called the *micro*-SIM and the *nano*-SIM cards.

In morphology, the four cognitive categories find their expressions in corresponding lexical (or open) word classes i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Substance includes human beings and objects, while action includes terms which denote states, actions and processes. Quality is concerned with features, properties and characteristics, while circumstance is about the reason, manner, time and location of actions. Outside the box for each cognitive category, there are linked terms like size, iterative, intensity and manner. These represent semantic evaluative values.

Several of them have been identified in the literature (Constantini & Grandi (2019, Masini, Norde & Van Goethem, 2023). They include DIMinution (SMALL) and AUGmentation (BIG) which deal with size; PEJoration (or DEPreciative) which expresses negative (BAD) appraisal; ENDearment (or APPreciative) which deals with positive judgements (GOOD); INTensification which conveys the superlative sense of a default value and APProximation which refers to the reduced sense of quality, fake or an inferior version of substance. Languages differ in terms of their semantic evaluative values and the strategies with which they are realized. This difference is represented with the unlabelled lines around the boxes in figure 1. Depending on the number of evaluative values it encodes, a language will have need for fewer or more of those lines.

The paper is organized into four sections. Section 1 states the research objectives and discusses the method used for this study. Section 2 provides some information about the Edo language. Section 3 addresses the objectives of this study. Section 4 presents the summary and conclusion.

2. The Edo Language (ISO-code 639-3: bin, Glottocode: bini1246)

Èdo is a language from the Edoid genus (Elugbe 1979) in the Benue-Kwa group of African languages (Williamson & Blench 2000 and Guldemann 2018). It is indigenous to seven Local Government Areas in Edo State, Nigeria. Following Eberhard, Simons & Fennig (2022), the population of speakers within the country is 2,030,000. Besides Èdo, native speakers use two other languages widely; they are English, which is the official language of the country and Nigerian Pidgin.

2.1. Typological Profile

Èdo has thirty-nine sounds comprising twenty-seven consonants, seven oral and five nasal vowels. It has three lexically distinctive tones: high, low and a rising tone which contrasts low tones in monosyllabic verbs (Omozuwa 2013). The language has eight established word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections (Omoregie 1983). In terms of word-formation, Èdo has been described as a verb-based language (Imasuen 1993) which allows several derivational processes including affixation, compounding, conversion and reduplication.

Constituents in the sentence follow the subject-verb-object order. Morphosyntactic features in the language include tense, aspect, number, person and case. Tense makes reference to present, past and future events, while aspectual distinction is between perfective and imperfective (Omoruyi 1991 and Yuka & Omoregbe 2011). Number has two values: singular and plural. It is marked on nouns and pronouns; if they occur with adjectival modifiers, such adjectives agree in number with the noun or pronoun (Omoruyi 1986a). Person differentiates pronoun referents; it is realised cumulatively with number. Case is structural in the language; the feature is evident solely in Èdo pronouns (Omoregie 1983 and Usenbo & Taiwo 2025).

2.2. Orthography

The language has an official orthography based on the Roman script. It has been used here with a few modifications. The study added the digraphs <*mw*> (cf. Agheyisi, 1986), <*nw*> and <*ny*> (cf. Omozuwa 2013). They represent the labiodental nasal and palatal nasal respectively. These digraphs are yet to be included in the official orthography. In addition, the study used tone marks for the entire data set. Currently, the orthography only uses tone marks to differentiate homographs.

2.3. Previous Studies

Previous studies on Èdo morphology focused mainly on inflection and derivation. As an example, Omoregbe and Evbayiro (2022) discuss the derivational patterns of Èdo words using the theory of lexical morphology. Adeniyi (2007) took a similar approach by using auto-segmental theory to analyse morphological structures in the language.

There are two articles (Omoruyi 1986b and Omoruyi 1990) which mention evaluative morphology. Omoruyi (1986b) considers the morpho-syntactic and morpho-phonological strategies for expressing number in nouns, pronouns and verbs. The article states that *òvbi* “child” functions as a diminutive prefix when it occurs with non-human nouns (Omoruyi 1986b:65). The second article, Omoruyi (1990), considers the internal structure of words providing examples of inflectional, derivational and evaluative morphology. Additional resources on Èdo evaluative morphology include the two comprehensive dictionaries – Melzian (1937) and Agheyisi (1986). These works show that the strategies for evaluation include the use of overt markers which are actual free and bound morphemes in the language. These markers are shown in the examples under the different sub-sections outlining the types of evaluation in the Èdo language.

The use of overt free and bound markers has also been documented in other Niger-Congo languages like Akan (Appah & Amfo 2011), Ghotuo (Bankale & Elugbe 2019), Lamnso' (Yuka 2020) and Yoruba (Ilori & Adubairo-Ajayi 2021). Like the previous studies on Èdo, research in related languages narrowed their scope to

diminution and augmentation. The only exception is the study on Emai (Schaeffer and Egbokhare 2024), which explores two additional values: approximation and intensification.

3. Evaluative Morphology in Edo

This study found that the Edo language uses morphological means to express diminution, augmentation, intensification and approximation. Beyond the appraisal of size, the diminutive and augmentative markers also express the depreciation (or pejorative) and appreciation (or endearment). Approximation is unlike the other evaluative values; it is expressed morphologically and via a periphrastic construction.

3.1. Diminution

The diminutive value modifies the interpretation of a root by adding the semantic sense associated with a decreased quantity. The marker which introduces this value changes neither the word class nor meaning of the root (Schneider 2013:138). This re-echoes the position that evaluative morphemes do not change the category of the words to which they attach (Scalise 1984 as cited in Bauer 1997:541). In many instances, diminution in Edo follows these descriptions as one can observe from example 1. Sub-section 3.5 discusses the exceptions to the patterns shown here.

- | | | | |
|--------|---|---------------------------|---------------------|
| (1) a. | <i>à -</i>
NOML
'A small-sized person' | <i>tínniè</i>
be_small | |
| b. | <i>à -</i>
NOML
'A small-sized object' | <i>kàmwá</i>
be_small | <i>ùdù</i>
heart |
| c. | <i>ikù</i>
small_bits_of
'Wood chips' | <i>èrhàn</i>
wood | |
| d. | <i>ikpè</i>
seed
'Gravel' | <i>òkútá</i>
rock | |
| e. | <i>òlùkù</i>
offspring (animal)
'Piglet' | <i>èsì</i>
pig | |
| f. | <i>òsómwè</i>
'broken_piece'
'Piece of yam' | <i>ìnyá</i>
yam | |
| g. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Kid' | <i>èwé</i>
goat | |

The examples above show diminution via affixation and compounding. Affixation, as shown in examples 1 (a) and (b), is an uncommon strategy in Edo evaluative morphology. Though the language employs several affixes for inflection and derivation, this study found that only the prefix in 1(a) and (b) occurs in evaluative constructions. Earlier, the paper mentioned that evaluative morphology allows for a range of meanings. This is exemplified with the term *àkàmwùdù* in example 1(b). It refers to small-sized objects, but Melzian (1937:6) shows that it also expresses pejorative evaluation when used in reference to persons. Such individuals are small-

sized; their physical stature is viewed as an undesirable trait and not something that is attractive or worthy of appreciation.

Compounding provides a more lucid illustration, as one can observe from examples 1(c) – (g). Observe that diminutive morphemes in 1(e) and (g) have a similar denotation – “offspring”. These two morphemes are not the same; the difference lies in their morpho-syntactic distribution. As indicated in the parenthesis, *òlùkù* is only acceptable for the smaller form of herbivorous animals. The restriction does not apply to *òvbí*, as this diminutive marker combines freely with both animate and inanimate nouns as shown in example 2.

- | | | |
|--------|--|-------------------------|
| (2) a. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Child of the deceased' | <i>òrímwì</i>
corpse |
| b. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Pupil' | <i>àrò</i>
eye |
| c. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Pestle' | <i>ódó</i>
mortar |
| d. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Pupil' or 'Student' | <i>èsùkù</i>
school |
| e. | <i>ìvbí</i>
child.PL
'A kaleidoscope of butterflies' | <i>òvèn</i>
sun |

The data shows that wider distribution of *òvbí* is due to its use for purposes other than evaluation. As illustrated in the examples above, this lexical item marks kinship as in 2(a). This basic function can be extended to other kinds of relations like the body-part and part-whole in 2(b) and (c) respectively. Example 2(d) shows that *òvbí* also indicates group membership and collective reference as example 2(e) shows.

With regards to evaluation, this diminutive marker is used to appraise the size of animals, plants and objects as in examples 3(a), (b) and (c). This sense of small size becomes depreciative when *òvbí* combines with nouns which refer to humans as in examples 3(d) – (f).

- | | | |
|--------|--|------------------------|
| (3) a. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Calf' | <i>émílá</i>
cow |
| b. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Sapling' | <i>èrhán</i>
tree |
| c. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Small chair' | <i>ágá</i>
chair |
| d. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'A small-sized person' | <i>ámìmì</i>
infant |
| e. | <i>òvbí</i> | <i>áwéké</i> |

	child 'A small-sized person'	small-sized person	
f.	<i>òvbí</i> child 'Brat'	<i>à -</i> NOML	<i>tínniè</i> be_small

In all six examples above, there is explicit mention of the concept under evaluation. Examples 3 (a), (b) and (c) show a direct mapping between the meanings of their constituents and the denotation of the evaluative expression. The other examples show that the language expresses the depreciative value via diminution of terms which denote young or small-sized persons.

The depreciative use of the diminutive marker is illustrated in 3 (d) and (e), where *òvbí* combines with words that refer to infants and small-sized persons. Both examples have been glossed as 'a small-sized person' but there is a difference in their meaning. The term *áwéké* is also associated with the sense expressed by the English word 'weakling'.

The last example contains the expression *àtínniè* which was first shown in example 1(a). Observation of the language shows this term expresses both an appreciative and a depreciative value. Generally, it is used as a nickname for people with small physical stature; think of this as referring to someone as "cute" in English. This socially acceptable use of the term is considered derogatory, when the referent is an older person. Another construction where *àtínniè* is considered depreciative is in example 3(f), where it is combined with *òvbí*.

The meaning shifts described here are consistent with the extension of the roles and interpretation of diminutive markers in the literature (Schneider 2013, Prieto 2005 and Jurafsky 1996). For example, this paper has shown the inherent sense of diminution as a decreased size in example 1. Also, it has shown that the diminutive markers convey other senses like membership as in example 2, admiration and contempt as shown in example 3. It is hoped that subsequent studies will explore other possible senses of the diminutive markers, as well as the exact mechanisms through which these meaning extensions occur.

3.2. Augmentation

Augmentation is the opposite value of diminution. It expresses the primitive 'BIG' and may have derived readings such as exaggeration and intensification. (Bakema & Geeraerts 2004:1045). In Edo, the morphological strategy is compounding with one of the following makers of augmentation: *èní*, *ògiè* and *òkpé*. The first two are free morphemes; the last one is a bound root with the same sense as the English adjectives 'big', 'large', 'great, and eminent'.

- | | | |
|--------|---|------------------------|
| (4) a. | <i>ùdián</i>
tsetse fly
'Large variety of the tsetse fly' | <i>èní</i>
elephant |
| b. | <i>ògiè</i>
king
'Large sized prawn' | <i>énitàn</i>
prawn |
| c. | <i>òkpé</i>
AUG
'Big tree' | <i>èrhán</i>
tree |
| d. | <i>ògiè</i>
king
'King of thieves' | <i>òyí</i>
thief |

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| e. | òkpé
AUG
'One who talks without actions' (literally, big mouth) | ùnú
mouth |
| f. | òkpé
AUG
'Long or confident strides' (literally big legs) | òwẹ̀
leg |
| g. | òkpé
AUG
'An illustrious woman' | òkhuò
woman |

Examples 4 (a) – (c) can be interpreted as augmentation. The first marker which literally means elephant is only used with reference to size, but the other markers also express pejorative evaluation in examples 4 (d) and (e), and the appreciative evaluation in examples 4 (f) and (g). These examples show that augmentative markers also have extended interpretations. As shown in the glosses, AUG in 4(d) – (g) does not refer to an increased size.

In example 4(d), the augmentative expresses a negative evaluation of the thief's expertise. Referring to a person as **ògiè-òyí** is the speaker's way of expressing contempt for the individual. Example 4(e) illustrates another pejorative use of the augmentative marker. A person can be described as **òkpé-ùnú** if he/she talks but does not follow through with the required actions. The nearest equivalent in English will be the idioms 'all talk and no action' and 'all sizzle and no steak'.

The augmentative marker also expresses positive evaluation as shown in examples 4(f) and (g). One uses **òkpé-òwẹ̀** to describe a person who approaches confidently or with long strides; in this sense he/she is physically walking towards another individual. It could also be used in reference to people who are advancing in their endeavours. Example 4(g) also illustrates this appreciative sense of the augmentative marker. From the gloss, one will observe that **òkpé** does not refer to the woman's size but her ability. Relative to what is expected of the concept "woman", a person called **òkpé-òkhuò** is one who has exceptional qualities in terms of their business acumen, ability to manage a home and contribute to societal stability.

So far, the paper has presented examples using only nouns; but the unified radial model adopted in this paper allows one to analyse evaluation as decrease or increase in the default value for four categories: nouns (i.e. the cognitive category of substance), verbs (i.e. the cognitive category of action), adjectives (i.e. the cognitive category of quality) and adverbs (i.e. the cognitive category of circumstance).

For verbs, evaluation is analysed in terms of the quantity of an action relative to its default value, which is a single instance of whatever state, action or process a verb denotes. This is expressed via "semantic categories like diminutive, augmentative, frequentative, iterative, aktionsart etc." (Körtvelyessy 2015:44). Consider the following examples.

- | | | |
|--------|---|---|
| (5) a. | sá
sting
'sting once' | sà - ló
sting - PL
'sting several times' |
| b. | bièn
slice
'slice once' | bièn - nẹ
slice – PL
'slice several times' |
| c. | bàá
thrust
'thrust one object' | bàbá
thrust.PL
'thrust several objects' |
| d. | fián | giá giágiá |

cut
'cut once'

cut.PL
'cut several times'

cut.PL
'cut several times'

Example 5 shows that increased action employs a suffix realized as *-lv* after oral vowels as in 5(a) and *-nv* after nasal vowels as in 5(b). The language uses several v(owel) segments for both suffixes; the exact conditions for their realization has been discussed in Aikhionbare (1989). A less productive strategy is reduplication as shown in 5(c) and (d); it is used for a small number of verbs which do not mark pluractionality via suffixation. The motivation for the choice of affixation or reduplication has not been explored, but Imasuen (2010:34) points out that PL may be mistaken for an infix in certain constructions. That publication states that “Èdo verbs form their plurals by suffixation and reduplication; splitting verbs have the plural morpheme suffixed to the first half of the verb as in *bigbé* “close” and *bilógbé* “close.PL” or both parts of the verb as in *déwù* “die suddenly” and *déléwù* / *déwùló* / *déléwùló* “die suddenly.PL”.

Observe that examples 5(a) – (c) contain evaluated expressions which are identical to the forms which express the default value; the only difference is the evaluative marker. However, in example 5(d), one finds there are distinct forms for the default value and the ones which indicate increased activity. This is not peculiar to the category of verbs; the study observed it with nouns and addresses the issue in subsection 3.5, where it considers conceptual challenges of delineating evaluative morphology in the Èdo language. The point to note here is the position that irregular forms like the ones in 5(d) also constitute morphological evaluation.

3.3. Intensification

Intensification expresses the degree of perceived difference in quality. It applies to gradable categories like adjectives and adverbs as well as the non-gradable ones like nouns and verbs (Napoli & Ravetto 2017). Intensification is considered a special kind of evaluative function (Stekauer 2015), because it may be understood as an increase (i.e. superlative) or a decrease (attenuation).

- | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| (6) a. | <i>ò</i>
3SG
It is deep. | <i>dimwí</i>
be_deep | <i>ò yé dimwídimwí</i>
3SG seem be_deep.INT
'It seems very deep' |
| b. | <i>ò</i>
3SG
'He/she hurried along' | <i>khírí khián</i>
hurry along | <i>ò rú éré khíríkhírí</i>
3SG do 3SG hurry.INT
'He/she did it hurriedly' |
| c. | <i>èsé</i>
well
'Well' | | <i>èsésé</i>
well.INT
'Very well' |
| d. | <i>gèlè</i>
really
'Really' | | <i>gèlègèlè</i>
really.INT
'Truly' |
| e. | <i>mòsèè</i>
beautiful
'Beautiful' | | <i>mòsèmòsè</i>
beautiful.INT
'Very beautiful' |
| f. | <i>èsi</i>
good
'Good' | | <i>èsiési</i>
good.INT
'Excellent' |

In the Èdo language, intensification always denotes an increased quantity when it is marked morphologically. The examples above show intensification of a verb, adverbs and adjectives. For all three categories, the strategy is total reduplication.

3.4. Approximation

Approximation is an evaluative domain comprising several closely related but distinct values (Masini, Norde & Van Goethem 2023). In the Edo language, approximation is evident in a sense which has been described as “similarity in quality” (Treis 2023) and formally defined as “the value expressed when Y refers to an entity that is merely similar to X, without being an X” (Masini & Micheli, 2020:383).

(7) a.	<i>èbé</i> leaf ‘Leaf’	<i>èbébé</i> leaf.APR ‘Greenish’
b.	<i>àmè</i> water ‘Water’	<i>àmámè</i> water.APR ‘Watery’
c.	<i>èkèkèn</i> sand ‘Sand’	<i>èkènkèn</i> sand.APR ‘Sandy’
d.	<i>òrhò</i> mud ‘Mud’	<i>òrhòrhò</i> mud.APR ‘Muddy’
e.	<i>ùmwé</i> salt ‘Salt’	<i>ùmwúmwé</i> salt.APR ‘Salty’

Examples 7(a) – (e) show that reduplicating certain nouns results in a word which denotes a similar sense as the noun. The approximate expressions serve as complete utterances; they can also be used as modifiers to express other semantic values of evaluation such as contempt as shown in example 8.

(8)	<i>ùnwòmwe</i> soup	<i>àmámè</i> water.APR	<i>èré</i> FOC	<i>ò</i> 3SG	<i>lé</i> cook
	‘It is watery soups that he/she cooks’.				

The expression *àmámè* in example 7(b) describes an object which has more liquid than it should. This sense of resemblance is illustrated with the modified noun in example (8). Superficially, this sentence describes the amount of liquid in the soups an individual makes. However, with the knowledge of local cuisine one is aware that soups are much thicker than water. So, apart from evaluating the soup as being similar to water, approximation is used here to cast aspersions on the cook.

Besides reduplication, the Edo language uses a periphrastic construction for approximation. This alternative strategy is used for the value referred to as ‘fakeness’ (Masini & Micheli 2020), or ‘simulative’ (Masini, Norde & VanGoethem 2023). The key element is the preverbal particle – *bá*.

(9) a.	<i>à</i> 1PL.IMP ‘One who pretends to act’	<i>bá</i> APR	<i>rú</i> do	<i>éè</i> 3SG
b.	<i>ò</i> 3SG ‘He/she is pretending to cry’.	<i>bá</i> APR	<i>vié</i> cry	

The approximate value illustrated in examples 9 (a) and (b) can only be expressed syntactically. Other values discussed earlier can also be expressed via syntax;

in such cases, the language does not rely on morphological evaluative markers. Instead, native speakers use adjectives and adverbs as modifiers in phrases which have equivalent meanings as the evaluative expressions.

3.5. Issues in Edo Evaluative Morphology

In the previous section, the paper discussed evaluative morphology with words that segment into two constituent parts: the default expression of the concept under evaluation and an evaluative marker. In addition to the expressions in previous examples, the study found lexicalized forms which lack overt marking and others which contain non-existent words.

- | | | | | |
|------|----|---|---------------------------------|---|
| (10) | a. | <i>égilẹ̀</i>
snail
'Snail' | <i>Ø</i>
DIM
'Baby snail' | <i>àkìkọ́</i>
Snail |
| | b. | <i>èhiẹ̀n</i>
pepper
'Pepper' | <i>Ø</i>
DIM | <i>Ø</i>
INT |
| | | | | <i>àkpókọ́</i>
pepper
'Smallest and hottest local pepper' |
| (11) | a. | <i>òvbí</i>
child
'Young woman' | <i>àlèkè</i>
??? | |
| | b. | <i>ìkpẹ̀</i>
Seed
'A small variety of pepper' | <i>òrùkhò</i>
??? | |

Examples like (10) and (11) pose the conceptual challenge of defining what constitutes morphological evaluation. The literature describes the problem illustrated above as a consequence of the prototype effect (Schneider 2013:137). Prototypical evaluative constructions “satisfy two conditions, one relating to semantics and the other to structure. The first condition is that a linguistic construction can be defined as evaluative if it has the function of assigning a semantic value, which differs from the default value of concept. The second condition is that an evaluative construction must include an evaluative marker and an explicit expression of the concept by means of a linguistic form which is lexically autonomous and recognised as an actual word by the speakers of the language” (Grandi 2009:46).

Lexicalized evaluative expressions do not satisfy these conditions. For example, the expressions in (10) have existing words with corresponding evaluated forms but the markers are null. Those in (11) have overt markers and non-existent words. Nevertheless, the paper proposes that lexicalized expressions like these should be treated as examples of evaluative morphology. The basis of this suggestion is the structure and semantics of such expressions. In terms of structure, each example consists of identifiable morphemic units that function independently. Their meanings show a difference between default value of the concepts and their evaluated forms in terms of size (i.e. quantity of substance) in example 10(a) and 10(c). There is a semantic difference in the value of intensity (i.e. quantity of quality) as shown in example 10(b).

This study's position on lexicalized evaluative expressions resonates with the view that evaluation has different levels of membership: there are prototypical members that meet the formal conditions and marginal members with clear traces of similar semantic function (Appah & Amfo 2011:88 and Grandi 2009:47).

Another issue in Edo evaluative morphology is the many-to-one correspondence between markers and semantic evaluative values; diminution, for example, has six markers. Two of them (i.e. *òlùkù* and *òvbí* in example 1) occur with the same base; so, there is an overlap in their distribution. This study established differences between the rival markers using their distributional preferences (Masini et al. 2023) and features (Yuka 2020). Both markers apply to a reduction in the size of a

noun. Competition arises where the noun refers to an animal. The form with a narrower distribution (i.e. *òlùkù*) only occurs with herbivorous animals. The other (i.e. *òvbi*) can be considered the elsewhere diminutive marker.

4. Summary and Conclusions

This paper focused on evaluative expressions in the Edo language. The study set three research objectives. The first was to identify the range of evaluative values in the language. The second was to determine the morphological processes used for evaluation. Besides addressing these objectives, the paper touched on the conceptual and methodological challenges of investigating evaluatives in the language.

In terms of the range of evaluative values, the paper showed that the language has expressions for six values: DIMinutive, AUGmentative, INTensive and APPRoximative, PEJorative and ENDearing. The first four have distinct evaluative markers; the last two are derived from extended uses of the diminutive and augmentative markers. The depreciative and appreciative values can also be derived via the use of a phrasal structure which involves the use approximate expressions as nominal modifiers. The study also found a type of approximation that can only be expressed periphrastically – ‘fakeness’ or ‘simulative’ function. This implies that Edo has both morphological (synthetic) and syntactic (analytic) evaluative constructions.

With regards to the markers and processes, the study found a many-to-one correspondence between the markers and their functions. For diminution and augmentation, the language uses several markers. There is an overlap in their distribution, as some of them occur with the exact same category of words. Furthermore, there is the extended usage of some of these markers to derive readings for pejoration and endearment. For the morphological processes, the study observed three: affixation, compounding and reduplication.

Abbreviations

3=third person, APR=approximative, AUG=augmentative, DIM=diminutive, FOC=focus marker, IMP=impersonal, INT=intensifier, NOML=nominaliser, PL=plural, QM=question marker, SG=singular

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