

Diminution, augmentation and pejorativeness in IciNdali: the semantics of classes 5/6, 3/4, 7/8 and 21*

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Introduction

IciNdali is a linguistically little-known Bantu language spoken mainly in the Misuku Hills, and some parts of Bulambya and Kamene areas in Chitipa district and the northern tip of Karonga district of northern Malawi.¹ And across the Songwe River in Tanzania, IciNdali is spoken in Mbozi and Tukuyu districts. To the west of Misuku Hills, a variant of IciNdali known as IciSukwa, named after the hills, is spoken. The IciNdali speaking peoples are surrounded by four main ethnolinguistic groups. To their west live the Lambya; to their north are the Kukwe; and to their east are the Nyakyusa/Ngonde, while on their southern flank are the ChiTumbuka-speaking peoples. In his classification Guthrie (1948) puts IciNdali in Zone M, Group 20. Bryan (1959) follows Guthrie's classification and places it in the Nyiha-Safwa group.

This paper's main objective is to discuss the semantics of classes 5/6, 3/4, 7/8 and 21 which show aspects of diminution,² augmentation³ and pejorativeness.⁴ The discussion will be essentially descriptive since IciNdali remains largely undocumented and undescribed,⁵ and will concentrate on IciNdali as spoken in Malawi.

The IciNdali noun class system: a synopsis

There are 21 noun classes in IciNdali. These are distinguished morphologically by prefixes that are affixed to the noun stem, and syntactically by the occurrence of certain associated sets of agreement markers. The controlling prefix consists of two morphemes, the Initial Vowel (IV) and the Basic Prefix (BP). In certain situations, only the BP occurs, while elsewhere the full prefix sequence IV-BP occurs.⁶

In analysing noun prefixes in IciNdali, it is imperative to make a distinction between

what are considered primary basic prefixes (PBP) and secondary basic prefixes (SBP). The former occur immediately before the noun stem, while the latter are, in certain cases, superimposed upon the PBP. The regular pattern for the structure of the noun is: (SBP) - PBP - stem.

Ordinarily the noun prefix has the canonical Vowel-Consonant-Vowel (VCV) shape, but V may sometimes occur alone. In certain cases the homorganic nasal, N-, is an integral part of the noun prefix, for example in class 9/10. And at other times the prefix occurs as a zero element, /Ø/.

With regard to the grammatical number of nouns and their associated prefixes, there are three categories: **singular**, with the correlative plurals that have the same lexical meanings as the singular forms; **plural**, with which occurs a correlative form; and **neutral**, which has neither correlative plural nor correlative singular forms.⁷

Historically the noun classes would seem to have been based on some semantic-denotational classification of the universe such that nouns denoting humans were and still mostly occur in class 1/2, those denoting objects existing in pairs in class 5/6, and those denoting instruments in class 7/8.⁸ Today, however, the noun classes have mostly a formal grammatical significance. The original semantic classification has been disrupted and is virtually lost. Class membership varies from language to language, and within the same language nouns for instruments, for instance, appear in more than one class (7/8, 3/4, and 5/6), nouns for **mass** denotations and for humans appear also in more than one class. On the other hand, in numerous languages, many nouns have joined class 1/2 which now denote all sorts of miscellanea. This has led Givon (1971: 33) to conclude that:

Whatever it may ultimately prove to have been, the old state of affairs has been almost completely obliterated by now, with the various semantic types of nouns dispersed all over the noun-class system seemingly at random.

One of the more engaging features in IciNdali nouns is the preponderance of substituted secondary prefixes employed to indicate notions of diminution or augmentation, or to convey pejorative or honorific import. Since such semantically marked prefixes are substituted for other unmarked prefixes and not generally superimposed upon them, it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly the status of a given prefix save on the basis of meaning. In the subsequent sections we will discuss notions of diminution, augmentation and pejorativeness as manifested by classes 5/6, 3/4, 7/8 and 21 respectively. However, before we do that a table of IciNdali noun prefixal system will be presented for easy reference.

CLASS	PREFIX	EXAMPLE	GLOSS
1	umu-	umundu	'person'
2	aβa-	aβandu	'persons'
1a	uØ-	uØsumbwe	'wild cat'
2b	awo-	awosumbwe	'wild cats'
3	umu-	umughunda	'garden'
4	imi-	imighunda	'gardens'
5	iØ-	iØshu	'word'/root'
6	ama-	amashu	'words'/roots'
7	ici-	icirombe	'maize'
8	ifi-	ifirombe	'maize'
9	iN-	inyoβe	'finger nail'
10	iN-	inyoβe	'finger nails'
11	ulu-	ulughano	'love'
12	aka-	akafungwi	'finger'
13	utu-	utufungwi	'fingers'
14	ubu-	uβufu	'flour'
15	uku-	ukupaasa	'to castrate'
16	pa-	panyumba	'at the house'
17	ku-	kunyumba	'to the house'
18	mu-	munyumba	'inside the house'
21	ili-	ililoshi	'notorious witch'

IciNdali noun class prefixal system

In the discussion that follows the singular/plural forms will be presented as pairs. Class numbers will be provided only in those cases where the singular/plural pair is irregular or derived from another class. The symbol '<' will be used to indicate that a given form is 'derived from' another.

Class 5/6

The nouns of this class have a broadly miscellaneous signification. They include natural phenomena, inter alia, names of plants and human anatomy. The singular prefix is recognised by the morphemes /iØ--ily-/ and its plural correlative by /ama--am-/. /iØ- occurs before V(owel)-commencing stems. /ama-/ occurs before all C(onsonant)-commencing stems and /am-/ occurs before all V-commencing stems. For example :

1a C-commencing stems

iØβeele/amaβeele	'breast/breasts'
iØshu/amashu	'word/words', 'root/roots'
iØtuŋgu/amatuŋgu	'testicle/testicles'
iØwingu/amawingu	'cloud/clouds'

2b V-commencing stems

ilyino/amino	'tooth/teeth'
ilyeya/ameya	'body hair/hairs'
ilyani/amani	'leaf/leaves'

It is worth noting, however, that sometimes when correlated with collective nouns of class 6, class 5 nouns express diminution coupled with pejorative insinuations, thus:

3.

iØfuta	'drop of oil'	<amafuta	'oil' (6)
iØka	'ounce of strength'	<amaka	'strength' (6)
iØhala	'slight wisdom'	<amahala	'wisdom' (6)
ilyishi	'drop of water'	<amishi	'water' (6)

The use of affixes to show diminution with pejorative innuendoes has also been observed in other Bantu languages. In Sotho, for example, when diminutive suffixes are applied to feminine nouns, i.e. nouns indicating females, insult is generally conveyed, though this depends largely on circumstances and tone. For instance, *molinyana* 'little woman' generally conveys a derisive meaning; nevertheless, when an alternative diminutive *mōsajana* is used, endearment is implied (see Doke and Mafokeng (1957) [1985]).

Class 3/4

Nouns in this class refer in most cases to various entities and elements that characterise the natural world. Apart from the general nature terms, there are also numerous nouns which indicate specific names of, among other things, human physiology, plants and animals. Formally the singular prefix is recognised by the morpheme /umu--umw-/ and sometimes the morphophonemic variant /uwo-/. /umu-/ occurs as primary prefix with C-commencing stems other than those of classes 1a/2b. /umw-/ occurs both as a primary and secondary prefix before all V-commencing stems. The plural prefix is recognised by the prefix /imi--imy -/ and the morphophonemic variant /iyo-/. /iyo-/ is formally identical with the demonstrative pronoun of class 4, *iyo* 'that'.

4a. C-commencing stems

umusewo/imisewo	'road/roads'
umileeŋgi/imileeŋgi	'thigh/thighs'
umutu/imitu	'head/heads'

umulomo/imilomo	'mouth'/'mouths'
umulilo/imililo	'fire/flare'
umuselu	'nausea'

4b. V-commencing stems

umwafi	'ordeal poison'	imyafi	(4)
umwoyo	'heart'	imyoyo	(4)
umwaka	'year'	imyaka	(6)
umwusi	'pestle'	imyusi	(4)
umwenda	'garment'	imyenda	(6)
umweshi	'moon, month, menstrual cycle'	imyeshi	(4)

/uwo-/ occurs only as a secondary prefix with augmentative import with certain noun stems of class 1/2 and regularly with noun stems of classes 1a/2b. The shape of this prefix is formally identical with the demonstrative pronoun of class 3, *uwo* 'that'. The occurrence of this prefix is rare with nouns of classes 1/2, and when augmentation is intended for such nouns, class 21 is generally employed. It is fully productive only with nouns of classes 1a/2b. For example:

5.

uwomundu	'large person'	iyomundu	(4)
<umundu	'person' (1)	aBandu	(2)
uwokambaku	'large bull'	ayokambaku	(2b)
<uØkambaku	'bull' (1a)	awokambaku	(2b)
uwokatuundu	'big piece of baggage'	iyokatuundu	(4)
<uØkatuundu	'baggage' (1a)	awokatuundu	(2b)

Apart from appearing as a primary prefix, the class 3 prefix may also occur as a substituted secondary prefix. When this happens, the semantic implication is one of augmentation and/or pejorativeness. Note the following :

6.

uwonduuli	'large hyena'	iyonduuli	(4)
<uØnduuli	'hyena' (1a)	awonduuli	(2b)
umukasu	'large hoe'	imikasu	(4)
<iØkasu	'hoe' (5)	amakas	(6)
umuButa	'large arrow'	imiButa	(4)

<uβuta	'arrow' (14)	amaβuta	(6)
umukuku	'large chicken'	imikuku	(4)
<iŋguku	'chicken'(9)	iŋguku	(10)

Further to conveying an augmentative significance, the secondary prefixes /umu-/ and /umw-/ may also exhibit pejorativeness or express abusive connotations. When a noun has its characteristic pejorative connotation expressed through the use of secondary prefixes of class 3/4, ordinary augmentation is achieved through the use of the noun stem with its primary prefix and adjective stem *-kulu*, 'large/big' (Vail, 1974: 30).

The concept of pejorativeness linked with the use of prefixes of class 3/4 as secondary prefixes seems to be inseparably bound to the notion of augmentation as shown in the following examples:

7.

umwino	'large, ugly tooth'	imyino	(4)
<ilyino	'tooth' (5)	amino	(6)
umwufwo	'big, ugly ear'	imyufwo	(4)
<icufwo	'ear' (7)	ifyufwo	(8)
umulota	'nightmare'	imilota	(4)
<icilota	'dream' (7)	ifilota	(8)
umupuŋgo	'chronic disease'	imipuŋgo	(4)
<imbuŋgo	'disease' (9)	imbuŋgo	(10)

Class 7/8

When the prefixes of this class appear as primary prefixes, the nouns have a broadly miscellaneous signification, generally impersonal. Nouns include the names of languages, anatomical terms, and terms for natural phenomena. The singular prefix is recognised by the morpheme /ici--ic-/ and the morphophonemic variant /ico-/. /ici-/ occurs both as a primary prefix before all C-commencing stems and as a secondary prefix before all C-commencing stems other than those usually found in class 1a/2b. /ic-/ occurs both as a primary and a secondary prefix before all V-commencing stems. /ico-/ occurs as a secondary prefix with noun stems usually found in class 1a/2b. The shape of this prefix is formally identical with that of the demonstrative pronoun of class 7 *ico* 'that'. The correlative plurals of class 7 are found in class 8 and they are recognised by the prefix morpheme /ifi--ify-/ and the morphophonemic variant /ifyo-/ which is formally identical with the demonstrative pronoun of class 8 *ifyo* 'that'. /ifi-/ occurs as a

primary prefix before all C-commencing stems except those usually in class 1a/2b. /ify-/ occurs as both a primary and secondary prefix before all V-commencing stems. /ifyo-/ occurs as a secondary prefix before those stems that are usually in class 1a/2b. For example:

8a. C-commencing stems

icitawo/ifitawo	'book/books'
icipeni/ifipeni	'knife/knives'
icisetuka/ifisetuka	'miracle/miracles'
icinyoŋgolo/ifinyoŋgolo	'millipede/millipedes'
icisi	'darkness'
icisa	'kindness'
iciNdali	'the Ndali language'

b. V-commencing stems

iculu/ifyulu	'termite/termites', 'anthill/anthills'
icanŋa/ifyanŋa	'granary/granaries'
iceni/ifyeni	'face/faces'

When the prefixes of class 7/8 occur as secondary prefixes, the nouns have a special pejorative or abusive import. Note the following:

9.

icifumbi	'rotten egg'	ififumbi	(8)
<iØfumbi	'egg' (5)	amafumbi	(4)
iciŋombe	'thin sickly cow'	ifiŋombe	(8)
<iŋombe	'cow' (9)	iŋombe	(10)
iciŋoma	'useless drum'	ifiŋoma	(8)
<iŋoma	'drum' (9)	iŋoma	(10)
iconduuli	'dirty sickly hyena'	ifyonduuli	(8)
<uØnduuli	'hyena' (1a)	awonduuli	(2b)
icipondi	'highly skilled useless blacksmith'	ifipondi	(8)
<umupondi	'blacksmith' (1)	aŋapondi	(2)
icokaŋwa	'very dirty dog'	ifyokaŋwa	(8)
<uØkaŋwa	'dog' (1a)	awokaŋwa	(2b)

As substituted secondary prefixes, the prefixes of class 7/8 are generally operative with classes other than 7/8 to indicate either pejorative or abusive connotations. The meaning of this secondary prefix is much more extreme than that of the prefixes of class 21.

The augmentative nature of the class 7/8 prefixes, although not necessarily the pejorative import, has been observed in other languages such as Xhosa. Louw (1973: 45) commenting on the Xhosa class 7/8 remarks that:

It seems as if the general all inclusive function of classes 7 and 8 is to intensify the meaning of the noun system in both positive or negative manner, or in some way or other to enlarge, extend or augment the concept or thing associated with it.

Class 21

Nouns of this class are exclusively secondary.⁹ This means that the members of this class are derived from nouns of other classes. The derived forms have generally an augmentative import. Further to the augmentative import, often a pejorative meaning, or some other negative or prejudiced attitude is also expressed.

Class 21 is recognised by the prefix morpheme /ili--ily-/ and the morphophonemic variant /ilyo-/ in the singular. /ili-/ occurs as a secondary prefix before C-commencing stems other than those that occur in class 1a/2b. /ily-/ occurs as a secondary prefix before all V-commencing stems. The correlative plurals of these forms are found in class 4. For example:

10. C-commencing stems

ilikasu	'big, awkward hoe'	imikasu	(4)
<iØkasu	'hoe' (5)	amakasu	(6)
ilililo	'bonfire'	imililo	(4)
<umulilo	'fire' (3)	imililo	(4)

b. V-commencing stems

ilyusi	'big, awkward pestle'	imyusi	(4)
<umusi	'pestle' (3)	imyusi	(4)
ilyenda	'big, ugly, oversized garment'	imyenda	(4)
<umwenda	'cloth' (3)	amyenda	(6)

Class 21 has two major imports. First, is simple augmentation, stressing the objects large size. The other related import is augmentation coupled with an implication of pejorativeness. Consider the following wide-ranging sample:

11. Augmentation

ilimundu	'big person'	imiḅandu	(4)
<umundu	'person' (1)	aḅandu	(2)
ilyolyembe	'large chicken hawk'	ayolyembe	(4)
<uØlyembe	'chicken hawk' (1a)	awolyembe	(2b)
ilitumbili	'large baboon'	imitumbili	(4)
<iØtumbili	'baboon' (5)	amatumbili	(6)
ilyufwo	'large ear'	imyufwo	(4)
<icufwo	'ear' (7)	ifyufwo	(8)

12. Pejorative augmentation

ililoshi	'notorious witch'	imiloshi	(4)
<umuloshi	'witch' (5)	aḅaloshi	(2)
iliNdali	'disgusting Ndali person'	imiNdali	(4)
<umuNdali	'Ndali person' (1)	aḅaNdali	(2)
ililomo	'large ugly mouth'	imilomo	(4)
<umulomo	'mouth' (3)	imilomo	(4)
ililundi	'swollen misshapen leg'	imilundi	(4)
<icilundi	'leg' (7)	ifilundi	(8)
ilikambo	'rotten bit of tobacco'	imikambo	(4)
<iŋgambo	'tobacco' (9)	iŋgambo	(10)
ilifula	'disgustingly long rain'	imifula	(4)
<ifula	'rain' (9)	ifula	(10)
iliḅuta	'large cumbersome arrow'	imiḅuta	(4)
<uḅuta	'arrow' (14)	amaḅuta	(6)
ilinyoŋgo	'diseased gall-bladder'	iminyoŋgo	(4)
<akanyoŋgo	'gall-bladder' (12)	utunyoŋgo	(13)
ilyanda	'paunchy, ugly stomach'	imyanda	(4)
<ulwanda	'stomach' (11)	inyanda	(10)

Compared to class 3, class 21 is a more subjective and emotive class when its prefix is used as an augmentative. Although it is evidently more forceful and picturesque its range of usage is somewhat much more constrained than that of class 3. However, despite the fact that there is no obvious difference in the structure of the forms, a dis-

inction is still made between class 4 forms which are correlative plurals for class 21 forms and those that are the correlative plurals for class 3 forms. The distinction is maintained by the use of intonation.

Semantic overlap: classes 3/4 and 21

Since class 3's prefixes are employed to show augmentation and/or pejorativeness, with the correlative plurals in class 4, and since class 21 also shows augmentation and/or pejorativeness, with correlative plurals also in class 4, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the issue of augmentation. When a noun receives an augmentative import and pejorative connotation through the use of one of the classes (3 or 21), then the employment of the other class seems to indicate only augmentation. However, there is no predictable pattern of occurrence. For example:

13.

injuki	(9)	'honeybee'	injuki	(10)
umuyuki	(3)	'large bee'	imiyuki	(4)
iliyuki	(21)	'nuisance of a bee'	imiyuki	(4)

Nevertheless, compare with the following:

14.

icufwo	(7)	'ear'	ifyufwo	(8)
umwufwo	(3)	'big ugly ear'	imyufwo	(4)
ilyufwo	(21)	'large ear'	imyufwo	(4)

Ordinarily, class 21 is the one that is usually employed to express pejorative or abusive nuances. Because this class' prefix cannot occur with all nouns, while class 3s can, the inclination is to employ class 3 for both augmentative and abusive/pejorative insinuations, with the precise meaning intended is determined by the actual context.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed diminution, augmentation and pejorativeness as it applies to IciNdali. It has been observed that the carriers of these significances are prefixes of classes 5/6, 3/4, 7/8 and 21. While class 5/6 prefixes show diminution coupled with pejorativeness, class 3/4 shows augmentation and pejorativeness, class 7/8 exhibits

pejorativeness and abusive connotations. It has, however, been shown that the class that is more often than not employed to express pejorativeness or abusive overtones is class 21. This seems to be the significance of the class since by its very nature derivative.

Notes

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1. The number of people who speak IciNdali is not known since statistics to that end are lacking.
 2. Is defined here as the act, process, or an instance of diminishing.
 3. Is defined here as the act, process, or an instance of making greater, more numerous, larger or intense.
 4. Is defined here as the act, or process, or instance of making or becoming worse.
 5. The only published work on this language hitherto seems to be Vail's (1974) pioneering work.
 6. It should be noted, nevertheless, that in classes 16-18 (locatives) no IV ever occurs.
 7. Note that neutral nouns are generally abstract concepts, locatives, infinitives and collectives. In certain cases, however, neutral nouns may appear with an apparent collective singular or plural but such commonly exhibit a lexical or connotational difference.
 8. See Bleek (1862) Creider and Denny (1975) and Welmers (1973) for arguments in favour of this position.
 9. Class 21 is numbered following Meinhof (1906, [1948]). The class appears in Venda, Tsonga and Shona among other languages, with an augmentative/pejorative import (see Doke 1954). By analogy with its occurrence in these languages and following Vail (1974) IciNdali has been numbered accordingly although its agreement markers are those of class 5.

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