Metatony in Abo (Bankon), A42
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ABSTRACT

Since Meeussen (1967), there have been recurrent reports of “metatony”, a process by which a subset of verb forms ending with L tone utterance-finally, end with H tone if followed by an object. While Schadeberg (1986) and Hadermann (2005) speculate that the H is historically derived from the Proto-Bantu *H tone augment and relate metatony to the conjoint/disjoint distinction, we show that neither hypothesis accounts for the full range of facts in Abo (A42), a Cameroonian Bantu language closely related to Basaa. Avoiding arbitrary reference to specific TAM forms, we present a strictly phonological analysis based on distinct tonal representations.

1. What is metatony?

Within traditional Bantu studies, the term metatony was introduced to characterize tonal alternations on the final vowel of the class 15 ku- infinitive:

“The final element has to be set up as -a (low) or -á... (with metatony: high if an object follows, low otherwise).” (Meeussen 1967: 111)

Canonical examples in (1) from Songye (L23) (Stappers 1964) are cited by Dimmendaal (1995:32) and Schadeberg (1995: 176) as representative of the phenomenon:

(1) a. ku-sep-a ‘to laugh (at)’ (without metatony)
   b. ku-sep-á mfumu ‘to laugh at the chief’ (with metatony)

As seen in (1a), an infinitive ends with L(ow) tone in isolation, but acquires a final H(igh) if followed by an object noun phrase. Both Dimmendaal and Schadeberg point out that the “metatonic” final H is lacking when the infinitive is followed by a connective (genitive) NP:

(2) ku-sep-a kwá-mbwá ‘the laughing of the dog’ (without metatony)
   to laugh of-dog

Citing several additional cases, Hadermann (2005: 405) shows that metatony can also be observed in verb conjugations built historically on the ku- infinitive, e.g. the present tense in Lega (D25) (from Meeussen 1971: 20):

(3) a. be-ko-bolót-á mózígi ‘they are pulling the rope’ (with metatony)
   b. be-ko-bolot-a təŋə ‘they are pulling also’ (without metatony)

Note that metatony occurs before the object noun in (3a), but not before the adverbial in (3b). Thus, to summarize, metatony originally referred to constructions which involve both the ku- ... -a infinitive and a following object NP.
Since (1967), the term *metatony* has been extended to describe tonal alternations in certain conjugated verb forms which clearly do not involve the infinitive *ku-* prefix, as well as cases where the following constituent need not be an object (to be exemplified below):

“Metatony is the term used for those cases where the tone of the final (inflectional) suffix of certain verb forms is (underlyingly) high before an object and low otherwise.” (Schadeberg 1995: 176)

“La métatonie consiste à attribuer à la finale d’une forme nominale-verbale ou d’une forme verbale un ton haut si celle-ci est suivie d’un « complément ». Bien que dans la majorité des exemples cités par les sources, la métatonie opère dans le contexte classique « Verbe + Objet », nous n’utilisons pas le terme d’objet car la fonction syntaxique du syntagme qui suit le verbe ne nous paraît pas toujours facile à identifier.” (Hadermann 2005: 404)

“Dans la phrase fásàà la silhouette tonale d’un verbe conjugué avant pause est sensiblement différente de celle du même verbe, conjugué au même temps, mais suivi d’un mot quelconque.” (Bitjaa-Kody 1990: 364)

In synchronic analyses, the general assumption appears to be that the final H is derived:

“...metatony, whereby in certain T[ense]A[aspect] forms a high tone replaces a low or falling tone on post-radical syllables... if and only if the verb is not phrase-final, that is, followed by other material such as an object or adverbial.” (Nurse 2008: 48)

Attention has, however, been more focused on the question of how metatony originates. Two diachronic origins have been proposed for an historical *H developing into metatony: (i) from the connective (genitive) *á morpheme (Angenot 1971; but see Hadermann 2005: 408-9); (ii) from the initial *H “augment” morpheme on the following noun phrase (Dimmendaal 1995, Schadeberg 1995). The first proposal naturally accounts for why metatony is often restricted to infinitive + object. As seen in the hypothetical derivation in (4), when the segments of the class 15 connective marker /ku-á/ drop out, its H tone is reassOCIated to the final vowel of the preceding infinitive verb:

(4)  
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ku-sep-á} \\
\downarrow
\end{array} 
\quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{ku-á mbwá} \\
\downarrow
\end{array} > 
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ku-sep-á} \\
\downarrow
\end{array} 
\quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{mbwá} \\
\downarrow
\end{array} 
\quad \text{‘laughing of the dog’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\quad \begin{array}{c}
\downarrow
\end{array} 
\quad \begin{array}{c}
\downarrow
\end{array}
\quad \text{Ø} 
\end{array}
\quad \begin{array}{c}
\downarrow
\end{array} 
\quad \text{‘to laugh at the dog’}
\]

While such a development might seem reasonable, even intuitive, Hadermann (2005: 408-9) rightly points out the absence of evidence that a connective morpheme was ever present in the forms that become metatonic. In Bantu, when the ku- infinitive is used verbally, e.g. to mean ‘to laugh at the dog’, the NP object normally follows without any marking, as in (1b) and (3a).

Turning to the second proposed origin, as schematized in (5), when the vowel of the hypothetical class 1 “article-like” augment *ú- drops out, its H reassociates to the final vowel of the infinitive:
This proposal makes two predictions: (i) metatony should only occur in languages which do not today have an overt augment; (ii) metatony could, at least originally, occur only before post-verbal nominals which could take the historical initial H augment, e.g. not kinship terms, proper nouns, etc. The languages cited by the above authors seem to support the first prediction, but probably not the second. (In any case, if metatony did occur before all objects, one could always propose that there had been an analogical extension to augmentless nominals.) While this reconstruction might account for why it is only objects which condition metatony, it would not be able to explain why the process is limited to infinitives in some languages. Still, Dimmendaal finds the augment source so appealing that he even extends it to account for pre-object verb-tone raising in distant non-Bantu Yoruba and Kana:

"...the metatony rule is so specific and similar in detail in the languages discussed above, that a hypothesis of an original augment causing the tonal alternation provides the most plausible explanation, despite the conjectural nature of this hypothesis." (Dimmendaal 1995: 37)

A more recent idea is that metatony is related to focus and the “conjoint-disjoint” distinction attested in a number of Bantu languages (see §2):

"...in Duala and Basaa, where a tonal distinction with respect to a following complement can still be seen, we have [immediate after verb] focus as opposed to initial focus, pointing to the fact that the tonal effects... are the indicator of focus (via prosodic structure).” (Costa & Kula 2008: 313)

"[Metatony] is often described as just a tonal process, but it is striking that it has certain characteristics linking it to focus.... This suggests it has a syntactic-semantic function....” (Nurse 2008: 204)

Perhaps these authors would also seek a relationship between focus and the presence vs. absence of the augment, as sometimes occurs, e.g. synchronically in Luganda (Hyman & Katamba 1993) and diachronically in Makuwa (van der Wal 2009: 32, 121). However, in the relevant languages the observed tonal changes occur not only before an object, but before any post-verbal constituent occurring within the same clause. Either the original metatony has been analogized to new contexts or, as we shall argue, focus and conjoint/disjoint distinctions are not related to the canonical metatony observed in Songye, Lega etc., where infinitives are not expected to be followed by focused elements.

Finally, somewhat vaguer is the characterization of metatony as simply marking a special relation between the verb and what follows:

“Even if the syntactic details are not known, it is clear that metatony is a syntactic marking of a certain relationship between a verb and a class of complements which includes what we call the object.” (Schadeberg 1995: 176)

“Nous préférons avancer que la métatonie est un phénomène suprasegmental conditionné par la syntaxe de l’énoncé qui consiste à mettre en évidence le lien « verbe-complément » ....” (Hadermann 2005: 409)

Despite the above, varying ideas, we suspect everyone would agree with Nurse (2008: 204): “The nature and origin of this whole tonal phenomenon needs more examination....” It is with this in mind that we now turn to consider “metatony” in Abo.
2. "Metatony" in Abo

In this section we describe apparent metatony in Abo (Bankon), a Cameroonian NW Bantu language designated as A42 in Guthrie's (1967-71) referential system. Spoken by an estimated 12,000 speakers (SIL, 2001), Abo is located to the north of Duala and to the west of Basaa, to which it is closely related, although it is more closely to Barombi (A41) (Lamberty 2002)). Previous work on Abo includes Spellenberg (1922), Ittman (1926-7) and Atindogbe (1990, 1996). The present study is based on a yearlong field methods course, based on the speech of Achille Massoma from Mângambà to whom we owe our deepest thanks, as well as to the other participants in the class.

As seen in (6) Abo verb forms show three final tone patterns, illustrated with the L tone verb pòŋò ‘make, create’:

(6) suffix tone | TAM | pre-pause | + bitámbé ‘shoes’
--- | --- | --- | ---
a. -L ~ -H | present | à pòŋò | à pòŋò bitámbé | ‘he is making shoes’
past | | | à póŋò | à póŋò bitámbé | ‘he made shoes’
perfect | | | à má pòŋò | à má pòŋò bitámbé | ‘he has made shoes’
b. -L | future | à káá pòŋò | à káá pòŋò bitámbé | ‘he will make shoes’
c. -H | stative | à pòŋò | à pòŋò bitámbé | ‘he has made shoes’
imperative | | | pòŋò | pòŋò bitámbé | ‘make shoes!’
subjunctive | | | sá pòŋò | sá pòŋò bitámbé | ‘let’s make shoes!’

As seen, verbs either alternate between -L and -H, always end -L, or always end -H. As also seen, while the tone of the prefix of bitámbé ‘shoes’ is underlyingly L, it sometimes becomes H, to be discussed below.

The first question is how to analyze the metatony-like alternations in (6a) diachronically. First, it is highly unlikely that it derives from an infinitive + *H connective marker: There is no trace of ku- or any reason to think that an infinitive is involved in these forms, either synchronically or diachronically. In fact Abo does not have an infinitive, the verbal noun which does exist has a quite different form: pòŋlà(ghà) dì bitámbé ‘making of shoes’.

The tonal alternations in (6a) are also not likely to derive from a *H augment. The tenses in (6a) acquire a final -H even when followed by a non-object. That is, the final -L observed before pause becomes -H before all parts of speech and all constituents within the clause:

(7) a. à sònse | ‘he is counting’
b. à sònse mò-tì | ‘he is counting money’
c. à sònse àmù mòni | ‘he is counting this money’
d. à sònse mò | ‘he is counting it’
e. à sònse látalá | ‘he is counting now’
f. à sònse ni minnyòtì myé | ‘he is counting with his fingers’
g. à sònse ni/tò sák | ‘he counts and/or dances’

Since pronouns, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions are not marked by an augment in Bantu, a different source of the tonal alternations must be sought.

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1 Nadine Borchardt, Roslyn Burns, Toni Cook, Thera Crane, Rachele Delucchi, Stefanie Fauconnier, Greg Finley, Clare Sandy.
2 As seen in the translations, the stative is also used transitively as a resultant, while the subjunctive is also used as a hortative. Depending on the verb, there may also be vowel modifications in the stative and/or subjunctive.
We now turn to the second question, which is how to interpret the alternating -L ~ -H tenses in (6a) synchronically. We first show that it has nothing to do with marking focus or with the tightness of the bond between the verb and what follows, e.g. Meeussen’s (1959) “conjoint” vs. “disjoint” distinction. As seen in (8), metatonic -L → -H occurs independently of where the focus is within the sentence:

(8) a. “neutral” focus mān Ṣənsé másəŋ mé ‘the child is counting his teeth’
   b. subject focus mān ndi Ṣənsé másəŋ mé ‘the CHILD is counting his teeth’
   c. non-subject focus mān Ṣənsé ndi másəŋ mé ‘the child is counting his TEETH’

Whether unmarked for focus as in (8a), or whether the focus marker occurs pre- or post-verbally, as in (8b,c), the verb /sənsé/ ‘count’ is realized with a final -H. In (8c), the post-verbal focus marker ndi can indicate focus on the object, the lexical verb, or both. Hence, (9a) can be the answer to any of the questions in (9b) (Burns 2011):

(9) a. kém, mān Ṣənsé ndi másəŋ mé
   b. Is the child counting his fingers? Answer: No, the child is counting his TEETH
   c. Is the child cleaning his teeth? Answer: No, the child is COUNTING his teeth.
   d. Is the child cleaning his fingers? Answer: No, the child is COUNTING HIS TEETH.

Since the same three-way distinction in final tone is observed in corresponding relative and other backgrounded clauses, where most focus distinctions are typically neutralized in Bantu, we can conclude, contrary to Costa & Kula (2008: 313) that the final -H is not an “indicator of focus”:

(10) suffix tone TAM pre-pause + bitəmbé ‘shoes’ ‘the person who…”
    a. -L ~ -H present mút nú pəŋə mút nú pəŋə bitəmbé ‘is making shoes’
    b. -L future mút nú kāa pəŋə mút nú kāa pəŋə bitəmbé ‘will make shoes’
    c. -H stative mút nú pəŋə mút nú pəŋə bitəmbé ‘has made shoes’

Can one however exclude the possibility that the -L ~ -H tenses realize a tighter bond between the verb and what follows? That is, that they represent a “conjoint” form of the verb? We follow Hyman & Watters (1984) in identifying two types of “conjoint” vs. “disjoint” distinctions:

(11) a. Type 1: syntactic [+focus]
    b. Type 2: morphologized [+F]

Consider the following characterization of syntactic [-focus] conjoint vs. [+focus] disjoint in Chibemba (M42):

“[Conjoint forms] throw emphasis (if any) on what follows the verb, or more precisely, are strongly linked to what follows (and formally therefore cannot stand at the end of the sentence...) [Disjoint forms] throw emphasis on the verb itself, or more precisely, have only a weak link with what follows (and formally therefore may stand in mid-sentence or at sentence-end.)” (Sharman 1956: 30)3

3 In most type 1 systems, conjoint verb forms can occur at sentence-end if in a relative clause, where focus distinctions are minimized or prohibited. Thus, the final verb form in a sentence such as ‘I picked up the book that fell’ would be conjoint.
More than tone can be involved in realizing the conjoint/disjoint distinction. In Chibemba the disjoint [+focus] present tense is marked by -la- prefix, while the corresponding conjoint [-focus] is marked by -Ø-:

(12) a. disjoint: bušē mu-la-peep-a ‘do you (pl.) smoke’?  
    (Sharman 1956:40)  
    b. conjoint: ee tu-peep-a sekeléeti ‘yes, we smoke cigarettes’  
    c. disjoint: bámó bá-la-ly-á insoka ‘some people actually eat snakes’

While disjoint -la- must appear in a main clause final verb, as in (12a), both forms occur internally. In (12b) the verb is conjoint because it is [-focus]; in (12c) -la- appears because the verb is included in the focus. There are also (and sometimes only) tonal affects. As seen in (13a), disjoint verb forms are marked by spreading the H tone to the end of the word (Sharman 1956: 40):

(13) a. disjoint: nga mw-aa-tòb-à úmutóndó, báléléisaafulwá  
    ‘if you break the pot, they will get angry’  
    b. conjoint: nga mw-aa-tòb-à úmutóndó, tsáákuláatápíla múnsupa  
    ‘if you break the POT, we will have to use a calabash to draw water’

The H of /-tòb/- ‘break’ does not spread in the conjoint form in (13b). As seen above in (9) and (10), the -L ~ -H alternations in Abo clearly have nothing to do with type 1 conjoint vs. disjoint.

In type 2 systems different tense-aspect-mood-polarity features result in a similar strong vs. weak prosodic bond between the verb and what follows. In Haya (JE22), all H tones of [-F] verbs are deleted in non-final position, while [+F] verbs retain their H tones (Hyman & Byarushengo 1984: 71-2; Hyman & Watters 1984: 260). In the following examples we see that the affirmative of the P1 (today past tense) is [-F], while the corresponding negative is [+F]:

(14) a. [-F] bá-á-kóm-a ‘they tied’ (today)  
    ba-a-kom-a Káto ‘they tied Kato’  
    b. [+F] ti-bá-á-kóm-a ‘they didn’t tie’ (today)  
    ti-bá-á-kom-a Káto ‘they didn’t tie Kato’

In general, [+F] forms are intrinsically focused, “marked” values of tense, aspect, mood and polarity (Hyman & Watters 1984), while the “unmarked” values tend to be [-F], as in Haya:

(15) **Affirmative [-F]**  
    **Affirmative [+F]**  
    + All Negatives = [+F]  
    0 tense (present habitual)  
    PROG (progressive)  
    P1 (today past tense)  
    PERF (perfect ‘to have already...’)  
    P2 (yesterday past tense)  
    EXP (experiential ‘to have done before’)  
    PH (past habitual)  
    PRST (persistive ‘still’)  
    F1 (today future)  
    SJCT (subjunctive)  
    F2 (general future)  
    IMPER (imperative)

The most clear indication of this is that all negatives are [+F], indicating that they form a less tight bond with what follows. That this is not the case in Abo is seen in the negative forms in (16):

(16) **suffix tone TAM pre-pause** + bitámbé ‘shoes’
    a. -L ~ -H present  
        à tá póŋđo à tá póŋđo bitámbé ‘he isn’t making shoes’  
        past  
        à tá póŋđo à tá póŋđo bitámbé ‘he didn’t make shoes’  
        perfect  
        à táá póŋđo à táŋ póŋđo bitámbé ‘he hasn’t made shoes’  
    b. -L future  
        à táá póŋđo à táá póŋđo bitámbé ‘he won’t make shoes’
As can be observed, the three final tone patterns of the affirmative forms in (6) stay the same in the negative except (16d). If inherent focus or markedness were conditioning a disjoint absence of metatony, we would expect the imperative and subjunctive negatives to be the least prone to the -L ~ -H alternations seen in (16d). We thus safely conclude that -L → -H does not correspond with [±focus] or [±F]. Instead, the alternation has a strictly phonological basis, as we shall now see.

3. A phonological analysis

Given that there are only three suffix tone patterns on verbs, there are several possible phonological analyses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suffix tone</th>
<th>analysis #1</th>
<th>analysis #2</th>
<th>analysis #3 (etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. -L ~ -H</td>
<td>/-LH/</td>
<td>/-Ø/</td>
<td>/-H/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. -L</td>
<td>/-L/</td>
<td>/-L/</td>
<td>/-L/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. -H</td>
<td>/-H/</td>
<td>/-H/</td>
<td>/-HL/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analysis #1, the metatonic tenses would end in a /-LH/ suffix sequence distinct from both /-L/ and /-H/. The L would be lost in final position, but kept in medial position. While simplifying a final LH to L would not be surprising, there would be no explanation for why the LH sequence is not simplified to a downstepped H after a H root, e.g. á · sá lā bitambé ‘he is using shoes’ (not *ãsá · lā bitambé). In analysis #2, the metatonic tenses would end in a toneless specification, which would acquire a L finally, but a H medially. Besides being arbitrary, how could one distinguish a toneless specification on a monomoraic H tone verb such as jé ‘eat’ or já ‘put’, which do not have a second mora to contrast the -Ø specification. Analysis #3 assumes a contrast between /-H/, /-L/ and /-HL/. The /-H/ of the metatonic tenses would become -L finally. In order to keep these distinct from those verb forms which remain -H in all contexts, these latter would have to be analyzed as having an underlying /-HL/ suffixal sequence. In the remainder of this section we will argue for analysis #3, beginning with a demonstration that the contrasting /-HL/ representation is well motivated.

To make the argument we begin by observing in (18) that -L → -H not only raises the final tone of the verb, but also the L tone of the following noun prefix:

| (18) | a. L-L → H-L | á sôŋɛ má-kôn ‘he is counting plantains’ (mà-kôn) |
|      | L-LH → H-LH | á sôŋɛ má-cêê ‘he is counting eggs’ (mà-cêê) |
|      | L-H → H-H   | á sôŋɛ má-kôş ‘he is counting stones’ (mà-kôş) |
| b.   | L-L-L → H-L-L | á sôŋɛ má-kákô ‘he is counting crabs’ (mà-kákô) |
|      | L-L-H → H-L-H | á sôŋɛ má-bêndé ‘he is counting cups’ (mà-bêndé) |
|      | L-H-H → H-H-H | á sôŋɛ má-póndô ‘he is counting holes’ (mà-póndô) |

In addition, when the noun has a floating L prefix, e.g. in class 9/10, a following L or LH stem will instead undergo raising:

| (19) | a. (L)-L → HL | á sôŋɛ njôk ‘he is counting elephants’ (n-jôk) |
|      | (L)-LH → H-H | á sôŋɛ mbé-ê ‘he is counting pots’ (m-béê) |
|      | (L)-H → H    | á sôŋɛ mbyô ‘he is counting dogs’ (m-byô) |
(L)-L-L → H-L  ā sòṣẹ mbọnjí  ‘he is counting flowers’  (‘m-bọnjí)
(L)-L-H → H-H  ā sòṣẹ  njègèndó  ‘he is counting beans’  (‘njègèndó)
(L)-H-H → H-H  ā sòṣẹ mbòtí  ‘he is counting clothing’  (‘m-bòtí)

The forms in (20) show that the same alternations take place in the ‘N₁ of N₂’ connective construction:

(20)  a.  L-L  →  H-L  ibók di má-kòn  ‘place of the plantains’  (mà-kòn)
      L-LH  →  H-LH  ibók di má-cèè  ‘place of the eggs’  (mà-cèè)
      L-H  →  H-H  ibók di má-kòs  ‘place of the stones’  (mà-kòs)
  b.  L-L-L  →  H-L-L  ibók di má-kàkò  ‘place of the crab’  (mà-kàkò)
      L-L-H  →  H-L-H  ibók di má-bèndé  ‘place of the cups’  (mà-bèndé)
      L-H-H  →  H-H-H  ibók di má-pàndó  ‘place of the holes’  (mà-pàndó)
  c.  (L)-L  →  H-L  ibók di njèk  ‘place of the elephants’  (‘njèk)
      (L)-LH  →  H-H  ibók di mbe¨è  ‘place of the pots’  (‘mbe¨è)
      (L)-H  →  H  ibók di mbyò  ‘place of the dogs’  (‘m-byò)
  d.  (L)-L-L  →  H-L  ibók di mbọnjí  ‘place of the flowers’  (‘mbọnjí)
      (L)-L-H  →  H-H  ibók di njègèndó  ‘place of the beans’  (‘njègèndó)
      (L)-H-H  →  H-H  ibók di mbòtí  ‘place of the clothing’  (‘mbòtí)

On the other hand, if the following word does not have a L- prefix, either overt or floating, it will not undergo raising, even if the form itself begins L:

(21)  a.  demonstrative:  ā sòṣẹ àyí njèk  ‘he is counting those elephants’
      ibók di áyí njèk  ‘the place of those elephants’
  b.  preposition:  ā sòṣẹ ni ndīnj yè  ‘he is counting with his friend’
  c.  particles:  ā sòṣẹ ki mákàkò  ‘he is also counting crabs’
      à tá sòṣẹ tè múù  ‘he isn’t counting anyone’

To account for the raising of a L prefix, one might naturally propose a rule of H tone spreading (HTS). However since a L prefix + H root becomes H-H, not the expected H-H, we must prevent the prefixal L from conditioning a downstep. There are two possible interpretations: (i) rather than HTS, the L of a noun prefix is featurally changed to H in the above two contexts (i.e. L → H); (ii) the L of a noun prefix is deleted in the above contexts, followed by HTS. We adopt and illustrate this second interpretation in (22).

(22)  ā sòṣẹ + mà-kòs  →  ā sòṣẹ + mà-kòs  →  ā sòṣẹ + mà-kòs  ‘he is counting stones’

   \( \land \mid \mid \lor \) \rightarrow \( \land \mid \mid \lor \) \rightarrow \( \land \mid \mid \lor \)  ‘he is counting stones’

While there are thus two aspects to “metatony” in Abo, final L → H on the verb + raising of the prefix tone of a following noun, it is important to note that the latter occurs only with the former. Crucially, L prefixes are not raised after verb forms which end -H (recall (6c), repeated below in (23a)):

(23)  a.  -H  static  à pòŋò  à pòŋò bìtambé  ‘he has made shoes’
      imperative  pòŋò  pòŋò bìtambé  ‘make shoes!’
      subjunctive  sà pòŋò  sà pòŋò bìtambé  ‘let’s make shoes!’
  b.  -H  static  à pòŋò  à pòŋò mbòtí  ‘he has made clothing’
      imperative  pòŋò  pòŋò mbòtí  ‘make clothing!’
      subjunctive  sà pòŋò  sà pòŋò mbòtí  ‘let’s make clothing!’
As seen in (23b), H tone nouns which have a floating L prefix are realized with a downstep in (23), which does not occur a metatonic -H (cf. (19)). Similarly, pronouns, which also have a floating L prefix, are realized H in (24a), but ↓H in (24c).

(24) suffix tone TAM pre-pause + byó ‘them’ (class 8) < /bi-ɔ/ or /‘bi-ɔ/
   a. -L ~ -H present  ámbò ámbò byó ‘he is making them’
      past       ámbò ámbò byó ‘he made them’
      perfect    ámbò ámbò byó ‘he has made them’
   b. -L future    ámbó ámbó byó ‘he will make them’
   c. -H imperative ámbó ámbó byó ‘make them!’
      subjunctive ámbó ámbó byó ‘let’s make them!’

Our proposal to account for this difference is that metatonic tenses end with an underlying /-H/, which undergoes H → L finally. Final -H tenses are underlying /-HL/, which simplifies to -H, with its delinked L conditioning downstep on a following H.

However, since nouns and pronouns begin with a (linked or floating) L tone, we have not been able to demonstrate that the observed downsteps are indeed due to the L of suffixal /-HL/. In order to do this we need to test the hypothesis by placing an unambiguously /H/-initial constituent immediately after the /-HL/ tenses. This is rather hard to find, as most words in Abo begin with a L tone. One clear source of an initial H constituent is a headless connective, e.g. class 8 ámbó ‘those of the child, the child’s’, illustrated in (25).

(25) suffix tone TAM pre-pause + ámbó ‘the child’s’ (e.g. bitámé ‘shoes’)
   a. /-H/ present  ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘he is making the child’s’
      past       ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘he made the child’s’
      perfect    ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘he has made the child’s’
   b. /-L/ future    ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘he will make the child’s’
   c. /-HL/ imperative ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘make the child’s!’
      subjunctive ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘let’s make the child’s!’

In (25a) we observe the expected final H on the verb. Also as expected, in (25b) the final vowel of verb in the future tense in (25b) remains L. Crucially, the downstep preceding ámbó in (25c) shows the effect of the final L of the posited /-HL/ suffixal tone sequence. Our analysis is thereby confirmed: The “metatonic” tenses in (25a) end in a /-H/ suffix, which becomes L finally. Non-alternating final-L tenses such as the future in (25b) end /-L/, and non-alternating final-H tenses end /-HL/.

The last point to clarify is that the final /-H/ of metatonic tenses will be preserved only if the postverbal element occurs within the same clause. The H → L rule thus applies in recapitulative right-dislocations such as in (26).

(26) a. ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘the child is counting, even he’
     b. ámbó ámbó ámbó ‘he is counting, the child’
      (cf. ámbó ámbó ‘he is counting the child’)

In (27) we formulate the rule as lowering the H suffix of a verb at the end of an intonational phrase:
With this established, we consider further evidence for the analysis in the following two subsections.

4. **Curious further evidence concerning /H/ verbs**

In our treatment of the different verb-tone patterns in Abo, we have thus far considered only /L/ verbs, where one can easily see the -L ~ -H alternation on the verb itself. Although /H/ verbs always end H, e.g. sálá ‘use’, the effect of the different tonal suffixes can be seen on the following word. Thus, the prefix bi- of bitámbé ‘shoes’ is raised in (28a), but not in (28b,c).

\[(28) \text{suffix tone} \quad \text{TAM} \quad \text{pre-pause} \quad + \text{bitámbé ‘shoes’}
\]

a. /-H/ present á sálá á sálá bitámbé ‘he is using shoes’
   past á sálá á sálá bitámbé ‘he used shoes’
   perfect á má sálá á má sálá bitámbé ‘he has used shoes’

b. /-L/ future á káá sálá á káá sálá bitámbé ‘he will use shoes’

c. /-HL/ stative á sélé á sélé bitámbé ‘he has used shoes’
   imperative sálá sálá bitámbé ‘use shoes!’
   subjunctive sá sálá sá sálá bitámbé ‘let’s use shoes!’

The fact that bi- stays low after sálá in (28b) shows that the future has to have a /-L/ suffix which blocks HTS. Similarly, the floating L prefix of `mbótí ‘clothing’ is raised (or deleted) in (29a), where the noun follows the verb without a downstep:

\[(29) \text{suffix tone} \quad \text{TAM} \quad \text{pre-pause} \quad + \text{‘mbótí ‘clothing’}
\]

a. /-H/ present á sálá á sálá mbótí ‘he is using clothing’
   past á sálá á sálá mbótí ‘he used clothing’
   perfect á má sálá á má sálá mbótí ‘he has used clothing’

b. /-L/ future á káá sálá á káá sálá mbótí ‘he will use clothing’

c. /-HL/ stative á sélé á sélé mbótí ‘he has used clothing’
   imperative sálá sálá mbótí ‘use clothing!’
   subjunctive sá sálá sá sálá mbótí ‘let’s use clothing!’

In (29b,c), where the floating L prefix follows the /-L/ or /-HL/ suffixal tones, either of the two floating L tones in sequence would have conditioned the downstep. /H/ tone verb roots thus support the analysis.

Further evidence for the proposed underlying verb suffix tones comes from a curious, morpheme-specific tonal effect: a H tone verb becomes L before the complementizer là ‘that’, *but only in the tenses that exhibit metatony*! Thus, the verb sáá ‘make’ is realized sàà in (30a), but not in (30b,c).

\[(30) \text{suffix tone} \quad \text{TAM} \quad \text{final} \quad + \text{là bà jé ‘that they eat’}
\]

a. /-H/ present á sáá á sáá là bà jé ‘he is making them eat’
   past á sáá á sáá là bà jé ‘he made them eat’
   perfect á má sáá á má sáá là bà jé ‘he has made them eat’

b. /-L/ future á káá sáá á káá sáá là bà jé ‘he will make them eat’

c. /-HL/ stative á séé á séé là bà jé ‘he has made them eat’
   imperative sáá sáá là bà jé ‘make them eat!’
   subjunctive sá séé sá séé là bà jé ‘let’s make them eat!’
Any H tone verb of however many syllables and any syllable shape will show the same alternations before là; This is illustrated again with the verb yɔ́ ‘say’ in (31).

(31) suffix tone TAM final + là kém (lit. ‘that no’)
a. /-H/ present ǎ yɔ́ ǎ yɔ̀ là kém ‘he says no’
   past ǎ yɔ́ ǎ yɔ̀ là kém ‘he said no’
   perfect ả mà yɔ́ ả mà yɔ̀ là kém ‘he has said no’
b. /-L/ future ả káà yɔ́ ả káà yɔ̀ là kém ‘he will say no’
c. /-HL/ stative ả yɔ́ ả yɔ̀ là kém ‘he has said no’
   imperative yɔ́ yɔ̀ là kém ‘say no!’
   subjunctive sá yɔ́ sá yɔ̀ là kém ‘let’s say no!’

Note that là can lower a preceding H only on the verb, not on a noun or pronoun:

(32) a. ǎ tɔŋ je ‘he wants food’
   b. ǎ tɔŋ là à jé ‘he wants to eat’ (lit. ‘he wants that he eats [indicative]’)
      ǎ tɔŋ là à jé ‘he wants him to eat’ (lit. ‘he wants that he [subjunctive] eats’)
      ǎ tɔŋ là mà à jé ‘he wants the child to eat’

In the above examples, pre-là lowering is illustrated with H tone verbs, e.g. tɔŋ ‘want’, since its effect would be vacuous on a L tone verb. là may however be assumed to remove the suffix /-H/ of L tone verbs, e.g. kɔŋgɛ ‘remember’:

(33) suffix tone TAM + là à jé ‘that he eat’
a. /-H/ present ǎ kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘he remembers to eat’
   past ǎ kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘he remembered to eat’
   perfect ả mà kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘he has remembered to eat’
b. /-L/ future ả káà kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘he will remember to eat’
c. /-HL/ stative ǎ kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘he has remembered to eat’
   imperative kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘remember to eat!’
   subjunctive sá kɔŋgɛ là à jé ‘let’s remember to eat!’

The lowering effect of là on a preceding H tone verb in metatonic tenses is significant for several reasons. First, it shows that “metatony” is not a raising process: Just looking at the L tone verbs in (33), one might at first conclude that “raising” is blocked before là. However since the H tone of the verb root is also affected, as in (30)-(32), a lowering process is clearly needed. Second, the fact that lowering is limited to metatonic tenses cannot be due to these latter having an underlying /-L/ suffix. This is seen from the absence of lowering in the future tense, which unambiguously ends /-L/. Finally, lowering before là supports our decision to set up the relevant tenses with a final /-H/ suffix. Consider the metatonic past tense forms of the verbs /kàŋŋà/ ‘refuse (to s.o.)’ and /nísé/ ‘ask (for)’ in (34).

(34) a. ǎ kàŋŋà à nísé ‘he refused/asked’
   b. ǎ kàŋŋà bitámbé à nísé bitámbé ‘he refused/asked for shoes’
   c. ǎ kàŋŋà là à jé à nísé là à jé ‘he refused/asked that he eat’

4 It is possible that the agreement marker which occurs in relative clause formation is L because it precedes là. This is particularly clear in subject relatives such as mà nù là nù kɔ ‘the child who fell’, which provide the only context in which the class 1 marker /nù/ is realized with a surface L tone. The second /nù/ which occurs before the verb maintains its underlying /H/.
As seen in (34a), the past tense has a prefixal H-tone which associates onto the first syllable of kàñá. According to our analysis the underlying representation would thus be /´+ kàñá/ with the second syllable being realized L before pause. The final H is maintained in (34b), with the H + L-H sequence being realized as H-H. While the prefixal H- is not realized before a H tone verb such as nísé we do observe that the prefix of /bi-támbé/ undergoes HTS after both verbs, as we expect from a metatonic tense. What’s of particular interest are the realizations in (34c). Since /´+ kàñá/ is realized káñá, it is clear that only the final H is lowered before là. The prefixal H is presumably protected by the /L/ of the root. However, note that /´+ nísé/ is realized nísè, i.e. all L. What this means is that the prefixal H + root H + suffixal H are all lowered before là. While we cannot explain why là has the effect that it does, its lowering effect supports our contention that the so-called metatonic tenses have an underlying /-H/ suffixal tone, not /-L/. As seen in (30c)-(32c), the tenses which end /-HL/ are notably not affected.

5. Variation and the focus marker ndí

Up until now we have proceeded as if the facts were completely clean and without variation. Quite late in our investigation we noted that our one speaker occasionally accepted forms in which a L prefix remained L after a metatonic H. Thus, in addition to the expected form in (35a), (35b) was also judged to be acceptable, but less preferred:

(35) a. ā sònsè bi-támbé ‘he is counting shoes’
    b. ā sònsè bi-támbé

However, when the noun begins with a floating L prefix, e.g. /njók/ ‘elephant(s),’ /mbyó/ ‘dog(s),’ the L cannot be maintained in the output:

(36) a. ā sònsè njók ‘he is counting elephants’  (*ā sònsè njók)
    b. ā sònsè mbyó ‘he is counting dogs’  (*ā sònsè mbyó)

We therefore assume that sporadic cases like (35b) are innovative, something which should be investigated in more depth and with more speakers of different ages.

Another variation occurs with the focus marker ndí, which occurs either after a preverbal constituent or immediately after the verb. Curiously, ndí has a L tone when preverbal, but a H tone when postverbal. Thus recall the sentences from (8), repeated in (37a,b).

(37) a. subject focus  màn ndí ā sònsè másè mé ‘the CHILD is counting his teeth’
    b. non-subject focus  màn ā sònsè ndí másè mé ‘the child is counting his TEETH’
    c. màn ā káà sònsè ndí másè mé ‘the child will count his TEETH’

Our initial hypothesis was that ndí was underlyingly /L/, but became H in post-verbal position by the same HTS process that affects nouns. However, the sentence in (37c) convinced us that postverbal ndí must be underlyingly /H/ as it here follows the future verb ending in suffixal -L. We thus recognize postverbal /ndí/.

What is much more puzzling is the effect that /ndí/ has (or does not have) on what follows. Compare the following sentences with those seen earlier in (6):

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5 It is of course entirely possible that preverbal /ndí/ becomes a L by a process similar to lowering before là, as it likely is a left-dislocation. là may not follow ndí, however, in (37a).
(38) suffix tone TAM
a. /-H/ present ā pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé ‘he is making shoes’
   past ā pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé ‘he made shoes’
   perfect ā má pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé ‘he has made shoes’
b. /-L/ future ā káa pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé ‘he will make shoes’
c. /-HL/ imperative pɔŋɔ ·ndi bitámbé ‘make shoes!’
   subjunctive sá pɔŋɔ ·ndi bitámbé ‘let’s make shoes!’

As seen, ndí is transparent to HTS: In (38a) the verb seems to have spread its final -H onto /bì-támbé/ right through ndí. No such effect is seen in (38b), where the future ends /-L/, or in (38c), where the final /-HL/ causes /ndí/ to be downstepped. Now compare the following sentences containing /bí mán/ ‘those of the child, the child’s’ with the forms seen earlier in (25).

(39) suffix tone TAM
a. /-H/ present ā pɔŋɔ ndi bì mán ‘he is making the child’s’
   past ā pɔŋɔ ndi bì mán ‘he made the child’s’
   perfect ā má pɔŋɔ ndi bì mán ‘he has made the child’s’
b. /-L/ future ā káa pɔŋɔ ndi bì mán ‘he will make the child’s’
c. /-HL/ imperative pɔŋɔ ·ndi bì mán ‘make the child’s!’
   subjunctive sá pɔŋɔ ·ndi bì mán ‘let’s make the child’s!’

In (39a) ndí occurs in a H plateau from the verb onto the complement. In (39b), bì mán is downstepped after ndí, while in (39b) both bì mán and ndí itself are downstepped. In order to account for both sets of forms we must assume that the same suffixal tone occurs on ndí as on the main verb: /ndí + H/ in (39a), /ndí + L/ in (39b), and /ndí + HL/ in (39c). This suggests that ndí was once a verb, perhaps a copular verb, as it appears cognate with such forms found in other Bantu languages.

Despite the neatness of the above demonstration, again we find minor variation. Thus we have as well recorded pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé (without downstep) and ā káa pɔŋɔ ndi bitámbé (with HTS). Over a long period of elicitation varying the forms and contexts on different days, we found these variants to be in the minority. (We did not find such variations in the forms in (39).) In order to figure out exactly what the range of variations is, a much broader investigation involving more speakers would be required.

6. Summary and Conclusion

From the previous sections we can conclude that Abo metatony: (i) is not likely derived from the *H of either the connective or the augment; (ii) is not related to marking objects, focus, or the conjoint-disjoint distinction; (iii) can be accounted for in terms of underlying suffix tones on the verb; (iv) is best analyzed as an underlying /-H/ suffix which becomes L at the end of an intonational phrase. We speculate that such lowering may be part of a general tendency to lower final Hs in this region; cf. Tunen (A44) where, with the loss of final vowels, underlying trisyllabic /L-H-H/ is realized as disyllabic L-L, but /L-H-L/ is realized L-H, i.e. without lowering because the H is not final (Mous 2003: 286-7). Although metatony has been identified in mostly westerly Bantu languages, arranged below by Guthrie zone, more work is required in almost every case:
Relating the above cases to Eastern Bantu type 1 conjoint/disjoint distinctions is tenuous, at best: Even the distributional properties argue against such an identification. First, although metatony cannot occur when the verb is final in its clause, it occurs non-finally in all kinds of clauses. Second, both conjoint and disjoint verb forms can occur finally and non-finally, depending on clause type, as indicated in (41).

Note also that conjoint/disjoint distinctions can be marked non-tonally and other than by differences in suffixal tone. One thing they do have in common so far is that metatony and conjoint/disjoint are both restricted by specific TAMs and polarity, but this may be only an accident.

The final question is what we should do concerning terminology. One possibility is to restrict the term metatony to Meeussen’s (1967) original characterization of -H vs. -L suffixal tone alternations in infinitive verb ± object constructions. The other is to allow it to refer to -H vs. -L suffixal tone alternations in any verb form and involving any a postverbal constituent. If we map out these variations, we arrive at the table with the four logical possibilities in (42).

While both the Songye/Lega type and the Abo/Basaa type are now amply attested, the other cells and combinations most likely also exist.

References
Burns, Roslyn. 2011. Paper on syntax, focus and class 1 subject agreement in Abo (in progress).


