

Tone in Limbum derived forms

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After the ground breaking work on tonal representation in the 1970s (Goldsmith 1976, Pulleyblank 1986) there has largely been consensus among phonologists on the nonlinear representation of tone. Hyman (2011) notes that “no issue has had a greater impact on phonological representations than the study of tone.” Accounting for surface alternations in tone has, however, often remained quite elusive. Grassfields Bantu languages of Cameroon in particular, exhibit several intriguing phenomena such as the merger of certain tonal patterns in citation forms (Hyman 2010), the association of nasals with low tone (Akumbu and Hyman 2017), and the lowering and raising of high and low tones respectively (Chumbow and Neba 2011). Hyman (2003) observes that the relative complexity of Grassfields tonology in comparison to narrow Bantu languages results from the fact that while many segmental morphemes have been lost historically, their corresponding tones have survived resulting in “floating tones”. This paper examines tonal variation in derived forms in Limbum, a Grassfields Bantu language spoken in Donga Mantung division in the North West region of Cameroon. Using examples from some morphological processes (reduplication, emphatic possessive forms, and nominalization), it is demonstrated that the disparity between lexical and surface tones in certain derived forms in Limbum results from the existence of ‘tonal’ affixes which interact with lexical tones.

References

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