

4. Tone

Tyhurst (1984) and Mbuagbaw (1994) identified four basic tones in Kenyang: two level tones, high [´] and low [`], and two contour tones, rising [ˇ] and falling [^]. Tone was represented lexically within morphemes and grammatically within sentences.

4.1 Tonal Contrast

Tones in Kenyang contrast minimally. The speaker uses the pitch of his voice to distinguish lexically between morphemes and words which would have been otherwise identical. For example, tone minimally distinguishes the following words:

(1)

[ɛβ´á]	fence
[ɛβà]	bag
[m̀mú]	dog
[m̀m̀]	person
[fá]	give way
[fà]	here
[ŋk´k]	ladder
[ŋk̀k]	fowl

[tí]	to sell
[tî]	to scrub

In the previous orthography, low tone was left unmarked.

4.2 Grammatical functions of Tone

Tone plays an important role in the grammar of the language. Compare the following examples:

(2)

Present perfective	[àtò]	'he has sent'
Present imperfective	[àtó]	'he sent'
Present continuous	[ǎtó]	'he is sending'

Thus, when we do not mark tone properly, the meaning becomes ambiguous.

4.3 Representation of Tone in the Orthography

The grammatical functions of tones discussed above make it necessary to represent them in the Kenyang orthography. Longacre (1964: 136-7), Nida (1964b:26-7) and Wiessemann (1989:16) agree that when tone changes affect verb tenses and pronominal subjects, they should be marked in the orthography. Thus, in the 1990 orthography, tones were marked in the

orthography following the above proposals. Since the low tone has a higher frequency than the high tone, the low tone was left unmarked thus, following the tone economy principle (Williamson 1984).

The Society for Kenyang Literature (SKL) started producing literature after the Linguistics Department of SIL, Yaoundé approved the orthography. In 1991, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), sponsored the first teachers training seminar. About 55 teachers received training to teach Kenyang in their respective schools and communities.

4.3.1 Revision of Kenyang Tone Orthography

After the teachers' seminar in 1991, teaching started in the various schools and community centres. Beginning in 1995, we started receiving feedback from some teachers and supervisors. One of the major problems was that of tone marking. Many teachers shared the view that they did not see the difference between a downstepped high and a high tone on the one hand, and an unmarked low tone and a falling tone on the other hand. According to their suggestions, the downstepped high should have been marked as high, while the falling tone should have been left unmarked, like the low tone. These suggestions provoked other problems in the orthography. The reason was that the falling tone and the unmarked low contrast. The same situation occurs between the high tone and the downstepped high. Here are some examples:

(3)

[báfi]

'they sold'

[bá'tí]	'they are selling'
[mápéné]	'they ate'
[má'ne]	'they are eating'
[bákwén]	'they fell'
bá'kwén]	'they are falling'
[bátò]	'they are throwing'
[bátô]	'they threw'
[bákò]	'they are walking'
[bákô]	'they walked'
[bàsò]	'they are wahing'
[bàsô]	'they washed'

Faced with this situation, the Linguistics Department of SIL Yaoundé undertook a study of the problem. In 1997 tone was identified as a potential problem for new literates. Chris Jackson, an SIL member working with the Manyu team suggested that the grave accent from French could be used to mark the progressive aspect in Kenyang. We tried this proposal, and it has worked successfully. Thus, instead of marking three tones, we mark only two in the orthography. The grave accent causes no problem because the native speakers had never been taught the grave accent in the old orthography.

Mbuagbaw (1997) introduced this new system of marking tone in *Kenyang Primer 1*.

A Teachers/supervisors seminar, organised in March, 1998, was a total success when they received training with the new primer. The new system of marking tone was satisfactory to both the teachers and supervisors. They remarked that this orthography was easier than the first one because the number of tone marks was reduced from four to three, and the grave accent was only used with the progressive aspect.

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