

THE GREAT *HL SPLIT IN BANTU GROUP B 40

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1. A SURVEY OF B 40 DIALECTS

Guthrie's group B40 covers most of South-West Gabon and spills over the frontier with the Popular Republic of the Congo in some places. The exact number of dialects is difficult to determine in a non-arbitrary way, and I am only familiar with those that are spoken on the Gabonese side. In terms of the number of speakers, the principal dialect is **yi-Punu** (B43), spoken in the central area around Mouila, Moabi, Ndéndé, and Tchibanga. Then comes **yi-Sirə** (B41) to the North-West, around Fougamou and Mandji, the first member of the group to have been learnt by Europeans and still enjoying a certain prestige as the language of a printed catechism that was used for many years over most of the area. It probably includes as sub-dialects both **yi-Varamə**, spoken in three villages inland from Gamba, and **yi-Vungu**, West of Mouila. Then come two varieties of **yi-Lumbu**, or **yi-Lumbu**, (B44), spoken along the coast between Setté-Cama to the North and Mayumba to the South, as well as some way into the interior. The Southern variety has been considerably influenced both by **ci-Vili** (H12) and **yi-Punu** (B43). The last dialect to boast a significant number of speakers is **i-Sangu** (B42), spoken in a narrow band that extends from the plains along the river Ngounié up into the mountains to the East towards Mimongo and Mbigou, thus separating the languages of group B30 to the North and B50 to the South. Finally, special mention must be made of **Ngubi** (unclassified), still spoken by a few old people along the banks of the Iguéla lagoon, the younger generations having gone over to **Nkomi**, a dialect of the **Myɛnɛ** Group (B10). **Ngubi** is the most conservative of

the B40 dialects and presents archaic features that are of the utmost interest for the proper understanding of the whole group.

2. °HH NOMINALS IN *yi-Sirə* (B41)

The problem I want to deal with here came to my notice while I was investigating *yi-Sirə*, but I soon discovered that it has implications that go far beyond that dialect.

The following test-frame: *nzɪlɔbə* ----- *məsɪyə*, "I saw ----- yesterday", suffices to establish four tone-classes for the nominals:

A: <i>dɪbàɣələ</i> , "man, male":	<i>nzɪlâbè</i>	<i>dɪbàɣələ</i>	<i>məsɪyè</i>
B: <i>mùɣé:tù</i> , "woman, girl":	<i>nzɪlâbè</i>	<i>mùɣé:tù</i>	<i>məsɪyè</i>
C: <i>ngwâlɪ</i> , "kind of partridge":	<i>nzɪlâbè</i>	<i>ngwâlɪ</i>	<i>məsɪyè</i>
D: <i>dɪkúndə</i> , "pigeon":	<i>nzɪlâbè</i>	<i>dɪkúndə</i>	<i>məsɪyè</i>

A comparison with Guthrie's reconstructions: ps 10 **-bàkàdà*, CS 1041 **-kén tù*, CS 865 **-gùàdí*, CS 1221 **-kúndá*, suggests that tone-classes A, B, C, D, are reflexes of Proto-Bantu *LL, *HL, *LH, and *HH, and invites us to set up underlying forms that are °LL, °HL, °LH, and °HH, respectively.

If we look a little more closely at tone-class D, supposed to be underlyingly °HH, we can see that it has the following characteristics:

- it has a radical H tone like class B (<*HL)
- it is followed by *məsɪyè* with a H prefix, like class C (<*LH)
- the final vowel is H between two H tones.¹

However, like all the other dialects of B 40, except **Ngubi**, *yi-Sirə* is a so-called "tone-case" language, a misleading expression which should be taken to mean

1. I have shown elsewhere that this is due to a raising rule that creates a "tone bridge". See BLANCHON (1988).

that the tone-pattern of a nominal varies according to its *position* in the utterance though not necessarily according to its grammatical *function*. The above characteristics of tone-class D are therefore valid only for the position between a verb and a following nominal. To obtain a fuller picture we must explore other positions. For instance:

nzìlâbè dîkúndè

"I saw a pigeon"

dîkúndè dítsìpúrùmùγè

"the pigeon flew away"

nzìlâbè dîkúndè dí mūsìrù

"I saw a pigeon of the forest"

nzìlâbè màpâpì mà díkúndè

"I saw the wings of the pigeon"

nzìvé:γè díkúndè mílúndè

"I gave the pigeon seeds"

nzìvé:γè díbáyólè dîkúndè

"I gave the man (°LL) a pigeon"

nzìvé:γè múγé:tù dîkúndè

"I gave the woman (°HL) a pigeon"

nzìvé:γè múfûdù díkúndè

"I gave the boy (°LH) a pigeon"

nzìvé:γè múγátsí díkúndè

"I gave the wife (°HH) a pigeon"

Any nominal identified as belonging to tone-class D by means of the test given above behaves exactly like *dĩkúndə*, "pigeon", in all the contexts examined so far. However, the picture changes as soon as we examine the position before a possessive. Nominals of tone-class D now split into two subclasses as follows:

D1: màtám̃bì, "feet"

nzìlâbə mətám̃bì mǎndì

"I saw his feet"

màtám̃bì mǎndì mǎmǎrándə

"his feet have swollen"

àtsìtábúlǎ nyálǎ tsí mǎtám̃bì mǎndì

"he pared his toe-nails"

D2: mílèmbù, "fingers"

nzìlâbə mílèmbù míǎndì

"I saw his fingers"

mílèmbù míǎndì mímǎrándə

"his fingers have swollen"

àtsìtábúlǎ nyálǎ tsí mílèmbù míǎndì

"he pared his finger-nails"

D1 nominals are followed by a possessive that is entirely low, whereas D2 nominals are followed by a possessive with a H tone on the prefix.

In order to discover the principle that produced this split it is necessary to draw up lists of nominals that correspond to well-established reconstructions in Common Bantu. Thus we have for sub-class D1:

mà y á y ì	"leaves"	CS 1019	*-k á y á
k á l ò	"crab"	CS 981	*-k á d á
p é m b ì	"white clay"	CS 1477	*-p é m b é
d ù s á l ò	"feather"	CS 248	*-c á d á
m à t á m b ì	"feet"	CS 1659	*-t á m b í
m à t s é n d ì	"thorns"	CS 320	*-c é n d é
t s í n d ì	"squirrel"	CS 340	*-c í n d í

And for sub-class D2:

m à y á l ò	"charcoal"	CS 980	*-k á d á
m ù y í l ò	"tail"	CS 1053	*-k í d á
m ù r á m b ù	"trap"	CS 1661	*-t á m b ò
m ù r í m ò	"heart"	CS 1738	*-t í m à
d ù l í m ì	"tongue"	CS 572	*-d í m ì
m ù l ú m ì	"husband"	CS 193	*-d ú m ì
m f ú l ò	"rain"	CS 225	*-b ú d á
t ú l ù	"chest"	CS 1822	*-t ú d ò
m à y ú r ù	"body"	CS 960	*-j ú t ù
m à r á y ù	"buttocks"	CS 1650	*-t á k ò

Vocabulary items for which no Common Bantu reconstruction is available can be compared with the corresponding items in one of the neighbouring languages of group B 50 such as *i-Nzɛbi* or *li-Wanji*, which seem to reflect the P B situation with little change:

	ɣ i – S i r ə		l i – W a n j i ²
D1:			
	ɣ i b ú l ù	"animal"	ù b ú l ú
	m ù f ú n ə	"load"	m f ú n ú
	d ì k á k ə	"hand"	l ì k á k á
	ɣ i k á n d ə	"potto"	ù k á n d á
	k ó d ù	"nape of neck"	l ì k ó t ó
	m ù k ó n g ù	"hill"	ù k ó n g ú
	ɣ i l í n g ə	"robe"	ù r é n g á
	b ì l ó n g ù	"medicine"	b ì l ó n g ɔ
	m ó n d ì	"dog"	m v w á : n d í
	m à n g ú n d ù	"hips"	m à n g ú n d ú
	p í n d ə	"peanuts"	p é n d á
	p í v ì	"axe"	p í v í
	m à t s á n g ə	"tears"	m à t s á n g á
	ɣ i v ú n d ə	"adult"	ù v ó : n d á
	etc...		
D2:			
	ɣ i r í n ì	"piece"	ù t í n î
	m ù s ó b ù	"worm"	ù s ó v î
	t s y é s ì	"gazelle"	s é t î
	etc...		

It should by now have become obvious that only sub-class D1 contains reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HH and that sub-class D2 contains part of the reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HL. The existence of two kinds of supposedly °HH nominals in ɣ i – S i r ə therefore points to a more basic split that runs through the reflexes of *HL, some of which have become indistinguishable from the reflexes of *HH in all

2. This list was established with the help of Médard Mouélé, who is a native speaker of li-Wanji and is doing research on that language at Lyon 2 University.

contexts except before a possessive, whereas the others, now found in tone-class B, have remained entirely distinct.

3. °HH NOMINALS IN THE OTHER DIALECTS OF B 40

Having discovered that there were two kinds of Type D nominals in $\gamma i-Si r \emptyset$ (B41), I then tried to find out if this was true also in the other dialects of the group. In **i-Sangu** (B42), **yi-Punu** (B43), and **yi-Lumbu**, or **yi-Lumbu**, (B44), all type D nominals behave the same in all contexts. As regards **Ngubi** and **yi-Vungu**, I did not have enough data to be able to reach any conclusion. However, in the Summer of 1989 I worked with two speakers of **yi-Varam** \emptyset , father and son³, aged 43 and 18 respectively. In the father's speech I was able to detect two kinds of type D nominals as in **yi-Sir** \emptyset , although the tonal manifestation was somewhat different and so slight that I could easily have overlooked it if I had not been hunting for it:

D1: $n\grave{i}m\acute{a}\gamma w\acute{e}n\grave{o}$ $m\grave{a}t\acute{a}mbi$ $m\grave{a}nd\grave{i}$

"I have seen his feet"

D2: $n\grave{i}m\acute{a}\gamma w\acute{e}n\grave{o}$ $m\grave{i}l\acute{e}mb\acute{u}$ $my\grave{a}nd\grave{i}$

"I have seen his fingers"

I obtained 19 words in sub-class D1 and 18 in sub-class D2 and was able to verify that the former were reflexes of *HH and the latter of *HL as in **yi-Sir** \emptyset . However, in the speech of the son I could not detect the slightest difference. Sub-classes D1 and D2 are apparently no longer distinguished by the younger generation.

This curious situation suggests that the fact that there is only one kind of Type D nominals in dialects B 42, 43, and 44 may be due to a similar falling together that took place at an earlier date when those dialects were not under

3. Mr. Mutsinga-Souza Jean-Félix and Souza Yeno Henri-Joseph.

observation by linguists. If this is correct, it should be the case that although tone-class D is now synchronically unified as °HH, it can still be shown to contain items that were originally *HH and others that were originally *HL. Indeed we can observe the following:

°HH reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HH:

B 42	B 43	B 44 ⁴	CB
d í t s à l ə	d ù s á l ə	d ú t s à l ə	CS 248 *–c á d á
b á t s è n d ə	m á t s y è n d ì	ˈ t s è n d ə	CS 320 *–c é n d é
Ø	k á l ə	ˈ k à l ə	CS 931 *–k á d á
d í ɣ à y ì	d ù ɣ á j ì	d ú ɣ à y ù	CS 1019 *–k á y á
etc...			

°HH reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HL:

B 42	B 43	B 44	CB
ˈ f ù l ə	m f ú l ə	ˈ m f ù l ə	CS 225 *–b ù d á
d í l ì m ì	d ù l í m ì	d ú l ì m ì	CS 572 *–d í m ì
m á ɣ à l ə	m à ɣ á l ə	m á ɣ à l ə	CS 980 *–k á d á
m ú ɣ ì l ə	m ù ɣ í l ə	m ú ɣ ì l ə	CS 1053 *–k í d á
etc...			

As all the dialects of B 40 have a tone class B that is underlyingly °HL⁵, it follows that the split mentioned above among the reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HL is not simply a peculiarity of B 41 (ɣi-Sirə) but a characteristic of the whole group. It is therefore urgent to investigate it more closely.

4. All forms labelled B 44 in this paper are from the variety of Lumbu spoken at Gamba (ɣi-Lumbu)

5. In the variety of Lumbu spoken at Mayumba (ɣi-Lumbu) tone-classes B (°HL) and D (°HH) are no longer distinct.

4. ACCOUNTING FOR THE GREAT °HL SPLIT

Returning to γ i-Sirə we find that all polysyllabic stems of tone-class D are in sub-class D1, which only contains reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HH. We have for instance:

kú l ə̃ γ ə̃ n ɪ	"worthless thing"
dũmbwé l ɪ l ə̃	"star"
mà s ámb ə̃ k ə̃	"shoulders"
b ɪ s óng ə̃ n ɪ	"heels"
mù t áng ə̃ n ɪ	"white man"
γ ɪ y á l ə̃ l ə̃	"light"

This shows that no polysyllabic reflexes of *HL have gone over to °HH.

Moreover, if we examine tone-class B (°HL) in all the dialects of B 40, we find that it contains mostly two kinds of words:

- words with polysyllabic stem, such as:

"broom"	dù γ ómbù l ù (B 41), dù γ ómbù t s ù (B 43)
"cough"	γ ɪ k ó t s ù l ù (B 41), ɪ k ò s ù l ù (B 42), y ɪ k ò t s ú l ù (B 43), γ ɪ k ò t s ù l ù (B 44)
"ants"	t s á l ù :ngù (B 41), bá t s ɪ l ù :ngù (B 42), t s á l á :ngù (B 43), ʼ t s y à l à :ngù (B 44)
"end"	d ɪ s ú k ɪ s ɪ l ù (B 41), d ɪ s ù k ù s ù l ù (B 42), d ɪ s ú k ù s ú l ù (B 43)
"afternoon"	t s ɪ s ɪ γ ə̃ (B41), ʼ t s ɪ s ɪ γ ə̃ (B42), t s ɪ s ɪ γ ə̃ (B43), m á s ɪ s ɪ γ ə̃ (B 44)
"darkness"	d ɪ v ɪ s ə̃ m ə̃ (B 41), d ɪ v ɪ s ə̃ m ə̃ (B 42), p ɪ s ə̃ m ə̃ (B 43)

- words with dissyllabic stem and long radical vowel, such as:

	B 41	B 42	B 43	B 44
"breast"	d ì b é: n ì	d í b è: n à	d ì b é: n ì	d í b è: n ì
"ghost"	d ì t é: ng ù	d í t è: ng ù	d í t é: ng ù	d í t è: ng ù
"woman"	m ù y é: t ù	m ú y è: t ù	m ù y é: t ù	m ú y è: t ù
"hunter"	m ù r é: l à	m ú r è: l à	m ù r é: l à	m ú r è: l à
"ash"	d ì b ú: f ù	d í b ù: f ù	d ì b ú: f ù	d í b ù: f ù
"honey"	b ú: y ì	b ú: y ì	b ú: j ì	Ø
"canoe"	b w á: t ù	Ø	b w á: t ù	Ø
"thirst"	p w í: l à	í b w ì: l à	p w í: l à	´ p ì: l à
"clothes"	b ì d w á: r ù	b í d w æ: r ì	b ì d w á: r u	Ø

If we combine these observations, we conclude that the Proto-Bantu *HL stems that have gone over to °HH (the whole way or part of the way, according to the dialect concerned) can only be *the dissyllabic stems with short vowels*.

The problem now becomes: "What kind of rule can we posit to account for this 'Great *HL Split' in B40 ?" The behaviour of infinitives in **Ngubi**, the most conservative dialect, may suggest an answer⁶.

In isolation all infinitives with °L stems are to be found in tone-class A (°LL), which shows that the final vowel is underlyingly °L. Compare:

d í p ú m ù	"belly"	CS 229	*-b ù m ò
y ú m í n à	"to swallow"	CS 1311	*-m ì n -
d í b á y à l à	"man"	ps 10	*-b à k à d à
y ú l í b à n à	"to forget"	CS 556	*-d ì b a d -

6. My thanks are due to Gilbert Puech who kindly allowed me to consult his field-notes on Ngubi.

However, infinitives with °H stems are of two types: B (=°HL) if the stem is polysyllabic or has a long radical vowel, but D (=°HH) if the stem is *dissyllabic with a short vowel*.. Compare:

Type B (°HL), polysyllabic:

γ ú v ú l ú γ à	"to come/go out"
γ ú γ ó l ó n g à	"to kill"
γ ú s ú m b í s à	"to sell"

Type B (°HL), dissyllabic:

γ ú r í : n à	"to run away from"
γ ú v é : γ à	"to give"
γ ú v y ó : γ à	"to pass"

Type D (°HH)

γ ú b á r á	"to go up"
γ ú r á n g á	"to count"
γ ú s ú m b á	"to buy"

The °L final vowel of the infinitive has obviously been raised to H in type D. If we admit with A.E.Meeussen that extensions are underlyingly °L, like the final vowel, we can say likewise that the post-radical vowel has been raised to H in polysyllabic stems. Finally, if we say that long radical vowels are really double vowels, a rule emerges for the infinitives of **Ngubi** : the radical H spreads over, or is copied on to, the next vowel to the right.

To account for the Great °HL Split in Bantu Group B 40, it is enough to generalise this rule to all *HL stems. In dissyllabic stems with short radical vowels the post-radical vowel is also final and when the rule applies to such stems they go over to °HH.

5. CONCLUSION

The heterogeneous nature of tone-class D (=°HH) in Group B 40, whether still synchronically relevant as in B 41, *yi-Sirə*, or merely of historical and comparative interest, as in most of the other dialects, has been shown to proceed from a split in the reflexes of Proto-Bantu *HL stems, and this in turn has been explained as the effect of a very general and rather natural tone rule. Many details remain to be filled in but that much is now firmly established. Considering that the classification of the North-West Bantu languages is still very uncertain and subject to debate, I suggest that it would be useful to examine any language that one might wish to *include in* B 40, or any group of languages that one might wish to *join with* B40 to form a group at the next higher level, for presence or absence of that particular tone rule in its grammar.

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