

Meeussen's Rule in Lusaamia: evidence for levels of derivation

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This paper examines tone patterns in the pre-stem domain of finite verbs in the Bantu language Lusaamia (Guthrie E.34). Stem-domain analyses generally infer a floating tone, focusing on domain edges and alignment (see Poletto 1998 for an OT analysis of Lusaamia stems). Conversely, in the pre-stem domain, tones are associated with specific morphemes. Thus, issues of alignment are not as informative, while issues of specification, adjacency, and syllabification play heavily.

Lusaamia has a two way tone contrast. Following analyses from multiple frameworks, we assume a privative input distinction of H, Ø (Bickmore 2000, Myers 2000, Hyman 2000, Poletto 1998, et al.).

The data indicate, and the analysis is based on directionality and iteration in Meeussen's Rule (MR). MR, an instantiation of the Obligatory Contour Principle, explicitly states that in a sequence H H, the rightmost will delete leaving H L. In OT analyses, a general constraint OCP is used for this ((Poletto 1998, Bickmore 2000, Myers 2000, et al.). For situations involving two tones, the framework is relatively moot, but when three tones are in sequence, issues of directionality and iteration are an important consideration and offer potential explanatory power. Hyman (2000) cites evidence from Ganda where H1 H2 H3 surfaces as H1 L L, indicating right-to-left scanning. In our data, the same input will surface as H1 L H3, indicating left-to-right scansion.

We also address instances of downstep and upstep, which, in our data, cannot be reduced to constraints on output or to phonetic exigencies. Rather, they appear to involve (i) tonal specification following notions in Hyman (2000), and (ii) issues of syllabification.

With this analysis, pre-stem tone patterns for eight tenses, affirmative and negative, can be accounted for with a limited, constrained, and uniform set of general phonological principals. Annotations are based on instrumental analysis of primary data from two native speakers.

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