

ATR harmony in ten Mbam languages

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The Bantu A40-A60 languages of the Department of the Mbam-et-Inoubou, Cameroon's Centre province are well known for having vowel harmony. This paper looks at ten of these languages. The languages compared are: Tunen (Nen) A44, Nomaande (Mande) A46, Yambeta (Ngii) A46 (or A60 according to Phillips 1979), Tuki A61, Gunu (Nugunu) A62, Elip (Nulibie) A62, Mmala A62, Yangben (Kalɔŋ, Nukalɔŋɛ) A62, Baca (Bongo) A62, and Mbule (Dumbule), an unidentified language associated with the Yambassa languages in ALCAM.

These ten languages are generally analysed as having seven to nine vowels divided into two sets of mutually exclusive vowels within the word. One set is +ATR or "dominant", the other –ATR or "recessive". This paper looks into how ATR harmony operates in each of these languages including the scope of the harmony. For example, in most of these languages, ATR affects at least the derivational affixes, but with some of them, ATR extends to even prepositions and conjunctions as well as various inflectional pre-verbal elements.