

## Prenasalization and Bafanji noun tonology

This study examines the role of prenasalization on the realization of tone in the Bafanji noun phrase. Bafanji [bfj] is an Eastern Grassfields Bantu language spoken in the North West region of Cameroon. This study focuses on monosyllabic singular nouns to examine whether prenasalised segments are tone-bearing units (TBUs) and concludes that they are TBUs, but with specific constraints on their role in the phonology. On the one hand, the presence of prenasalization introduces no tonal complexity to noun stems; the same inventory of underlying noun tone patterns is shown to be present whether syllable profiles include prenasalized consonants or not—/H/, /L/, /HL/, and /LH/ are normally present in all monosyllabic profiles, with the occasional addition of /HLH/ and /LHL/ in stems with long vowels. (This observation is also true of nouns that have homorganic nasal prefixes rather than stem-initial prenasalized onsets.) We can conclude then that either prenasalization does not involve the addition of a TBU or it is always a toneless TBU. Note however that a floating low tone prefix precedes all nouns and this results in default mid and low realizations of pitch production for prenasalized onsets in nouns. This is in accordance with observations made for other Grassfields Bantu languages (Akumbu & Hyman 2017).

Where prenasalization does have an effect on tonal realization is in the syllable *preceding* the noun stem. Here, we see in certain contexts that the presence of tonal contours is conditioned by prenasalization in the following syllable onset. This can be seen at the phrase level of modifier-noun sequences where the modifier has two tones lexically assigned to it. This is examined in detail with the indefinite quantifier /tʃǎ<sup>w</sup>/ 'a certain', where we see for example [tʃǎ<sup>w</sup> fà] 'a certain trumpet' but [tʃǎ<sup>w</sup> ndè] 'a certain time'. Phonetic pitch traces show how this low-high tone sequence is mapped onto the segmental tier, looking specifically at the pitch realization of the prenasalization. This role of prenasalization in hosting tone is also described in the literature for prefix-noun sequences where for example the prefix /mú/ followed by a floating L tone is realized on /mbî/ 'bird' as [mû-mbî] or [mú-mbî] (Hamm 2011).

In this respect then, prenasalized segments are tone-bearing. Prenasalized segments are not permitted to be hosts for lexically-assigned tone, but they are targets for the mapping of tone onto the segmental tier. This study concludes with some possibilities of what this might imply for tone in the verb phrase where prenasalization on the verb is a segmental element in the expression of certain tense and aspect distinctions.

Akumbu, Pius W. & Larry M. Hyman. 2017. Nasals and low tone in Grassfields noun class prefixes. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 26(1). 1–13.

Hamm, Cameron. 2011. Noun class system of Chufie' (Bafanji). <http://reap.sil.org/handle/9284745/49674>