

**A Comparative Study of Tone of West Ugandan Bantu Languages,
with Particular Focus on the Tone Loss in Tooro**

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0. Introduction

In Western Uganda, some closely related Bantu languages such as Ankole, Kiga, Tooro and Nyoro are spoken. These languages plus Haya of Tanzania which is spoken to the south of Ankole are sometimes referred to as Kitara (using the old name of Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom) as a group. However, when we look at the tone system of these languages, we easily notice some striking differences. The most particular is the fact that Tooro has completely lost its original tonal distinction, where the penultimate syllable of the word is always high-pitched in isolation., whereas Haya, and also Ankole to a certain point, retains a relatively old system, in which the disyllabic -HL, -LH and -LL noun stems are differentiated. Nyoro which is spoken to the north of Tooro shows an intermediate stage; it has two patterns only, namely penultimate high-toned (...HL) and final high-toned (...LH) patterns.



The aim of this paper is to try to explain how the Tooro system, which phonologically lacks tone, has come into being, by examining comparatively the tone system of each language itself and also by closely looking at the differences which exist between the Haya, Ankole and Nyoro systems (Kiga data insufficient) in order to look for phonetic reasons of the tone changes.

Generally speaking the tone system becomes simpler as we proceed from south to north. This may have something to do with the fact that this group of Bantu languages is the northern most one of this area and to the north of it Nilotic languages like Acholi, Lango and Alur are spoken. In this paper, however, we will look for internal causes of tone simplification, putting aside external factors of language contact.

1. Haya

The characteristics of Haya tone include the following¹:

1. The Haya tone system is the oldest among these languages.
2. There are words which have no high (...ss).
3. If a word has high tone, it appears only in one syllable underlyingly (...sšssss, ...sšsss, ...sšss, ...sšs, ...sš).
4. Underlying distinctions are kept in isolation.
5. When the possessive adjective *-ange* “my” qualifies a noun, a syntactic H is inserted.

The Haya tone and its phonetic realization are illustrated in 1.1. The nouns are arranged according to the

¹ See Byarushengo et al. (1976) for more details.

5. In the noun phrase construction with the possessive adjective *-anje* “my”, a syntactic H is inserted only when the noun has no high tone, thus avoiding low flat configurations.
6. In a number of words high tone is lost in comparison with Haya.

2.1. one-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| a. omu-zi 3,4 | root | cf. omuzi gwanje 3 “my root” |
| b. omú-si 3,4 | vein, nerve | cf. omusí gwanje 3 “my veine” |

2.2. two-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------|------------------------------------|
| a. omu-hara 1,2 | daughter | cf. omu-hará wanje 1 “my daughter” |
| b. ama-ríra 6 | mourning | cf. amarirá ganje 6 “my mourning” |
| c. omu-káma 1,2 | king | cf. omukáma wanje 1 “my king” |

2.3. three-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|---|
| a. aka-gobora 12,14 | elephant tusk | cf. akagoborá kanje 12 “my elephant tusk” |
| b. eci-tentére 7,8 | young hen | cf. ecitenteré canje 7 “my young hen” |
| c. oru-tongána 11,10 | index finger | cf. orutongána rwanje 11 “my index finger” |
| d. aka-tádoaba 12,14 | hand-made lamp | cf. akatádoaba kanje 12 “my hand-made lamp” |
| e. ebi-runjire 8 | sauce | cf. ebirunjire byanje 8 “my sauce” |

2.4. four-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|--|
| a. aka-hungabebe 12,14 | termite | cf. akahungabebé kanje 12 “my termite” |
| b. oru-tofóeréra 11,10 | drizzle | cf. orutofóererá rwanje 11 “my drizzle” |
| c. aka-samuóiga 12,14 | skunk | cf. akasamuóiga kanje 12 “my skunk” |
| d. eci-gungúniro 7,8 | threshed corncob | cf. ecigungúniro canje 7 “my threshed corncob” |
| e. eci-síjisiro 7,8 | small clay pot | cf. ecisíjisiro canje 7 “my small clay pot” |

2.5. five-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| a. oku-siftagirira 15 | crashing with feet | cf. okusiftagirirá kwanje 15 “my crashing” |
| b. VCV-CVCVCVCV̄CV | no examples | |
| c. VCV-CVCVCVCV̄CV | no examples | |
| d. VCV-CVCVCV̄CVCV | no examples | |
| e. VCV-CVCV̄CVCVCV | no examples | |
| f. en-táfgurukane 9,10 | crossroads | cf. entáfgurukane yanje 9 “my crossroads” |

2.6. words with a penultimate long syllable

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. eki-jífko (*eki-jífko) 7,8 | spoon | cf. ekijífko kyanje 7 “my spoon” |
| b. eki-tófma (*eki-tófma) 7,8 | bark cloth | cf. ekitófma kyanje 7 “my bark cloth” |
| c. e-túftu (*e-túftu) 9,10 | sweat | cf. etúftu yanje 9 “my sweat” |

3. Tooro

The characteristics of Nyoro tone include the following.

1. Tooro has lost its lexical tone.² All nouns are pronounced with high tone on the penultimate syllable in isolation (...sss).
2. H tone in isolation disappears when the noun is followed by the possessive adjective *-ánge* “my”, which has a high tone.

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 3.1 one-syllable stem words | omú-ti 3,4 | tree | cf. omuti gwánge 3 “my tree” |
| 3.2. two-syllable stem words | omu-kázi 1,2 | woman, wife | cf. omukazi wánge 1 “my wife” |

² Tone still fulfills grammatical functions in Tooro. See Kaji (2009).

3.3. three-syllable stem words	omu-gurúsi 1,2	old man	cf. omugurusi wáŋge 1 “my old man”
3.4. four-syllable stem words	omu-rolefrézi 1,2	bishop	cf. omurolefrézi wáŋge 1 “my bishop”
3.3. five-syllable stem words	obu-junaŋnizibwa 14	responsibility	cf. obujunaŋnizibwa bwáŋge 14 “my responsibility”

4. Nyoro

The characteristics of Nyoro tone include the following.

1. Nyoro has two tone patterns underlyingly regardless of the length of the word (...s̄s, ...s̄s̄).
2. There are no low flat words (...ss).
3. The underlying H is realized as F in isolation.
4. High tone anticipation is remarkable.
5. The underlying H and the anticipated H remain H even when followed by the possessive adjective *-áŋge* “my”, which has a high tone.

4.1. one-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| a. omú-tí 3,4 | tree | cf. omútí gwáŋge 3 “my tree” |
| b. obû-ne 14 | liver | cf. obúne bwáŋge 3 “my liver” |

4.2. two-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| a. eki-gérê 7,8 | foot | cf. ekigéré kyáŋge 7 “my foot” |
| b. ama-zíga 6 | tears | cf. amazíga gáŋge 6 “my tears” |

4.3. three-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|---|
| a. obu-horókô 14 | chicken lice | cf. obuhorókó bwáŋge 14 “my chicken lice” |
| b. omu-gúrúsi 1,2 | old man | cf. omugúrúsi wáŋge 1 “my old man” |

4.4. four-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|
| a. e-ŋamunúŋgû 9,10 | porcupine | cf. eŋamunúŋgû yáŋge 9 “my porcupine” |
| b. oru-kanakâna 11,10 | dewdrop | cf. orukanakâna lwáŋge 11 “my dewdrop” |

4.5. five-syllable stem words

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|--|
| a. aka-gongabahárâ 12,14 | wagtail | cf. akagongabahárâ káŋge 12 “my wagtail” |
| b. eki-tabujúgûta 7,8 | civet sp. | cf. ekitabujúgûta kyáŋge 7 “my civet” |

5. Comparison of Haya, Ankole, Nyoro and Tooro

There are several patterns of tonal correspondence between Haya, Ankole and Nyoro, but the following three from (5.1) to (5.3) with examples of two-syllable stem nouns are the most numerous. Note that whereas the original patterns -HL and -LH are kept differentiated in Nyoro, the -LL pattern has received high tone on the penultimate syllable, a default position in Bantu (?). The result is that there are only two patterns in Nyoro, namely the -HL pattern and the -LH pattern.

Haya	Ankole	Nyoro	Tooro	
5.1. -HL	-HL	-HL	-HL	
a. amazíga 6	amazíga 6	amazíga 6	amazíga 6	tears
b. olulími 11,10	orurími 11,10	orulími 11,10	orulími 11,10	tongue
c. embúzi 9,10	embúzi 9,10	embúzi 9,10	embúzi 9,10	goat
5.2. -LL	-LL	-HL	-HL	
a. omumíro 3,4	omumíro 3,4	omúmíro 3,4	omumíro 3,4	throat
b. ekiŋóŋi 7,8	ekiŋóŋi 7,8	ekiŋóŋi 7,8	ekiŋóŋi 7,8	bird

c. eɲama 9,10	eɲama 9,10	eɲâma 9,10	eɲâma 9,10	meat
5.3. -LH	-LH	-LH	-HL	
a. etáfba 9	etáfba 9	etáfâba 9	etáfba 9	tobacco
b. ebitSwánta 8	amatSwánte 6	ebitSwántâ 8	ebitSwánta 8	spit
c. eméfza 9,10	eméfza 9,10	eméfzâ 9,10	eméfza 9,10	table

As for patterns with an original high tone before the antepenultimate syllable, we note that high tone has moved to the penultimate syllable. This also confirms the fact that Nyoro has only two patterns, ...HL and ...LH.

Haya	Ankole	Nyoro	Tooro	
5.4. ...HLL	...HLL	...LHL	...LHL	
a. enkókola 9,10	enkókora 9,10	enkókôra 9,10	enkokéra 9,10	elbow
b. omutábani 1,2	omutábani 1,2	omutábâni 1,2	omutabáni 1,2	son
c. omusígazi 1,2	omusígazi 1,2	omusígâzi 1,2	omusigázi 1,2	male youth
5.5. ...HLLL	...HLLL	...LLHL	...LHL	
a.	oruzíramere 11,10	enzirámîra 9,10	enzirmíra 9,10	python
b. ekikálakamba 7,8		ekigaragâmba 7,8	(ekikarakáfta 7,8)	scale

There are other types of correspondence between Haya, Ankole and Nyoro, like those listed from (5.6) to (5.9) though their examples are not numerous. The examples in (5.6) are a different development from those in (5.1) in which Nyoro reflexes are -HL. Also, the examples in (5.7) show a different development from those in (5.2) in which Nyoro reflexes are -HL. The examples in (5.8) and (5.9) indicate that it is rather Ankole which has deviated from the normal development. Especially, it is interesting to note that in (5.8) Ankole has lost H in otherwise H-toned words. We also note that in all these examples Nyoro reflexes are the -LH pattern.

Haya	Ankole	Nyoro	Tooro	
5.6. -HL	-HL	-LH	-HL	
a. ekijíko 7,8	ekijíko 7,8	ekijífkô 7,8	ekigífkô 7,8	spoon
b. engáta 9,10	engáta 9,10	engátâ 9,10	engáta 9,10	headpad
c. ekitébe 7,8	ekitébe 7,8	entébé 9,10	entébe 9,10	chair
5.7. -LL	-LL	-LH	-HL	
a. olugino 11,10	engino 9,10	engúnû 9,10	engúnu 9,10	gum
b. omuguwa 3,4	omuguha 3,4	omugúhâ 3,4	omugúha 3,4	rope
c. olubafo 11,10	orubafo 11,10	orubáfhô 11,10	orubáfo 11,10	board, plank, timber
5.8. -LH	-LL	-LH	-HL	
a. omuhára 1,2	omuhara 1,2	omuhárâ 1,2	omuhára 1,2	daughter
b. ekigéle 7,8	ekijere 7,8	ekigérê 7,8	ekigère 7,8	foot, sole
c. empúnu 9,10	empunu 9,10	empúnû 9,10	empúnu 9,10	pig
5.9. -LH	HL	-LH	-HL	
a. engége 9,10	enjéje 9,10	engégyê 9,10	engége 9,10	tilapia
b. ekiSúSu 7,8	ekiSúSu 7,8	ekisúsû 7,8	ekisúsu 7,8	bark
c. eikópo 5,6	ekikópo 7,8	ekikópô 7,8	ekikópo 7,8	cup

6. Step from Nyoro to Tooro

As we confirmed in the previous section, Nyoro has only two patterns: ...HL and ...LH. Only one step is

necessary to arrive from the Nyoro stage at the Tooro stage, which always has high tone in the penultimate syllable in isolation, namely merger of the ...HL and ...LH patterns. This merger must have happened by changing the ...LH pattern to the ...HL pattern. This may happen without much difficulty if we consider the phonetic realizations of these two patterns. The ...LH pattern, which realizes as ...HF in isolation in Nyoro but sometimes heard as ...HL and in fact it realizes as ...HL in Ankole. The ...HL pattern realizes as ...HF in isolation in Nyoro but heard sometimes as ...HL and it in fact is ...HL in Ankole in isolation when the H-toned syllable is a short one.

7. Summary by way of conclusion

In Haya, with the oldest system, the underlying ...LH and ...HL patterns are differentiated even in isolation, but the difference between their respective phonetic realizations ...HL and ...FL is slight (see for example, 1.2.b. *eki-zíla* 7,8 “prohibition” and 1.2.c. *omu-káma* 1,2 “king”). In Ankole, these two patterns are differentiated underlyingly as in Haya, but when the penultimate H-toned syllable is short they are pronounced in the same way in isolation (see for example 2.2.b. *ama-ríra* 6 “mourning” and 2.2.c. *omu-káma* 1,2 “king”).

In Nyoro we note one big change, namely that all the patterns except the ...LH have become ...HL (except some exceptions). In particular the ...LL pattern has become ...HL (cf. 5.2.), with the result that Nyoro has only two patterns, that is ...HL and ...LH. The Tooro state can be reached by one step from Nyoro by changing the underlying...LH to ...HL. This change must have been realized without much difficulty if we consider the subtlety or sameness of the phonetic difference between these two patterns, namely ...FL and ...HF in Nyoro and ...HL in Ankole.

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