

Símákonde Verb Tone

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The goal of this paper is to present an overview of the tonal phonology of Símákonde verbs. Símákonde is an endangered variety of Makonde, a Bantu language (P 23) spoken by immigrant Mozambican communities in Zanzibar (Unguja island) and on the Tanzanian mainland (around Dar es Salaam and Tanga). Its endangerment is due to relatively poor intergenerational language transmission. The language is only actively used by adults, with younger generations speaking Swahili, the regional lingua franca, at school and in multilingual villages. Contrary to other varieties of Makonde, Símákonde has been protected from external linguistic influences. For example, it has stricter constraints on prosodic phrasing than related dialects do (Patin & Rialland 2006).

This paper will discuss the complexity of tone assignment and the tonal phonology of various grammatical tones in the verbal system. It has been claimed that "*in Makonde, the tense-determined contrast is not in the location of the H, since stem Hs generally appear on the penult, but rather the kind of contour, ranging over LL (...), LH (...), HH (...) and LHL (...)*" (Kisseberth & Odden 2003). I show that in Símákonde, the crucial elements in the implementation of tense-aspect-mood distinctions are not only the four melodies L (or Ø?), LH, H and LHL that appear on the bimoraic penultimate syllable automatically lengthened by stress, but also the complex assignment of a *grammatical high tone* (also called *Melodic High* by Bickmore 2008 and Marlo 2008) and high tones contributed by the Subject and Object Markers. The grammatical high tone targets the left edge of the stem.

I present an extensive autosegmental analysis of how the high tone of the subject marker, the high tone of the object marker, and the *grammatical high* interact with the four penultimate melodies. I will discuss their phonological domains and how Meeussen's rule (H-H => H- Ø) applies. This analysis also takes into account tone doubling, the number of syllables in the stem, and a constraint which preserves the melody of the penult. Interestingly, the penultimate L and LHL melodies present a challenge to the commonly unspecified low tone discussed in Bantu linguistics.

Selected References :

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