

## Attenuated qualities in a cross-linguistic perspective

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Our workshop focusses on the diverse morphological and lexical means of expressing attenuation (reduced degree of a quality) in the languages of the world. Examples (i)-(iii) illustrate the use of derivational morphemes to mark a quality as being attenuated; in (iv) a reduced degree of a quality is marked by reduplication, and in (v) attenuation is expressed by the use of a dedicated ideophone.

- (i) English *-ish* as in *green-ish*
- (ii) French *-âtre* as in *blanch-âtre* ‘whitish’
- (iii) Kambaata (Afroasiatic, Cushitic) *-lab* as in *biish-lab-á* ‘reddish’ (from *biishsh-á* ‘red’) and *qaraar-lab-á* ‘a bit bitter’ (from *qaraar-á* ‘bitter’) (Treis field data)
- (iv) Gashua Bade (Afroasiatic, Chadic) *buwâ-buwâ* ‘reddish’ (from *buwâ* ‘red’) (Ziegelmeier 2015)
- (v) Sar (Nilo-Saharan, Central Sudanic) *pùtì-pùtì* attenuates the basic colour terms *ndà* ‘white’, *kìrē* ‘white’, *ndùl* ‘red’ (Gotengaye & Keegan 2016)

Typological studies of derivational morphology show that attenuation is among the most frequent adjectival derivational categories in the languages world-wide (see e.g. Bauer 2002: 42), and we find attenuative morphology mentioned in descriptions of languages from different families all over the world, see e.g. Czech (Janda & Townsend 2000), K’ichee’ (Mayan) (Polian 2017), Khanty (Finno-Ugric) (Sauer 1967) and Udihe (Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001), to name but a few arbitrarily chosen examples. Note that grammatical elements with attenuative meaning are also labelled “moderative”, “approximative”, “diffusive”, “deintensifying” in the literature.

So far attenuative morphology has attracted much less attention in cross-linguistic studies than, for instance, diminutive morphology. Although attenuation is discussed in the major typological works on “Evaluative morphology”, most notably in the seminal work by Grandi & Körtvélyessy (2015), there are still synchronic, diachronic and areal aspects of attenuative derivation that remain unexplored. To the best of our knowledge, it has so far not yet been investigated systematically which semantic classes of adjectives (or quality lexemes) are most likely to permit attenuative marking (maybe colours?). We also have little knowledge of the diachronic origin of attenuative morphology of non-Indo-European languages. Furthermore, we would like to extend the study of attenuation from purely morphological, mostly derivational attenuative marking, to lexical means of expressing attenuation (see (v) above) and to also study modifying attenuative adverbs and ideophones. Note, for instance, that among African languages – which are well-known for their ideophonic colour intensifiers – there are (at least) 17 languages that possess specialized ideophonic colour attenuators (Segerer & Flavier 2011-2018).

The aim of our workshop is to bring together scholars from different subfields and theoretical frameworks of linguistics and working on a variety of languages world-wide. We do not only focus on languages in which attenuation is grammaticalised, but we would also like to include studies on the lexical means of attenuation. Although the existing literature is mostly concerned with the attenuation of adjectives, we are, of course, also interested in languages that do not have a word class of adjectives and thus mark attenuation on quality nouns, quality verbs, etc.

The aim of this workshop is to address one or more of the following questions from the perspective of language-specific analysis (especially of little known languages), corpus linguistics, typological comparison, areal linguistics, semantics and pragmatics and/or grammaticalisation.

- 1) What are the morphological means to mark attenuation on adjectives (or other quality lexemes) in individual languages or language groups? Does the occurrence of attenuative morphology exclude the marking of other grammatical categories (e.g. the comparative *\*greenisher*)?
- 2) How productive is attenuative morphology in individual languages? Which semantic sub-classes of adjectives or other quality lexemes are most likely to permit attenuative derivation, which semantic sub-classes are hardly ever attenuated in individual languages and across languages? Are there languages with several attenuative morphemes that specialise on certain semantic sub-classes (as e.g. the attenuative prefixes *pa-* and *ie-* in Latvian, see Kalnača 2015)?
- 3) What are dedicated lexical attenuators in individual languages and which (classes of) adjectives (or other quality lexemes) do they modify? What is their degree of semantic specialisation? To which word class do they belong?
- 4) What are the precise semantic features of attenuative morphemes in individual languages? Are attenuated adjectives (or other quality lexemes) mostly neutral, pejorative, ameliorative in meaning (see e.g. that many attenuated non-colour adjectives in French are pejorative: *douçâtre* ‘sweet but not in a nice manner, badly sweet’, *bellâtre* ‘beautiful (usually for a man) but in a ridiculous way’)? What are frequent discourse-pragmatic contexts in which attenuated adjectives are used in individual languages (see Hengeveld & Keizer 2011)?
- 5) What are possible diachronic sources of attenuative morphology?
- 6) It is known that nominal diminutive morphology can convey attenuative meaning on adjectives (or other quality lexemes), see e.g. the suffix *-úluluka* in Kikongo (Laman 1936). But what are other attested, little known functional extensions or multifunctionality patterns of attenuative morphology in individual languages, groups and areas? (For a case study of English *-ish*, see e.g. Morris 2009.)
- 7) In which geographical areas and which language (sub-)families is attenuative morphology most common/absent? In which areas/families do we find attenuation by ideophones? In which areas/families do we find (partial or full) reduplication as a means to mark attenuation?

## References

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