

Tonal variation within NPs in Cuwabo (Mozambique, Bantu P34)

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In this talk I report my first findings on the interaction between the nominal phrasal syntax and the tonal phonology in Cuwabo. In this language, a noun followed by a modifier can surface in two ways, which differ in their prosody. On the one hand, each constituent behaves as a tone unit, preserving the tone pattern attested in their citation form. An example is provided in (1)a with a demonstrative modifier, and (1)b with a numeral modifier¹. On the other hand, contraction may occur between both constituents. The resulting contracted form constitutes one prosodic unit with a modified tone pattern, which usually implies the deletion of the first underlying H tone of the noun (as well as the doubled subsequent H tone, triggered by the High-Tone Doubling prosodic rule), as can be seen in (2). By comparing different contextualised examples of this nature, with different types of modifiers, I will try to establish the semantic and syntactic contexts in which contraction, and thus tone alteration, applies within Cuwabo NPs.

In this overall picture, I will also show that the situation with the possessive modifiers is more complex. When contraction occurs between both constituents (as is typical in spontaneous speech), the long vowel of the possessive pronoun systematically shortens, triggering the loss of the underlying H tone. Compare in (3) the tone patterns of the full forms with the contracted forms of a small sample of nouns. As can be seen, the contracted forms do not respect a common pattern: while *nikótti* ‘neck’ maintains its underlying H on the second mora, the HØ pattern of *ttúmbi* ‘bag’ changes to ØH, and *dháávu* gains a final H. In trying to account for these different (and somewhat intriguing) resulting tone patterns, I will show that the original tone pattern of the noun seems to be of importance.

By studying different cases of noun-modifier sequences, the main aim of this talk is to show that NPs in Cuwabo may constitute a morphosyntactic structure in which specific tonal alternations operate and may thus serve to indicate phrasal information.

¹ Note that each underlined segment represents an underlying H tone which doubles onto the following mora, as a consequence of the High-Tone Doubling (HTD) prosodic rule. The conditions under which HTD applies in Cuwabo will be briefly exposed during the talk.

Author's fieldwork data

- (1) a. *mwáán' óólle kaádhówa omundda* ▶ cit.form: *mwáaná*
mwáaná **óólle** ka-á-dhówa o-mundda
 1.child 1.DEM.III NEG.1-PST.IPFV-go 17-3.field.PL
 'that child did not go to the field'
- b. *mwa síkú nimodhá alóófiyá* ▶ cit.form: *(n)síku*
 mwa **síkú** **ni-modha** a-lé-ófiyá
 18.in 5.day 5-one 2-CE.PFV-15.arrive
 they arrived in one day'
- (2) a. *yaak' ééjw' éénda ddaámfun' óókósa máttánga* ▶ cit.form: *yáaká*
yaaká **éjó** [e-ní-dá]_{REL} ddí-á-ni-funá ókósa máttánga
 9.year 9.DEM.II 9-IPFV.CJ-come 1SG-PST-IPFV.DJ-want 15.do 6.feast
 'next year, I would like to make a feast'
- b. *meerí míinndi ddihílogagá na mwámúnaga* ▶ cit.form: *mwéerí*
meerí **mí-inndi** ddi-hí-lóg-ag-á na mwámúni = aga
 4.month 4-two 1SG-NEG-speak-HAB-Fi.SEQ with 1.husband = POSS.1SG
 'I have not spoken with my husband for two months'
- (3) Full form Contracted form Gloss
 nikótti náâga (ØHØ HFØ) nikóttí = naga (ØHH = ØØ) 'my neck'
 ttúmbi náâga (HØ HFØ) ttumbí = nâga (ØH = FØ) 'my bag'
 dháávu dháâga (HHØ HFØ) dháávú = dhâga (HHH = FØ) 'my nets'