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Riika Halme’s monograph, *A tonal grammar of Kwanyama*, is an important contribution to the study of the Oshiwambo (Guthrie R.20) group of Bantu languages spoken in Angola and Namibia. Since tonal information on the languages of this group has been scanty, Halme’s broad and rigorous coverage is particularly welcome. The work is organized into eight chapters:

Chapter 1 “Introduction” situates Kwanyama (R.21) and its neighbors, surveys past literature, and ends with a discussion of orthography and tone marking.

Chapter 2 “Segmental phonology” provides an overview of consonant and vowel phonology. Of particular interest is the fate of Proto-Bantu prenasalized consonants: While a nasal + voiceless stop is realized as a voiceless nasal (e.g. *-ntu > omunhu* ‘human being’), the “Kwanyama Law” denasalizes the second of two successive prenasalized voiced consonants. In three tables (p.16), Halme organizes NCVNCV inputs by place of articulation and provides the Proto-Bantu reconstructions, Kwanyama reflexes, and equivalents from neighboring Ndonga (R.22), e.g. *-jambá > Kw. ondjába* ‘elephant’ (Nd. ondjamba), *gombe > ongobe* ‘head of cattle’ (Nd. ongombe).

Chapter 3 “Tone” gives a brief introduction to tone in Kwanyama, setting the stage for description of tonal phenomena in the rest of the book. Halme notes that previous works on Kwanyama describe tonal patterns in quite disparate ways. This is presumably due in large part
to the difficulty of translating unevenly fluctuating surface pitches into what Halme will ultimately recognize as a /H/ vs. /L/ system: Sequences of Ls start quite high, each L descending from the level of the preceding L, as in o-ku-lim-in-afan-á [−−−−−−] ‘to cultivate for each other’ (p.23). On the other hand, sequences of Hs start quite low with each H rising in pitch. In a form such as o-ku-túm-ín-áfán-á [−−−−−−] ‘to send to each other’, from /o-ku-túm-in-afan-a/, the /H/ of -túm- ‘send’ spreads to the end of the word. In addition, by a late rule of “Tone Shift”, each tone moves one to the right. What this means is that the input to phonetic pitch assignments is o-ku-túm-ín-áfán-á, where ` indicates a H which has been displaced one tone-bearing unit to the right. As seen in the pitch schemas provided by Halme, -túm- is realized with the lowest pitch in the word.

Given such complexities, Halme suggests that H and L can be understood in terms of height relative to the preceding pitch (with H tones higher than or level with, and L tones lower than, the preceding tones). She goes on to posit three basic tone rules that apply throughout Kwanyama grammar: The first, Tone Shift has already been mentioned: After all other tone rules apply, the tones move one mora to the right. This tone shift, similar to that seen in several other Bantu languages, e.g. Kikuyu (Clements & Ford 1979, Clements 1984), has the interesting consequence that the underlying identity of the final tone of a word can only be determined by its effect on the following word. This effect has caused previous analyses of Kwanyama tone to miss important contrasts that are “clearly identifiable” by native speakers (p. 40). For example, as seen in (1), bimoraic noun stems elicited in isolation appear to have only a two-way contrast, L-H or L-L. (Note that noun augments and prefixes in Kwanyama are all L).

(1) a. L-H : o-ka-dilá ‘small bird’

b. L-H : o-ka-fumá ‘small frog’
c. L-L : **o-ka-vela** 'bracelet'
d. L-L : **o-ka-puka** 'insect'

However, when the initial tone of the following word is taken into account, as in (2), the expected four-way contrast (characteristic of Proto-Bantu) can be found.

(2)

a. /H-H/ : **o-ka-dilá  ō-ká-wá** ‘the small bird is nice’
b. /H-L/ : **o-ka-fumá  o-ká-wá** ‘the small frog is nice’
c. /L-L/ : **o-ka-vela  o-ká-wá** ‘the bracelet is nice’
d. /L-H/ : **o-ka-puka  ō-ká-wá** ‘the insect is nice’

Halme’s exposition and exemplification of the translation of pitch patterns to H and L tones, of the tone shift rule are nicely laid out and convincing, and she is able to greatly simplify an apparently messy system.

The other two rules in this chapter deal with tone spread and deletion. Derivations, both here and elsewhere in the book, are given with each mora having its own H or L tone feature and without association lines, with the justification that “in Kwanyama, a multiple linked tone seems to behave like a sequence of equal tones and not like a single tone.” Her rules of tone spreading are thus shown as tone copying rather than with the dotted line convention of autosegmental phonology.

In chapter 4, “Nouns”, Halme gives the requisite information about noun classes (§4.1), their agreement patterns (§ 4.2), nominal derivation (§4.3), and lexical tone patterns (§4.4) before introducing rules to account for tonal alternations (§4.5), which make up the bulk of the chapter. In particular, she deals with “tonal alternation induced by the phonological environment” (§4.5.1) and “tonal alternation on grammatical grounds” (§4.5.2). She shows that Kwanyama has what Schadeberg (1986) terms “tone cases”, best known in the Kikongo area.
(Blanchon 1998), where noun tones depend on the function and/or position of a noun (phrase) in the sentence (p.45). Ten heavily interacting tone rules are introduced. The short final section, “Tonal alternations in nouns without the augment”, (§4.6) makes tentative observations about class 1a nouns, which do not have the o- or e- augment found on all other nouns and thus behave quite differently in their tonal patterns. A nice feature of the chapter is the inclusion of numerous tables detailing, for example, the possible tonal patterns of nouns, their relative frequencies, and their correlation to Proto-Bantu tones.

Chapter 5 “Verbs” is the longest chapter in the book. It begins with a short description of verbal derivation (§5.1) and then gives extensive descriptions of verbal inflection rules (§5.2) and their tonal effects. One new rule (“Floating Contour Simplification”) is introduced, but most rules affecting verbs are also applicable to nouns and have been defined in the preceding chapters. In this chapter again, Halme includes a number of clear and useful tables that show the combinatorial possibilities and tonal effects in Kwanyama’s somewhat complex TAM system, both in main and independent clauses. Because of its focus on tone, this chapter omits in-depth descriptions of the semantics and pragmatics of the various verb forms; although this clearly falls outside the scope of the work, it is still something of a pity due to the lack of other descriptions of these for Kwanyama. Of particular interest might be the somewhat enigmatic role of the initial vowel that appears on most, but not all, main-clause positive verb forms. Halme describes the tonal realization of forms with and without the initial vowel (§5.4.2) and hints at its interesting semantic features but leaves the final analysis open. This chapter, like the others, contains numerous examples and detailed derivations of tone from its underlying representation to its surface form in words and phrases.
Chapter 6 “Minor Word Categories” follows with short descriptions of the morphology and tone of adjectives (§6.1), pronominal forms (§6.2), numerals (§6.3), and invariables such as interrogatives, conjunctions, and ideophones (§6.4).

Chapter 7 “On tone in other zone R languages” summarizes the scanty information that is available for tone in other Wambo (R.20) languages, including her own data for Mbandja, an Angolan dialect closely related to Kwanyama. Mbandja tone is strikingly different from tone in Kwanyama, both in its rules (Tone Shift, for example, does not apply) and its phonetic realization, in which H and L tones are quite discrete and do not show the pitch gradation seen in Kwanyama. The chapter ends with a description of research on tonal patterns in the well-documented neighboring language Herero (R.41) and in Umbundu (R.11). The chapter underscores the paucity of tonal data for zone R, languages and particularly for the Wambo lects.

Chapter 8 “Conclusion” summarizes the arguments made in the preceding chapters and repeats all posited tone rules, both for reader convenience and to facilitate a discussion of rule ordering, a somewhat complicated matter. Chapter 8 concludes a short summary placing Kwanyama phenomena in context with regard to other zone R and K languages, as well as encouraging future work on several issues raised in Halme’s investigations.

The book ends with a fairly extensive set of appendices. The first two are “Nominal paradigms” (9 charts with tonal information and examples) and “Verbal paradigms” (49 charts detailing the combinations and realizations of H and L verb roots with subject concords, object concords, and clitics for Kwanyama’s various tenses and aspects). Appendix 3 contains three short glossed texts, with each mora marked for tone. Finally, Halme includes a Kwanyama-English vocabulary (pp, 228-299, with approximately 6000 entries) based on Turvey, Zimmermann and Taapopi’s (1977) dictionary, with each entry marked for tone.
Halme’s data and presentation are uniformly rigorous and thorough, and her analysis is careful. Data that (appear to be) quite complex, both phonetically and in terms of their interactions, are clearly presented in a straightforward and easy-to-follow format.

Even so, a reader interested in a specific issue may find herself flipping back and forth through the pages more than might be desired. This is perhaps inevitable in such a complex array of data; however, brief examples – or at least page references to where relevant examples can be found – given with summaries of rules might make for greater convenience. In addition, a summary of key tonal issues and unique features of Kwanyama (noted throughout the text) might be of use to typologists not specializing in the language or language area.

A larger issue in the book is Halme’s assumption, stated early in the study, that “Low tones [are] independent tonemes and not […] default tones assigned at the final stage of derivation” (p.25). It is widely known that the great majority of Bantu languages have two tones, and the many of these systems can be analyzed as having a privative /H/ vs. Ø opposition, and that L tones are assigned at a later stage in the derivation (cf. Hyman 2001, Kisseberth and Odden 2003). The fact that Kwanyama does not exhibit any surface contour tones (p.52) is consistent with a privative interpretation of Halme’s Hs and Ls.

As justification for her binary analysis, Halme cites several tone rules that appear to crucially hinge on the presence of a floating L. However, as shown in Crane (2006), it may be possible to account for all of the tonal effects demonstrated by Halme in a privative-H system. If this is indeed the case, it may be preferable to the binary system assumed in Halme, as it could reduce the need for the proliferation of rules Halme posits to account for the Kwanyama data. For example, Halme states an otherwise identical rule twice ("High Doubling"/ “Augment High Doubling”) for different contexts to avoid what would otherwise be an “ordering paradox” (144).
In fact, these two rules can be collapsed given several assumptions about the behavior of floating H and the effects of the OCP in Kwanyama. The salient issues in the elimination of underlying L would be the assumptions that the OCP functions at word level, that pro- and enclitics do not function as part of a word with respect to the OCP, and that a floating H tone links, in order of preference, to the following toneless mora or to the preceding toneless mora, and, in the absence of a toneless mora to which it can attach, delinks and deletes the following H. If these assumptions can be accepted, a reanalysis of the underlying tonal system of Kwanyama might be worth undertaking.

In general, Halme’s clear and precise, but not overly formal presentation of tonal data for Kwanyama make this work a very useful reference on a language family very much in need of description.

References


Crane, Thera. 2006. Two tones may not be better than one: Attempting a privative analysis of Kwanyama tone. Ms. University of California, Berkeley

