

The role of tone in TAM, verb class, and subject agreement in Rere

Rere is a Kordofanian language spoken in the Nuba Mountains area of Sudan (Quint, 2009). Resembling other Kordofanian languages (Moro: Rose, 2013; Lumun: Smits, 2017), Rere uses tone to mark TAM, subject, and verb class. The tone on verb stem reflects the interaction among grammatical tone (TAM), lexical tone (verb class), and phonological tone spreading (subject).

TAM & Verb class. The domain of verb tone assignment is the subject class prefix /kw-/ plus the verb root, and any TAM prefixes (e.g. past tense /m-/ in recent past). There are two classes for TAM melody: **non-replacive** class where the lexical tone of the verb is preserved, and **replacive** class where all the TBUs in the verb are overwritten into L tone. The **non-replacive** class involves future (FUT), recent past (REC), and habitual (HAB). FUT is marked by H-toned subject class prefix /kw-/ while REC and HAB have L-toned /k̀w-/. The lexical tone of the verb is realized on the verb root. There are three classes of the lexical tone: LH (/pèrté/ “wipe”), HL (/légðà/ “shut”), and HH (/méteí/ “help”) (1).

(1)

	TAM	FUT	REC	HAB
Lexical class				
Class I		k̀w-pèrté H-LH	k̀w-m-pèrté L-m-LH	k̀w-ṭí-pèrté L-ṭí-HH
Class II		k̀w-légðà H-HL	k̀w-m-légðà L-m-HL	k̀w-ṭí-légðà H-ṭí-HL
Class III		k̀w-méteí H-HH	k̀w-m-méteí L-m-HH	k̀w-ṭí-méteí L-ṭí-HH

The lexical class I and III are neutralized into HH in HAB. A possible explanation is that the H of the HAB prefix /ṭí-/ spreads to the adjacent right TBU so that the lexical /LH/ is overwritten into [HH].

The **replacive** TAMs includes perfective (PRV), progressive (PROG), and remote past (REM). (2) shows Class I and II verbs conjugated in those replacive TAMs.

(2)

	TAM	PRV	PROG	REM
Lexical class				
Class I		k̀w-βirtù L-LL	ngó k̀w-pèrtù L-LL	k̀w-m-pèrtà L-m-LL
Class II		k̀w-légðà-ðù L-LL	ngó k̀w-légðà-ðù L-LL-L	k̀w-m-légðì-ðà L-m-LL-L

Subject agreement. Besides the subject class marker /kw-/ (SG) or /l-/ (PL), 3SG, 3PL, 1EXCL, and 2PL are indicated by separate pronouns (e.g. /níná/ in 3a), which do not affect the tone of the verb stem. 1SG and 2SG are marked by subject prefix on the verb (3b, c). The subject prefixes initiate an unbounded right-ward H spreading up to another H tone (3b), which overwrites the L tone of TAM and lexical class. (3c) shows how the H of the subject class marker /kw-/ in FUT blocks the spreading of the subject H tone.

(3)

a.	REC.1.EXCL	níná li-m-pèrté	L-m-LH
b.	REC.1.SG	ní-k̀w-m-pèrté	H-H-m-HH
c.	FUT.1.SG	ní-k̀w-pèrté	H-H-LH

In summary, in Rere, the tone on the verb stem reflects the interaction between TAM, lexical class, and subject agreement. In FUT, REC, and HAB, the grammatical tone of TAM surfaces on the subject class marker while the lexical tone is realized on the verb root. The other three TAMs (PRV, PROG, REM) have grammatical tone that overwrites the lexical tone. Subject prefix triggers a phonological H tone spreading to the verb stem, overwriting the grammatical and lexical L tones.

References

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