

Metrically conditioned vowel length in Dagaare

1. Introduction

Dagaare (Gur, Mabia; Naden 1989, Bodomo 1997) is a two-tone language of northwestern Ghana.¹ There is little direct evidence for metrical stress, but vowel alternations in nominal and verbal morphology suggest the presence of a word-initial metrical foot (Anttila and Bodomo 2009). New evidence for the foot hypothesis comes from vowel length alternations in action nominals, the topic of the present paper.

Kennedy (1966: 9) gives the following vowel inventory for Dagaare word-medial syllables.

¹

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	–round	–round	+round	+round
	+ATR	–ATR	+ATR	–ATR
+high, –low	i, ii	ɪ, ɪɪ	u, uu	ʊ, ʊʊ
–high, –low	e, ie	ɛ, ɛɛ	o, uo	ɔ, ʊɔ
–high, +low		a, aa		

Table 1: Dagaare vowels (Kennedy 1966)

Vowel length is contrastive in Dagaare. High and low vowels can be short or long, but there is a striking gap in Kennedy’s inventory: long mid vowels are missing. Kennedy (1966: 8) notes that word-medially “there are high and low long vowels, but no mid long vowels” and suggests that in terms of the phonological system the diphthongs [ie], [ɪɛ], [uo], [ʊɔ] are in fact the missing long vowels /ee/, /εε/, /oo/, /ɔɔ/. This is an attractive interpretation because it makes the long vowel pattern symmetrical.

The problem is that long mid vowels do exist on the surface. There are even near-minimal pairs that demonstrate a phonemic contrast between a long mid vowel and the corresponding diphthong: *bée* ‘or’ vs. *bíé* ‘child.SG’, *gòó* ‘left’ vs. *góó* ‘thorn.SG’. Examples of long mid vowels are shown in Table 2. /E/ stands for a [–high, –low, –round] vowel and /I/ for a [+high, –low, –round] vowel, both underspecified for [±ATR]; /V/ stands for a [–high] vowel underspecified for [±back], [±round], and [±ATR].²

² Tone does not figure into the vowel length alternations, but a brief note is warranted. Underlyingly there is a three-way contrast between H, L, and toneless; on the surface there is a three-way contrast H, 'H, and L. Toneless morphemes surface as H or L depending on the context. We mark downstep as a raised exclamation point before a H toned syllable. Downstep seems analyzable as a floating L and contour tones as combinations of H and L. The underlying tone marking reflects our work in progress. For more details, see Kennedy (1966, 42-9) and Anttila and Bodomo (2000).

Underlying Surface			Underlying Surface		
/béé/	bée	‘or’	/bóò/	bóò	‘which’
/pɔg-léé/	pòglée	‘woman-DIM’	/tòò-rí/	tòòrí	‘ear-SG’
/gbé-É/	gbèè	‘leg-PL’	/dɔɔ-’/	dóó	‘man-SG’
/bar-ÈÉ/	bàrèè	‘leave-PERF’	/ɔɔ-rV/	òòró	‘chew-IMPF’
/téésì/	téésì	‘test.SG’	/lóó-rí/	lóórì	‘lorry-SG’

Table 2: Long mid vowels

However, Kennedy’s insight is nevertheless well founded: long mid vowels are phonologically special. The long mid vowels in Table 2 are either underlying or result from the concatenation of two underlying short mid vowels; phonologically derived long mid vowels are systematically missing. In particular, the process of vowel lengthening stops short of creating long mid vowels as shown in Table 3.

Root Suffix form			N + A Compound	
(a)/bí-/	bíí-rí	‘child-PL’	bì-fáá	‘bad child’
/pì-/	pìì-rí	‘rock-SG’	pì-fáá	‘bad rock’
/kù-/	kùù-rí	‘hoe-SG’	kù-fáá	‘bad hoe’
/gó-/	góú-rì	‘thorn-PL’	gó- ¹ fáá	‘bad thorn’
(b)/pò-/	pùò-rí	‘back-SG’	pò-fáá	‘bad back’
/nó-/	nóó-rì	‘mouth-SG’	nó- ¹ fáá	‘bad mouth’
/dò-/	dò-rí	‘pig-PL’	dò-fáá	‘bad pig’
/dè-/	dè-rí	‘room-PL’	dè-fáá	‘bad room’
/lè-/	lè-rí	‘bead-SG’	lè-fáá	‘bad bead’
/gbé-/	gbé-rì	‘leg-SG’	gbé- ¹ fáá	‘bad leg’

Table 3: Vowel lengthening in suffixed nouns

Table 3 shows that the number suffix /-rǐ/ triggers vowel lengthening in high vowel stems, but not in mid-vowel stems where the result is either a diphthong or the vowel simply fails to lengthen, depending on the lexical item. The noun-adjective compound is given as a diagnostic for the underlying form of the noun: the nouns in Table 3 all have a short stem vowel. In contrast, the long mid vowel in *dǒǒ* ‘man.SG’ given in Table 2 is underlying: *dǒǒ-fǎǎ* ‘bad man’.

Lengthening is lexically conditioned even in high vowel stems: there are words like *bǐ-rǐ* ‘seed-SG’ and *yǐ-rǐ* ‘house-SG’ where lengthening does not happen. Finally, the data illustrate a characteristic aspect of Dagaare number morphology: /-rǐ/ may mean either singular or plural depending on the stem, an instance of “polarity morphology” that has attracted the attention of semanticists (Grimm 2012).

Vowel lengthening also occurs in singular forms with no overt suffix. Anttila and Bodomo (2009) propose that in such cases the root vowel lengthens in order to satisfy a bimoraic foot template.

	Root	Singular		N + A Compound	
(a)	/bi-/	bíé	‘child.SG’	bì-fǎǎ	‘bad child’
	/gú-/	gúǒ	‘thorn.SG’	gú- ^l fǎǎ	‘bad thorn’
(b)	/dè-/	dìé	‘room.SG’	dè-fǎǎ	‘bad room’
	/dò-/	dùó	‘pig.SG’	dò-fǎǎ	‘bad pig’

Table 4: Vowel lengthening in unsuffixed nouns

Here is the reasoning: the singular form is a phonological word; therefore it must contain at least one foot; therefore it must be minimally bimoraic (McCarthy and Prince 1986/1996). In Dagaare this generalization holds for almost all nouns.³ In contrast, function words, weak forms of pronouns, and citation forms of verbs can be

³ We are aware of four monomoraic (CV) nouns: *bâ* ‘father.SG’, *mǎ* ‘mother.SG’, *nû* ‘hand.SG’, *zû* ‘head.SG’.

monomoraic. The question is why the vowel does not simply lengthen, yielding **bíí*, **góòò*, **dèèé*, and **dòóó*. Anttila and Bodomo (2009) propose that this is due to two constraints: **bíí* and **góòò* are blocked by a constraint against word-final high vowels; **dèèé*, and **dòóó* are blocked by a constraint against long mid vowels. Crucially, both constraints only apply in phonologically derived environments. The optimal outcome is a rising diphthong: *bíé*, *góò*, *dìé*, and *dùó*.

In sum, we have seen that all the nine vowels of Dagaare can be underlyingly either short or long (Kennedy 1966). There are also underlying diphthongs, such as *tìè* ‘shoot’, *pùòrì* ‘thank’, *yíélì* ‘sing’, *lúór-áá* ‘lion-SG’. However, long mid vowels [ee], [ɛɛ], [oo], [ɔɔ] are special in that they cannot be the result of lengthening.

This system of vowel length may seem complicated and one can reasonably question whether it has anything to do with foot structure. We will now provide new evidence suggesting that it indeed does. We first show that verbs exhibit parallel length alternations, complete with parallel exceptions. Particularly interesting is the action nominal paradigm where the length alternations are entirely regular and the foot template triggers both vowel lengthening and vowel shortening.

2. Length alternations in verbs

The key alternations in the verbal paradigm are illustrated in Table 5.

	Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
(a)	/ba-/	bà	bàà-rá	báá-ó	‘stick into the ground’
	/baa-/	bàà	bàà-rá	báá-ó	‘grow (of child)’
(b)	/bar-/	bàrì	bà-rá	bár-óó	‘leave’
	/bàrr-/	bàrrì	bàrr- ^l rá	bàrr- ^l r-óó	‘bargain’
	/bààr-/	bààrì	bàà- ^l rá	bàà- ^l r-óó	‘finish’

Table 5: Vowel length alternations in Dagaare verbs

The root and the citation form are identical except that consonant-final roots acquire a final epenthetic vowel in the citation form, either /i/ or /ɪ/ depending on ATR-harmony. This is because a Dagaare word must end in a vowel or in the velar nasal [ŋ]; in the latter case vowel

epenthesis seems optional.⁴ The imperfective suffix /-rV/ copies its vowel quality from the root. Our main focus is on the action nominals where both roots and suffixes alternate. We assume that the underlying form of the suffix is /-ÚÚ/, where /U/ stands for a [+high, –low, +round] vowel underspecified for [±ATR]. Here are the key generalizations. First, a short root vowel lengthens before the suffix, e.g., /ba/ ‘stick into the ground’ becomes *báá-ó* (long root vowel). Second, the suffix vowel is short after vowel-final roots, but long after consonant-final roots, e.g., /ba/ ‘stick into the ground’ yields *báá-ó* (short suffix vowel), but /bar/ ‘leave’ yields *bár-óó* (long suffix vowel).⁵

Tables 6 and 7 illustrate vowel length alternations in CV verbs. The above generalizations hold without exception in action nominals: the root vowel is always long and the suffix vowel is always short. Vowel height matters to root vowel lengthening: low and high root vowels lengthen (Table 6), e.g., /bà/, *báá-ó* ‘stick into the ground’ and /dì/, *díí-ú* ‘eat’, whereas mid root vowels diphthongize (Table 7), e.g., /kyè/, *kyíé-ó* ‘cut’ and /bó/, *bóó-ò* ‘want, look for’. The verbs are further divided into two sets (a) and (b) based on vowel length in the imperfective. We will return to the imperfective shortly.

⁴ This word-final epenthetic /i/ or /ɪ/ is a systematic counterexample to the ban on word-final derived high vowels. It seems that the ban only holds in the lexical phonology and that these epenthetic vowels are postlexical.

⁵ There exists another nominalizing suffix /-bÚ/, which results in doublets such as *dííú* ~ *dííbú* ‘eating’, *íyóó* ~ *ímmó* ‘putting’, *wóyúú* ~ *wómmú* ‘understanding’, and *zíyóó* ~ *zímmó* ‘sitting’. More examples can be found in Durand 1953. We have not conducted a systematic study of this suffix variation, but we speculate that it may depend on dialect and speech rate. The variation is not completely free: some verbs allow /-ÚÚ/, but not /-bÚ/, e.g., *pííróó*/**pííríbó* ‘sweep’, *sííróó*/**síírí’bó* ‘touch’.

	Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
(a)	/ba-/	bà	bàà-rá	báá-ó	‘stick into the ground’
	/da-/	dà	dàà-rá	dáá-ó	‘buy’
	/wa-/	wà	wàà-ná	wáá-ó	‘come’
	/kpá-/	kpá	kpáá-rà	kpáá-ò	‘boil’
	/la-/	là	làà-rá	láá-ó	‘laugh’
	/mí-/	mí	míí-rè	míí-ù	‘rain’
	/bó-/	bó	bóó-rò	bóó-ò	‘come (of rain)’
	/bú-/	bú	búú-rò	búú-ù	‘measure, calculate’
	/nyú-/	nyú	nyúú-rò	nyúú-ù	‘drink’ ⁶
	/zú-/	zú	zúú-rò	zúú-ù	‘steal’
(b)	/tá-/	tá	tá-rà	táá-ò	‘reach’
	/ɪ-/	ì	ì-ré	íí-ó	‘do’
	/dĩ-/	dĩ	dí- ¹ ré	díí- ¹ ó	‘take’
	/dì-/	dì	dì-ré	díí-ú	‘eat’
	/ko-/	kò	kò-ró	kóó-ó	‘give, offer’
	/yí-/	yí	yí-rè	yíí-ù	‘divorce a male’

Table 6: CV verbs, low and high vowel roots

⁶

We mark contrastive nasalization with a subscript tilde to avoid clutter. The interpretation of nasalized vowels is controversial. Kennedy (1966: 12) derives them via absolute neutralization from vowel-/m/ sequences, e.g., /fààm/ → fầ̀̀ ‘fail’: “There is a clear hole in the final nasal pattern. Though n and ŋ occur word final, m does not. Therefore nasalized vowels which are not contiguous to nasals are interpreted as vowel-m sequences.” Bodomo (1997: 9) assumes that nasalization is phonemic and notes that it is mostly found in long vowels.

	Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
(a)	/kyɛ-/	kyɛ	kyìè-ré	kyíé-ú	‘cut’
	/kpɛ-/	kpɛ	kpìè-ré	kpíé-ú	‘enter’
	/gyé-/	gyé	gyíé-rè	gyíé-ò	‘refuse to take’
	/ɣmɛ-/	ɣmɛ	ɣmìè-ré	ɣmíé-ú	‘beat’
	/gbɛ-/	gbɛ	gbìè-ré	gbíé-ú	‘grind roughly’
	/bó-/	bó	bóó-rò	bóó-ò	‘want, look for’
	/kó-/	kó	kóó-rò	kóó-ò	‘farm’
	/yó-/	yó	yóó-rò	yóó-ò	‘roam’
(b)	/ko-/	kò	kò-ró	kúó-ú	‘dry’
	/kó-/	kó	kó-rò	kúó-ù	‘get ready for rain’
	/té-/	té	té-rè	tíé-ò	‘display’
	/zo-/	zò	zò-ró	zóó-ú ⁷	‘run’
	/nyé-/	nyé	nyé-rè	nyáá-ò ⁸	‘see, understand’

Table 7: CV verbs, mid vowel roots

The imperfective paradigm is more complicated. The suffix /-rV/ copies the root vowel except that a high vowel becomes mid, reflecting the constraint against word-final derived high vowels, e.g., /dì/, *dì-ré* ‘eat-IMPF’. The verbs are further divided into two sets (a) and (b) based on whether the root vowel undergoes lengthening and/or diphthongization. The choice is phonologically unpredictable: we have vowel lengthening in /bà/ *bàà-rá* ‘stick into the ground-IMPF’, but not in /tá/ *tá-rà* ‘reach-IMPF’ (Table 6); we have diphthongization in /gyé-/ *gyíé-rè* ‘refuse to take’, but not in /nyé-/ *nyé-rè* ‘see,

⁷ The action nominalization *zóó-ú* is a counterexample to our generalization that there are no derived long mid vowels. Another such verb is /go-/: *gò, gò-ró, góó-ú* ‘wait for, keep watch’.

⁸ With this verb, vowel lengthening results in [áá], not in the expected [íé].

understand’ (Table 7). This makes the imperfective suffix /-rV́/ look rather similar to the number suffix /-rÍ/ which also exhibits lexically conditioned vowel lengthening.

Table 8 illustrates the same paradigms in CVV verbs.

	Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
(a)	/baa-/	bàà	bàà-rá	báá-ú	‘grow (of child)’
	/fàà-/	fàà	fáá- ¹ rá	fáá- ¹ ú	‘seize’
		wàà	wàà-rá	wáá-ú	‘be’
	/tʰe-/	tìè	tìè-ré	tíé-ú	‘shoot’
	/fʰɛ-/	fìè	fìè-ré	fíé-ú	‘whip’
	/dʰɛ-/	dìè	dìè-né	díé-ú	‘play’
	/yuo-/	yùò	yùò-ró	yúó-ú	‘open’
(b)		tàá	tá- ¹ rá	táá-ú	‘have, own’
	/gaa-/	gàà	gè-ré	gáá-ú	‘go’

Table 8: CVV verbs

The pattern in action nominals is the same as with CV verbs: the root vowel is long and the suffix vowel is short. In imperfectives the root vowel typically remains long, but there is an interesting minor pattern: some verbs undergo vowel *shortening* in the imperfective, e.g., *tá-¹rá* ‘have-IMPF’ and *gè-ré* ‘go-IMPF’.⁹ These verbs provide evidence for a process of root vowel shortening which was not visible in CV verbs where we could only see root vowel lengthening. The verbs ‘be’ and ‘have’ are tonally idiosyncratic and given our uncertainty about the analysis we do not give underlying forms for them.

We now turn to consonant-final roots. Table 9 illustrates the same paradigms in CVC roots.

⁹ The ablaut in *gèré* ‘go-IMPF’ is specific to this lexical item.

	Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
(a)	/bɔŋ-/	bòŋì	bòn-nó	bóŋ-úú	‘know’
	/dóg-/	dógi	dóg-rò	dóg-òò	‘boil, brew’
	/ɪŋ-/	ìŋì	ìŋ-né	íŋ-úú	‘put’
	/biŋ-/	bìŋì	bìn-né ~ bìŋ-né	bíŋ-úú	‘put down’
	/sɪŋ-/	síŋì	síŋ- ¹ né	sí ¹ ŋ-úú	‘equal’
	/pɔg-/	pògi	pòg-ró	póg-úú	‘(en)close’
	/sag-/	sàgi	sàg-rá	ság-úú	‘answer’
	/séŋ-/	ségi	ség-rè	ség-òò	‘write’
	/sɔŋ-/	sòŋì	sòn-nó	són-úú	‘help’
(b)	/bar-/	bàrì	bà-rá	bár-úú	‘leave’
	/bur-/	bùrì	bù-ró	búr-úú	‘soak’
	/êr-/	érì	é- ¹ rè	é ¹ r-úú	‘grind’
	/mar-/	màrì	mà-rá	már-úú	‘paste’
	/sar-/	sàrì	sà-rá	sár-úú	‘slip’
	/sór-/	sórí	só-rò	só-ròò	‘count’
	/wɔŋ-/	wòŋì	wò-nó	wón-úú	‘understand’
	/yel-/	yèlì	yè-lé	yél-úú	‘speak’
	/ziŋ-/	zìŋì	zì-né	zíŋ-úú	‘sit’
(c)	/bal-/	bàlì	bàl-lá ~ bàl-á	bál-úú	‘be tired’

Table 9: CVC verbs

Here the action nominal suffix vowel is always long. The imperfective paradigm shows mixed behavior of the familiar kind: the initial syllable may be heavy (CVC.CV) as in (a) or light (CV.CV) as in (b), depending on the verb. One and the same verb may even allow both forms as in (c): /bal-rV/ ‘be.tired-IMPF’ may come out either as *bàl-lá* or *bàl-á*. Minimal pairs like /bòŋ-rV/, *bòn-nó* ‘know-IMPF’ with a heavy initial syllable and /wòŋ-rV/ *wò-nó* ‘hear-IMPF’ with a light initial syllable suggest that the choice between the two is lexical. Note

that the suffixal /r/ assimilates in place and/or manner to the root-final consonant; the details will be set aside here.¹⁰

The same paradigms for CVCC verbs are shown in Table 10. Again, the vowel in the action nominal suffix is always long. This time even the imperfective paradigm is uniform: the initial syllable is always heavy (CVC.CV), with no free or lexical variation.

Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
/bârr-/	bárrì	bár- ¹ rá	bár ¹ r-óó	‘bargain’
/bèll-/	bèllì	bèl-lé	béll-óó	‘deceive’
/gòll-/	gòllì	gòl-ló	góll-óó	‘go around’
/kann-/	kànnì	kàn-ná	kánn-óó	‘learn’
/kyèll-/	kyèllì	kyèl-lé	kyéll-óó	‘listen’
/mánn-/	mánnì	mán- ¹ ná	mán- ¹ nóó	‘measure’
/nyunn-/	nyùnnì	nyùn-nó	nyúnn-úú	‘smell’
/pègl-/	pèglì	pèg-lé	pégl-óó	‘carry’
/pènn-/	pènnì	pèn-né	pénn-óó	‘rest’
/síll-/	síllì	síl- ¹ lé	síl ¹ l-óó	‘tell stories’
/táll-/	tállì	tál-lá	táll-óó	‘walk fast’

Table 10: CVCC verbs

Finally, Table 11 illustrates CVVC verbs. The action nominal suffix vowel is again always long and the imperfective paradigm is uniformly CVV.CV, with no variation.

¹⁰ The CVC verb /gbîr-/ ‘sleep’ has the exceptional paradigm *gbîrì*, *gbî¹ré*, *gòó¹ó*. The action nominal is exceptional in having a short suffix vowel, but since it differs segmentally from the root in several ways, including its [ATR] value, we suspect it is probably based on a different lexeme.

Root	Cit. form	Imperf.	Nominal	
/báàr-/	báàrì	báá- ¹ rá	báá ¹ r-úú	‘finish’
/naan-/	nààrì	nàà-ná	náán-úú	‘get ready, develop’
/saal-/	sààlì	sààl-á	sáál-úú	‘sharpen’
/saʌŋ-/	sàà	sàà-ná	sáʌŋ-úú	‘spoil’
/piir-/	pìirì	pìir-ré	píir-úú	‘discover’
/piur-/	pìirì	pìiré	píir-úú	‘sweep’
/siir-/	síirì	síí-ré	síí ¹ r-úú	‘touch’
/yíèl-/	yíèlì	yíé- ¹ lé	yíé ¹ l-úú	‘sing’
/gíèr-/	gíèrì	gíé- ¹ ré	gíé ¹ r-úú	‘belch’
/fúòr-/	fúòrì	fúó- ¹ ró	fúó ¹ r-úú	‘sip’
/puor-/	pùòrì	pùò-ró	púór-úú	‘thank, greet, pray’
/kòòr-/	kòòrì	kòò-ró	kóór-úú	‘delay’
/òòr-/	òòrì	òò-ró	óór-úú	‘chew’

Table 11: CVVC verbs

Having the overtly vowel-final *sàà* ‘spoil’ listed among CVVC verbs deserves a comment. The citation form is clearly vowel-final, i.e., CVV, but there is good evidence that the root is underlyingly /saʌŋ/: the velar nasal surfaces in the action nominal *sáʌŋ-úú*. It is as if the root-final /ŋ/ were present when the suffix vowel length is determined and then deleted leaving its nasal component behind, resulting in *sàà*. The coronal nasal in the imperfective *sàà-ná* results from place assimilation with the initial coronal consonant of the imperfective suffix /-rV/. Parallel examples from nouns include *kòò* ‘water’, underlyingly /kòŋ-/, as in *kòŋ-fáá* ‘bad water’. In the free form the velar stop deletes leaving nasalization behind and the mid vowel diphthongizes to fill the foot template, resulting in (*kòò*).

Not all verbs with nasal vowels behave in the same way. Compare *sàà* ‘spoil’ to *díè* ‘play’ and *fíè* ‘whip’. Unlike *sàà*, the latter two must be

underlyingly vowel-final since the corresponding action nominals are *dǐĕ-ǔ* and *fǐĕ-ǔ*, with a short suffix vowel. However, the two differ in the imperfective: in *dǐĕ-nĕ* the coronal stop of the imperfective suffix /-rǔ/ becomes a nasal, whereas in *fǐĕ-rĕ* it does not. We do not have a satisfactory analysis to offer and must leave the topic with these preliminary remarks.

3. Proposal

Our claim is that these vowel length alternations serve to optimize metrical structure. The key assumption is that the action nominal suffix /-ǔǔ/ subcategorizes for a foot: the left edge of /-ǔǔ/ strives to be aligned with the right edge of a foot. This demands a well-formed foot that respects alignment. Vowel length adjustments are a way to achieve this goal: a short root vowel lengthens to make up a minimal foot and a long suffix vowel shortens because it is unstressed.

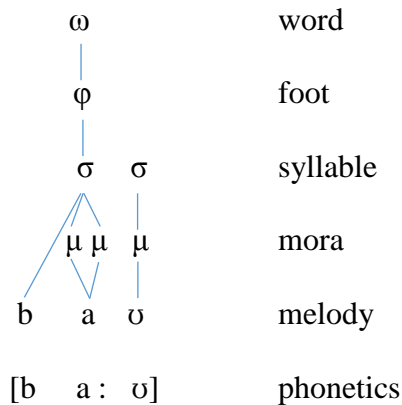
We illustrate the analysis in Table 12 with two vowel-final verbs: /ba/ ‘stick into the ground’ and /baa/ ‘grow (of child)’. The processes are described in terms of informal ordered rules. Foot boundaries are marked with parentheses and imply syllable boundaries.

Process	/ba-ǔǔ/	/baa-ǔǔ/	Motivation
Footing	(bá)ǔǔ	(báá)ǔǔ	Initial foot needed
V lengthening	(báá)ǔǔ	--	No degenerate feet
V shortening	(báá)ǔ	(báá)ǔ	No unstressed VV
	[bááǔ]	[bááǔ]	

Table 12: The derivation of vowel length in V-final roots

/ba-ǔǔ/ undergoes both root vowel lengthening and suffix vowel shortening; /baa-ǔǔ/ only undergoes suffix vowel shortening. In both cases, the outcome is (báá)ǔ, where the syllable containing the suffix vowel falls outside the foot, i.e., it is extrametrical. Kennedy (1996: 4) calls such word-final light syllables *secondary syllables*. Their prosodic structure is illustrated in (1) below.

(1) A phonological word with a secondary syllable: (*báá*)*ó*

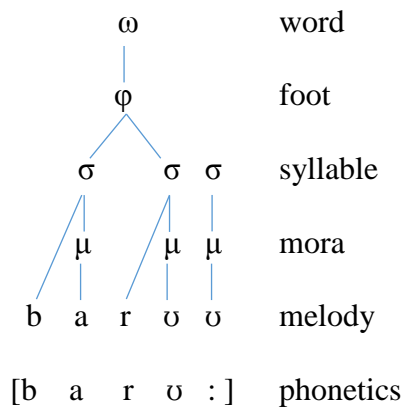


Consonant-final roots are different. Consider /bar/ ‘leave’: if suffix alignment were all that counts the input /bar-óó/ should be footed **(bár)óó*, but that is not possible because it implies the syllabification **bár.óó* which is illegal in Dagaare. Suffix alignment and word prosody are driven into conflict and word prosody wins: the solution is (*bá.ró*)*ó* where the long suffix vowel is split into two light syllables: the first is incorporated into the foot and the second remains extrametrical. This implies the syllabification CV.CV.V which is legal in Dagaare (Kennedy 1966: 3-4). Table 13 illustrates this for the consonant-final verbs /bar/ ‘leave’, /bàrr/ ‘bargain’ and /bààr/ ‘finish’ in terms of informal ordered rules. The prosodic structure of *báróó* is shown in (2) below.

Process	/bar-óó/	/bàrr-óó/	/bààr-óó/	Motivation
Footing	(bá.ró)ó	(bár. ¹ ró)ó	(báá. ¹ ró)ó	Initial foot needed
V lengthening	--	--	--	No degenerate feet
V shortening	--	--	--	No unstressed VV
	[báróó]	[bár ¹ róó]	[báá ¹ róó]	

Table 13: The derivation of vowel length in C-final roots

(2) A phonological word with a secondary syllable: (*báró*)ó



Summarizing, vowel length alternations in Dagaare action nominals can be understood from a metrical perspective. The three key facts, namely vowel lengthening in CV roots, suffix vowel shortening after vowel-final roots and absence of suffix vowel shortening after consonant-final roots receive a unified explanation. In the next section we will outline an optimality-theoretic analysis of action nominals.

4. Analysis

4.1. Constraints

To keep things simple we will make the following assumptions. Dagaare words have an initial trochaic foot; feet are binary under syllabic or moraic analysis; and degenerate feet, e.g., $*(ba)$, and ternary feet, e.g., $*(ba.r\bar{u}.u)$, are excluded. At most one syllable may be extrametrical: $(baa.\bar{u})u$ is possible, but $*(baa)u.u$ is not. Candidates that violate these high-ranking constraints will not be mentioned.

Four phonological constraints are needed to express the generalizations informally outlined in earlier sections. These constraints are given in Table 14.

WEIGHT-TO-STRESS PRINCIPLE	‘No unstressed heavy syllables’
MAX(V)	‘No vowel deletion’
DEP(V)	‘No vowel insertion’
ALIGN(SUFFIX, L, FOOT, R)	‘The left edge of a suffix coincides with the right edge of a foot’

Table 14: Four constraints

The Weight-to-Stress Principle (WSP, Prince 1990) punishes unstressed heavy syllables. It is satisfied in *(báá)ó* where the suffix vowel has shortened and surfaces as the light extrametrical syllable *ó* that lacks an onset. It is also satisfied in *(bár.ró)ó* where the long suffix vowel has been parsed into two light syllables: the tail of the foot *ró* and the light extrametrical syllable *ó* that lacks an onset. The latter is Kennedy’s (1966) *secondary syllable*. The WSP is violated in **(báá)óó*, **(bár)róó* and **(bár.róó)* where the long suffix vowel is parsed as a single heavy syllable.¹¹

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer notes that the word /dàgáári/ ‘the Dagaare language’ violates the WSP given a left-aligned trochee, i.e., *(dà.gáá)rì* and wonders why the vowel does not shorten. Two explanations seem possible. First, this could be an instance of nonderived environment blocking (Kiparsky 1993). Second, the intuitively strong syllable is the penult, suggesting the foot structure *dà(gáári)*. It should be pointed out that trisyllabic and longer words in Dagaare are often right-headed compounds with the morphological structure $\sigma+\sigma\sigma$, e.g., *lábìrì* ‘small axe’ from *lári* + *bìrì* ‘axe-SG + seed-SG’. It is possible that /dàgáári/ is etymologically a compound, i.e., /dà+gáári/, although synchronically opaque.

4.2. Deriving vowel length

The four constraints in Table 14 allow us to derive the vowel length alternations in action nominals. We start with CV stems. Tableau (3) establishes the crucial rankings. To simplify presentation, we have omitted tone and simply assume the correct vowel harmony (ATR, rounding). Candidates with ternary feet, degenerate feet, and multiple extrametrical syllables are systematically omitted.

(3) Vowel length with CV roots

/ba-ʊʊ/	WSP	ALIGN	DEP(V)	MAX(V)
(a) $\text{baa}\text{ʊ}$			1	1
(b) $\text{ba.ʊ}\text{ʊ}$		1!		
(c) ba.ʊʊ	1	1		
(d) $\text{baa}\text{ʊʊ}$	1!		1	
(e) baa.ʊʊ	1!	1	1	
(f) ba.ʊ		1		1

The winner (a) exhibits both suffix vowel shortening and root vowel lengthening. The faithful candidate (b) is perfect in every way except that it fatally misaligns the suffix and foot boundaries. Since ALIGN dominates both faithfulness constraints, MAX(V) and DEP(V), the result is a double adjustment of vowel shortening and vowel lengthening. Candidates (c), (e), and (f) are grayed out to show that they are harmonically bounded: they can never win no matter how the constraints are ranked.

We now turn to CVV roots illustrated in Tableau (4). In this case, only suffix vowel shortening is needed in order to satisfy the WSP:

(4) Vowel length with CVV roots

/baa-oo/	WSP	ALIGN	DEP(V)	MAX(V)
(a) $\text{baa} \cup$				1
(b) $(\text{ba} \cup) \cup$		1		1
(c) $(\text{ba} \cup \cup)$	1	1		1
(d) $(\text{baa}) \cup \cup$	1!			
(e) $(\text{baa} \cup \cup)$	1!	1		
(f) $(\text{ba} \cup)$		1		2

Consonant-final roots behave differently. What sets them apart from vowel-final roots is that they inevitably violate ALIGN when combined with a vowel-initial suffix. Given the input /CVC-VV/ the perfectly aligned candidate is (CVC)VV where the suffix boundary is crisply aligned with the foot boundary. But this foot structure entails the syllabification *CVC.VV which is illegal in Dagaare.¹² We need a better syllabification, but that will inevitably violate ALIGN. This makes alignment irrelevant with consonant-final roots because it will have to be violated no matter what. We illustrate this for CVC roots in Tableau (5). The winner $(\text{ba} \cup \cup) \cup$ has the syllable structure CV.CV.V which is legal in Dagaare.

¹²

A full analysis of Dagaare syllable structure cannot be undertaken here. Here we simply assume an undominated locally conjoined constraint ONSET &_L *CODA that is violated by the syllabification C.V where the first syllable has a coda and the second syllable has no onset. Other analyses are no doubt possible.

(5) Vowel length with CVC roots

/bar-ʊʊ/	WSP	ALIGN	DEP(V)	MAX(V)
(a) ☞ (ba.rʊ)ʊ		1		
(b) (ba.rʊʊ)	1	1		
(c) (baa.rʊ)ʊ		1	1	
(d) (baa)rʊʊ	1	1	1	
(e) (ba.rʊ)		1		1

The following question raised by a reviewer is best quoted verbatim:

I see a potential inconsistency between the analyses of /ba-ʊʊ/ and /bar-ʊʊ/. If foot structure can make the suffix split across foot edges, why does /ba-ʊʊ/ need vowel lengthening? The structure *(baʊ)ʊ* has no degenerate foot and no unstressed VV. It doesn't have -ʊʊ attaching to a foot, but then neither does *(ba.rʊ)ʊ*.

The answer is characteristically optimality-theoretic: grammaticality is determined by competition. In the case of /ba-ʊʊ/, the candidate **(baʊ)ʊ* loses because there is a better candidate available: the winner *(baa)ʊ* that satisfies ALIGN. In the case of /bar-ʊʊ/ we have no such luxury: all candidates violate ALIGN and therefore we must settle for the suffix-splitting *(ba.rʊ)ʊ*.

We conclude by showing the tableaux for CVVC and CVCC roots. They behave analogously and present no additional complications.

(6) Vowel length with CVCC roots

/barr-ʊʊ/	WSP	ALIGN	DEP(V)	MAX(V)
(a) ☞ (bar.rʊ)ʊ		1		
(b) (bar.rʊʊ)	1	1		
(c) (baar.rʊ)ʊ		1	1	
(d) (bar.rʊ)		1		1

(7) Vowel length with CVVC roots

/baar-uu/	WSP	ALIGN	DEP(V)	MAX(V)
(a) (baa.ru)u		1		
(b) (ba.ru)u		1		1
(c) (baa)ruu	1	1		
(d) (baa.ru)		1		1

4.3. Lexically conditioned length

Our metrical analysis of Dagaare action nominals is relatively straightforward. Much more intriguing are the number and imperfective paradigms. Table 15 below illustrates lexically conditioned length alternations with the imperfective suffix /-rV́/.

Underlying	Imperfective	Alternation	
(a) /da-rV́/	dàà-rá	lengthening	‘buy’
/tá-rV́/	tá-rà	--	‘reach’
(b) /fàà-rV́/	fáá- ^l rà	--	‘seize’
/gaa-rV́/	gè-ré	shortening	‘go’
(c) /bɔŋ-rV́/	bòn-nó	--	‘know’
/woŋ-rV́/	wò-nó	C-deletion	‘understand’
/bal-rV́/	bàl-lá ~ bàl-á	variation	‘be tired’

Table 15: Lexical conditioning in the imperfective

In CV-roots the vowel lengthens or stays short; in CVV-roots the vowel stays long or shortens; in CVC-roots the suffix creates a CC cluster /CVC-rV́/ which either survives or shortens, sometimes variably within a single lexical item. Why are length alternations so

uniform in the action nominal paradigm, but riddled with lexical exceptions in the number and imperfective paradigms? To answer this question with any degree of confidence would require a deeper understanding of Dagaare morphophonology than we have at the moment. However, one is immediately struck by the observation that it is the *vowel-initial* suffixes that tend to have uniform paradigms. In addition to the action nominal /-úú/, the perfective /-èè/ and the plural /-v/ seem fairly regular. It is the *consonant-initial* suffixes that permit exceptions, in particular the number /-rí/ and the imperfective /-r¹³v/. Trying to explain these apparent suffix-related regularities is an interesting project, but must be left for future work.

5. Summary

We have provided new evidence for metrical structure in Dagaare based on vowel length alternations in action nominals. If the root is CV the root lengthens and the suffix shortens; if the root is CVV the suffix shortens; if the root ends in C nothing happens. Similar length alternations appear more idiosyncratically with number and aspect suffixes. We have proposed a metrical analysis that explains the length alternations in action nominals and lends further support to the metrical analysis of vowel length proposed in Anttila and Bodomo 2009 for Dagaare nouns.

¹³

Space does not permit a discussion of the perfective /-èè/ and the plural /-v/ here. We hope to return to the topic in a more complete exposition in the future.

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