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TONE AND THE VERBAL SYSTEMS OF NYOKON

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of the formal aspects of the verbal paradigms of Nyokon, a Cameroonian Bantu language (A45). The language has a rich system of 22 non-negative verbal paradigms expressing tense, aspect and mood, and additional negative constructions. The paradigms are built on a TAM word with segmental and tonal properties in association with the choice of which set of subject pronouns to use and which shape of the verb stem to use. Verbs appear in two possible shapes; one of which contains a petrified suffix which is etymologically related to the Bantu **-a(n)g* imperfective or pluractional suffix. A crucial property of each verbal paradigm is the position of the full object: for certain paradigms, this position is before the verb contrary to the general pattern in Bantu which tends to be strictly VO for full objects; in other paradigms, the object must occur after the verb; a third group allows both orders. Negative constructions have a clause final clitic. Nyokon is a tonal language and the article discusses the basic tonal rules that are needed for an analysis of the verbal paradigms. The analysis of any sentence in Nyokon requires an understanding of the verbal paradigm and to which verbal paradigm it belongs. Therefore, this article aims at providing the groundwork for further analyses of Nyokon. The emphasis is on the formal characteristics of the verbal paradigms while a substantial analysis of the semantics and functional distinctions of these paradigms awaits the next study, for which the labels used for the various paradigms here only function as first approximations.

Keywords: Bantu, Cameroun, conjugation, TAM, Object-Verb Order,

Resumé

L'article donne un aperçu des aspects formels des paradigmes verbaux du Nyokon, une langue bantoue camerounaise (A45). La langue possède un riche système de 22 paradigmes verbaux non-négatifs exprimant le temps, l'aspect et la modalité, ainsi que des constructions négatives supplémentaires. Les paradigmes sont construits sur un mot TAM avec des propriétés segmentales et tonales en association avec le choix de l'ensemble des pronoms sujets à utiliser et de la forme du radical du verbe à utiliser. Les verbes apparaissent sous deux formes possibles, dont l'une contient un suffixe pétri qui est étymologiquement lié au suffixe imperfectif ou pluractionnel bantou **-a(n)g*. Une propriété cruciale de chaque paradigme verbal est la position de l'objet complet : pour certains paradigmes, cette position est avant le verbe, contrairement au modèle général en bantou qui tend à être strictement VO pour les objets complets ; dans d'autres paradigmes, l'objet doit se trouver après le verbe ; un troisième groupe permet les deux ordres. Les constructions négatives ont un clitique final de phrase. Le Nyokon est une langue tonale et l'article discute des règles tonales de base qui sont nécessaires pour une analyse des paradigmes verbaux. L'analyse de toute phrase en Nyokon nécessite la compréhension du paradigme verbal. Par conséquent, cet article vise à fournir les bases pour des analyses ultérieures du Nyokon. L'accent est mis sur les caractéristiques formelles des paradigmes verbaux, tandis qu'une analyse substantielle de la sémantique et des distinctions fonctionnelles de ces paradigmes attend une prochaine étude, pour laquelle les étiquettes utilisées pour les différents paradigmes ici ne fonctionnent que comme des premières approximations.

Mots Clefs: Bantu, Cameroun, conjugaison, TAM, ordre des mots

Muhtasari

Makala yanatoa muhtasari wa vitenzi vya Nyokon, lugha ya Kibantu ya Kikameruni (A45). Lugha ina mfumo tajiri wa wakati zaidi ya 22. Wakati hujengwa juu ya neno la TAM lenye sauti na toni, kwa kuhusishwa na uchaguzi wa seti ya viwakilishi vya somo na umbo lipi la shina la kitenzi litumike. Vitenzi huonekana katika maumbo mawili yanayowezekana; kimojawapo kina kiambishi tamati ambacho kinahusiana kimaadili na kiambishi tamati cha Kibantu **-a(n)g*. Sifa muhimu ya kila wakati ni nafasi ya kitu: kwa dhana fulani nafasi hii iko mbele ya kitenzi kinyume na muundo wa jumla katika Kibantu ambao huelekea kuwa VO kwa vitu; katika wakati nyingine kitu lazima kitokee baada ya kitenzi; kikundi cha tatu kinaruhusu maagizo yote mawili. Miundo hasi ina clitic ya mwisho ya kifungu. Nyokon ni lugha ya toni na makala inajadili kanuni za msingi za toni ambazo zinahitajika kwa uchanganuzi wa wakati. Uchanganuzi wa sentensi yoyote katika Nyokon unahitaji uelewa wa vitenzi na wakati zao. Kwa hivyo, makala haya yanalenga kutoa msingi wa uchanganuzi zaidi wa Nyokon. Mkazo ni juu ya sifa rasmi za vielezi vya maneno huku uchanganuzi mkubwa wa semantiki na tofauti za kiuamilifu za dhana hizi unangoja utafiti unaofuata, ambao lebo zinazotumiwa kwa dhana mbalimbali hapa hufanya kazi tu kama makadirio ya kwanza.

1. Introduction¹

Nyokon (autonym *nɪjɔ́'ɔ*) is a Bantu language (A.45) spoken in Nyokon and Makenene in the Mbam region of Cameroon. This article presents an overview of the formal properties of

¹ I wish to thank Viviane Kigno Abwa-Yah for sharing her insights on her mother tongue with me. It was our intention to write this article together. Unfortunately, later discussions were impossible due to unforeseen circumstances, and it became impossible to put her name as co-author on the article as I would have wished because responsibility on the contents including any mistakes can solely be on me. In the spirit of our co-operation in which we were both analysing linguists, I use the first-person plural pronoun in the text of the article. We would like to thank Dr. Emmanuel Ngue Um for arranging the contact, Prof. Chumbow for making his desk available, Dr. Pius Tamanji for his pleasant support sharing the office, Joseph Lovestrand for making his materials and his

the verbal system of this little-studied language. It is based on two weeks of cooperation at Yaounde University in the summer of 2012 with Viviane Kigno Abwa-Yah, a mother tongue speaker of the language and, at the time, a Linguistics student at the University of Yaounde and at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. We collected three texts: a tale, a recipe, and the telling of the frog-tale cartoon (Meyer 1969), in addition to an extensive discussion of sentences (made up or translated) without context, some of them unnatural but useful for establishing form properties; we used the texts as input for establishing meaning. The article concentrates on the formal aspects of the tense system and is doubtlessly incomplete. Lovstrand (2011) presents an overview of the phonology.² An initial analysis of nominal morphology is presented Yde (n.d.).

Recurrent elements are tone on the verb stem, choices in the form of the subject pronoun, the choice between simple verb stem or an *-a'* extended stem, the presence of a specific auxiliary, presence or absence of a clause final element. What makes Nyokon quite unique as a Bantu language is the fact that in some tenses the full noun object can occur before the verb. Bantu languages by and large place a full object after the verb. In Mous (2014) a tentative historical scenario for this surprising word order in Nyokon and in its closest relative and neighbour, Tunen, is offered; as well as a detailed comparison of the commonalities and major differences between the word order properties of these two languages.

The paper is organised as follows: We first present the building blocks of verbal paradigms and an overview of all the verbal paradigms in section 2. Then we discuss all verbal paradigms in groups, starting with the simplest one, the imperative, section 3. In section 4 we discuss the paradigms that are most complex in terms of tonal changes and that lack a segmental TAM marker, including the general Present and several Past tenses. Having introduced the tonal properties, we delve into the paradigms with a TAM marker in section 5, starting with the Perfect. In section 6 we discuss complex verbal paradigms that involve the verb 'to be'. Followed by verbal paradigms with special structures, a subject pronoun after the TAM marker in the Future, 7.1, and a combination of TAM markers for the Narrative, 7.2. In section 8, we present the focus paradigms that have a different shape of their subject marker. Section 9 deals with the procedural tenses which require an infinitival form of the verb. The negative paradigms are given in section 10. After the discussion of all the tenses, we offer an overview of the Preverbs that can occur in any of the tenses, section 11. And finally in section 12, an overview of the properties of the object position which is a particularly interesting feature of Nyokon with its option of pre-verbal full objects.

2. Basic structure of the verbal paradigm

The construction for the various conjugational paradigms of the verb consists of a TAM marker and changes to the verb. The Subject precedes the TAM marker and the object is either between the TAM marker and the Verb or after the verb. Some tenses require a clause final element, here termed Final. The verb may be preceded by a limited set of preverbal markers which are verbal in nature and can in principle occur with any tense; formulated differently, these so-called Preverbs are independent of the TAM marker and the paradigm. This structure is represented in the following scheme, (1), after which we briefly introduce each of the constituting elements in turn.

(1) Scheme of tense marking structure

Subject TAM (Object) preverb=V+ (Object) X =Final

phonology paper available to us. I am very grateful for the insightful and meticulous comments by two anonymous reviewers.

² Our representation differs slightly because the speech of the second author is slightly different (glottal stop where Lovstrand and Barreteau have voiced pharyngeal fricatives, no devoicing of the word final trill as in Lovstrand 2011: footnote 8) and we decided to give the representation at the systematic phonetic level, writing the voiced velar fricative which is analysed as an allophone of /w/ (Lovstrand 2011).

The scheme is different from the verb structure in core Bantu in the fact the subject marker and the TAM marker are separate words and that they do not form one word with the verb stem. Such a looser structure is typical for North-West Bantu languages (Nurse 2008:70).

2.1 Elements of building verbal paradigms

Subject: The nominal subject can be replaced by a subject pronoun. In most tenses it is impossible to have a pronoun in addition to a nominal subject, i.e., there is a pro-drop; with the exception that in the future tense and in the subjunctive the pronoun is always present and can appear in addition to a full subject noun phrase (no pro-drop). Some tenses have a tonal TAM marker. If it consists of a High-tone, this tone docks on the final syllable of the subject. If it consists of a Low tone, it only does so for the singular subject pronouns, see section 3.3 for an overview of pronouns. Subject pronouns agree to some extent with the noun class of the subject but this is severely reduced. Therefore, we use the gloss 3SG/PL rather than a class indication in the later examples throughout the paper.

TAM-marking: Many forms are attested in this slot: **nǎ**, **nà**, **mbie** (in three different tonal shapes), **maa**, **pi**, **nəkə** and **nəku** with various tones, **me**, etc. These are separate words. Some of them double as copula or verb “to be”. The verb ‘to be’ **mbie** is similar to such a verb, **m̀b̀b̀** in neighbouring Medumba Bamileke (Kandem 2020:144). Otherwise, the TAM markers are quite different from those of neighbouring and related Tunen as well as from neighbouring Bamileke languages. Some differ from each other in a tonal pattern only and we take each of those as a separate form. Some tenses do not have a segmental TAM marker; these require tonal realisations on the verb stem (and sometimes on the subject). A more abstract analysis could consider these realisations as tonal TAM markers.

Verb shapes: Verbs undergo two kinds of changes in the tenses. One is their tonal shape mentioned above, and the second is the addition of the **-à**’ suffix in one of its many manifestations; this suffix is glossed as κ. In fact, the morphophonology involving the suffix is so complex that the most efficient analysis seems to us to assume two verb-stem variants: one with and one without **à**’. Additionally, there are two basic tone patterns in addition to the underlying tone of the lexical verb. These are the Present tense tone pattern,³ and the Past tense tone pattern. The underlying tone shows up in the infinitive of the verb stem, which is formed by the prefix **ù-**. Most verb stems are monosyllabic and they fall into three tonal groups: H, L, HL.

Object position is also a factor to take into consideration. Some tenses do not allow the object to precede the verb. This is indicated by (N) in the penultimate column of Table 1. The Present tense has a special tonal shape for when an object follows.

Final All negative tenses require a clause final **á**. This is not the common Bantu final vowel of the verb form; it rather occurs as a clitic as the last element in the clause. Since it is required by the negative tenses, we consider it as yet another element to build a specific tense.

Preverb. In addition, and somewhat independent of the tenses, there are a number of preverbal aspectual markers; these are discussed in section 17. As they are independent additional aspectual markers they are not treated as building elements of the distinguished tenses.

Table 1 presents an overview of the Nyokon tenses, their labels, their realisation schema and their value for these building elements. The order represents the order in which they are discussed.

³ The Present tense has two different tone patterns. The standard tone pattern here labelled with Present tense tone pattern is the one when the object precedes the verb, the most common pattern. The Present tense has a different tone pattern for when an object follows. Details can be found in section 4.1.

label	schema	TAM marker	verb stem	OV	remarks	section
Imperative	V\H	-		N		3
Present	V:K +T	-	K	Y		4.1
Subjunctive	<u>SPRO</u> \H V\H	-		Y	subject pronoun obligatory	4.2
Recent past	H\V	-		Y		4.3
Far past	V\H	-		Y		4.3
Remote past	V\H:K	-	K	Y	built on Far past	4.3
Perfect	V\H	nòó nə́kú		N	built on Far past	5.1
Present Continuous	V +T	ně	no K	N	built on Present; nə COP	5.2
Conditional	V +T	nó	no K	Y	built on Present Continuous	5.3
Past Imperfective	S mbíó S (O) V(\PR) (O)			Y		6
Past Imperfective 2	S mbíóku V\PA (O)	mbíóku		N		6
Background	S mbíó V(\PR) (O)	mbíó		N		6
Background Past R	S mbíó V (O)	mbíó		N		6
Background Moment	S màà S (O) V (O)			Y		6
Future	mə = <u>Spro</u> V\PA (O)			N		7.1
Narrative	pí (+ kě ~ kə) + V	pí		Y		7.2
Present Subject Focus	Compl INF-V- á ' (O)			N		8
Recent Past Subject Focus	Compl nóó/nə́kú V\PA (O)	nóó nə́kú		N		8
Far Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb\PA (O)			N		8
Remote Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb-K\PA (O)			N		8
Procedural	(O) INF-MID-V\H* Obl			Y obl		9
Procedural2	(O) mbíó _{INF} - V\H* Obl			Y obl		9
Negative General Present	S sí V\H (O) other= á	sí		N		10
Negative Present	S nà~nəkə~káj (O) á	nà nəkə káj		N		10
Negative Background	S mbíó V (O) á	mbíó		N		10
Negative Past	S mbíó V\PA (O) á	mbíó		N		10

Table 1: Overview of Nyokon tenses

2.2. Pronouns

The subject and non-subject pronouns differ in form depending on the tense. The following Table 2 presents these various forms. The complement pronouns are used in the Subject Focus tense which uses a cleft construction. We distinguish three different sets of subject pronouns of which the first two in the two first columns of Table 2, are very similar, PRO1 and PRO2. These two are clearly historically related and differ only in tone in the first and the second person singular. However, we cannot relate this tonal difference to any other factor and we have to assume different pronoun sets.

	subject PRO1 PRESENT	subject PRO2 RECPAST	subject pronoun with FUTURE	pre- verbal Object PRO	complement pronoun
1SG	m̃ ~ mĩ	m̃	mǎm	ηgómá	ηgóm
2SG	á	à	máà	ηgó	ηgê
3SG	ò	ò	mòó	vé	vê
1PL INCL	tèη	tèη		tèηá	tèη
1PL EXL	tàá	tàá		váásá	váás
2PL	nàá	nàá		vááná	váá
3PL	pí	pí	mè pí	pé	pé

Table 2: Pronouns across tenses

The first three columns provide the various shapes of the subject pronouns for the various tenses. The next three columns provide the non-subject pronouns. Column 4 gives the shapes of the object pronouns in pre-verbal positions. Column 5 the more generally used complement pronouns which are used clauses initially for the Focus tenses that are structured as cleft clauses. Not only does the table show gaps, but the table is also not exhaustive. we came across a variant *vəs* of the 3SG complement pronoun *vê* in a sentence with a generic reading, (2).

(2) Independent generic pronoun

vəs àyì ò kîr kitià mòó kwá kòn
 3SG REL 3SG bite\PR monkey FUT:3SG fall ill
 ‘Whoever eats a monkey will be ill.’

The inclusive/exclusive distinction for the first-person plural seems present in all pronouns in this table but it is not so clear whether the distinction is really maintained in subject pronouns in actual language use.

To give only one form for third person singular and one for third person plural is unexpected in a Bantu noun class language. However, Nyokon shows a strong tendency towards a default use of a general third-person pronoun for subjects irrespective of whether they are human or non-human, and not reflecting their noun class. However, there is a pair **kí** 3SG.NONHUMAN and **pí** 3PL.NONHUMAN which is sometimes used for non-human subjects, and sometimes preferred upon reflection. Another third-person non-human subject marker **yì** is specifically used in relative clauses. In the sentence in (3) the subject can be replaced by **ò** 3SG, by **kí** 3SG.NONHUMAN, or by **yì** 3SG.NONHUMAN. Any of these subject pronouns cannot be used alongside the full noun unless there is a clear and strong intonation break between them, (4). The noun class system is fully intact with strict morphological agreement within the noun phrase.

(3) Different markers for non-human subject

màpí twǎ swà
 water leaves wash:K
 ‘The rain washes the leaves.’

(4) Nominal subject as topic plus subject pronoun

màpí, yì twǎ swà
 water 3SG.NONHUMAN leaves wash:K
 ‘The rain, it washes the leaves.’

The subject marker **kí** is used for singular non-human referents, (5), while **ò** is not restricted to humans; the plural equivalent is **pí**, (6), note that this pronoun is marginally different from the general 3PL pronoun **pí** (Table 2).

- (5) Subject marker
- kí**
- where
- ò**
- was used before.

pùcó kí mbíó kí tǎǎ yámbôk nòó cóp
 thing 3SG.NONHUMAN PAST 3SG.NONHUMAN O1PL annoy PRF leave\PA
 ‘The thing that annoyed us has disappeared.’

- (6) Subject marker
- pí**
- for plural

ò nòó yóó ípém pí tǎǎ nâ àpô
 3SG PRF kill animals 3PL.NONHUMAN.REL 1PL eat:K today
 ‘He has killed the animals that we eat today.’

We start our overview of the tenses with the simplest one, the imperative.

3. Simplest verb form: Imperative

We start with the imperative as the simplest conjugational form. This facilitates our discussion of more complex forms. The imperative distinguishes between positive and negative imperative and between single and plural addressee. It does not distinguish tense, aspect, or mood. The basic positive imperative consists of the verb stem plus a high tone. The three basic tone patterns of verbs change in the following manner, (7).

- (7) Tonal changes in the imperative

L >LH
 H >H
 HL >H

The form with plural addressees requires the addition of the **-a** suffix. Table 3 provides some examples.

- (8)
- ndǎ’ màní ngóm**
-
- give:IMP water O1SG
-
- ‘Give me water!’

infinitive	meaning	SG	PL
ù-swǎ	wash	swǎ	swá’-á
ù-né	eat	né ~ ná’	ná’-á

Table 3: Singular and plural imperative forms

The prohibitive (negative imperative) is formed by the negation particle **kǎ** plus the same forms as the positive imperative, (9). The word order in the positive imperative is Verb+direct object+dative object, (8); in the prohibitive, the order is NEG+theme object+verb, (9b).

- (9a)
- kǎ líl**
-
- NEG cry
-
- ‘Don’t cry!’ (Barreteau n.d.: 211)

- (9b)
- kǎ kí kùú njóós**
-
- NEG 7.DEM 7.bone suck
-
- ‘Don’t suck that bone!’ (Barreteau n.d.: 161)

Next, we present the more complex tenses. First, those that have no TAM marker. These tenses are a challenge for analysis in the complexity of tonal changes that characterises them.

4. Verbal paradigms with tonal changes and no segmental TAM marker

The verb forms in these verbal paradigms vary in two dimensions: the choice between the extended stem with the **-ǎ** suffix or the basic stem; and the other dimension is the tonal shape of the verb: that of the Present tense or that of the Past tense. In the following tenses, these two

tonal shapes will be labelled \PR for the present or \PA for the past tense shape. These labels refer to the tonal shape only and occur in all sorts of tenses.

4.1 Present tense

The tone of the first-person singular pronoun is always high in the Present tense. In the Present tense, the verb is modified with the **-à'** suffix, or variants thereof, (25). The variants of the verb shapes with this multifaced suffix can be found in Table 3 for the imperative above and in (27) below. Not all verbs have a form with **-à'**: Stative verbs such as **mi** 'to know', for example, do not admit this suffix. In some verbs the suffix can only be noticed by the tonal change; its final consonant is sometimes **k**, a glottal stop, and often not pronounced at all, (12).⁴ We represent this suffix abstractly by :K in glosses. The suffix goes back to the Bantu pluractional and durative suffix **-a(n)g** (Nurse 2008: 153) which explains its use in the present tense and for plural addressees. The suffix does not have an independent function in Nyokon, and it is best analysed as a different variant of the verbal stem given its lexicalised shapes. Verbs that end in their basic form in what looks like this suffix take a different ending, often **-an**, to form their present tense form. A Nyokon lexicon should give the "**-a'** forms" of the verb. We will see below that the **-a'** shape is also used to form the Remote Past on the basis of the Far Past form. This usage shows that this verb shape takes different functions in the tense system and can no longer be analysed as an independent pluractional or durative suffix.

- (10) Example of verb final Present tense form of a L verb with **-à'**

màpí twǎ swà'
màpí twǎ swà-à'
 6.water leaves wash-K
 'The rain washes the leaves.'

- (11) Example of verb final Present tense form of a HL verb with **-à'**

píní páá lêr(k) chí
píní pàá lêr-à' chí
 2:2PL.POSS 2:childrencry-K a.lot
 'Your children cry a lot.'

- (12) Examples of verb final Present tense form of a H verb with **-à'**

ò tó'òk 's/he starts.' from **ù-tó'** 'to start'.
ò kìnò típk 's/he beats Kinyo.' from **ù-típ** 'to beat'.

If an object follows the verb in the Present tense, there are tonal changes on the verb which are summarised below, (13).

- (13) Tonal changes in the present if an object follows

L	>	LH	(examples	14-21)
H	>	HL	(examples	22-24)
HL	>	HL	(examples	25-28)

There are three further tone rules that are relevant here: First, the second element of the rising tone may be absorbed by a following non modulated High tone. Second, there is the phenomenon of High tone bridging. A Low between two Highs becomes High in this context; this also applies to the L of HL followed by H. In addition, there is a morpho-tonological rule applying to the oblique particle **à** which has a polar High tone if its following tone is Low. These tone rules are illustrated below.

⁴ This can be seen as part of the general tendency of devoicing and reduction utterance finally, see Lovstrand (2011).

Low tone verbs such as **ù-nò** ‘to throw’ and **ù-lè** ‘say’ occur with both the **-à**’ suffix and the LH tone pattern, glossed with PR, (14,15).

- (14) Present with Low tone verb and post verbal object

ò niá’ mîr
ò nò-à’\LH mîr
 3SG throw-K\PR wine
 ‘S/he throws (palm)wine.’

- (15) Present with Low tone verb and post verbal object

ò liá’ pìcààm
ò lè-à’\LH pìcààm
 3SG say-K\PR words
 ‘S/he says the words.’

The H of the LH is absorbed by the High tone of **mós** which is always High. This verb **ùkwè** does not have an **-a**’ form, (16).

- (16) Present tense of Low verb with absorption of the rise by following High

ò kwè mós
ò kwě mós
 3SG fall\PR ground
 ‘S/he falls on the ground.’

When followed by a Low-tone object the Rise is realised on the verb, (17).

- (17) Present tense of same Low-tone verb with Rise realised

ò kwě mù
 3SG fall\PR high
 ‘S/he falls “high”’

In the following example, there is no such absorption of the H of the Rise due to the fact that the subsequent tone is complex, (18).

- (18) Present tense of Low-tone verb with Rise realised because what follows is Fall

ò swá’ pân
 3SG wash:K\PR plate
 ‘S/he washes the plate.’

The object starts in a High tone because of the High-tone-bridge tone rule, (34). This verb has the **-a**’ shape and its tone is Rising but the High of the Rise forces the next Low to become High between two Highs (High-tone-bridge) and is subsequently absorbed by the following High (19,20).

- (19) Present tense of Low tone verb with H realised on next syllable because of H-bridge

ń swá’ ákín
ń swè-a’\LH àkín
 1SG wash-K\PR calabash
 ‘I wash a calabash.’

Likewise, High-tone-bridge between rising and falling tone, (20).

- (20) Present tense of Low tone verb with H realised on next syllable because of H tone bridge

ò swà' pípân
 ò swà-a'\LH pípân
 s/he wash plates
 's/he washes the plates.'

H tone verbs require a HL pattern in the Present tense if an object follows, (21). The final **k** of the **-a'** form **típk** is not realised with the object following, avoiding a cluster of **pkp** (21); alternatively, this may be interpreted as a form without the **-a'** (**-k**) suffix. We present examples with the same verb and a range of objects to show this behaviour, resulting in some uncommon but perfectly acceptable sentences.

- (21) Present tense of High tone verb

ò típ pân
 ò típ(:à)\HL pân
 s/he beat(:K)\PR plate
 's/he hits the plate.'

The L of the HL pattern of the High-tone verb **típ** 'to beat, hit' is not absorbed by the following Low tone, (22).

- (22) Present tense of High tone verb

ò típ pifômâ.
 3SG beat\PR oranges
 'S/he hits oranges.'

The Low-tone of the prefix of the object becomes High because of H-tone-bridge which applies to the prefix of the object in these cases, (23). The Low-tone of the Fall is realised as downstep, (23). There is some variation between examples between it being realised as a downstep or as Fall, compare (23) and (24).

- (23) Present tense of High tone verb with Low of Fall realised as Downstep

ò típ[↓] pípân
 ò típ pípân
 3SG beat\PR plates
 's/he hits the plates.'

- (24) Same present tense of High tone verb with Fall realised and no Downstep

ò típ míyíp
 ò típ mỳyíp
 3SG beat\PR houses
 's/he hits the houses.'

If the HL on the verb is the underlying tone of the verb, it triggers H-tone-bridge as well, (25, 26).

- (25) Present tense of HL verb with H tone bridge

á lêk ákín
 2SG like calabash
 'You like calabash.'

- (26) Present tense of HL verb with H tone bridge

á lêk pípân
á lêk(\HL) pípân
 2SG like(\PR) plates
 ‘You like plates.’

But the High-tone bridge does not apply if what follows is not an object but an oblique, (27, 28).

- (27) Present tense of HL verb with oblique and no H tone bridge

á lêk à jé
 2SG like at eat
 ‘You like to eat.’

- (28) Present tense of HL verb with oblique and no H tone bridge

á lêk à lók
 2sg like at close
 ‘You like to close.’

If the element following the verb is not an object, the Present tense form of the verb is tonally the same as when the object precedes it or is absent. Thus, in the following examples, (29-31), the tones are simply Low because what follows is an oblique complement marked by the **à** particle.

- (29) Low-tone verb in present tense with oblique

ò còp àkó
 3SG leave at:home
 ‘S/he leaves home.’

- (30) Low-tone verb in present tense with oblique

ò cì'èn à mós
ò cì'è-n à mós
 3SG leave:K at ground
 ‘S/he leaves the earth.’

- (31) Low-tone verb in present tense with oblique

ò cì'èn á mù
 3SG leave:K at\H high
 ‘S/he gets up.’

The particle **à** has a High polar tone in the last example because its complement is Low. This is also the case in the following example, (32).

- (32) Present tense of High-tone verb and oblique with polar High tone

á fir á còp
 2SG can at\H leave
 ‘You can leave.’

The Present tense is used to represent habitual situations; there is no dedicated habitual tense. After the beginning of the Frog-story (Meier 1969) which is recounted in past tenses, the general property that the boy sleeps with his dog is presented with the Present tense, (33). Likewise, a general truth requires a Present tense, (34), (35).

- (33) Present tense to indicate habit
ǎ pùtú yin ò-fyà pí yìèp
 at night arrive 3SG-sleep with dog
 ‘During the night he sleeps with his dog.’
- (34) **ṅò’ó ɲàás ndìk á-sì ɲìngórǎ**
 Nyokon twins see:K at-like 8: gods
 ‘Nyokon see twins as gods.’
- (35) **ɲàás nò ɲǎ**
 twins COP children
à-yí pí ɲín ɲê ɲáfòò, ɲátáá, ɲò nò ɲánìs
 at-REL 3PL born:K O3PL 2:two 2:three even COP 2-four
 ‘Twins are children that are born 2, 3, even 4.’

4.2 Subjunctive

The subjunctive is formed by a High-tone on the verb and a High-tone on the subject pronoun, except for the 1PL pronoun, (36, 37). In the Subjunctive, all subjects require a subject pronoun including in addition to nominal subjects (last two instances in (36), (37)).

- (36) Subjunctives with the L verb **ù-fè** ‘to come’
- ń fè kó** ‘I should come home’
á fè kó ‘You should come home’
ó fè kó ‘S/He should come home’
tèṅ fè kó ‘We should come home’
ɲàá fè kó ‘You (pl)should come home’
ɲí fè kó ‘They (pl)should come home’
kingó fè kó ‘The king should come home’
Kìṅòó fè kó ‘Kigno should come home’
- (37) Subjunctives with the H verb **ù-mó** ‘to drink’
- ń mó** ‘I should drink’
á mó ‘You should drink’
ó mó ‘He should drink’
tèṅ mwá ‘We should drink’
~tèṅ mó ‘We should drink’
ɲàá mwá ‘You (pl) should drink’
~ɲàá mó ‘You (pl) should drink’
ɲí mwá ‘They (pl) should drink’
~ɲí mó ‘They (pl) should drink’
kingó mó ‘The king should drink.’
Kìṅòó mó ‘Kinyo should drink.’

The High-tones of the subjunctive are realised on the verb and on the subject pronoun. If there is a preverbal object the High-tone is still realised on the subject pronoun and not on the

object (as it may be for the Recent Past, see section 4.3 below). In the following example (38) the Low tone object stays Low for all subjects.

(38) Subjunctive with a preverbal object

m̃ **mìr** **mó**
 1SG:SBJV wine drink(:SBJV)
 ‘I should drink wine’

The shape of the 1PL plural pronoun is falling if the Low tone object follows it, but not if the object follows the verb in which case, it is Low, (39), as in clauses without an object, or, optionally, rising with anticipation of the High tone of the verb. We cannot explain the falling tone on the 1PL pronoun which remains Low elsewhere in the subjunctive.

(39a) Falling tone on 1PL subject pronoun with object following it

t̃ɲ **mìr** **mó**
t̃ɲ **mìr** **mó**
 1PL wine wine
 ‘We should drink wine’.

Compare to:

(39b) Low tone on 1PL subject pronoun with verb following it

t̃ɲ **mó** **mìr** ~ **t̃ɲ** **mó** **mìr**
 1PL drink wine
 ‘We should drink wine’.

4.3 Past tenses: Recent, Far, Remote

There are three distinctions in the past tenses, distinguishing deictic differences in reference to the past. The Cameroonian Bantu languages are well known to have systems of past reference (Nurse 2008:88). We have tentatively labelled these three past tenses Recent, Far, and Remote Past reflecting these distinctions in temporal distance. We have not conducted a detailed semantic study into these tenses. The default past tense in the Recent Past which is used for situations in which the degree in past reference is irrelevant. Far and Remote Past are marked and used when specifying such past reference matters.

The Recent Past is formed by a High-tone which docks to the right onto the object if that follows it (and can receive it), (40, 41), and it goes to the left onto the subject if there is no object, (61, 62). It does not influence the verb. Low tone subject pronouns become High, (42, 46); noun subjects change a final Low tone to High, (43). However, the tonal shape for some subject pronouns is different for this tense: the subject pronoun for the second person singular is Low underlyingly in this tense, **à**, while **m̃** for the first-person singular is Low, (40). Pronouns and their variants across tenses are presented in Table 3 in section 2.2. The verb has the same tonal shape as in the Present.

(40) H tone on preverbal object

- a. **m̃** **ófàn** **típ** **vê**
 m̃ **H:ò-fàn** **típ** **vê**
 1SG RECP:CL3-thigh beat O3SG
 ‘I have hit his [him] thigh’
- b. **à** **ófàn** **típ** **vê**
 à **H:ò-fàn** **típ** **vê**
 2SG RECP:CL3-thigh beat O3SG
 ‘You have hit his [him] thigh.’

- (41) H tone on preverbal object

m̄ ándwóm ɲà'
m̄ H:àndwòm ɲà'
 1SG RECP:mutton eat
 'I have eaten mutton.'

- (42) H tone on preverbal object and on subject pronoun

m̄ ípún ndìk n̄ ìndwómâ
m̄ H:ìpún ndìk n̄ ìndwómâ
 1SG REC.P:goats see\PR and sheep
 'I have seen goats and sheep.'

- (43) Recent Past with a High tone verb and H tone on preverbal object

pól óf̄n típ v̄
Paul H:óf̄n típ v̄
 Paul REC.P:thigh beat O3SG
 'Paul has hit him on the thigh (recently)'

The High-tone TAM marker can be realised on the object and the subject pronoun, (44).

- (44) H of Recent Past on subject pronoun as well

óm̄r̄ n̄
ò:H:m̄r̄ n̄
 3SG:RECP:wine throw
 'He has thrown away wine.' (recently).

This does not happen on nominal subjects, (45).

- (45) No High tone of recent past on the nominal subject; only on the object

Kìɲ̄ óf̄n típ v̄
Kìgno H:óf̄n típ v̄
 Kìgno REC.P:thigh beat him
 'Kìgno has hit him on the thigh (recently).'

If there is no preverbal object, this High-tone of the Recent Past is realised on the subject pronoun, (46), or on the last syllable of the nominal subject, (47).

- (46) Recent Past without preverbal object

ó c̄p àkó
 3SG:RECP leave home
 'He has left the house.' (recently)'

- (47) Recent Past without preverbal object and nominal subject

Kìɲ̄ sw̄
 Kìgno:RECP wash
 'Kìgno has just washed.'

The object has an initial High-tone if it follows a Low tone verb, (48, 49). This shows that the verb is in the LH tonal shape of the Present tense with object following. The High tone of the Rise is realised on the following object (and as example (48) shows actually also on the preverbal part of the object as the head noun of the object is preverbal but its modifier post-verbal in this example).

- (48) Recent past with post verbal object and High-tone realised on

m̀páá **kìp** **páfòò**
m̀:H:pàá **kìp\LH** **páfòò**
 1SG:RECP:children\PR bath\PR two
 ‘I have bathed two children.’ (recently).’

- (49) Recent past with post verbal object and High-tone realised on it

ó **swə** **ákín**
Pól **swə** **ákín**
Kìpǎ **swə** **ákín**
Kìpò:H **swə\LH** **àkín**
 subject:RECP wash\PR calabash
 ‘S/he, Paul, Kigno have just washed the calabash.’

For High tone verbs, the Recent Past form with pronominal subject is indistinguishable from the Subjunctive in case there is no object.

The Recent Past is used as a general past. For example, in (50) it is clear the event is not meant to be recent but rather unspecific as to the time in the past.

- (50) **ìcój** **pí** **t’** **ápín** **mápín** **mì** **jàás**
 what? 3PL start dance 6:dances 6:of twins
 ‘Why did they start this dance of the twins?’

There are two further past tenses that differ from the Recent Past in tonal behaviour. The Far Past is formed by a High tone on the verb, (51). This High tone of the verb spreads to the following syllable of an object, (51). The Remote past (longer ago) is formed on the basis of the Far Past but with the –à’ form of the verb, (52). Replacing the base stem of the verb with the extended stem in this paradigm always rendered the reference further into the past. In both tenses, the object can be placed before the verb, compare (53) to (51) and (54) to (53). The subject pronouns for first and second person singular have a Low tone for both tenses (53-56). Object pronouns occur post-verbally (57,58).

- (51) Far Past

ò **swá** **ákín**
ò **swə\H** **àkín**
 3SG wash\PA calabash
 He washed the calabash

- (52) Remote Past

ò **swá’** **ákín**
ò **swə:k\H** **àkín**
 3SG wash:REM\PA calabash
 He had washed the calabash

- (53) Far Past with preverbal object

m̀ àkín **swá**
m̀ àkín **swə\H**
 1SG calabash wash\PA
 I washed the calabash

- (54) Remote Past with preverbal object

m̂ àkín swá'
m̂ àkín swə:k\H
 1SG calabash wash:REM\PA
 I had washed the calabash

- (55) Far Past second person singular subject

à swá ákín
à swə\H àkín
 2SG wash\PA calabash
 You washed the calabash.

- (56) Remote Past second person singular subject

à swá' ákín
à swə:k\H àkín
 2SG wash:REM\PA calabash
 You had washed the calabash.

- (57) Far Past pronominal object

ò lǎ vê
ò lə\H vê
 3SG say\PA O3PL
 'He told them.'

- (58) Remote Past pronominal object

ò liá' vê
ò lə:k\H vê
 3sg say:REM\H O3pl
 'He had told them.'

The object after a past tense of a High-toned verb often has a High initial syllable like *ákín* 'calabash' (56) above. These instances can be accounted for either by H-tone-bridge or by the polar High on the oblique particle *a*, (59, 60).

- (59) Past verb and High tone bridge with following oblique

ò cǎp ákó
ò cəp\H à ikó
 3SG leave\PA at home
 'He left the house.'

- (60) Past verb and High tone bridge with following oblique

kicà'pòr cés á cém
kicà'pòr cəs\H à cém
 frog leave\PA at inside
 'The frog left the inside.'

Observe that the same *à* does not become High if a Low tone follows, (61).

- (61) No High tone on **a** when Low follows

pí kǎ cés à kicâ
 3PL INCHO leave\PA at now
 ‘They left now.’

However, a High tone after a Past tense verb can be brought about by the polar High tone on the Oblique marker **a** ‘at’ before a Low tone of a nominal oblique, (62). This requires further study.

- (62) Polar High tone on oblique

pí tó’ á ndik
pí tó’\H à ndik
 3PL begin\PA at see
 ‘They began to see.’

And finally, there are cases where the Oblique marker **a** ‘at’ has a High polar tone and fuses with the vowel prefix of the noun, (63).

- (63) Polar High tone of oblique marker

ò vó típ áfǎn
ò vó típ à ifǎn
 3SG O3SG beat\PA at thigh
 ‘He had hit on the thigh.’

There is no general High-tone spread from the verb onto the next object, (64-68).

- (64) No High spread to object

m̂ yár m̂r
 1SG search\PA wine
 ‘I wanted wine.’

- (65) No High spread to object

ò yár m̂r
 3SG search\PA wine
 ‘S/he wanted wine.’

- (66) No High spread to object

m̂ mbá’ pùnùk
 1SG chew\PA meat
 ‘I chewed the meat.’

- (67) No High spread to object

m̂ ndík pifòmâ
 1SG see\PA oranges
 ‘I saw oranges.’

Nor does the High-tone spread to any other element following the verb, (68).

- (83) No High tone spread; also not to oblique

à mwá’ mbà’mbà’
 2SG drink:K\PA morning
 ‘You drank in the morning.’

And post verbal modifiers of the object noun stay Low after the High-toned verb in the past, (68).

- (68) No High tone bridge for modifier

ò pàkàbà ndá' mánjá' ápíyóó
 3SG root give\PA big at:8:children
 'He gave the big root to the children.'

However, the quantifier after the verb (referring to the preverbal nominal object) has a High-tone. Possibly, this High tone is a property of the quantifier concord, (60,70).

- (69) High tone on post-verbal quantifier

m̀ ìkín swó áfòò
 m̀ ìkín swà\H àfòò
 1SG calabashes wash\PA two
 'I washed two calabashes.'

- (70) High tone on post-verbal quantifier agreeing prefix

m̀ pìpân swó pífòò
 m̀ pìpân swà\H pífòò
 1SG calabashes wash\PA two
 'I washed two plates.'

In the next section we discuss the tenses which have a designated TAM marker. We will make use of the same labels \PA (in the Perfect tense) and \PR (in the Present Continuous tense) for the tonal shapes of the verbs.

5 Tenses with a segmental TAM marker

5.1 Perfect

The Perfect is formed by the TAM marker **nòó** or **nèkú** plus the High-toned verb form of the past, (71,72). The object hardly ever precedes the verb in this tense, but see (150a).

- (71) Perfect with locative goal complement

ɣìèp nòó kwá ḿ
 dog PRF fall\PA ground
 'The dog has fallen.'

- (72) Perfect with underlying High tone verb and High tone object

m̀ nòó típ vúm òfàn
 m̀ nòó típ\H vúm òfàn
 1SG PRF hit\PA my thigh
 'I have hit my thigh.'

In the following example H bridge applies and **ákà'á** 'on top' has a polar High tone on the initial Oblique marker **a**, (73)

- (73) Perfect with tone rules applying to complements

tép àyí m̀ nòó kón pìcípé ákà'á nè à kír ćí
 tép àyí m̀ nòó kòn\H pìcípè àkà'á nè à kír ćí
 table REL 1SG PRF place\PA stuff:eat top COP at small very
 'The table on which I have put the meal is too small.'

The High tone spreads from a vowel final High tone verb onto a following vowel that can coalesce with it (74, 75), and hence not to the **i** in **ipè̀m** 'animals' in (75).

- (74) High tone spread on adjacent vowels

ò nòó yóó ìpèm / ápèm
 ò nòó yóó ìpèm / ápèm
 3SG PRF kill\PA animals / animal
 ‘He has killed an animal.’

- (75) High tone spread on adjacent vowels

vəpûm nòó yóó áçìk
 vèpûm nòó yòò\H àçìk
 2:hunters PRF kill\PA elephant
 ‘The hunters killed the elephant.’

The Perfect is used with verbs like **mí** ‘know’ to indicate a present resultant state of knowing, (76), following Comrie’s analysis of the perfect (Comrie 1967:57). The Perfect is also used for the consequence of a condition; example (77) is the complement clause of conditional clause (86). It is also used for a general truth, (78).

- (76)
- yí pìè bàkim nòó mí**
-
- REL people 2:all PRF know
-
- ‘that everyone knows.’

- (77)
- pí nòó ngór ápín mápín m̀ twin**
-
- 3PL PRF must dance 6.dance 6:of twins
-
- ‘One has to dance the twin-dance.’

- (78)
- pí-náás nè pàá àyí pí nòò ngór páwá**
-
- 8-twin COP 2.children REL 3PL PRF possess power
-
- ‘Twins are children that have powers.’

5.2 Present continuous

The Present Continuous is formed by the marker **nǎ** and the tone pattern on the verb identical to the one in the Present tense if an Object follows but without the **-a**’ marker. The origin of the tense marker lies in the copula **nə**, (79). By assuming an underlying Rising tone on this tense marker, glossed as PROG, we can cover the tonal behaviour. The same tonal changes on the following object apply such as High-bridge in (79). The High of the Rise on **nǎ** is absorbed by the High tone of a High-tone verb (80), or of a HL tone verb. Subject pronouns in their underlying form are **á** ‘you’ and **ò** ‘s/he, it’ for this tense, as in the Present tense, subject PRO1, see Table 3. Objects cannot precede the verb in this tense.

- (79) Present Continuous with object and H bridge

m̀ nǎ swǎ ákín
 m̀ nǎ swə\LH àkín
 1SG PROG wash\PR calabash
 ‘I am washing the calabash.’

- (80) High of Rise absorbed by following High

m̀ nè típ kífá’
 m̀ nǎ típ kífá’
 1SG PROG beat stick
 ‘I am hitting with a stick.’

If the verb has HL as the underlying tone, this tone remains HL if a High-tone object follows; the rule of High tone bridge does not apply to this underlying Fall, (81).

- (81) H bridge not affecting underlying Fall

m̐ n̐ t̐n̐ yíp
m̐ n̐̌ t̐n̐ yíp
 1SG PROG build house
 ‘I am building a house.’

After a High-tone subject such as **á**2SG the form of the auxiliary becomes Low toned **n̐**, (82, 83).

- (82) Exceptional auxiliary tone after
- á**
- 2SG

á n̐ mbà’
á n̐̌ mbà’
 2SG PROG walk
 ‘You are busy chewing.’

- (83) Exceptional auxiliary tone after
- á**
- 2SG with H verb

á n̐ yóó
á n̐̌ yóó
 2SG PROG kill
 ‘You are busy killing.’

5.3 Conditional Future

The Conditional Future is very similar in shape to the Present Continuous, but there are tonal differences, and the object can occur on either side of the verb, (85), (86). The subject pronouns are from the PRO2 set that is also used in the Recent Past. It has a High tone on the tense marker **nó** after the Low tone **à** pronoun, (84), and after the Rising **nàá** pronoun, (85), but a Low tone on the tense marker after the Low tone **ò**, (86). More data are needed to analyse the tonal behaviour. The Conditional Future is used in yet unfulfilled conditions.

- (84) Conditional Future

pùtú (àyí) à nó l̐ sá m̐ n̐ ví m̐m v̐í tà’átà’á
 day REL 2SG COND.FUT say that 1SG PROG die FUT:1SG die truly
 ‘The day you will say that you will die, you will truly die.’

- (85) Conditional Future

nàá nó ng̐r mó
 2PL COND.FUT have money
 ‘If you(pl) will have money.’

- (86)
- ò n̐ v̐ yòó j̐ás pí à cé m̐ j̐’ó**
-
- 3SG COND.FUT O3SG child twin bear at inside Nyokon
-
- ‘When someone bears twins among the Nyokon, ...’

6. Constructions with **mbi̐**: Past Imperfective and Backgrounding tenses

Under this heading, we group a number of tenses that use the marker **mbi̐** with various tonal shapes. This is basically the verb ‘to be’, as it is also used with nominal complements in tensed clauses, (87, 88).

- (87) with a nominal complement

kà à mbíó y̐p
 if 2SG be:PAST thief
 ‘If you were a thief.’

- (88) with a Prepositional Phrase as complement

ò mbíó nò jùùm
 she be:PAST with pregnancy
 ‘She was pregnant (literally, with pregnancy).’

The infinitive **úmbiò** is used as complementiser ‘whether’, (89).

- (89) infinitive ‘to be’ as complementiser

ń pyá’àn úmbiò ò yám ilón màngâ
 1SG hear:K if 3SG sing nice song
 ‘I listen whether she sings a nice song.’

These constructions with **mbiò** are quite common in narratives which typically start as in (90) with an infinitive **úmbiò**.

- (90) Opening clause of story

úmbiò pió pútú
 INF:BE INDEF 14.day
 ‘Once upon a time’

Given the limited number of available examples, it is difficult to establish what the shape of the verb is in the following tenses. In most cases, it seems to be the underlying form of the verb but some cases point to the Present tense form when there is an object following. The Past Imperfective with the infinitive **ku** takes the High-toned Past tense form of the verb. The object follows the verb. Only the constructions with a repetition of the subject (and a new clause) after **mbiò** or **màà** allow a preverbal object. The following constructions are presented in this section, Table 4.

Label	scheme	gloss for aux
Past Imperfective:	S mbiò S (O) V(\PR) (O)	be:PAST
Past Imperfective 2:	S mbiòku V\ PAST (O)	be:PAST INF
Background	S mbiò V(\PR) (O)	BGND
Background before R in past	S mbiò V (O)	REL.BGND
Background moment	S màà S (O) V (O)	WHEN

Table 4: Constructions with variants of **mbiò**

The *Past Imperfective* uses a construction with the Subject pronoun plus **mbiò** followed by a clause with the same subject pronoun, (91, 92, 93).

- (91) Scheme of Past Imperfective: S
- mbiò**
- S(O)V (O)

- (92) Past Imperfective with preverbal object

ń mbíó ń àkín swò
 1SG be:PAST 1SG calabash wash
 ‘I was washing the calabashes.’

- (93) Past Imperfective with a preverbal pronominal object in the relative clause

pùcò àyí ò mbíó ò tǎṅá yámbòk
 14.thing REL 3SG be:PAST 3SG O1PL annoy:K
nòó còp
 PRF leave\PA
 ‘What annoyed us has left.’

The subject pronoun need not be repeated, (95), compared to (93).

- (94) Past Imperfective without second subject pronoun and V in Present tense form
m̄ mbíó swè ákín
 1SG be:PAST wash calabash
 ‘I was washing the calabash.’

The Past Imperfective can be used with an initial topic rather than the identical subject as in (95) with the topic ‘twins’ before the tense marker and the impersonal ‘they’ after it.

- (95) **ṣàás mbíó pí sáà ṣéè ṣàás kèn à kínóṣ**
 twins be:PAST 3PL say that twins walk:K at 7:road
 ‘It is said that twins walk on the road.’

Past Imperfective 2: The second clause can be replaced by an infinitival pro-clitic **kú**. No subject pronoun is possible in the infinitival complement. It is unclear whether this construction has exactly the same function as the Past Imperfective. The Past Imperfective 2 in (97) is used immediately after a clause with the other shape of the Past Imperfective. The time situation is identical in both clauses; possibly there are sequence effects.

- (96) Past Imperfective with infinitival complement **kú**.

nàá mbíó kú mí sá
 2PL be:PAST INF know\PAthat
tèṣ mbíó tèṣ pìnà’ káp ì
 1PL be:PAST 1PL 8:cattle buy\PA Q
 ‘Do you know that we have bought cattle?’

- (97) Past Imperfective with infinitival complement **kú**.

ò mbíó kú ṣḡár ṣìṣp nò kìcà’áṣṣr
 3SG be:PAST INF have(\PR) dog and frog
 ‘He had a dog and a frog.’

Backgrounding is used for clauses describing the background to the following focal clause, (99). The tone on **mbíò** is HL. The background is immediate and in the recent past (99-103). Example (102) differs minimally from the similar sentence (92) and the distinction is that (102) refers to the *recent* past.

- (98) Scheme of backgrounding tense: S **mbíò**V (O)

- (99) Backgrounding
ò mbíò cò
 3SG BGND leave
 ‘When he left.’

- (100) Backgrounding in complex sentence

ò mbíò kàr ò yíp pùú kàr
 3SG BGND make 3SG house bees destroy
 ‘While he was destroying the beehive.’

- (101) Conditional backgrounding with stative complement and preceded by “it is”

ò nè á mbíò kákóm á fír á còp ṣḡá ámís
 3SG COP 2SG BGND big 2SG can at leave O2SG alone
 ‘When you are grown up you can go on your own.’

- (102) with the verb in the shape of the Present and expressing the Recent past;
m̀ mbíò swè ákín
 1SG BGND wash calabash
 ‘I was washing the calabash. (recently)’

- (103) Background tense with oblique
ò mbíò cò cín ándòṅ àkíá’ pùèèṣ
 3SG BGND go see at:there at:side tree
 ‘When he looked there at the side of the trees.’

Relative Past backgrounding: The same construction with the opposite tone on the TAM marker is used for backgrounding in past situations prior to a reference point in the past (plus quam perfectum), (104, 105).

- (104) Scheme for Relative Past backgrounding: S **mbíò** V O

- (105) Example of Relative Past Backgrounding

ò mbíò yàr kicà’ápòr
 3SG REL.BGND search frog
 ‘When he was searching for the frog, ...’

Background moment with màà. The construction consists of the subject plus **màà** followed by a clause that commences with the same subject as a pronoun, (106). The construction with **màà** indicates the moment at which something, expressed in the next clause, happened, (107-108).

- (106) Scheme for background moment: S **màà** S (O) V

- (107) Backgrounding with **màà**

pí màà pí kàà cém yìr
 3PL WHEN 3PL arrive inside forest
 ‘When they arrived in a forest, ...’

- (108) Backgrounding with **màà** and preverbal object

ò màà ò pě nítán ndìk
 3SG WHEN 3SG INDEF rock see
 ‘When he saw a certain rock, ...’

The marker **màà** can be used as a prepositional like element to a noun phrase indicating ‘since’, as in (109), which is probably its etymological origin, as in all its uses time is involved.

- (109) **á màà pyàá pí-fòò**
 at WHEN 8.years 8-two
 ‘Since two years’

7 Tenses with complex TAM marker structure

7.1 Future

The future is formed by a TAM marker **mV** which precedes and fuses with the singular subject pronouns. Subject pronouns are obligatorily present in this tense, and thus also used in addition to nominal subjects. The verb has a High-tone; it is in the so labelled Past tense form \PA, (110). Objects cannot precede the verb. The forms are presented in Table 5.

(110) Scheme for the future: **mə** = Spro V\PA (O)

form	Gloss	translation
mǎm swó ákín	FUT:1SG wash\PA calabash	‘I will wash the calabash.’
máà swó ákín	FUT:2SG wash\PA calabash	‘You will wash the calabash.’
mòó swó ákín	FUT:3SG wash\PA calabash	‘S/he will wash the calabash.’
Pól mǎm swó ákín	Paul FUT:3SG wash\PA calabash	‘Paul will wash the calabash.’
mə pí ndík	FUT 3PL see	‘They will see.’

Table 5: Future Conjugation

The Future is used for the immediate consequence of the action in a preceding clause. The clause in (111) is preceded by the condition ‘when they see a family in trouble’ which also employs the future tense.

(111) **mə pí cóó cém pìnòm vió óníis**
 FUT 3PL enter inside 8:stomach INDEF wife
á-ndòḡ àyí ò-nə pí pḡ
 at-there REL 3SG-PRES bear O3PL
 ‘They (twins) will choose to enter in the belly of a woman who is giving birth to them (twins).’

7.2 Narrative

The Narrative is formed by **pí**, (112,113), optionally followed by **kǎ** or **kə**, (114), and followed by the verb without tonal changes. The object is either before, (112) and (113) or after the verb, (114). There seems to be no extra meaning in the addition of **kǎ**; therefore, we use the unspecified gloss preV(erb). The preverb **kǎ** is dealt with in section 11 below.

(112) Narrative with post verbal pronominal object

ò pí pìcà’ápòr sòm à yí pí yír vḡ
 3SG other frogs thank at PRO NARR take 3SG.O
 ‘He thanks the other frogs for taking care of him.’

(113) Narrative with preverbal pronominal object

ké kìcà’ápòr pí vó lyès
 his frog NARR him notice
 ‘His frog notices him.’

(114) Narrative with addition of the preverb **kǎ**

pàá pìcà’ápòr pí kǎ cés àkìcyâ
 children frogs NARR preV leave now
 ‘The small frogs appeared at that moment.’

8 Subject Focus tenses with a complement pronoun as subject marker

Subject focus for present, recent past and past tenses starts with the personal pronoun from the complement series, Table 2 in section 2.2, without any tonal changes suggesting that the construction involves clefts. The object has to follow the verb. The various subject focus tenses are schematized in Table 6. Examples for each are presented in (115-120). These tenses occur often in relative clauses.

Label	Schema
Present Subject Focus	Compl INF-V-à' (O)
Recent Past Subject Focus:	Compl INF-V (O)
Perfect Subject Focus:	Compl nóò/nókú V\PA (O).
Far Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb\PA (O)
Remote Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb-K\PA (O)

Table 6: Various subject focus tenses (Compl = Complement pronoun)

(115) Present Subject Focus

ngóm ù-swà' àkín
 me INF-wash:K calabash
 'I washed the calabash.'

(116) Recent Past Subject Focus with nominal subject

Kìpò ù-swà' àkín
 Kigno INF-wash:K calabash
 'KIGNO washed the calabash.'

(117) Perfect Subject Focus (No High tone spread to object pronoun)

kǔn àyí ò nóò má yóó tẹ̀ ndík vê nó
 tortoise REL 3SG S.FOC end kill\PA O1PL see him F
 'The **TORTOISE** who finished killing us is here.'

(118) Perfect Subject Focus

ngóm nóò(nókú) swá' àkín
 me S.FOC wash\PA calabash
 'I washed the calabash.'

(119) Far Past Subject Focus

ngóm swá' àkín
 me wash\PA calabash
 'I washed the calabash (some time ago).'

(120) Remote Past Subject Focus

ngóm swá' àkín
 me wash:K\PA calabash
 'I washed the calabash (long time ago).'

9 Procedural tenses with an infinitival verb form

In procedural texts, we encounter subject-less infinitival verb forms with a High-tone on the verb and the infinitival prefix, often with the middle prefix **pí** between the infinitival prefix and radical, (121). These clauses express instructions and translate as imperatives. Nearly all sentences in our text that entail a recipe for making couscous with vegetables contain this verb form, (122-124). The object precedes the infinitive. Many, but not all, clauses have a final **a**. A variant of the procedural tense contains the background marker **mbíà** before the High-toned infinitive, also with a preverbal, pre **mbíà**, object. These forms usually do not contain the middle prefix **pí**.

(121) Scheme of procedural: (O) INF-MID-V\H* other

(O) **mbíà**INF-V\H* other

(122) part of a recipe⁵

kənəŋ ù-pí-kó' nə pàsəŋ ǎ
 peanuts INF-MID-crush with pepper F
 ‘Crush the peanuts with pepper.’

(123) next line in recipe

ànjéŋ ú-pí-pós á sín
 vegetables INF-MID-put at pot
 ‘Add vegetables to the pot.’

(124) **ànjéŋ mbíò ú-mán á pí-síór**
 vegetables BGND INF-end\H at MID-cut
 ‘When the vegetables are cut, ...’

10. Negation in the verbal paradigm

To render a clause negative Nyokon employs a negative segmental TAM marker and a clause final element **á** which is **ǎ** after a Low tone. All clauses with negation require an object to follow the verb. The constructions with negation are schematized in Table 7.

Negative General Present	S sí V\PA (O) other á
Negative Present	S nà~nəkə~káŋ (O) á
Negative Background	S mbíó V (O) á
Negative Past	S mbíó V\PA (O) á

Table 7: Overview of negative verbal constructions

The *Negative General Present* is formed with the TAM marker **sí**; with no tonal change of subject, but the verb becomes High, (125). The usual tone rules apply. There is an end of clause marker **á**, (126); also present underlyingly in (125). Objects cannot precede the verb in the negative clauses, (127).

(125) Negative General Present

m sí swó ákíná
 1SG NEG wash calabash:F
 ‘I don’t wash the calabash (never).’

(126) Negative General Present

m nòó píkór á sǐ ò sí kwè nìjò’ó (n)á
 1SG PRF 8:surprise at COMPL 3SG NEG speakNyokon F
 ‘I am surprised that he does not speak Nyokon.’

(127) Negative General Present

pí sí yàr písá’ á
 3PL NEG search 8:problems F
 ‘They don’t want problems.’

The *Negative Present* is formed with the TAM marker **nà**. The verb has its underlying tone, (128-130).

⁵Unexplained Low tone on the infinitive prefix.

(128) Negative Present

pí nà púúŋ á
 3PL NEG find F
 ‘They don’t find (it).’

(129) Negative Present

yé t̃ nà(nək̃) yóó àyóò ǎ
 POSS.2SG father NEG kill snake F
 ‘Your FATHER did not kill a snake.’

(130) Negative Present

m̃ nà jé ỹ’ mǎŋgòrà àm̃ ǎ
 1SG NEG eat even mango one F
 ‘I haven’t eaten even one mango.’

There is an alternative negative present using **k̃ŋ**, (131).

(131) Negative Present with **k̃ŋ**

m̃ k̃ŋ á f̃ ǎ
 1SG NEG at come F
 ‘I don’t come.’

The *Negative Background* is formed with the TAM marker **mbíó** which is also used for the Past Imperfective. In the Negative Background construction, the subject pronoun cannot be repeated after **mbíó**, the object has to follow the verb, and there is a clause final marker **á**. Moreover, the verb has its underlying tone, (132, 133).

(132) Negative Background

ò mbíó púúŋ ké k̃cà’ápòr ǎ
 3SG NEG find 3SG.POSS:7 frog F
 ‘He didn’t find his frog.’

(133) Negative Background with a Low tone verb.

pí mbíó ndìk k̃cà’ápòr ǎ
 3PL NEG see frog F
 ‘They didn’t see the frog.’

The Negative Past is similar to the Negative Background but the Verb has the High tone of the Past tense, (134). The usual tone rules apply.

(134) Negative Past

ò s̃á p̃ŋ mbíó f̃r
 3SG say LOG NEG can\PA
ù-sík ké k̃cà’ápòr yì ñm ǎ
 INF-let 7POSS.3SG frog it loose F
 ‘He says that he can’t let his frog to be lost.’

It is possible to negate a noun phrase with a negative marker **k̃** before the phrase, and the clause final **á**, (135, 136).

- (135) Negation of noun phrase

ò cîn kè kicà'ápòr á ndòŋ ă
 3SG see\PR NEG frog at there F
 'He does not see the frog anymore.'

- (136) Negation of noun phrase

kè pyé písá' tó á cém yă yíp kìnòm ă
 NEG INDEF 8:problems again at inside DEM house family F
 'No problems anymore in that family.'

The marker **kè** and **kâŋ** are also used for negation in nominal clauses, (137, 138).

- (137) Negative of existential nominal clause

kè pân á
 NEG plate F
 'There is no plate.'

- (138) Negative of locative nominal clause

pân kâŋ ándòŋ ă
 plate NEG there F
 'The plate is not there.'

11. Preverb Phasal Aspectuals

The preverbs are for the most part aspectual in nature. In principle, they are independent of the choice of tense and from the choice of verb, and clearly, there are preferential patterns, e.g., the inchoative **kă** is mainly attested after the Narrative or in the Present tense. Bear in mind that some of the tenses have no segmental TAM marker and then the preverb may be taken for the TAM marker. Whenever a marker can be used in addition to a TAM marker, it is analysed as a preverb. The preverb **kă** seems to be part of the TAM marker **năku** as a variant of TAM marker **noo** for the Perfect and Recent Past Subject Focus, and there is a homophone negation marker **kă** that we assume to be a different morpheme. The phasal aspectual preverbs are presented in Table 8.

Preverb	gloss	Function	etymological source
cò	go	immediate action	verb 'go'
fè	come	movement to deictic centre	verb 'come'
má	finish	Terminative	verb 'end'
kè	INCHOative	Inchoative	?
ngô	busy	Continuative	?
sí	so	Consequential	?

Table 8: Overview of preverbs

The preverb **cò** is used to mark an immediate action, (139, 140). It is derived from the verb 'to go'. Its directional counterpart is the preverb **fè** 'come', (141).

- (139) Preverb
- cò**
- 'go'

pí cò nìòm
 3PL go hide
 'They hide (him).'

- (140) Preverb **cò** ‘go’

mǎm cò tɛn yíp
 FUT:1SG go build house
 ‘I’ll go build a house.’

- (141) Preverb **fɛ̀** ‘come’

m̃ fɛ̀ tɛn yíp
 1SG come build house
 ‘I have come to build a house.’

The preverb **má** doubles as the verb ‘to finish, end’, (142)

- (142) Preverb **má** ‘to finish’

kũn àyí ò nòò má yóó tɛ̀
 tortoise REL 3SG S.FOC end kill O1PL
 ‘Tortoise who finished killingus, ...’

The preverb **kə̀** is the opposite in that it marks a beginning, an inchoative, (143-145). It is not clear whether it is derived from a verb, and if so, from which. It is probably related to the element **kə̀** that reoccurs in long forms of certain TAM markers, and in the negative marker **kə̀**.

- (143) Preverb **kə̀** inchoative

pìpyê kə̀ nîm vâ yíp
 things INCHO loose 3SG.POSS house
 ‘Things start to get lost in his house.’

- (144) Preverb **kə̀** inchoative but with a LH tone melody

yìòŋ kǎ kǎm vâ
 dog INCHO help O3SG
 ‘The dog set out to help him.’

- (145) Preverb **kə̀** inchoative with H tone verb and an Object

á kə̀ típ kífá’
 2SG INCHO beat stick
 ‘You start beating the stick.’

The preverb **ŋgô** is used to emphasize the continuation of the action, (146).

- (146) Continuative **ŋgô**

ò pyâ’ ásɛ̀ pìcà’ápòrmbíó ŋgô yù ándòŋ àkíá’
 3SG hear\PR that 8:frogs BGND busy make.noise\PR at:there at:side
 ‘He heard that the frogs were making noise there at the side.’

The preverb **sí** translated with ‘alors’ in French is difficult to characterise but it adds logical consequence to the sentence. We gloss it with ‘so’, (147-149).

- (147) Preverb **sí** for logical next step.

ò sí yíón mbà’mbà’
 3SG so get.up\PA morning
 ‘He thus got up in the morning, ...’

- (148) Preverb
- sí**
- in time conditional

tám àyí ò sí pí jàás sí
 time REL 3SG so beget twin F
 ‘When someone gives birth to twins.’

- (149) Preverb
- sí**
- in a verbless clause

jàás sí mbíó só
 twin so be:PA so
 ‘Twins thus, ...’

12 Object position

Nyokon is remarkable in that it allows a full object to occur before the verb root while Bantu languages are strictly VO in word order. It shares this property with neighbouring and related Tunen. A detailed comparison between the functions of object placement in Nyokon and Tunen can be found in Mous (2014). It differs from Tunen in that this order is only possible (and optional) in certain tenses: the Present, the Subjunctive, the Recent Past, the Far Past, the Remote Past, the Conditional, the Past Imperfective, the Background Moment, the Narrative. It is not possible in the Imperative, Perfect, Present Continuous, the Future. The impossibility of the OV order in the Subject Focus tenses and the Negative tenses must be related to the information structure properties of the alternative orders. But otherwise, the distribution of which tenses do and do not allow pre-verbal objects is not solely determined by the semantics of the tenses. Structural properties of the constructions of the various tenses play a role too. The Procedural tenses are the only ones that require the object to be before the verb stem and do not allow a post-verbal position but these are also the only tenses that are built on an infinitive, a nominalised verb. The constructions with **mbiò** ‘to be’ tend not to allow a pre-verbal object with the exception of the Past Imperfective, and possibly this tense has grammaticalised a step further by allowing that.

Only direct objects can occur pre-verbally, including a locative object, (151), but dative or indirect objects are never pre-verbal, (150b). This asymmetry and hierarchy in objecthood are also reflected in the order in the imperative where the direct or theme object needs to precede indirect or dative objects, (152).

- (150)a. **m̀ nòó yíp t̃n ngóò**
 1SG PRF house build O2SG
 ‘I have built a house for you.’

- b. ***m̀ nòó ngóò t̃n yíp**
 1SG PRF O2SG build house

- (151)a. **m̀ ỹn àkó**
 1SG arrive house
 ‘I arrive at the house.’

- b. ***m̀ àkó ỹn**

- (152)a. **ndáà’ màní ngóm**
 give:K 6.water O1SG
 ‘Give me water!’

- b. ***ndáà’ ngóm màní**

The object typically occurs preverbally in polar questions with a tense form that allows it (153a), (154a,b), but it then occurs post-verbally in answers that contain negation, corrective or contrastive focus, (153b,c). In non-contrastive affirmative answers to polar questions, the object precedes the verbs in tenses that allow that, (154c).

- (153)a. **á kàángè jâ'-ì**
 2SG cassava eat-Q
 'Do you eat cassava?'
- b. mbéè m̀ sí jé kààngà á
 no 1SG NEG eat cassava F
 'No, I don't eat cassava.'
- c. **m̀ jâ' píjáá**
 1SG eat yam
 'I eat YAM.'
- (154)a. **ò nóò jâ' nìpán ájè̀m ì**
 3SG PRF 5.eat liver animal Q
 'Did he eat the liver of the animal?'
- b. **ò nìpán ájè̀m jâ' ì**
 3SG liver animal 5.eat Q
 'Did he eat the liver of the animal?'
- c. **ò nìpán ájè̀m jâ'**
 3SG liver animal 5.eat
 'He ate the liver of the animal.'

In answers to What?-questions, the object is typically post-verbal, (155d). The question word is either sentence initial, (155a) or in situ (155b,c).

- (155)a. **ìć ó à yáà á kà'á t̀ép**
 what? 2SG put at top table
 'What did you put on the table?'
- b. **à yáà ìć ó á kà'á t̀ép**
 2SG put what? at top table
 'What did you put on the table?'
- c. **á kà'á t̀ép à yáà ìć**
 at top table 2SG put what?
 'On the table, what did you put?'
- d. **m̀ yáà m̀ìr nìpíí á kà'á t̀ép**
 1SG put wine palm at top table
 'I have put palm wine on the table.'

When there is a choice to position the object before or after the verb, there are differences in information structure. In (156b), the object after the verb receives contrastive focus. Circumstantial locative phrases are topics when sentence initial, (155c.) above.

- (156)a. **m̀í ìngí ỳè tà'm**
 1sg claws leopard fear
 'I feared the claws of the leopard.'
- b. **m̀í tà'm ìngí ỳè**
 1sg fear claws leopard
 'It is the claws of the leopard, that I fear (maybe not other claws)'

Objects that consist of coordinated phrases naturally have the coordinated phrase after the verb, and the first co-ordinant before the verb, (157a). To have both before the verb stresses the fact that the two co-ordinants, goats and sheep, are together. Such "discontinuous" phrases regularly occur with the numeral following the verb, (158). Associate phrase cannot be split across the verb; (159) is only acceptable if the leopard is not the modifier of the claws but a

separate addressee with a preceding pause. Likewise, an adjective cannot follow the verb modifying a preverbal nominal object, (160). Such a construction is possible if the object and the adjective do not qualify the object but denote a discrete type, like, for example long and short trousers, or a black type of sheep, (161).

(157)a. **mí ípún ndìk nẹ̀ ìndwóm á**
1SG 10.goats see:K with sheep F
'I have seen goats and sheep.'

b. **mí ípún nẹ̀ ìndwóm ndìk**
1SG 10.goats with sheep see:K
'I have seen goats and sheep together.'

(158) **n̄ ándwôm ndà' àmò**
1SG sheep give one
'I have given one sheep (not two).'

(159) **mí ìngî tà'm, ...** yà'
1sg claws fear leopard
'I feared the claws, leopard.'

(160) **ò ákín mànjá ndà' à pí yó**
3sg calabash big give at with child
'He gave the big calabash to the child.'

b. **#ò ákín ndà' mànjá à pí yó**
3sg calabash give big at with child
'He gave a big-calabash to the child.'

(161) **n̄ ándwôm ndà' fī'**
1SG sheep give black
'I have given a black sheep (not white).'

Do the alternations with longer verb stems in tenses have the properties of the disjoint/conjoint that is so common in Bantu? The longer verb stem with the fused -á' suffix is required for the Present tense, irrespective of whether the object precedes or follows the verb, (162); although there can be minor differences in phonetic realisation depending on what follows the verb due to sequence restrictions, which is why the final **k** is not realized on the verb in (163a). In the Recent Past, differences in interpretation do occur: in (165a) with the long verb stem the object race is something like a cognate object forming one semantic unit with the verb while in (164b) with the short stem the object, race, is what is avoided, fled from. The distinction in two stems does not correspond with the conjoint/disjoint distinction, however. One of the crucial distinctions for conjoint/disjoint, namely that "one form is not allowed in sentence-final position" (Van der Wal 2016:15) does not hold for Nyokon. Moreover, the choice between a short and a long verb stem marks the difference between Far Past and Remote Past, as we will see in section 6 below.

The tone-bridge-rule is limited to true post-verbal objects and does not apply to phrases that are more loosely linked to the clause.

(163)a. **ò cánk pìr**
3SG flee:K war

b. **ò pìr cánk**
3SG war flee:K
'He flees from war.'

(164)a. **m̄ yǎr m̄r**
1SG search\PR wine

- b. **m̃ m̃r yàr(k)**
 1SG wine search\PR(:K)
 ‘I want wine.’
- (165)a. **ò cánk òcér**
 3SG flee:K race
 ‘He ran his race’
- b. **ò cá òcér**
 3SG flee race
 ‘He ran from the race.’
- c. **Pól òcér cánk**
 Paul race flee:K
 ‘Paul has run his race.’

13. Summary

We have presented the “tenses” of Nyokon. In view of the paucity of publications on this language, we have illustrated the tenses with examples that cover to some extent the various tonal configurations given the three tone types of the verb. Nyokon has a rich system of tenses making distinctions in degree in past reference. This is a common feature in the Grassfields Bantu area and Nyokon is situated at the border of this with Bamileke as one of its neighbouring languages. Of particular interest is the final marker **á** that marks the end of the clause in negative tenses. A final marker of some shape is also used in complement clauses and relative clauses, and in polar questions. The verb paradigms are rich in the expression of tense, aspect, and, to some extent mood, but also in marking information structure in terms of subject focus and backgrounding. In addition, there is a system of preverbal elements that operate independently of the tenses and indicate phasal semantics such as beginning and end of action, continuation and logical link to the previous clause. Nyokon will probably receive most interest from comparative linguists because of its property of allowing a full object before the verb which is extremely uncommon for Bantu languages. As this option is dependent on the tense or conjugational paradigm of the verb, the overview of the full system of tenses of Nyokon, as presented in this paper, is essential for subsequent study of word order functionality.

Abbreviations

\PA	past shape of verb
\PR	present shape of verb with object
BGND	background
COMPL	complementiser, complement pronoun
EXCL	exclusive of first person plural
F	final
FUT	future
INCHO	inchoative
INCL	inclusive, of first-person plural
INF	infinitive
K	verb stem with -a' suffix
LOG	logophoric pronoun
MID	middle
NEG	negative
O	object
PRF	perfect
PL	plural
POSS	possessive

