

Shilluk noun morphology and noun phrase morphosyntax

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In this research, we build on recent discoveries in the suprasegmental system of Shilluk to analyse its noun morphology and the morphosyntax of the noun phrase. One of these discoveries is that Shilluk has three levels of vowel length (Remijsen, Ayoker & Jørgensen, under review); the other is that the language has eight distinctive tone categories, two of which are distinguished primarily by tonal alignment (Remijsen & Ayoker 2014).

This unusually rich system of suprasegmental contrasts plays a central role in Shilluk morphology. This can be seen from illustration (1), which presents the inflectional paradigm of the noun **gwôk** 'dog' in the context of an existential predicate. Note that Shilluk nouns present two types of head-marking: a) pertensive, i.e. an inflection which marks the possessed or head term in a possessive noun phrase (cf. Dixon 2010:268); and b) construct state (cf. Creissels 2011), which marks a noun for being modified by most modifiers other than possessors. The pertensive and the construct state forms both constitute the basis for additional inflectional modification. First, the pertensive additionally shows inflectional marking for the number of the possessor, with a High tone target for plural possessors (1b,c). Second, the construct-state form (1d) is additionally marked for proximal demonstrative, through the addition of a Low tone target (1e). The associative inflection, finally, is an instance of dependent marking with a limited distribution (1f).

(1)

a. **dâa gwôk** (base form)
exist dog
'There is a dog.'

b. **dâa gwôook twôŋ** (pertensive, singular possessor)
exist dog:pert.s Twong
'There is Twong's dog.'

c. **dâa gwóook málŋ** (pertensive, plural possessor)
exist dog:pert.p women
'There is the women's dog.'

d. **dâa gwôookŋ dwôŋ** (construct state)
exist dog:cs big
'There is a big dog.'

e. **dâa gwóookŋ** (proximal)
exist dog.s:prox
'There is this dog.'

f. **dâa jáaā gwóook-ii** (associative)
exist those.of dog-assoc
'There are the likes of a dog.'

The above summary of the morphological paradigm reveals that the morphology of Shilluk

nouns revolves around head marking. The study of Shilluk noun phrases and the variety of modifiers involved yields a range of interesting findings, including the following:

- a. Definiteness is expressed through the selection of alternative modification structures.
- b. Adjectival modifiers present a morphologically-marked distinction between on the one hand permanent and contingent forms, reminding of comparable distinctions in Russian and Spanish (involving *ser* vs. *estar*);
- c. Numerals are nouns: they have morphological paradigms like the one in (1);
- d. Cardinal numerals are morphologically derived from ordinal numerals through prefixation (e.g. **d̀̀k** 'third' > **á-d̀̀k** 'three');

References

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