

Evaluative morphology in Muna

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1. Introduction

The Muna language (ISO 639-3 code *mnb*) is spoken on the island of Muna and some smaller neighbouring islands in the province of Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, by an estimated 300,000 speakers.¹ Muna is an Austronesian language belonging to the Celebic macrogroup within Western Malayo-Polynesian (Mead 2003). Major publications relating to Muna are van den Berg (1989, 1996, 2004).² All Muna words in this chapter are written in the standard orthography.³

Muna morphology is mostly agglutinative with a rich and diverse array of forms. Prefixation and suffixation are prevalent, but there is also infixation, circumfixation, reduplication (with three subtypes: partial, full and supernumerary), and various combinations of these categories. Less common are compounding, incorporation and abbreviation.

The major word classes are verbs and nouns, both of which have extensive morphological possibilities, especially verbs. Verbs are classified into three declension classes (*a-*, *ae-* and *ao-* class, based on the 1SG subject form) and are inflected for subject, direct object and indirect object. In addition, verbs are morphosyntactically grouped into a further three classes: stative (corresponding to adjectives), dynamic (intransitive) and transitive. Closed classes, most of which have few morphological possibilities, are pronouns, numerals and classifiers, quantifiers, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, particles and interjections.

Inflectional morphology centers around four person-number sets: subject prefixes, direct object suffixes, indirect object suffixes, as well as the possessor/agent suffixes (on nouns and on passive participles). TAM morphology is limited to irrealis *-um-*, perfective *-mo* and reduplication for continuous action. Verbal derivational morphology is broad, including a variety of valency-changing affixes (among others causative *fo-₁* and *feka-*, reciprocal *po-*, detransitivising *fo-₂*, applicative *-ghoo*, transitivity *-Ci*, requestive *fe-*, accidental passive *ti-*) and nominalisations (*ka-*, *-ha*, as well as the circumfix *ka-...-ha*). Many affixes, however, appear to be category-neutral vis-à-vis the inflection-derivation distinction, such as *ta-* ‘only’, *-e* ‘vocative’, *pe-* ‘approximately’ and *paka-* ‘when first’.

2. Evaluative categories in Muna

Muna has a relatively rich saturation of evaluative morphology, covering diminution, contempt, approximation, attenuation and intensification. Most of these function productively in the language.

In the following subsections each of these five evaluative categories and their morphological exponents are dealt with in detail. Phonology does not seem to play an independent role in evaluative morphology, and so the emphasis will be on formal expression and semantics.

2.1 Diminution

The combination of the prefix *ka-* and full reduplication (defined as disyllabic and prefixing) on a nominal base normally indicates diminution. Examples are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. DIMINUTION

<i>golu</i>	ball	<i>ka-golu-golu</i>	small ball
<i>kabhawo</i>	mountain	<i>ka-kabha-kabhawo</i>	small mountain, hill
<i>kabhera</i>	piece (cut off)	<i>ka-kabhe-kabhera</i>	small piece (cut off)
<i>kontu</i>	stone	<i>ka-kontu-kontu</i>	small stone, pebble
<i>lia</i>	cave, hole	<i>ka-lia-lia</i>	small cave, small hole
<i>raha</i>	platform (for drying)	<i>ka-raha-raha</i>	small platform
<i>robhine</i>	woman, female	<i>ka-robhi-robhine</i>	small (and young) female
<i>sau</i>	tree, stick	<i>ka-sau-sau</i>	small tree, small stick

A number of points should be noted about this formation. First, what counts as a ‘small’ token of a particular entity is of course subject to cultural and personal norms. For example, since Muna is relatively flat with only low hills, any elevation in the landscape may count as a *ka-kabha-kabhawo* ‘hill’. Secondly, many formations have developed specific lexicalised meanings. Examples include *ina* ‘mother’ > *ka-ina-ina* ‘foster mother, wet nurse’; *lima* ‘hand, arm’ > *ka-lima-lima* 1. ‘handrail’, 2. ‘pickpocket’ and *mata* ‘eye’ > *ka-mata-mata* ‘k.o. edible sea shell’. In some of these cases a diminutive meaning is still available given the right context. For instance, when admiring a new-born baby, one could comment on its *ka-lima-lima* ‘little hands’ and *ka-mata-mata* ‘little eyes’, overriding their more usual lexicalised meanings. Thirdly, diminutive formation appears to be mainly productive on nouns referring to concrete, specific and tangible entities. Generic nouns such as *kalalambu* ‘toy’ and *kadadi* ‘animal’ do not take the diminutive, and neither do natural objects such as *gholeo* ‘sun’, *wula* ‘moon’, *kawea* ‘wind’ and *ifi* ‘fire’.

2.2 Contempt

The combination of the prefix *ka-* and full reduplication on a nominal base may also indicate contempt, but this is a marginal procedure, limited to two elicited examples (discovered while investigating diminution): *guru* ‘teacher’ > *ka-guru-guru* ‘non-professional teacher, poorly performing teacher’ and *pahulo* ‘hunter’ > *ka-pahu-pahulo* ‘poorly performing hunter’. In both cases the formation is applied to a noun referring to a profession, indicating a lack of ability and conveying contempt.

2.3 Approximation

Various morphological procedures exist in Muna to signal approximation. The target of the approximation is either a stative verb (translated as an adjective) or a numeral phrase.

a. *mba-* + reduplication

The combination of the prefix *mba-* and full reduplication on a stative verbal base carries an approximative meaning, indicating that a certain degree of the state of affairs holds, but that it cannot be properly called that state. English equivalents are ‘somewhat’, ‘rather’, ‘quite’ and ‘-ish’. Table 2 shows several examples of this productive process. (The prefix *no-* marks 3rd person singular realis subject.)

TABLE 2. APPROXIMATION WITH *MBA-*

<i>dea</i>	red	<i>no-mba-dea-dea</i>	it is rather red, it is reddish
<i>hali</i>	difficult	<i>no-mba-hali-hali</i>	it is rather difficult
<i>lalesa</i>	wide	<i>no-mba-lale-lalesa</i>	it is rather wide
<i>nifi</i>	thin	<i>no-mba-nifi-nifi</i>	it is rather thin
<i>taa</i>	good	<i>no-mba-taa-taa</i>	it is rather good, it is okay
<i>wanta</i>	long	<i>no-mba-wanta-wanta</i>	it is rather long

In some people’s speech *mba-* is in free variation with *ma-*. This *ma-* is also the allomorph found when the stative verbal base contains a prenasalised consonant: *mpona* ‘long (of time) > *no-ma-mpona-mpona* ‘rather long (of time)’. An example of this formation in a clause:

- (1) *Do-po-kapi-kapihi* *welo daoa* *no-mba-hali-hali* *rampano*
 1/3PL.R-RECP-REDUP-search in market 3SG.R-APPROX-REDUP-difficult because
no-bhari *mie*.
 3SG.R-many person
 ‘Looking for each other in the market is rather difficult because there are so many people.’

b. *ka-* + reduplication

A second avenue to expressing approximation is by combining the prefix *ka-* with full reduplication. This procedure is limited to less than ten stative verbs, some of which are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. APPROXIMATION WITH *KA-*

<i>kodoho</i>	far	<i>no-ka-kodo-kodoho</i>	rather far
<i>lolu</i>	stupid	<i>no-ka-lolu-lolu</i>	rather stupid
<i>lui</i>	tough	<i>no-ka-lui-lui</i>	rather tough
<i>luntu</i>	slow	<i>no-ka-luntu-luntu</i>	rather slow
<i>pongke</i>	deaf	<i>no-ka-pongke-pongke</i>	rather deaf
<i>rombu</i>	fat	<i>no-ka-rombu-rombu</i>	rather fat

Approximation with *ka-* appears to be limited to stative verbs referring to notions with a negative or undesirable meaning component. With many neutral or positive stative verbs, this formation is impossible: *bhala* ‘big’ (**no-ka-bhala-bhala*), *rubu* ‘small’, *maho* ‘near’, *kesa* ‘beautiful’, but also the inherently negative *dai* ‘broken; ugly’. On the basis of *kadoho* ‘far’, both *no-ka-kodo-kodoho* and *no-mba-kodo-kodoho* are possible, both meaning ‘rather far’, without any clear difference in meaning. The negative meaning overtones of *ka-* could be related to various other *ka-* + reduplication derivations referring to negative or undesirable character traits. In most cases the simple base does not exist. Examples include *no-ka-dhoro-dhoro* ‘unmannered, arrogant’ (**dhoro*); *no-ka-hao-hao* ‘greedy’ (**hao*) and *no-ka-duso-duso* ‘hasty, reckless’ (**duso*).

Three stative verbs referring to taste sensations display the unusual feature of (optional) initial consonant aphaeresis, as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4. APPROXIMATION WITH *KA-* ON TASTE WORDS

<i>kolo</i>	sour	<i>no-ka-kolo-kolo</i> ~ <i>no-ka-olo-olo</i>	rather sour
<i>meko</i>	sweet	<i>no-ka-meko-meko</i> ~ <i>no-ka-eko-eko</i>	rather sweet
<i>tembe</i>	insipid, tasteless	<i>no-ka-embe-embe</i>	rather insipid, rather tasteless

c. *-hi*

The suffix *-hi* is a multi-purpose affix. In addition to indicating plurality and diversity on nouns and verbs, it may also signal that the state or event is part of a larger series or that the action was done at leisure, without specific purpose. For example, *do-fumaa-hi* (3PL.R-eat-PLUR) may mean 1. ‘they all eat’; 2. ‘they eat (among other things)’; 3. ‘they eat (at their leisure)’.

With a few stative verbs, it appears that *-hi* may also have an approximating meaning, as in *ne-taa-hi* ‘it is rather good, it is okay’ (from *taa* ‘good’) and *no-rubu-hi* ‘it is rather small’ (from *rubu* ‘small’). Since the ‘part of a larger series’ meaning appears to be the most accessible, some language consultants do not accept the meaning ‘rather’ in these cases, and most textual examples are in fact ambiguous. For example, a bird is described as *ne-ngkonu-hi parewa-no* (3SG.R-round-PLUR body-3SG.POSS), which is either ‘its body is rather round’ or ‘its body is round (among other things)’, in the context of a longer description. The use of *mba-* + reduplication would disambiguate in this case.

d. *sa-...ha-no*

A rather special formation on the basis of stative verbs is the combination of the prefix *sa-* and the suffix *-ha*, followed by a possessive suffix, which is almost always 3SG *-no*, though other person-number combinations are also possible. Allomorphs of *sa-* are *sae-* (with *ae-* verbs) and *sao-* (with *ao-* verbs). The resulting formation is not so much an approximation, but rather means that a state

X has been reached to a minimal degree in the perception of the speaker. English translation equivalents are ‘only just X’, ‘just X enough’, ‘(just) barely X’, ‘just about X’, ‘not really X’, ‘almost not X’. Table 5 illustrates some examples.

TABLE 5. MINIMAL DEGREE WITH SA-...-HA-NO

<i>bhie</i>	heavy	<i>sao-bhie-ha-no</i>	only just heavy, not really heavy
<i>lowu</i>	drunk	<i>sao-lowu-ha-no</i>	just about drunk, barely drunk
<i>meko</i>	sweet	<i>sao-meko-ha-no</i>	only just sweet, not too sweet
<i>ntalea</i>	light (not dark)	<i>sae-ntalea-ha-no</i>	just barely light, not really light
<i>pana</i>	hot	<i>sao-pana-ha-no</i>	just barely hot, not really hot
<i>pande</i>	clever, able	<i>sa-pande-ha-no</i>	just barely able, not really clever

In clausal examples:

- (2) *Tee aini sao-meko-ha-no.*
 tea this MINIMAL-sweet-DEGREE-3SG.POSS
 ‘This tea is barely sweet enough.’
- (3) *Ne-fanahi oe sao-pana-ha-no.*
 3SG.R-heat water MINIMAL-hot-DEGREE-3SG.POSS
 ‘She heated the water until it was just about hot (but not boiling).’
- (4) *No-ghuse sao-bhie-ha-no.*
 3SG.R-rain MINIMAL-heavy-DEGREE-3SG.POSS
 ‘It is raining, but not really that heavy.’ (Lit. ‘It rains just about heavy.’)

It seems helpful to think of this construction in terms of grading along a scale of 1-10, where 5 is a fail and 6 a pass. If a cup of tea is considered *sao-meko-ha-no*, this means it just narrowly scores a 6 for being sweet. If, however, it is *no-mba-meko-meko* ‘rather sweet’, its score is around 7-8.

In some of the illustrative examples there appears to be a temporal meaning element, translated as ‘until’. It appears that (at least historically) this formation is related to the prefix *sa-*, signalling a temporal connection as in the sentence *sa-rato-ku, no-kala-mo* (WHEN-arrive-1SG.POSS 3SG.R-go-PRF) ‘as soon as I arrived, he went away.’ In other examples this temporal element appears to have disappeared and only the resulting state is in focus.

This *sa-...-ha-no* formation is also possible on intransitive verbs, as in *sa-toolea-ha-no* (MINIMAL-contain-DEGREE-3SG.POSS) ‘just barely able to contain, just the right size’, and *sa-wanu-ha-ku* (MINIMAL-get.up-DEGREE-1SG.POSS) ‘I am just able to get up (but I cannot really walk).’ This

usage is rather rare and mostly occurs in elicited material. In these cases there is the nuance of ability.

Finally, on the basis of the stative verb *taa* ‘good’, the derivation *sae-taa-ha-no* ‘just about good’ has acquired the specialised meaning ‘medium, around the middle of the scale, average’, when followed by a nominalised stative verb. An example is

- (5) *Nunsu-no sae-taa-ha-no ka-bhala-no*
 beak-3SG.POSS MINIMAL-good-DEGREE-3SG.POSS NMLZ-big-3SG.POSS
 ‘Its beak is of average size.’ (Lit. ‘Its beak, its bigness is just about good’.)

e. *pe-*

The prefix *pe-* signals approximation with numbers. It is found with so-called measure phrases, that is, phrases consisting of a prefixed numeral and either a classifier or a measure noun. It also occurs with numeral verbs. The meaning of *pe-* in each case is ‘approximately, about’, and as illustrated in (6), *pe-* must co-occur with the irrealis prefix *na-* in measure phrases, or with the irrealis set of plural subject markers in numeral verbs, as illustrated in (7).

- (6) a. *na-pe-se-dhamu* ‘about one hour’
 IRR-APPROX-one-hour
 b. *na-pe-lima-wula-mo* ‘about five months ago’
 IRR-APPROX-five-moon-PRF
 c. *na-pe-tolu-folu ue* ‘about 60 cm’ (lit. ‘about 30 knucklebones’)
 IRR-APPROX-three-ten knucklebone
 d. *na-pe-raa-moghono ghulu* ‘about two hundred (animals)’
 IRR-APPROX-two-hundred body
- (7) a. *da-pe-tolu-fulu* ‘there are about thirty of us/them’
 1PL.INCL/3PL.IRR-APPROX-three-ten
 b. *da-pe-raa-moghono* ‘there are about two hundred of us/them’
 1PL.INCL/3PL.IRR-APPROX-two-hundred

f. Reduplication

Reduplication in Muna is a very rich and rewarding area for research, as it has several forms and many meanings, some of which overlap. Reduplication typically indicates continuous or durative aspect, intensification, distribution, plurality (versus duality) or personification. Occasionally full reduplication may have an approximating meaning as shown by the following pair: *rambi se-mata* (o’clock one-eye) ‘one o’clock’ and *rambi-rambi se-mata* (REDUP-o’clock one-eye) ‘around one o’clock’.

2.4 Attenuation and reduction

a. *poka-* and reduplication

The combination of the prefix *poka-* with full reduplication of the verbal base (either intransitive or transitive) is a productive process in which the added meaning component of the resulting verb is that of downplaying the seriousness and importance of the activity. The action is not really performed in the strict sense of the word, but it is done ‘just a bit’, ‘just for fun’, ‘not properly and not seriously’, ‘as if one is learning to do it’, ‘according to one’s ability (and therefore not really well)’, ‘somewhat randomly’. Occasionally the meaning can even shade into ‘pretend to’. Providing adequate translation examples out of context is not easy, and the examples in Table 6 give rough equivalents only.

TABLE 6. ATTENUATION WITH *POKA-*

<i>buri</i>	write	<i>no-poka-buri-buri</i>	just write a little
<i>fumaa</i>	eat	<i>no-poka-fuma-fumaa</i>	eat just a little, eat a little for fun
<i>kadiu</i>	bathe	<i>no-poka-kadi-kadiu</i>	take a bath, but not properly; just have fun playing with water
<i>linda</i>	dance	<i>no-poka-linda-linda</i>	dance a little, dance just for fun
<i>toda</i>	notch	<i>no-poka-toda-toda</i>	just make some notches (not properly)

These derivations retain the transitivity of the original verbal base. Examples in clauses (with some comments) show the range of usage.

- (8) *O tobho ka-fegholei miina nae-mbali*
 ART dagger NZLR-sharpen.with.magic NEG 3SG.IRR-can
do-poka-buna-buna-ane; *amba-do kamokula-hi*
 3PL.R-NOT.SERIOUSLY-REDUP-pull.out-3SG.IND.OBJ word-3PL.POSS elder-PL
do-marangkuni-ane.
 3PL.R-hepatitis-3SG.IND.OBJ

‘A dagger sharpened with magic, you cannot just pull it out (from its sheath) for fun or for no particular reason; the elders say that (if you do that) you will get hepatitis.’

- (9) *No-bisara-mo tomi “Insoba poka-lengka-lengka-kanau*
 3SG.R-speak-PRF finch try NOT.SERIOUSLY-REDUP-open-1SG.IND.OBJ
do-po-bisara-ghoo deki.”
 1PL.INCL.R-RECP-speak-PURP first

‘The finch said (to the monkey), “Just open (your mouth) a little bit for me, so that we can talk first.” (The finch is trapped inside the monkey’s mouth and is hoping to escape. A

standard variety of Muna, but in the southern dialect this is much more common. However, only the consonant is reduplicated in that case. The vowel is a lengthened copy of the verb-class vowel *o* or *e*: *no-bhoo-bhala* ‘it is very big’, *no-doo-dai* ‘it is very bad’, *no-koo-kuni* ‘it is very yellow’, *ne-tee-taa* ‘it is very good’.

2.6 Conclusion

Evaluative morphology figures prominently in Muna, though the semantic nuances are not always easy to pin down and in a few cases (such as *-hi*), one can argue whether a particular formation should be classified as evaluative morphology.

References

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Non-standard abbreviations

APPROX	approximative
IND.OBJ	indirect object
IRR	irrealis
PAUS	pausal clitic
POL	polite
R	realis
REDUP	reduplication

Notes

1. The exact number of Muna speakers is difficult to come by, as several thousands of Muna speakers are found in the provincial capital of Kendari, but nobody knows their exact number. Also, since the population is shifting to Indonesian, there is an increasing number of ethnic Muna people with a limited or only a passive knowledge of the language.
2. I want to acknowledge some of the Muna friends who helped me to learn their beautiful language between 1985 and 1994: †Nilus Larangka, †Hanafi, †La Ode Abdul Fattah, †La Ada, and Syahrudin. More recently Mainuru Hado, La Habi, La Indasa and Lawa have been very helpful.
3. Most symbols have their expected value, but <bh> is an implosive /b̥/, <dh> a voiced dental plosive /d̥/ and <gh> a voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/.
4. There are also two known cases of partial reduplication with an approximative meaning: *rubu* ‘small > *no-ru-rubu* ‘it is rather small’ and *mpona* ‘long (of time) > *no-mpo-mpona* ‘it is rather long’.