S Raiders of the lost tone – tonal melodies in Ukaan nouns
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Ukaan (Benue-Congo, Nigeria) is a two-tone-plus-downstep language with L and H underlyingly present. Not all possible sequences of H and L occur on noun stems; instead a limited set of melodies is mapped onto tone-bearing units. When melodies with many tones associate with stems with few TBUs, the remaining tones are deleted. Ukaan therefore provides evidence for a way of associating tonal melodies that is not identified in the literature.

Tones in Ukaan associate with moras one-by-one left-to-right. Unassociated TBUs receive tonal specification through spreading of the final tone. Tonal melodies thus simplify the analysis of Ukaan nouns, explain the absence of non-final contours and LLH/HHL sequences and account for an observed free variation in ùgbátà ~ ùgbâːtà 'horse'.

However, whereas instances of $n_{TONES} = n_{TBUs}$ and $n_{TONES} < n_{TBUs}$ are attested, instances of $n_{TONES} > n_{TBUs}$ are suspiciously absent. If tonal melodies are understood as a set from which any melody can be selected for a given stem without making reference to phonological properties of the stem (Pulleyblank 1986), instances of $n_{TONES} > n_{TBUs}$ should be attested and a strategy for associating the leftover tones must be described.

Mende (Leben 1973) associates leftover tones with the last TBU, thereby creating final contours. In Dschang (Pulleyblank 1986), leftover tones remain floating, triggering downstep in an immediately following H. Neither strategy applies to Ukaan. Tone deletion, though empirically neither falsifiable nor verifiable in Ukaan, is the only explanation if the notions of tonal melodies and indeed the autosegmental nature of tone in Ukaan are to be maintained.
In this talk, I will present different analyses for Ukaan nominal tones, show why tone deletion is the most satisfactory analysis and demonstrate the use of Occam's Razor as a tool in linguistic analysis when empirical evidence is not available.