

Tonal affixes, clitics and pseudowords in Eton: the preservation of morphological structure after segmental attrition.

The Cameroonian Bantu language Eton has a rule that copies every structurally linked high tone followed by a boundary. The way in which this copied tone attaches to the following syllable depends on a number of factors, including the type of morphological boundary it has to cross. The relevant rules of high tone attachment are summarised in (1).¹ In (1a) the copied high tone moves across a word boundary, attaches to the following low syllable and pushes its original low tone to the right. That is, any following high tone will be downstepped. If the copied high tone crosses a clitic (1b) or an affix (1c) boundary, it deletes the following low tone, rather than pushing it away. The difference between the two is that in the latter case, but not in the former, the resulting high tone spreads further to the right.

- (1) a. $c\acute{v} \# c\grave{v} \rightarrow c\acute{v} \# c\acute{v}^L$
b. $c\acute{v}=c\grave{v} \rightarrow c\acute{v}=c\acute{v}$ (no tone spread)
c. $c\acute{v}-c\grave{v} \rightarrow c\acute{v}-c\acute{v}$ (tone spread)

Due to attrition of segmental material, many morphemes in Eton have become fully or partially tonal. Although tonal morphemes are obviously not prosodically independent, they show the same range of behaviours as structurally linked tones in the way they attach to a following low syllable. That is, by analogy they can be classified into tonal affixes, tonal clitics and in one case even a tonal (pseudo)word. It will be shown that this analysis allows us to a certain extent to reconstruct the origin of tonal morphemes and to simplify the complex, irregular and non-concatenative morphotonology proposed for closely related languages such as Ewondo.

This paper is based on original field work.

¹ The following conventions are used: \acute{v} vowel carrying a high tone; \grave{v} low tone vowel; # word boundary; = clitic boundary; - affix boundary; ^L floating low tone; ^H floating high tone.