

A NOTE ON DOWNSTEP IN YALA (IKOM)

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I am very pleased to find that three of your authors have noticed my article, "Yala (Ikom), a terraced-level language with three tones." I would be even more pleased if they had quoted it correctly.¹ The importance of the Yala (Ikom) case is shown by the fact that none of your authors has fully grasped the essential point: both low tone and mid tone produce that lowering of pitch on subsequent tones higher than themselves which we may call "downdrift". When a low or a mid-tone syllable has been elided, either as an optional form of current speech or obligatorily and as an event in the past history of the language, the result is the phenomenon of down-step, between two highs, between two mids, or between high and low. The effect of the last is to cancel the otherwise expectable down-glide. In the example which both Leben and Fromkin cite, *ó kà* [*ó káà*] versus *kó' kà* [*kó kà*], the downstep is surely produced by the historical elision of the mid-tone /-ò/ of the subjunctive which is heard in at least three other dialects of Idoma-Yala. I am also at pains to argue the case synchronically from

¹Robert G. Armstrong, "Yala (Ikom), a terraced-level language with three tones". Journal of West African Languages 5.1: 49-58.

Victoria Fromkin, "Tone features and tone rules". Studies in African Linguistics 3.1: 64. She quotes Leben, saying that *kó kà* does not have the expected glide, heard in *ó kà*, because of the deletion of an intervening low tone. She writes, "the difference between a contour tone and a sequence of level tones must somehow be represented in the systematic phonetic output of the grammar." Agreed; but I wrote *kó' kà*. Fromkin omits the down-step marker.

Jerry Larson, "Downstep, downdrift, and diacritics". Studies in African Linguistics, Supplement 2: 177. I symbolize the phonetic and phonological arbitrariness of which Larson speaks by setting up only one category of downstep, which may be triggered by either a latent mid or a latent low tone. The morphological or syntactic reason for the downstep is usually transparent.

William R. Leben, "Suprasegmental and segmental representation of tone". Studies in African Linguistics, Supplement 2: 184-186.

evidence to be found in the present Yala (Ikom) speech. (Paragraphs 5.2, 6.1 ff., and the end of 6.3). There is no evidence for an elided low tone in the $k\acute{o}' +$ verb utterances.

I call your attention to paragraphs 3.0, 5.0.1, 7.0, and 7.2, where I show that the correlate of the effect of the mid-tone in producing down-drift and downstep is a lengthened normal pitch-interval between high and mid, by comparison with many cognate forms in the other dialects of Idoma-Yala. I point out that tonetically Yala (Ikom) \acute{o} múwā sounds like Yoruba \acute{o} já'de, where the lengthened interval is indeed produced by an elided low tone that may still be heard in some varieties of Yoruba. Thus \acute{o} já'de = \acute{o} jáàde, from \acute{o} já òde. But there is no evidence that such a thing happened in Yala (Ikom). The hypothesis that elided low tones underlie all those lengthened high-to-mid intervals would be quite lopsided, since it would imply that the low tones in question are spurlos versunken in the other dialects. It seems to me more economical simply to report the fact of the lengthened interval plus its effect in producing down-drift and downstep and to confess that on present evidence we do not know how this happened to happen.

It should be noted that from the very beginning, at the Ibadan Seminar in January, 1967, Dr. Elizabeth Dunstan queried the extension of the notion of "downstep" from environments of two equal tones (e.g. high plus high) to two unequal tones (e.g. high plus low). The second sentence of paragraph 6.0 and the decision to write "downstep" between quotation marks when it comes between high and low (paragraph 6.3) reflect this discussion. Not everybody is convinced yet, and I would claim nothing more than the convenience of expediency in what I have done.

When we meet new phenomena, we normally try to comprehend them with the older concepts that we already have, perhaps modifying or extending these in some way. The result may or may not be expedient. My doubts about "downstep" between high and low are expressed in 6.3. In 6.0, I suggest that we might consider the phenomenon from the point of view of its origin, calling it "latent non-high tone", or more briefly "latent tone". (So far as one can tell, high tone is never elided.) We could

then say that between two high and between two mid tones, latent tone produces a downstep; between high and low it blocks the normally expectable glide. We can show both situations with the same mark, e.g. an apostrophe, and call it a "latent tone". Other possible names seem to me less good. "Assimilated tone" seems counter-intuitive. "Elided or lost non-high tone syllable" implies more than we know on present evidence. (Cf. 6.3.1)

The reason for uniting the "blocking of the glide" with "downstep" is, firstly, that we have already had to extend the concept of downstep to include the lowering of successive mid tones, and secondly, that the same things that produce downstep between two highs or two mids also block the glide between high and low. E.g. kó' sósí! 'Let him cut the tree!' and kó' kwènyà! 'Let him run!' (6.3 and 6.3.1). For latent low before low, note òs'wò 'God'. (Parenthetically, it now seems likely that the first morpheme of òs'wò is not òsé 'king', but rather òsí, plural èsí 'tree, medicine' with vowel harmony. Note the saying in Central Idoma, "òwò'icò ècí" 'God is 'medicine''.)

While I have your attention, I should like to correct an unfortunate typographical mistake in line 22, page 55, of my article: for "appropriate" write "propitiate". In the spirit of Nabokov commenting on the text of Eugene Onegin, I should like to report that an etymologically literal translation of my prize sentence is, 'From time to time the penis and the vagina make the dead spirits.' ('Make' in the sense of 'invoke, propitiate'.)

