

Vowel harmony in Central Kenya Bantu languages

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Kitharaka, a Central Kenya Bantu language, has two types of vowel harmony. The first type occurs between the vowels of the pre-prefixes and those of the following prefix. Furthermore, in the demonstrative adjectives, each of which consists of a noun class prefix and an adjectival root, the vowels of the two morphemes are identical.

The second type of vowel harmony in Kitharaka operates between the verb roots and some of the verb suffixes such as the applicative, stative, and reversive morphemes. This vowel harmony into which the seven vowels of Kitharaka divide themselves into tense and lax subsets, is determined by the vowel of the root.

Whereas the first type of vowel harmony is a morphological phenomenon, the second type results from the operation of a phonological process. The former is occasioned by morphological processes such as reduplication; the later is the outcome of assimilation.

Just as Kitharaka has vowel harmony, so do the other Central Kenya Bantu languages. This paper seeks to explore the nature and the scope of vowel harmony within the Central Kenya Bantu family, that is, Kitharaka, Kikuyu, Kikamba, Kimeru and Kiambu. After analyzing the current state of vowel harmony in each of the five-member language family, the paper will try to establish the vowel harmony in the proto-Central Kenya Bantu. Finally, the paper will show how the current vowel harmony situation in each of the languages has developed from the proto-system.