

Adjectives in Kam

(a Niger-Congo language of central-eastern Nigeria)

Jakob Lesage (LLACAN, Paris)
jakob.lesage@gmail.com
+32479968126

49th Colloquium on African Languages and Linguistics, 28-August-2019, Leiden

See <http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/AdaGram/talks.html>

Kam (àṅwòm): an Adamawa language (?)

- 5,000-11,000 speakers
- Classification unclear (Lesage 2019)
- Contact with various groups
 - Jukun (Benue-Congo)
 - Mumuye (Adamawa)
 - Jirim (Chamba Daka, Benue-Congo (?))
 - Hausa (Chadic)
 - Fulfulde (Atlantic)



Good (2017)

Why adjectives?

- Touches on a variety of aspects of Kam phonology and morphosyntax
 - Gives a more general impression of the language
- Grammar (Lesage in prep.) treats topics discontinuously
 - Convenient alternative ‘function to form’ resource

Understanding adjectives



Segmental phonology

(vowel inventory)



Tonal phonology

(H-tone spread, floating ^h tones,
downstep)



Accent and prosodic
prominence

(prosodic prefixes vs. prosodic stems)



Morphology

(derivation, reduplication, grammatical
tone)



Syntax

(negation, expressing intensity and
comparison, predication and
attribution, TAM, POS classification)



Iconicity, expressiveness?

Structure

1. The internal structure of adjectives

- Predicative adjectives (the man is tall)
- Attributive adjectives (a tall man)
- Derivation
- Exceptions

2. Distributional analysis of adjectives

- Adnominal adjectives
- Predicative adjectives

3. Conclusion: Adjectives as a word class in Kam

The internal structure of adjectives (1) – Predicative adjectives

Syllable structure	Melody	Example	English
CV(C).CV(C)	L-L	dìn.dàm	to be red
	M-M	būm.būm	to be rotten, spoiled
	H-H	kík.kág	to be crunched
CVC.CV.CV(.CV)	L-H- [↓] H(-H)	sùn.só.ŋ [↑] í	to be sweet, tasty

- (Partially) reduplicated (copy~stem)
- Assimilation/gemination
- Underspecified V1 (high) → prosodic prefixes
- Trisyllabic: stem-internal floating [↑] tone

The internal structure of adjectives (2) – Attributive adjectives

Structure	Example	English
á(n) ^L -C ^V C-í	á- [↓] búr-í	white
á ^L -C ^V	á- [↓] wú	ripe

- Morphologically complex:
 - 1) Prefix á^L-
 - 2) Replacive H tone
 - 3) Suffix -í
- á^L- is prosodically weak, and centralizes to í- in utterance-internal position

àtár í[↓]búrí
stone white
'a white stone'

The internal structure of adjectives (3) – Regular deverbal adjectivization

Both predicative and attributive adjectives are morphologically complex and can be derived from verbal forms.

Predicative adjectives:

Monosyllabic V → ~V

lèm ‘to become good’ → lèllèm ‘good’

Disyllabic V → ~V/LH[↓]H

sòṅí ‘to please’ → sùnsón[↓]í ‘tasty’

Attributive adjectives:

-CVC verbs → á(n)^L-V/H-í

lèm ‘to become good’ → á[↓]lémí ‘good’

-CV verbs → á^L-V/H

wū ‘to become ripe’ → á[↓]wú ‘ripe’

The internal structure of adjectives (4) – Deverbal adjectivization with weak suppletion

búmbóm ‘long, pred.’

ábò ‘long, attr.’

(cf. **bòmí** ‘to lengthen’)

ṣíṣòb ‘hot, pred.’

áfò ‘hot, attr.’

(cf. **ṣòptí** ‘to boil’)

fúffóg ‘dry, pred.’

áfò ‘dry, attr.’

(no corresponding verb)

The internal structure of adjectives (5) – Missing counterparts

- No predicative form attested

án[↓]tié ‘small’ (→ tám hñ ‘not big’)

á[↓]sámrí ‘cruel, bad’ (→ sámrájì ‘spoiled, stative verb’)

ántwàb ‘young’ (→ dí k-átwàb ‘be INSTR-young’)

- No attributive form attested

búgbág ‘skinny, pred.’

The internal structure of adjectives (6) – Irregular melodies

Downstepped H in predicative forms

bú[↓]bbórí ‘many, pred.’

dzí[↓]dzíbí ‘round, pred.’

HL in attributive forms

áfò ‘dry, attr.’

ábō ‘long, attr.’

átwàb ‘young, attr.’

Distributional analysis of adjectives (1) – Adjectives in the noun phrase

Utterance-internally, á- becomes í- (cf. nouns: à- → ì-)

àt̀ar í↓búrí
stone white
'a white stone'

Word order in noun phrase

NOUN^{HEAD} + NOUN^{MODIFIER} (+PL) + **ADJECTIVE** (+PL) + QUANTIFIER (+PL) (+ POSSESSIVE PRONOUN) + DEMONSTRATIVE

Distributive analysis of adjectives (2) – Adjectives in the noun phrase

No adjectives attested in head position (always part of (lexicalized) phrases or nominalized)

à replaces á; + -rì

à-dág-í-rì
NLZ-cold/ADJ-ADJ-NLZ
'cold, n.'

from

á[↓]-dág-í
ADJ-cold/ADJ-ADJ
'cold, attr.'

NP with nì 'thing':

nì í[↓]-lóg-í
thing ADJ-give.birth/ADJ-ADJ
'fertile thing, fertility, life'

Distributional analysis of adjectives (3) – Predicative adjectives

Adjectival predication: NP + ADJ (vs. nominal predication)

kòm ʃíʃób
place PRED~hot
'The place is hot.'

TAM distinctions and negation: verbal forms

ʃób-â 'became hot, perfective'
ʃôb 'will become hot, future'
ʃób hn̂ 'not hot, negation'

Distributional analysis of adjectives (4) – Predicative adjectives

- Serial verb constructions? (continuative and inchoative)

jékóm	fí [↓] ffágí	tàní
door	PRED~close	remain/stay/stand
‘The door is still closed.’ ‘The door is already closed.’		

- For now, predicative adjectives look like a type of stative verb
- ... Input?

Conclusion: Adjectives as a 'word class' in Kam

- No simplex adjectival stems
- Predicative adjectives look like stative verbs
- Attributive adjectives are derived from verbs – most are synchronically analyzable, some diachronically analyzable
- In general, adjectives are phonologically, morphologically and syntactically distinct from both verbs and nouns

ì jót â

Comparative constructions

equative (the man is as tall as the woman):

V + gbán + P

(gbán = ‘arrive’)

V + lànìm (+ η̄m̄kpī) + P

(lànìm has no verbal counterpart; η̄m̄kpī = ‘together’)

NP + ADJ + àrí + NP

(àrí = ‘like’ preposition, from noun ‘type’)

comparative (the man is taller than the woman):

V + kòrì + P

negated equative/comparative:

Verbal construction + NEG hñ

intensification is not often expressed (the man is very tall)

~V-ì + NEG hñ (?)

àwàn tìn[↓] tàmí hñ

chief INT~grow NEG?

‘The chief is very tall.’