

Syllabic Analysis of Selected Bole Ideophones

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Abstract

According to Haruna (2014), Bole is one of the seriously endangered languages, hence, the need for linguists to come to its rescue. Thus, this study will form part of documentations on the language: it will help in documenting, revitalizing and safe-guarding the language. This paper titled ‘Canonical shape analysis of Bole ideophones’ has examined one of the phonological aspects of ideophones: ‘syllabic structure’ of Bole language – a West Chadic language spoken in some states of northeastern Nigeria. The research seeks to explore the phenomenon using a descriptive approach adopted by Newman (2000). It is made up of three parts, namely: introduction, analysis and conclusion. Ninety-six lexical items have been collected for the analysis and Fika dialect is the source of the data. The activities in the field may involve: conversations with randomly sampled adults within the ages of 35 years and above who are expected to be most competent speakers who are both educated or non-educated, though being a native speaker, my intuitive knowledge is an additional primary source of data for the research.

Keywords: *Bole, ideophone, syllable*

Introduction

Bole is a language spoken in Yobe and Gombe states of northern Nigeria. About 25,000-30,000 people speak Bole, making it one of the widely spoken language in the region, perhaps surpassed only by its linguistics cousin Hausa, dominant language of all northern Nigeria and the sub-Saharan language with the largest native speakers and Kanuri, historically dominant language of Northern Nigeria over the past few centuries. Bole is a member of the Chadic family along with Hausa. Bole is a member of the West branch of Chadic, but Bole and Hausa are not particularly closely related.” Ethnologue described it as A.2 language among West-Chadic languages. This indicates that both Bole and Hausa are from the same language family which is Afro-Asiatic. Schuh and Gimba (2015)

Bole is a tonal language with three surface tones: High (H) tone which is notationally left unmarked /a/, Low (L) tone indicated by a grave accent /â/, and Falling (F) tone indicated by a circumflex /â/. Some Bole researchers Gimba (2000) and Shuch (2001) pointed out that “evidence from a number of areas, such as contractions, paradigmatic patterns, morphological formations, (etc.), shows clearly that the falling tone represents H + L on a single syllable, moreover, the level tones originally belonged to two separate syllables” (Newman 1992: 128). The languages also have short and long vowels. Long vowels could be indicated by double letters /aa/ (tone is marked on first vowel only /âa/), or by putting a diacritic called “macron” on top of short vowel /ā/, or by assigning colon in front of a short vowel /a:/. But I will be using double letters to indicate vowel length in this research.

It is hoped that this study will further enhance the development of this language and contribute positively to the linguistic situation in Nigeria. Since language is the chief means by which human beings communicate and interact, its development will go a long way towards enhancing national development. Hence, this study recommends among other things, that more studies and documentation should be done in order to safe-guard, maintain and revitalize the language. The method chosen for this research was mainly observation. It is normal for a native speaker to evaluate and assess every piece of data oral or otherwise. Many of the ideophones were jotted down immediately someone used them. The research seeks to explore the phenomenon using a descriptive approach adopted by Newman (2000).

Ideophone

Ideophones are special class of words that are used to describe sound, colour, shape, manner, etc. According to Newman (2000: 242), ideophones are ‘phonesthetic words’ that “describe sound, colour, smell, manner, appearance, state, action or intensity...that is they are words that are vivid vocal images or representation of visual, auditory and other sensory or mental experience.” Crystal (2008: 235) on the other hand defines ideophones as a “term used in linguistics and phonetics for any vivid representation of an idea in sound, such as occurs through onomatopoeia.” Ideophones are characterized not only by their expressiveness in meaning, but also by their form.

Canonical Shape Analysis of Bole Ideophones

In this study only 96 ideophones are identified and most of their syllable structure are consonant-final with some few exceptions which have vowel at the end. Below is the syllable structure of Bole ideophones.

Monosyllabic

Monosyllabic ideophones contains only one syllable which is onset + nucleus + (coda) structure; onset stands for a consonant while nucleus stands for a vowel (short or long) and an optional coda which stands for either a consonant or a semi – vowel. The following are identified structure of monosyllabic ideophones in the language.

- I. Bole monosyllabic ideophones typically consist of a consonant with a short vowel and another consonant. The syllable structure is onset + nucleus + coda and the tone pattern of these ideophones are always high. Examples are as follows:
 1. *bas* = /bas/ ‘just, nothing’
CVC
 2. *dap* = /dap/ ‘action of grabbing’
CVC
 3. *dam* = /dam/ ‘silent’
CVC
 4. *dap* = /dap/ ‘exactly’
CVC
 5. *dél* = /dél/ ‘action of hopping’
CVC
 6. *díl* = /díl/ ‘redness’
CVC
 7. *gar* = /gar/ ‘erectness’
CVC
 8. *kal* = /kal/ ‘exactly two’
CVC
 9. *kan* = /kan/ ‘sweetness’
CVC
 10. *kar* = /kar/ ‘extended straight’
CVC
 11. *kel* = /kel/ ‘conspicuously’
CVC
 12. *kip* = /kip/ ‘covered tightly’
CVC
 13. *kop* = /kop/ ‘action of arising quickly’
CVC
 14. *kap* = /kap/ ‘action of jumping onto’
CVC
 15. *lut* = /lut/ ‘wiping’
CVC
 16. *mut* = /mut/ ‘distant’
CVC
 17. *pel* = /pel/ ‘snapping’
CVC
 18. *pil* = /pil/ ‘new’
CVC
 19. *pir* = /pir/ ‘exactly one’
CVC
 20. *pit* = /pit/ ‘red’
CVC
 21. *pok* = /pok/ ‘white’
CVC
 22. *put* = /put/ ‘tallness’
CVC
 23. *rak* = /rak/ ‘exactly two’

- CVC
 24. *rap* = /rap/ ‘action of holding tightly’
 CVC
 25. *rim* = /rim/ ‘eaten completely’
 CVC
 26. *ros* = /ros/ ‘action of cutting, plucking’
 CVC
 27. *sap* = /sap/ ‘early morning’
 CVC
 28. *sar* = /sar/ ‘whiteness’
 CVC
 29. *sit* = /sit/ ‘black’
 CVC
 30. *tir* = /tir/ ‘action of hacking off something hard’
 CVC
 31. *yim* = /jim/ ‘completely’
 CVC
 32. *yen* = /jen/ ‘action of falling or dropping’
 CVC

II. Bole also have some few monosyllabic ideophones which consist of a consonant and a long vowel with a syllable structure cvv. These ideophones describe some kind of echoey sound and their tone pattern are always low below are some examples:

33. *pa* = /paa/ ‘action of falling with a bang’
 CVv
 34. *pe* = /pèè/ ‘sound of exhaling’
 CVv
 35. *zu* = /zùu/ ‘pouring out’
 CVv
 36. *sha* = /ʃää/ ‘action of pouring out’
 CVv

Disyllabic

Disyllabic ideophones consist of two syllables and the second syllable could be iambic light-heavy or closed heavy-heavy or open-closed heavy-heavy⁸. The following are the examples:

I. In this disyllabic shape of ideophones, the first vowel is always short /i, a, e, o, u/ and first and second vowels in the syllable are identical. They have iambic light-heavy with high and low tone pattern. For instance:

- High tone pattern
 37. *dīwir* = /diwir/ ‘calm and clear’
 CVCvc
 38. *godom* = /godom/ ‘silently’
 CVCvc
 39. *gurut* = /gurut/ ‘quickly entrance’
 CVCvc
 40. *keker* = /keker/ ‘sweat taste’
 CVCvc
 41. *kitip* = /kitip/ ‘oldness of things’
 CVCvc
 42. *kodop* = /kodop/ ‘action of arising quickly’
 CVCvc

⁸ “A light (or ‘weak’) syllable is one whose rhyme comprises a short-vowel nucleus alone or followed by a coda of no more than one short consonant (in terms of phonological length, a mora); a heavy (or ‘strong’) syllable is any other type (its phonological length being greater than one mora)” (Crystal 2008: 520). Open refers to a syllable which ends in a vowel, as opposed to the closed which refers to syllable which ends in a consonant.

43. *kurut* = /kurut/ ‘action of getting in’
CVCvc
44. *lukup* = /lukup/ ‘old (person)’
CVCvc
45. *murus* = /murus/ ‘burnt up’
CVCvc
46. *nenet* = /nenet/ ‘abuse’
CVCvc
47. *parak* = /parak/ ‘openness, brightness’
CVCvc
48. *pelem* = /pelem/ ‘licking’
CVCvc
49. *pilim* = /pilim/ ‘full to the brain’
CVCvc
50. *porot* = /porot/ ‘movement at a run, or state of having a hole’
CVCvc
51. *radal* = /radal/ ‘full to the brim’
CVCvc
52. *rumus* = /rumus/ ‘burnt up’
CVCvc
53. *sherep* = /ʃerep/ ‘dryness’
CVCvc
54. *surut* = /surut/ ‘quick, free movement’
CVCvc
55. *tirik* = /tirik/ ‘unripe, uncooked’
CVCvc
56. *yirin* = /jirin/ ‘blackness’
CVCvc

Low tone pattern

57. *gurus* = /gùrùs/ ‘small things in a group’
CVCvc
58. *jogob* = /dʒògòb/ ‘heap’
CVCvc
59. *kurus* = /kùrùs/ ‘action of falling in a cloud of dust’
CVCvc
60. *merel* = /mèrèl/ ‘falling’
CVCvc
61. *palai* = /pàlàj/ ‘unrolling’
CVCvc
62. *yanan* = /jàràŋ/ ‘bright, shining’
CVCvc

This class of dissyllabic ideophones are similar to the preceding ones which composed of consonant-final and also with identical vowels but they differ in having a closed heavy initial syllable with a tone pattern of high and low. For instance:

63. *konjom* = /kondʒom/ ‘emaciation’
cvccvc
64. *porsol* = /porsol/ ‘faded’
cvccvc
65. *zazzan* = /zazzan/ ‘stretched out’
cvccvc

Low tone

66. *boɓɓon* = /bòbòbòŋ/ ‘wide opening’
cvccvc
67. *buɓɓuk* = /bùbùkùk/ ‘swelling and dispersing’
cvccvc

68. *kalwas* = /kàlwàs/ ‘turning around’
cvcvcv

Trisyllabic

Trisyllabic ideophones refer to ideophonic words that typically have three syllables. This trisyllabic ideophones have the shape all open-heavy syllable structure. The final vowels are always long and the tone pattern is low.

69. *delele* = /dèlèlèè/ ‘broadness, spaciousness’
cvcvcvv
70. *likisha* = /likìfàa/ ‘disorder’
cvcvcvv
71. *rukuba* = /rùkùbàa/ ‘a lot’
cvcvcvv
72. *takisha* = /tàkìfàa/ ‘sound of falling into a liquid’
cvcvcvv

Reduplicative

In Bole, there are some ideophones formed by reduplicating ideophonic base and all of the reduplicative ideophones have full reduplication of base plus L-L and H-H tone melodies with the following canonical shapes. The following ideophones have a shape of heavy-heavy syllable ideophones, the ideophonic base is reduplicated twice in order to have reduplicative ideophones which have identical vowels in base with a high and a low tone pattern.

High Tone

73. *dim – dim* = /dim.dim/ ‘state of crowdedness’
cvc.cvc
74. *dup – dup* = /dup.dup/ ‘trimmed neatly and flat’
cvc.cvc
75. *del – del* = /del.del/ ‘folktale opening and closing’
cvc.cvc
76. *gan – gan* = /gaŋ.gəŋ/ ‘grasping tightly’
cvc.cvc
77. *kus – kus* = /kus.kus/ ‘very near or hidden scratching’
cvc.cvc
78. *lik – lik* = /lik.ik/ ‘grasping loosely’
cvc.cvc
79. *nyim – nyim* = /ɲjim.ɲjim/ ‘pieces or drops’
cvc.cvc

Low Tone

80. *dek – dek* = /dèk.dèk/ ‘laughter’
cvc.cvc
81. *lum – lum* = /lùm.lùm/ ‘warm’
cvc.cvc
82. *leb – leb* = /lèb.lèb/ ‘action of carrying something flexible’
cvc.cvc
83. *lai – lai* = /láj.láj/ ‘mildly warm’
cvc.cvc
84. *nyam – nyam* = /ɲjam.ɲjam/ ‘noisiness of crowd (humming)’
cvc.cvc

This reduplicated ideophones has iambic (light-heavy) syllable structure in both base and formative. The two vowels of first and second syllables are not identical (the first is short and the second is long i.e. for those with low tone pattern but identical with those having high tone pattern). Below are the examples starting with those with high tone pattern.

High Tone

85. *kace – kace* = /kaʔe.kaʔe/ ‘disordered state’

- cvcv.cvcv
86. *pata – pata* = /pata.pata/ ‘pursuit’
cvcv.cvcv

Low Tone

87. *kaca – kaca* = /kàf̄ãa.kàf̄ãa/ ‘sound of noises from interior’
cvcvv.cvcvv
88. *kiya – kiya* = /kij̄ãa.kij̄ãa/ ‘movement in a group’
cvcvv.cvcvv
89. *tura – tura* = /tùràa.tùràa/ ‘pleasant smell’
cvcvv.cvcvv

I. This reduplicative ideophones also has iambic light-heavy syllable but the heavy syllable in this shape is closed, unlike preceded once and with identical vowels in both first and second syllables also with a high and a low tone pattern. For instance.

High Tone

90. *kidak – kidak* = /kidák.kidák/ ‘action done furtively, stealthily’
cvcvc.cvcvc
91. *koshor – koshor* = /koʃor.koʃor/ ‘sound of rattling seeds or stones’
cvcvc.cvcvc
92. *kudul – kudul* = /kudùl.kudùl/ ‘action of walking along’
cvcvc.cvcvc
93. *kikis – kikis* = /kíkìs.kíkìs/ ‘sound of scratching metal’
cvcvc.cvcvc

Low Tone

94. *kayan – kayan* = /kàjàŋ.kàjàŋ/ ‘action done hastily’
cvcvc.cvcvc
95. *kelen – kelen* = /kèlèŋ.kèlèŋ/ ‘action of walking awkwardly’
cvcvc.cvcvc
96. *kakar – kakar* = /kàkàr.kàkàr/ ‘movement of shaking, trembling’
cvcvc.cvcvc

Conclusion

The analysis of ideophones in Bole language of Fika dialect focusses and examines only ninety-six lexical items with a view to ascertaining their canonical shapes. This research has demonstrated to a large extend, that Bole ideophones have varieties of syllable structure ranging from monosyllabic, disyllabic to trisyllabic as well as reduplicated ones respectively.

Similarly, the study came up with a descriptive overview of some of the ideophones in Bole which shed light in their tone patterns. I hope this study will go a long way in preserving the norms and cultural values of the language. Given the fact that the elderly - the major custodians of culture, proverbs and ideophones are steadily dying, efforts should be made to tap and record the Bole ideophones. This would ensure continued use of ideophones that have been documented, even after the sources have died.

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