

## **The nominal prefix tone in Obang**

Ayu'nwi N. Neba & Asohsi Melvice

University of Buea - Cameroon

*A lot has been said about the underlying tone of the nominal prefix of Grassfields Bantu languages. A low tone has been postulated for Ngemba languages like Bafut (see Duncan 1972, Stallcup 1980, Mfonyam 1989, and Neba 1998), Nkwen (see Awambeng 1992) Pinyin (see Neba 1996) Mankon (Leroy 1977). This is because these languages have a uniform low tone on these prefixes in citation form. On the other hand, languages of the Ring and Momo sub branches of Grassfields Bantu generally have a high tone in citation forms and most grammatical contexts. As a result of this, it has been suggested that the prefix in these languages is either underlyingly High tone (cf see Asongwed and Hyman 1976) or that some classes have an underlying High tone while others have an underlying Low tone (cf Hombert 1976, Asongwed and Hyman 1976). Hyman (2005) points out that in Kom, one of the languages of the Ring group alternates /H/ and /L/ on the nominal prefix and further points out that whether the tone of a noun prefix will be /H/ vs /L/ depends on a number of factors one of which depends on a once preprefix. Watters (1990) attributes this variation in nominal prefix in Ejagham to a process of partial reduplication, among others.*

*In this paper, we describe the behaviour of tone in the nominal prefix of Obang, a language of the Momo subgroup of Grassfields Bantu languages and provide evidence that it is analysable as being underlyingly toneless. The paper argues that the tone that surfaces on the nominal prefix depends on three factors: the tonal melody of the root, the tonal melody of any preceding morpheme and the assignment of a default low tone. Our assumption is based on the fact that the same nominal prefix alternates both L and H tones. We demonstrate that when a noun is in isolation, its nominal prefix depends either on the tone of the root or on the rule of default L insertion but when it is preceded by a verb, the tone on the prefix derives from the verb. This is evidence that the nominal prefix is actually toneless.*