

The downstepped Low in Edo (Bini) and Ghotuṣ

Two issues are addressed in this paper: downstepped Low and the existence of two types of Falling tone in some West Benue-Congo languages. The term ‘downstepped Low’ is first used in Amayo 1976. It was further used by Elugbe 1985 and 2001. Since downstep is normally associated with High, any claim that it can be properly used with Low must be stoutly defended, and that is what this paper attempts.

In the traditional view of downstep (ds), there is no issue of spreading: non-low tones are lowered by preceding Ls. Where the Ls responsible for the ‘terraced’ lowering of the Hs are visible, we talk of ‘downdrift’ (dd) or ‘automatic downstep’. Downstep refers to those cases in which a lowering has taken place but the Low or Lows responsible for the lowering are not visible. In a classic downstep system (usually with two or three basic tones), it is normally possible to recover the lost low tones as we see in the following example from Edo (Bini):

1. Downstepped High in Edo (Bini)



a /édé # èné/ [édénē] (= édé!né or édé`né)

Sometimes, the Low cannot be recovered unless we look at surrounding languages:

b. ébō ‘the English language or a white man’

The lowering of the second syllable is assumed to be due to a L that dropped off after lowering the H it preceded. [ébō] is therefore from /é`bó/, although there is no Edo-internal evidence for this analysis. However, compare Ghotuṣ /ō`ìbō/ ‘white person’.

As for the downstepped L, it occurs where a L follows a deleted L – exactly the same position where a H (or M in Ghotuṣ) is downstepped. Amayo said that Kay Williamson drew his attention to the fact that what he observed and called a downstepped L also occurred in Yala (Ikom) and Yoruba. Examples from Edo and Ghotuṣ are given in 2 in the additional page.

In Edo (Bini), a H normally spreads to a L, so that HL > HH \widehat{L} . However, Elugbe (1985) points out that there are two types of spreading here. A falling tone may have two distinct components – High and Low. This is the case in the commonly recognised \widehat{HL} contours as well as in \widehat{LH} rising ones. These gliding tones have clear-cut beginning and end points and can be represented as ^ or, graphically, as: []. By contrast there is a spreading which is often regarded as \widehat{HL} , but is actually a case of a non-high tone falling from the level of a preceding non-low. This tone usually sounds like a raised Low. I often marked this as ` or, graphically, as []. It is a tone that is falling throughout its duration and does not fall all the way to Low. Typical contrasts from Ghotuṣ are given in the additional page. The final version will have tokens from experimental work.

2. Downstepped L and the non-low-falling in Edo and Ghotuo

a. Edo

/ íyó + ´ + òkpè / → [íyó `kpè] → [íyó!kpè]
‘money’ ‘associative marker’ ‘palm wine tapper’ ‘palm wine tapper’s money’

/ íyó + ´ + ókpè / → [íyó ´kpè] → [íyókpè]
money am flute ‘money for a flute’

b. Ghotuo

/ ēyō sé òkpè / → [ēyō só `kpè] → [ēyō só!kpè]
money am palm fruit harvester ‘money for a palm fruit harvester’

/ ēyō sé ūkpè / → [ēyō súkpè] → [ēyō súkpè]
money of/for festival ‘festival money’

/ ē gbè / → ‘they are dancing / they dance’
they pres.-dance

/ ē gbē / → ‘they should dance / let them dance’

References

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