Nominal classes and phonological agreement in Tagbana

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Abstract

In addition to total vowel harmony and nasal harmony, Tagbana, a Senufo language spoken in Côte d'Ivoire, and more especially the dialect called Frò?ò, has a pervasive consonantal agreement in its nominal domain: the morphologically 'dependent morphemes' (in terms of concord, Corbett 1991) or 'associate morphemes' (Hockett 1958) of nominal heads agree in their articulator and [±continuant] features. This is a special case of alliterative concord, because the head noun plays no role in the alliteration. Besides the consonantal agreement features, these free associate morphemes have their own vocalic features and their own [±voice] feature. The paper starts with a review of nominal classes in Frò?ò and the morphological structure of simple nouns. It is proposed that Frò?ò has a partly non-concatenative morphology and that a standard Distributed Morphology analysis cannot fully account for the phonology of the resulting morphemes. In the second part, the role of phonology is investigated. It is proposed that well-formed morphemes are the result of partial or deficient phonological specifications in need of repair. The phonological approach is couched in an optimality-theoretic framework (see Saba Kirchner 2010 and Bye & Svenonius 2012, among others, for different languages). Part of the final specification of these morphemes is due to phonological repairs needed to fulfill markedness and faithfulness constraints, and the filling in of features due to vowel and nasal harmony, as well as consonant epenthesis.