Many African tone languages have tonal morphemes and/or morphemes that introduce construction-specific grammatical tone patterns. As work like Hyman (2016), Inkelas (1998), Odden & Bickmore (2014) and Rolle (2018) shows, grammatical tone patterns have a number of properties that challenge a concatenative view of morphology. They associate a High tone or a tone pattern to a position or to positions that are not local to the sponsoring morpheme; they can also delete the tone of their morphological base; and they can introduce construction-specific tonal processes. In addition, more than one inflectional morpheme can influence the grammatical tone pattern of a word or a construction. The question then arises, as Hyman (2016) puts it, if grammatical tone patterns are in conflict, which one wins? Work like Hyman (2016), Inkelas (1998, 2018), McPherson & Heath (2016) and Rolle (2018) has taken the strong position that tonal dominance is defined by the morphosyntactic hierarchy: grammatical tones affect the base they take morphosyntactic scope over, and the hierarchically outermost dominant grammatical tonal morpheme wins.

This talk shows that grammatical tone patterns in Chichewa (Bantu N.31; Downing & Mtenje 2017; Hyman & Mtenje 1999; Kanerva 1990; Myers & Carleton 1996) are problematic for the outermost dominance principle. Indeed, often a single morpheme does not alone determine the tone pattern in a particular verb paradigm. And an innermost dominant morpheme can have an effect on the overall tone pattern, overriding the predicted effect of an outer dominant morpheme. These points can be briefly illustrated with verb paradigms related to the present habitual (PH) aspect, segmentally marked by the prefix -ma-.

The affirmative PH suggests that the PH prefix is tonally dominant, as the contrast between High-toned roots and toneless roots is neutralized (acute accents indicate High tone): ndí-ma-fotokóoza ‘I explain, toneless’ vs. ndí-má-tambaláala ‘I stretch legs, High’. The root tone contrast reappears in the negative PH, however, even though the negative prefix sí- is tonally neutral (it simply realizes a High tone): sí-ndí-má-fotokooza ‘I don’t explain, toneless’ vs. sí-ndí-má-tambaláala ‘I don’t stretch legs, High’. The intensive derivational suffix also affects the verb tone pattern. In the negative PH intensive, the tonal contrast in the root is neutralized: sí-ndí-má-fotokoz-eéts-á ‘I don’t explain a lot, toneless’ vs. sí-ndí-má-tambalal-itíts-á ‘I don’t stretch legs a lot, High’. In these last two forms, we see an inside out effect of tonal dominance. The intensive conditions a dominant, neutralizing tone pattern on the stem that is different from the dominant, neutralizing tone pattern of the outer PH prefix.

In sum, Chichewa grammatical tone patterns provide a challenge to what Spencer (2004) calls a “Radical Agglutination” approach to morphology: the phonological form of inflected words is not always predicted by a one-to-one match between meaning/grammatical function, output form and hierarchical constituent structure. Instead, a combination of morphological features holistically predicts the inflectional tone pattern associated with a particular word form. I will argue that paradigm-based, realizational models like that of Ackerman & Stump (2004), Bond (2016), Spencer (2004) and Stump (2016) best account for the Chichewa data. More specifically, I will propose that while the segmental exponents of verb paradigms are built up from the stem outwards, in 3 morphologically-defined “blocks”, the tonal realization for each block is determined by combinations of morphemes relevant for the entire verb word.
References


