

Tone on Kejom (Babanki) associative construction

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This paper presents the associative construction in Kejom, a Centre Ring Grassfields Bantu language spoken in the North West Region of Cameroon, while focusing on the behaviour of tone. The associative noun phrase in Kejom is of the form 'noun 1(N1) of noun 2 (N2)', where the two nouns are separated by an associative marker (AM) which translates roughly as 'of'. In this type of construction, one can juxtapose almost any noun with any noun. It has been demonstrated that in many African languages, the associative construction is conveyed by means of a tonal morpheme (Williamson 1986, Chumbow and Nguendjio 1991, Akumbu 2006). In Kejom, however, a segmental morpheme that depends on the noun class of the noun that occupies N1 position occurs as the AM.

The associative constructions in this language can be divided into five sets based on the type of AM they take. The first set involves those for noun classes 2, 7, 13, and 19 that have a CV shape and occur on a high tone. The AM for noun class 10, with a similar high toned CV structure is in a second set because it behaves differently giving that the noun class marker for this class is a suffix rather than a prefix as with all the other classes. The third set has class 6a nouns whose AM has a CV structure that occurs on a low tone. The AM for classes 3, 5, 6, and 8 nouns is a high toned V and so they are placed in the fourth set. Finally the AMs for noun classes 1 and 9 nouns which have a low toned V shape form the fifth set.

Tonal processes that occur in the Kejom associative construction include high tone spread followed by low tone delink, low tone raising, downstep of high tone, and the formation of a rising tone that results from the deletion of the AM vowel when it occurs adjacent to another vowel.

This study reveals that the behaviour of tones in these constructions is conditioned by the presence of a nasal in the onset position of the juxtaposed noun roots. For example, low tone raising can only occur if the nasal is not present. HTS occurs only if there is no nasal even though it does occur in the presence of the nasal only if the N2 root is high toned.