The Definite Morpheme in Bùlì

Abdul-Razak Sulemana//abdulraz@mit.edu

In this talk, I analyze a phenomenon that looks like suffixation but argue that it is strictly a root internal means of licensing a definite morpheme.

Bùlì has traditionally been described as having five definite singular suffixes {-wá, -ní, -ká, -kú,-mú} which correspond to a five singular noun class system in the language (Kröger 1992).

Class 1.

Noun	Noun+DEF	
núrú	núrúwá	'the man'
nà:b	nà:wá	'the chief'
nípók	nípó:wá	'the woman'

Class 2.

Noun	Noun+DEF	
bēlī	bēnní	'the river'
vílí	vínní	'the well'
tūrī	tūnní	'the ear'

Class 3.

wí:k	wí:ká	'the flute'
náŋ	náŋká	'the leg'
fíŋ	fíŋká	'the cane'

Class 4.

zúk	zúkkú	'the head'
túk	túkkú	'the nest'
pū:k	pū:kú	'the foam'

Class 5.

dʒúm	dʒúmmú	'the fish'
kàb	kàmmŭ	'the antelope'
tì:b	tì:mŭ	'the tree'

I propose that a high tone is the definite morpheme in the language. Since tones must be associated with TBUs, the language epenthesizes a vowel in order to license this tone. Secondly, the quality of the final vowel reflects the constriction of the final root consonant. Finally gemination is triggered by the need to satisfy an alignment constraint. Consider a sketch on how [zúkkú] is derived from /zúk ´/ in tableau (1).

Tableau 1.

/zúk ´/	Max-T	NoFloat	ALIGN R (RT, Syll)	Ident [±Long]
a. ☞zúkkú				*
b. zúk	*!			
c. zúk ´		*!		
d. zú.kú			*!	

Candidate (b) violates **Max-T**—which penalizes the deletion of an input tone while candidate (c) violates **NoFloat**—which requires tones to be associated with a TBU. Both candidates (a) and (d) satisfy **Max-T** and **NoFloat** through epenthesis. However, candidate (d) is penalized by **ALIGN R (RT, Syll)**—which requires the right edge of the root syllable to coincide with a right edge of a syllable in the output. The optimal candidate (a) violates the low ranked constraint **Ident [±Long]**—which assigns a violation for a change in length of any segment in the root.