

Theory and description in African Linguistics

Selected papers from the 47th
Annual Conference on African
Linguistics

Edited by

Emily Clem

Peter Jenks

Hannah Sande

Contemporary African Linguistics

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Contemporary African Linguistics

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Part I

Phonetics and phonology

Chapter 1

A featural analysis of mid and downstepped high tone in Babanki

Pius W. Akumbu

University of Buea, Cameroon

In this study, I examine the occurrence of the surface Mid (M) and downstepped High (↓H) tone in Babanki, a Central Ring Grassfields Bantu language of Cameroon. Hyman (1979) has demonstrated that Babanki has two underlying tones, namely, High (H) and Low (L), and that on the surface, it contrasts three level tones, H, M, L, plus a downstepped High (↓H). There is also contrast between a falling (L) and a level low (Lo) tone before pause in the language. I demonstrate in this paper that the M tone is from two different phonological sources and derived by the regressive spread of the high register feature of a following H tone while ↓H is caused by the progressive spread of the low register feature of a preceding floating L tone. The M and ↓H tone are phonetically identical in the language but differ in that ↓H establishes a ceiling for following H tones within the same tonal phrase.

1 Introduction

Part of the complexity of tone in Grassfields Bantu (GB) languages of Northwest Cameroon such as Babanki (a Central Ring GB language) is the lack of correspondence between underlying and surface tones as well as the presence of many floating tones. There is no underlying M tone in Babanki, yet it occurs on the surface with the constraint that it must be followed by a H tone. Hyman (1979) has given a historical account of this M tone which is unnecessarily abstract as a synchronic analysis. I demonstrate in this paper that M tone results from the regressive spread of the [+R] feature of high tones which is blocked only by a nasal in NC initial roots. Downstep on its part results from the progressive spread of the [-R] feature of a floating L tone. The synchronic reanalysis of Babanki surface tones in this paper addresses the following issues: 1) What are the underlying

sources of the M tone? 2) How should the M tone be represented, as opposed to the downstepped H? I begin by illustrating in §2 that the lexical tones of Babanki are H and L even though a number of other tonal distinctions are found on the surface. I then proceed to examine the sources of M tone in the language in §3 before turning to discuss how the M tone is derived in §4. In §5, I provide evidence that both M and ↓H are phonetically identical and differ only in that the register is reset to high after M tone but not after ↓H which establishes a ceiling for future H tones within the same tonal phrase.

2 Babanki lexical tone

Babanki has two underlying tones, namely H and L, illustrated in (1). As a native speaker, I have provided most of the data but have also taken some from prior literature, particularly Hyman (1979) and a lexical database of 2,005 Babanki entries in Filemaker Pro™.¹

(1)

ndòŋ	‘potato’	ndónŋ	‘cup’
kà-bwìn	‘witchcraft’	kà-bwín	‘ridge’
à-sè	‘grave’	à-sé	‘profit(n)’
kà-mbò	‘bag’	kà-mbó	‘madness’

On the surface, however, several tonal realizations are possible. As noted by Hyman (1979: 160-161), there is a distinction between falling low (L) and level low (Lo) tones before pause as in (2):

(2)	L		L ^o	
kà-ntò	‘cross (n)’	kà-mbò ^o	‘bag’	/kà-mbò’/
nyàm	‘animal’	dzàm ^o	‘back’	/dzàm’/
tàn	‘five’	wàn ^o	‘child’	/wàn’/
à-sè	‘grave’	dzè ^o	‘kind of fruit’	/dzè’/

The level low tone is considered an effect of a floating high tone that follows the low tone and prevents it from falling. A mid (M) tone also occurs even though with an unusual constraint that it must be followed by a H tone:

¹The IPA symbols for the following orthographic symbols used in this paper are given in square brackets: ny [ɲ], sh [ʃ], zh [ʒ], gh [gʰ], ch [tʃ], j [dʒ], y [j].

- (3) a. káŋ fəsés²
 káŋ ' fə-sés
 fry IMP c19-pepper
 'fry pepper'
- b. kùmá kǎkí
 kùm ' kǎ-kí
 touch IMP c7-chair
 'touch a chair'
- c. ghá? kǎvú
 ghá? ' kǎ-vú
 hold IMP c7-hand
 'hold a hand'

The data show that the M **tone** is derived from a L **tone** found between two H tones as illustrated in §3.1 and discussed elaborately in §4. Finally, there is a downstepped H **tone** as in (4):

- (4) a. kǎ-fó` ↓kǎ nyàm
 kǎ-fó` kǎ nyàm
 c7-thing AM c9-animal
 'thing of animal'
- b. kǎmbó ↓kǎ wí?
 kǎ-mbó` kǎ wí?
 c7-madness AM c1.person
 'madness of person'
- c. kǎkǎŋ ↓kǎ byí shóm
 kǎ-kǎŋ` kǎ byí shóm
 c7-dish AM goat.c10 mine.c10
 'dish of my goats'

The data in (4) illustrate that the H **tone** of the associative marker (AM) is produced at a lower level than that of the preceding noun root because of the intervening floating L **tone**. This is discussed further and formalized in §5. The presence of both M and ↓H in the same language is of interest for two reasons. First, Babanki is unique in that Grassfields Bantu Ring languages are typically said to have either M or ↓H. As Hyman puts it:

²There is a change in the root vowel because in Babanki, /e/ and /o/ are realized as [ɛ] and [ɔ] respectively in closed syllables (Mutaka & Chie 2006: 75).

For example, it is known that the western **Ring** languages and **Babanki** (of the central **Ring** group) have similar downstep systems. The remaining languages of the central group (**Kom**, Bum, Bafmeng, Oku, Mbizinaku) all have systems with M **tone** instead of ↓H, a system which **Grebe & Grebe (1975)** have also documented for **Lamnsoq** of the eastern group (**Hyman 1979**: 176-177).

Second, although phonologically distinct, the M and ↓H tones are phonetically identical, as I shall show below, which is of particular interest to the study of **tone** in general. It is therefore necessary to examine how the M **tone** is derived and how it should be formally represented.

It is important to note that contour tones are rare in the language, allowed mainly in a few borrowed words. In the lexical database of 2,005 **Babanki** entries in Filemaker Pro™, only eight monosyllabic nouns with low-Rising (LH) and four with high-falling (HL) tones were found.³

3 Sources of Babanki M tone

The M **tone** is derived in **Babanki** from L via two separate processes which I will refer to as prefix L-Raising and stem L-Raising.

3.1 Prefix L-Raising: H # L-H → H # M-H

The L **tone** of a prefix is raised to M if it appears between two H tones as in the following examples.

- (5) a. tətóʔ tətáʔ
 tə-tóʔ tə-táʔ
 c13-bush c13-three
 ‘three bushes’
 b. kəkím kə vətśóŋ
 kə-kím kə vətśóŋ
 c7-crab AM c2-thief
 ‘crab of thieves’

³LH: *əŋkəpàm* ‘pig’, *bələŋ* ‘groundnut’, *fəndzöndzò* ‘type of bird’, *kəŋgũ* ‘fool (n)’, *mbwĩ* ‘nail’, *ŋgũ* ‘rake (n)’, *sə* ‘saw (n)’, *tələm* ‘cobra’.

HL: *bibi* ‘deaf’, *bôbô* ‘Lord’, *byâ* ‘pear’, *lâm* ‘lamp’, *kî* ‘key’, *chôs* ‘church’, *wâs* ‘watch’.

The presence of words like *sə* ‘saw (n)’, *lâm* ‘lamp’, etc. suggests that many of the **Babanki** words with contour tones are borrowings.

- c. tətʰ? tətò
tə-tó? tət-bò
c13-bush c13-two
'two bushes'
- d. kəkím ká vələmà
kə-kím ká vət-ləmà
c7-crab AM c2-sibling
'crab of siblings'

Raising applies in (5a) where the L is flanked by Hs but not in (5b) where it is followed by a L **tone**. I return to the issue in §4 to provide a featural analysis of the raising.

3.2 Stem L-Raising: L-L # H → L-M # H

In **Babanki**, the L **tone** of certain noun roots that also have a L prefix is realized as M if it is followed by a H **tone**. The following sets of data show stem L-Raising when the noun is in N1 position in an associative N1 of N2 construction (6a), when the noun is followed by a modifier (6b), and in verb phrases (6c). Forms without raising (i.e. with surface L **tone**) are given in (6d):

- (6) a. kəkʰs ká wì?
kə-kòs ká wì?
c7-slave AM c1.person
'slave of person'
- b. fəkʰ? fə nyàm
fə-kò? fə nyàm
c19-wood AM c9.animal
'wood of person'
- c. fəsò fə↓wén
fə-sò fə wén
c19-abscess AM him
'his abscess'
- d. kəkyē lá kəmù?
kə-kyè lá kə-mù?
c7-basket just c7-one
'just one basket'

- e. wyé kàzhwī tsú
wyé kà-zhwì tsú
put c7-air there
'inflate it'
- f. kú kàlāŋ lúwèn
kú kà-lāŋ lúwèn
give c7-cocoyam now
'give cocoyam now'
- g. nyàm à wì?
nyàm à wì?
c9.animal AM c1.person
'animal of person'
- h. kàkòs kà mù?
kà-kòs kà-mù?
c7-slave c7-one
'one slave'
- i. áshù kàlāŋ nè mú↓ú
á-shù kà-lāŋ nè múú
INF-wash c7-cocoyam PREP c6a.water
'to wash cocoyam with water'

To account for the raising in (6a-c), Hyman (1979: 168) offers a synchronic analysis which mirrors the historical developments, as in (7):

(7) kákòs ká → kákôs ká → kàkòs ká → kàkôs ká ...

As seen, the prefix originally had a H **tone** which spreads onto the L **tone** stem.⁴ After spreading, the prefix H changes to L and then the resulting L-HL # H sequence becomes L-M # H by contour simplification. While this historical account derives the correct output, it appears to be unnecessarily abstract as a synchronic analysis. Instead, the H **tone** on the prefix can rather be analyzed as L (Akumbu 2011) and the change from L to M can be accounted for as a raising rule (see §4). There is, however, a complication that either analysis must deal with: L-L nouns that have a nasal as part of the root initial NC do not become L-M before H as illustrated in (8):

⁴Hyman's pre-autosegmental analysis also posits a floating L after the L stem, i.e., /-kòs/ 'slave'. This is ignored here because it is unnecessary and also an OCP violation.

- (8) a. kèndòŋ ká nyàm
 kà-ndòŋ ká nyàm
 c7-neck AM c9.animal
 ‘neck of animal’
 b. tàŋkàŋ tá ŋkà?
 tà-ŋkàŋ tá ŋkà?
 c13-comb AM c1.rooster
 ‘combs of rooster’
 c. fàŋgàm fá wì?
 fà-ŋgàm fá wì?
 c19-gong AM c1.person
 ‘gong of person’

To account for this, Hyman (1979: 167) distinguished two classes of nouns based on whether the stem syllable has an oral (O) or nasal (N) onset and observed that “a noun in the O class changes from L-L to L-M when in the N1 position before a H **tone** associative marker. A noun in the N class ...remains L-L.” He illustrates that L-Raising is blocked when the N1 is from a nasal class and posits that “in N1 position, N L-L nouns and L-Lo nouns have an underlying L prefix, rather than the underlying H proposed for other noun prefixes” (Hyman 1979: 169). Since HTS does not occur, there is no L-HL # H sequence to become L-M # H. While that analysis is historically plausible, we can again propose a more concrete analysis by which L-Raising is simply blocked when a L **tone** root has an NC onset. As argued in Akumbu (2011: 9), there is a L **tone** linked to the N in NC sequences that blocks the raising. This is because in these cases, the nasal forms part of the root and bears the same L like the root vowel because of the OCP (Snider 1999) that is enforced morpheme-internally in Babanki. The multiple linking of the L (to the nasal and root vowel) violates the condition for raising, namely, that the **tone** that precedes the target L must be singly-linked (Akumbu 2011: 6). L-Raising will automatically not apply to L-L° nouns since they have a floating H after them that prevents raising from occurring. The fact that the roots in (8) all end with a nasal could be relevant in providing a possibility of tying the failure of L-Raising to apply to some phonetic motivation. A possibility might be that the extra nasal, an extra mora, gives the L **tone** more of a chance to manifest itself. If so, then we might expect the same if the stem has a long vowel (another manifestation of an extra mora). Unfortunately, Babanki does not have long vowels and two other problems exist: there are stems, e.g. fàŋgù? fá wì? ‘small stone of person’, without final nasal that do not also become M, as well as stems with final nasal, e.g. kàbūm

ká wì? ‘mucus of person’, that do in fact become M. So far, the two sources of M **tone** have been presented: prefix L becomes M between Hs and stem L becomes M when preceded by a L prefix and followed by a H. It should be noted that this occurs over a word boundary although it is still unclear what the influence of the boundary is. In addition, there is another context in which a stem L becomes M. This arises when a coda consonant is deleted intervocalically (see Akumbu 2016 and references cited therein for more information on coda deletion in Babanki). As seen in (9), when the CVC stem is H and the following prefix vowel is L, the H+L sequence resulting from coda deletion is realized M:

- (9) a. *kàbā: kóm*
 kà-bán à-kóm
 c7-corn.fufu c7-my
 ‘my corn fufu’
 b. *kàŋkō: kóm*
 kà-ŋkón à-kóm
 c7-fool c7-my
 ‘my fool’
 c. *kàbā: kóm*
 kà-báŋ à-kóm
 c7-home c7-my
 ‘my home’

I propose to account for this by invoking the prefix raising rule. Thus, in (9a) for example, the input /*kà-bán à-kóm*/ first undergoes prefix L-Raising to become *kà-bán ā-kóm*. Next, the coda consonant (alveolar or **velar nasal**) is deleted in intervocalic position, creating the structure *kà-bá ā-kóm*. This is followed by vowel (schwa) deletion which allows its M **tone** to float: *kà-bá⁻-kó*. The floating M **tone** docks leftwards and causes the deletion of the H **tone**, since HM contour tones are not permitted in the language. The vowel that causes **vowel deletion** then undergoes compensatory lengthening, resulting to the surface structure [*kàbā: kóm*].

4 Featural analysis of Babanki M tone

In this section I show that the M **tone** can be insightfully accounted for using tonal features which spread. Various proposals for the use of features in the representation and analysis of **tone** have been addressed by Yip (1980), Clements

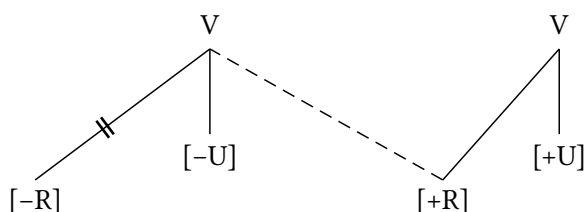
(1983), Pulleyblank (1986), Odden (1995), Snider (1999), Hyman (2011) and others. Following the **tone** features introduced by Yip (1980) and modified by Pulleyblank (1986), I assume the feature system in (10) for the two underlying Babanki tones:

(10)

	H	L
Upper	+	-
Raised	+	-

I propose that **Babanki** M **tone** be represented as [-U, +R] which can be derived directly from the leftwards spreading of the [+R] feature of a H **tone** to a preceding L **tone**, whose [-R] feature automatically delinks. I formulate the process in (11) where I link features directly to the TBUs even though there are arguments in the literature to link features to tonal nodes, e.g. Yip (1989) and Hyman (2011). This implies that linking features directly to TBUs is merely for expository convenience.

(11) Leftwards [+R] spread



It should be recalled that there are two different morphological restrictions on the application of this rule: the L **tone** that is raised must either be that of a prefix found between two H tones (§3.1) or of a stem preceded by a prefix L **tone** and followed by a H **tone** (§3.2). The first is an instance of **register** plateau where [-R] becomes [+R] between [+R] specifications. In both cases, the application of the rule results in a M **tone** with the features [-U, +R], as illustrated in the following derivations:

(12) UR		Leftwards [+R] spread	PR
tə- tóʔ tə- tsén		tə- tóʔ tə- tsén	[tətóʔ tət́sén]
	→	//	
[-R] [+R] [-R] [+R]		[-R] [+R] [-R] [+R]	

As shown in (15a), a H verb stem is realized as a downstepped H after the infinitive prefix. Downstep can be accounted for by assuming that the H tone schwa of the infinitive prefix is followed by a floating L. The presence of this floating L tone is justified by the fact that the H tone of the verb root is realized on a lower register than the preceding H tone. When the H tone prefix is followed by a L tone verb, the verb tone does not change (15b). These data are analyzed as involving ↓H as opposed to the previous cases analyzed as involving M specifically because it is shown, subsequently (see Figure 1), that ↓H sets a new ceiling for subsequent Hs producing a terracing effect as opposed to M which results from the local raising of L and is obligatorily followed by H.

In the noun system, certain H tone stems have a following floating L tone in their underlying representation. Evidence has been presented that in Babanki, “class 7 nouns fall into three subclasses, A, B, C [corresponding to (16a, b, c)] which behave differently in context” (Hyman 1979: 163-164).⁵ Hyman illustrates the distinction between the three using noun-plus-noun (N1 of N2) associative constructions (AM). When H tone roots are in N1 position and are followed by the H tone of the AM, the latter is lowered to ↓H after A and B, but not C. Secondly, when in N2 position after a L toned AM, A and C become L-Lo, while B remains L-H. Finally, when in N2 position after the H toned AM, A becomes H-Lo, while B and C become H-↓H.

As said above, A and B cause the following H tone of the AM to be realized at a lower level than the preceding root H tone (16a,b):

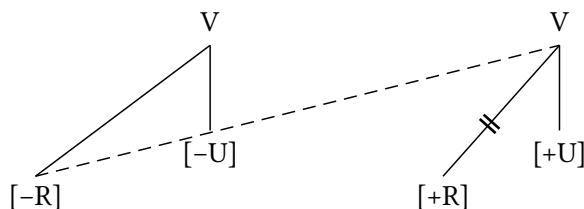
- (16) a. kàfó ↓ká wì?
 kà-fó` ká wì?
 c7-thing AM c1.person
 ‘thing of person’
- b. kàkáj ↓ká ndòŋ
 kà-káj` ká ndòŋ
 c7-tin AM c1.potato
 ‘tin of potato’
- c. kàfú ↓ká wì?
 kà-fú` ká wì?
 c7-medicine AM c1.person
 ‘medicine of person’

⁵The historical origins of the different classes adopted synchronically by Hyman (1979) were: A = *LH, B = *HL, C = *HH.

- d. kətyí ↓kə nyàm
kə-tyí kə nyàm
c7-stick AM c9.animal
'stick of animal'
- e. kəkím kə kə ↓kú
kə-kím kə kə-kú
c7-crab AM c7-gift
'crab of gift'
- f. kəshí kə kə ↓tən
kə-shí kə kə-tən
c7-place AM c7-belt
'place of belt'

Downstep of the AM H **tone** is best explained by the presence of a floating L **tone** on N1 noun roots. Hyman's class C nouns (16c) do not cause downstep of the following H **tone** of the associative marker because they do not have a floating **tone** in their underlying representation. The forms in (16c) further show that the H **tone** of the AM spreads rightwards and delinks the L **tone** of the prefix of N2 nouns. It is this floating L **tone** that causes downstep of the H **tone** of N2 noun roots. Its [−R] feature spreads rightwards and delinks the [+R] feature of the following H **tone** as follows:

(17) Rightwards [-R] spread (Downstep)

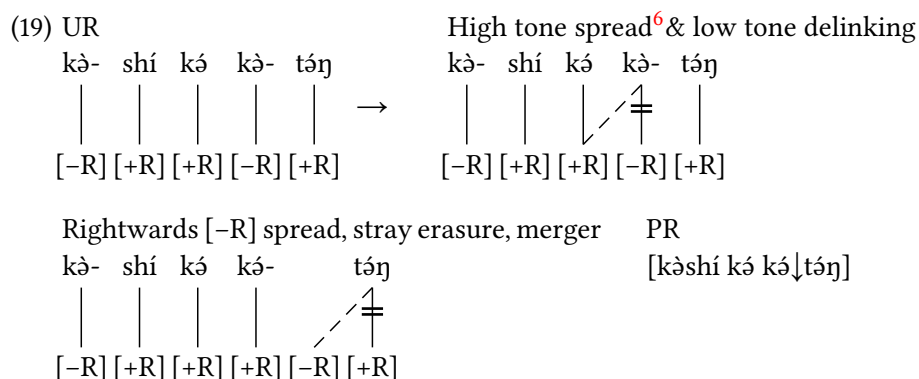


The application of this rule yields a $\downarrow\text{H}$ **tone** with the features [+U, -R], as illustrated in the following derivations:

- (18) UR Rightwards [-R] spread & stray erasure PR
- kə- fó kə wi? kə- fó kə wi?
- | | | | | | | |
- [-R] [+R] [-R] [+R] [-R] [-R] [+R] [-R] [+R] [-R]
- [kəfó ↓ kə wi?]

figures/fig-akumbu-1.png

Figure 1: Downstep



Each [+U, -R], i.e., ↓H, sets a new ceiling for subsequent Hs such that H tones after the one downstepped in the same tonal phrase do not rise above it as seen in (20), where italics have been used to indicate downstep of all Hs following H:

- (20) kàkán ↓ká byí shóm ‘dish of my goats’
nyám ↓sá wén shí sá ‘those animals of his’

The pitch traces in Figure 1 show lower F0 values (120Hz-125Hz) for all the H tones after ↓H compared to the F0 value of the H **tone** before ↓H which is

⁶I have shown only the spread of [+R] here but it must be said that it is the entire **tone** root node that spreads both [+U,+R] and delinks [-U,-R] of the L **tone**.

approximately 138Hz (In this and subsequent Figures, vowels are demarcated by vertical lines and marked by **tone** labels (L, H, M, ↓H) on the second tier.)⁷

We are now in a position to complete the tonal feature matrix to accommodate the downstepped high **tone**.⁸

(21)

	H	↓H	M	L
Upper	+	+	-	-
Raised	+	-	+	-

An issue this raises is whether the M **tone** [-U, +R] and the ↓H **tone** [+U, -R] are phonetically distinguishable from one another. Hyman (1979: 162) has observed that “...the sequence H-M is identical, phonetically, to the sequence H-↓H.” He further states that “the two are distinguishable, however, since ↓H establishes a ceiling for future H tones within the same tonal phrase, while M does not.” The two tones therefore differ only in that they come from separate sources as well as on the effect they have on subsequent H tones. The pitchtracks in Figure 2 show that M and ↓H are not phonetically distinguishable.

In both phrases, the F0 of vowels with M and ↓H tones are around 120 Hz while the intervening H **tone** has an F0 of about 135 Hz, confirming that M and ↓H are phonetically very similar, particularly if all other factors surrounding the utterance are the same. It is not likely that the two tones are discriminable if they typically exhibit this small F0 difference. The phonetic sameness of Mid and downstepped H is not unique to Babanki as it has been reported in other languages e.g. Bimoba (Snider 1998).

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show that the phonetic pitch levels of H tones differ slightly depending on whether the preceding **tone** is M or ↓H. These pitchtracks show that a M **tone** may be followed by a H **tone** whereas the H tones following ↓H, are pronounced at the same level as the ↓H. Figure 3 shows that the F0 of vowels with H **tone** is about 126 Hz, slightly higher than the F0 of vowels with ↓H in Figure 4 which is about 120 Hz.

⁷The pitch traces used in this paper were obtained from recordings of the author’s speech at the Phonology Laboratory at UC Berkeley and analyzed in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2016).

⁸The matrix is said to be complete because although Babanki has two contrastive underlying **tone** heights but five in derived forms, I do not treat the fifth - the prepausal level low **tone** as separate phonological **tone** features because I analyze it as the late phonetic effect of a floating high **tone** that follows the low **tone** and prevents it from falling.

figures/fig-akumbu-2a.png

figures/fig-akumbu-2b.png

Figure 2: Comparison between M and ↓H

figures/fig-akumbu-3a.png

Figure 3: Comparison of H tone following M

figures/fig-akumbu-3b.png

Figure 4: Comparison of H tone following ↓H

6 Conclusion

Although there is no underlying M tone in Babanki, it appears on the surface when a prefix or stem L tone is raised in two separate conditions: prefix L-Raising takes place if it is found between two H tones while stem-Raising takes place if preceded by a L prefix and followed by a H tone. I have given a synchronic account of the processes that derive the M tone, arguing that it results from the regressive spreading of the [+R] feature of high tones which is blocked only by a nasal in NC initial roots. Downstep on its part results from the progressive spread of [-R] feature of a floating L tone. Simple acoustic analyses have confirmed that both M and ↓H are realized with similar F0 levels.

It was stated above that the other Central Ring languages such as Kom have a much more general M tone (see Hyman 2005), while Western Grassfields Bantu languages instead have a downstepped ↓H. Babanki is unusual in having both M and ↓H. However, whereas the source of the M in other Central Ring languages is from an underlying /H/ that is lowered after a L, we have seen that Babanki creates output Ms from underlying /L/. Although Hyman's (1979: 166-168) account is unnecessarily abstract as a synchronic analysis, it clearly shows that M tone originates to avoid tonal ups and downs (Hyman 2010: 15). In particular, it is meant to avoid tonal contours surrounded by the opposite tone. As we have seen, unlike most other Ring languages, Babanki has rid itself of nearly all contours, but has developed a M tone level that is phonetically identical to ↓H, but phonologically distinct.

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Abbreviations

AM	associative (possessive) marker	INF	infinitive
c1-19	class Marker	n	noun
IMP	imperative	PREP	preposition

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Part II

Syntax and semantics

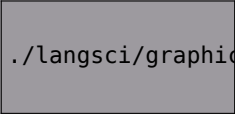
Part III

Areal features and linguistic reconstruction

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