Sophie Salffner, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Downstep in Ikaan

Ikaan, a dialect of the Ukaan cluster (iso code kcf; Benue-Congo) is an endangered and underdescribed language spoken in two villages in south-western Nigeria. Ikaan is a two-tone (H, L) plus downstep language, the tone-bearing unit is the mora. Downstep in Ikaan has unusual characteristics: (a) the presence of non-automatic downstep but absence of automatic downstep, (b) three different locations of downstep (after, on and before the TBU which provided L) and (c) a contrast between H and ˡH after pause.

Sequences of linked H and L do not result in register lowering, i.e. there is no downstep after overt L tones, as shown in (1). After floating L, H is partially lowered as shown in (2), where the vowel of the verb is deleted, its tone is not deleted and is set afloat.

(1) dʒɛ̀-r̥ɑ̃́n ɔ̀wɔ́g àrákpà → [dʒɛ̀r̥ɑ̃́n ɔ̀wɔ́g àrákpà]
1SG-cook soup bean _ ¯ _ ¯ _ ¯ _
I made bean soup.

(2) dʒè-jé ʊ̀jág → [dʒèjʊ́ˡjág]
1SG-eat food _ ¯ _
I ate.

The three locations of downstep are illustrated in (2)-(5). In (2) in a verb+object construction there is vowel deletion. Downstep occurs after the TBU that originally carried L. In the noun+modifier construction in (3) there is vowel assimilation. Downstep occurs on the TBU that originally carried L. In the predicative construction in (4) and with the emphatic marker in (5), downstep occurs far to the left, on the first L of a sequence of L-bearing TBUs, within the word in (4) and sentence-initially in (5).

(3) èrèké ɛ̀nɛ́n → [èrèkɛ́ˡɛ́nɛ́n]
sugar.cane DET _ _ ¯ _ _
the sugar cane

(4) ógìdìmòr̥ó → [óˡgídímór̥ó]
PRED-papaya ¯ _ _ _ _
It is a papaya.

(5) ɔ̀-jɑ̃̀na ɔ̀bɛ̀gɛ̀ ˡóː → [ˡɔ́jɑ̃́nɔ́bɛ́gɛ́ óː]
1SG-buy plantain EMPH _ _ _ _ _ _
I bought plantain oo.

Downstep immediately after pause occurs in constructions with the emphatic marker *ˡóː* if the sentence was all L as shown in (5) and in words in isolation as shown in (6).

(6) Enumeratives ˡwáː 'two', ˡtáːs 'three', ˡnɑ̃́ʲː 'four' *vs.* ʃíː 'one', r̥ɔ̀ːn 'five'
Nouns ˡúmú 'river', ˡír̥í 'body' *vs.* ègù 'house', égù 'It's a house.'
Demonstrative ˡdɛ́ːn 'that' *vs.* dɛ̀ː 'this'

I will illustrate the characteristics of Ikaan downstep with audio examples and acoustic phonetic data. I will motivate the presence of the floating L which triggers the register lowering and will correlate the locations of downstep with grammatical features of the constructions in which they occur to explain the distribution of the locations of downstep. Finally, I will relate the Ikaan findings to downstep in other languages.