

Can tone displacement be regarded as tone depression in Sukuma?

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Batibo (1976) proposed the notion of tone contour adjustment to capture the phenomenal two to three place displacement of high tone in Sukuma. Most of the publications which followed (Batibo, 1985, 1991, 1992), Goldsmith (1990), Matondo (2001, 2002) described this phenomenon as tone melody or tone movement within autosegmental phonology. In recent years, however, following Kisseberth and Odden (2006), this phenomenon is regarded as an incidence of tone depression in some of the Bantu languages.

This paper examines the phenomenon of tone displacement in Sukuma to determine whether or not it should be regarded as a case of tone depression. The analysis takes into account the conditions which prevail in languages which have tone depression. Then the case of Sukuma tone is re-visited by considering the articulatory and acoustic parameters. The results are highly revealing.