

Tonal Polarity and Compound Nouns in Shupamem

ACAL 53 submission

1 Introduction

Shupamem is an Eastern Grassfields Bantu language of Cameroon that exhibits quite a rich tonal grammar. The interaction of lexical and grammatical tones in Shupamem has not been discussed in detail in the literature. This work describes selected phenomena pertaining to tonal alternations observed on nouns. In particular, two processes will receive special attention. First, the final TBU, which is a vowel in Shupamem (Nchare, 2012; Markowska, 2020), undergoes consistent changes when modified by postnominal adjectives, such that underlying L tones surface as rising tones (LH), while underlying H tones surface as L, regardless of the tonal pattern associated with the following morpheme (See section 2). Second, nouns from certain noun classes in Shupamem create plurals by inserting a tone opposite to the lexical tone to the first TBU of the noun, which could be analyzed as a form of tonal infixation (See section 3). Our analyses are based on originally elicited data from one native speaker.

2 Nouns modified by postnominal adjectives

The majority of the Shupamem nouns are either monosyllabic or bisyllabic; some trisyllabic nouns are attested. Surface H tones are always present underlyingly. When the surface tonal melody contains solely L tones, such as in *sàsèrè* ‘European mantis’, *màpàm* ‘coat’ or *nɔ̀?* ‘flower’, the L tone is present in the underlying representation (UR). However in nouns, such as, *bújì* ‘cat’ or *màmví* ‘goat’, the TBU bearing L tone is toneless (\emptyset) in the UR. When nouns are modified by postnominal adjectives, only the last TBU of a noun is affected as follows: underlying H becomes L (1), L becomes LH (2) and \emptyset becomes H (3).

1. *kjèt* ‘arrow’ + *sí* ‘black’ → *kjèt sí* ‘black arrow’
2. *màpàm* ‘coat’ + *àsàrà* ‘evil’ → *màpãm àsàrà* ‘evil coat’
3. *bújì* ‘cat’ + *sí* ‘black’ → *bújì sí* ‘black cat’

3 Tonal infixation

Nchare (2012) recognizes 15 noun classes in Shupamem. Selected noun class pluralizations with special focus on tonal alternations are presented in Table 1. Those nouns create plurals by

inserting an H tone either at the left edge (Class 4) or at the right edge of the first TBU (Classes 8 and 12).

Class	SG	PL	Tonal changes
3/4	m̀̀n̄z̀̀èt	p̄̀n̄z̀̀èt	L-L → HL-L
7/8	m̀̀p̀̀àm	m̄̀p̀̀àm	L-L → LH-L
11/12	s̀̀s̀̀è̀̀r̀̀è̀̀	s̄̀s̀̀è̀̀r̀̀è̀̀	L-L-L → LH-H-L

Table 1. Tonal patterns in plural nouns

4 Analysis of tonal contrast in Shupamem

We present two analyses of the tonal alternation on nouns modified by postnominal adjectives. The first analysis explains the tonal changes via polarity, which is considered a simple and natural property of a tonal process (Newman, 1995; Schuh, 1978; Hyman, 1978). The tonal alternations in the second analysis are explained through OCP violations (Kenstowicz, 1994, p. 336). We will argue that the first analysis is superior because the second analysis requires positing an additional process of rightward spreading morpheme internally, for which there is no independent empirical evidence. We also provide a description of the pluralizing tonal morpheme, focusing on its representation and landing site.

References

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