

Is CamP a Tone Language? Revisiting a former statement

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INTRODUCTION

When a Cameroonian ventures on the Nigerian border, it does not take the frontier police there long to discover his identity. This is due, among other things, to the way he intones his pidgin. Identification through pidgin speech also happens when a Nigerian arrives in Cameroon. This situation, which has not earned enough attention from contrastive linguistic investigation, as far I know, is a signal that, even within West African pidgins, tones are not only relevant in particular regions, but could also vary from the one region to the other. Yet, much tone-based prosodic research has been carried out on African languages, and has shown that the tonology of African languages constitutes a significant area of study, given their systematicity and predictability. Pike (1967) (qtd. in Mbassi-Manga: 1976 12) defines tone languages as “languages having lexically significant, contrastive pitch on each syllable.” When tones are attested in a language, they help to distinguish meaning and, sometimes, also play grammatical and discoursal functions. The conclusion in Mbassi-Manga’s (1976) paper is that West African Pidgins in general, and CamP in particular, are not tone languages. The purpose of my paper is to re-examine his claims and predictions vis-à-vis synchronic realities in CamP.

MBASSI-MANGA’S ARGUMENTS

According to Mbassi-Manga (1976), what researchers referred to as tone was in fact either stress-timing or intonation. He asserts that different speakers of pidgin used the language with the substratum of their localities and continues that in the CamP situation, “depending on the context from which the analyst draws his material, there will be greater or less influence of the prosodic features of home languages, the English language and the French language” (Mbassi-Manga 11). He blames researchers who say that Pidgins are tone languages for working with assumptions that, since African languages are tone languages, their pidgins should necessarily be tone languages. He also says their pronouncements are anecdotal, as they are not

based on sufficient facts from the field. According to him, tone in CamP is “only those features that are judged significant, by way of being contrastive; namely: those whose omission from an utterance would cause a linguistically untrained group of native speakers to state that the utterance was different in meaning from their own language” and concludes that “hence, tone must contrast to be significant.” (12)

He continues that stress is *unemphatic* in CamP and has a fixed place. It falls on the final syllable of a word in isolation and of a sense group in connected speech (Mbassi-Manga 14). The exponents of stress in CamP, according to him, are prominence, length and pitch. Prominence deals with loudness or the force of the utterance. Length shows that all stressed syllables sound longer in duration than their unstressed counterparts. He dismisses the contrast in CamP “big eye” (an eye that is big) and “big éye” (greediness) as “not therefore significant contrasts [...] in Pidgin Englishes in West Africa” (10). According to him, the tonal features in the CamP of 1976 (*i.e.*, where contrast could be noticed) resulted from “conflict in the pronunciation of the user” and would lose significance with time. He concludes, therefore, that “W.A. [West African] Pidgin Englishes are to be considered syllable-timed languages where tonal features are temporary and, most importantly, characteristic of words that are still struggling to enter the language from sources in the contact situation” (16).

Mbassi-Manga provides the following condition that must be met for us to say that there is tone in CamP: “To make judgments on tone requires, on the one hand, the need to specify a standard level of loudness for contrastive pitch and within pitch [...] phonologically contrastive tone” (*ibid.*). Tones must therefore contrast to be significant, or to be taken seriously. Generally, Mbassi-Manga’s conclusion is that the low-high regular tone pattern on most words in CamP is syllable-timing. However, in syllable-timed languages like French, there are no distinctive pitches on single words, just as in stress-timed languages like English. However, in current CamP, where mono-syllabic words can either have a low or high pitch, even without being distinctive (that is phonetically), it is a significant prosodic feature, by constituting what a speaker needs to know to speak the language well. According to him also, the time-table for the expiration of tones in CamP showed that, as soon as the language was better *fixed*, tonal distinctions, probably carried over from local languages, were to disappear. Contrarily to his predictions, tones are still a vital feature of CamP today, thirty years after he made his predictions.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STRESS AND TONE

For the purpose of this paper, it is important to distinguish tone from stress. As Mbassi-Manga says:

whereas in English the stress in a sense group is according to syllable distribution, some strong and others weak, in CamP, except for emphatic stress, each syllable of a word (pronounced unemphatically) is uttered with the same amount of energy except the last where a slight increase of energy is expended. (1976 13)

To him therefore, the only difference between stress in English and in CamP is that unstressed syllables in English are weak, and in CamP, all syllables are pronounced with the same amount of energy. Though he uses this to strengthen his arguments for syllable-timing, the point paradoxically supports arguments for tones in CamP. For example, if we take the word “gari” (a semi powder-like product of cassava), we can distinguish tone from stress even synchronically. In the Cameroon English (CamE) stress context, the stress on [gari] will fall on the first syllable. If we changed the stress pattern and placed it on the second syllable, we would have [ga 'ri] (BrE /gə 'ri/). This is certainly different from [gàri], the CPE pronunciation of the word, where there is a low tone on the first syllable and a high one on the second syllable. This is different “prosodically” from [ga 'ri], where there is no low tone on the first syllable. What is meant here is that an unstressed syllable does not correspond to a low tone and a stressed syllable does not necessarily correspond to a high tone. Furthermore, unstressed syllables in English undergo the process of vowel reduction, which is a segmental change. It could also be said that monosyllabic words, which are inherently stressed, have the same prosodic effect as a flat tone. However, monosyllabic words in tone languages could also have a low or high tone, where stress would be insignificant. For example, “loss” (lose) has a flat tone in CamP, but one of its derivatives “lóssís” (loss) is realized with a high-high tone pattern. Lengthening the syllables in both cases does not change the pronunciation substantially. Speakers of CamP will distinguish these very easily. We can conclude from this example that CamP has its own prosody, different to an extent from what obtains in CamE. Rather, the CamP pronunciation of the word could be said to be similar to that attested in local languages in Cameroon.

GRAMMATICAL VALUE OF TONES IN CAMP

This section considers in greater detail some tonal occurrences in CamP and highlights their morphological value on the CamP lexicon.

Behaviour of tones on lexical items

Let's consider the tone on monosyllabic words.⁶

(1)	CPE word	Gloss
	for piss ¹	to urinate
	for shit	to excrete
	for loss	to lose
	for find	to look for / to be beautiful
	for come	to come
	for nak	to hit
	for fool	to deceive
	for lie	to tell a lie

The words in (1) show that the tone on monosyllabic English loans is generally flat. It could also be said that there is no tone involved in their realisation. The pronunciation of these words is the same as we will have in CamE. But (2) below shows the significance of tones in monosyllabic words.

(2)	Word	Gloss
	kwà	bag
	bǒy	boy child
	wéh	that (cf. weh = way)
	gò	future marker (cf. for go = to go)
	bin	past marker (different from "been/bean" in English)
	dóng	perfective marker
	à	!

In (2), tone is relevant because, unlike in (1), the pitch on the words could be low or high. The examples are considered in cases where the words are pronounced in isolation, that is, when they are not in sequence. It will be noted

⁶ There has been much inconsistency about writing in CamP. The confusion has been between an English based writing system and a phonetic one. The tendency, however, has been to mix up both without any justification. For this paper, I prefer to allow English loans that have not been tempered with phonologically and morphologically as they are written in English. A writing system for CamP is a serious debate that can only be handled in a different paper.

that the variations are more with function words and words borrowed from home languages. This leads us to supposing that the various function words have their tones, distinguishing them from the lexical words from which they are derived. This gives them a significant phonological value. Tone is used therefore to derive function words from their lexical counterparts. (3) below further shows the significance of tones in CamP:

(3) Word	Gloss
a. nyàngá ⁷	cray fish
nyàngá	pride, make-up, presumptuousness
b. Sává (n.)	person from the South-West or Littoral Provinces of Cameroon / Fashion name of the two provinces themselves.
sàwà (adj.)	stale, sour (cf. sàwà chop (stale food), sàwà ngwava (sour guava))
for sává (v.)	to go stale
c. i. Jesus è gò dì waka	Jesus SM FUT ASP walk - "Jesus will be moving."
ii. Jesus è ø gó dí waka	Jesus SM PAST go ASP walk - "Jesus went and was moving"
d. i. E take yì-séf fo up	He take his self to up - "He took himself up."
ii. E kam yí-séf.	He come his self - "He came by himself."

In (3a) and in (3b), we see how the variation in the tone on individual words can lead to differences in meaning. The comparison of (3ci) and (3cii) shows how variation in tone between "gó" (future marker) and "gó" (go) affects the tone of the following "dí" (perfective marker) leading to variations in meaning. Again, a comparison of (3di) with (3dii) brings out the two types of "yì": "yì" and "yí." "Yì-séf" in (3di) is direct object and is formed from the possessive adjective. "Yí-séf" in (3dii) is an adverb of manner and is formed from an objective pronoun.

Evidence from CamP shows that words ending in a final "i" almost always carry a high tone (*cf.* Gilman: 1980). They are mostly disyllabic words and their first syllables carry a low tone while their second syllables carry a high tone, yielding a low-high tone pattern.

(4) Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
mónkí	monkey	mòní	money
pòtí	car repairs substance	sàbí	to know
kòní	cunning	màmí	mother
kòfí	coffee	pùsí	cat, pussy
bèbí	girl child	fátí	fat person

⁷ It should be noted that *nyàngá* is a North West Province variant of *njàngá* in CamP.

(4) Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
shòtí	short person/surety	Vickí	Victorine
Tomí	Tommy, Thomas	bòdí	breast wear
kòkí	local dish	bòbí	breast (milk)
dàdí	daddy, father	jètíjètí	rash
kàkí	khaki	kèbí	personal name
Nòní	place name	ngràfí	grassfield
njaarí	ethnic group	shimí	feminine underwear
naití	evening dress for women	tròkí	tortoise
dòtí	dirt	stòrí	story
kàmí	new cars shop/dealer	jèlòsí	jealousy

However, there are some exceptions that do not take the above low-high tone pattern. For example, “*pòl*” (brassiere) carries two low tones. “*Mbót*” (colloquial word for clothes), “*bók*” (personal name), “*chók*” (misfortune as in *fall for chok*), “*már*” (marriage) and “*kwád*” (smooth talk) all take a high-high tone pattern. Other tone contrast contexts include the following:

(5)	i. a- bàbà	(n.) father, fetish priest, (v.) to carry (esp. baby) on the back
	b- bàbà	barber
	ii. a- màní	mother, mum, woman (as in màní-kòkí ‘woman who sells <i>koki</i>)
	b- màní:	used to refer to a woman fondly
	iii- a. láí-lái	interjection in North West province (<i>not at all</i> as in “láí-lái to láí-lái”) [tone here is not very high but is higher than the flat tone on “láí”(lie)]
	b. lài-lái	falsehood [as in “ <i>lái-lái tok</i> ” (deceptive speech)]
	iv- a. nyàngí	meeting, tontine, thrift and loans scheme
	b. nyángí	person from the Banyang ethnic group in the South West Province of Cameroon
	v- a. lás	groin, anus, bottom <i>as in</i> “lás koko” (the stem for cocoyam plant), “tif-lás” (person who has sex with a woman without paying), “shit-no-wipe- lás” (worthless person) etc.
	b. làs	last <i>as in</i> “làs-fight” “làs-koko” (last person in a series), làs-man (worthless person), làs-córñ (late harvest of corn)”

vi- a. ndénguè	music
b. ndènguè	terrible thing
vii- a. bólo	destructive or protective charm
b. bòló	(colloquial) job, place of work
viii- a. nàná	(colloquial) girl friend
b. Nánà	personal name

The Case of Vowel Lengthening in CPE

What seems to be vowel lengthening is a form of tone modulation. When a composite tone falls on a sound, it undergoes some delay in pronunciation, which is tantamount to lengthening. Also, because of the energy expended on a high tone, the syllables on which it falls sounds longer than those on which low tones fall (see Huber: 1999 169).

(6) i-	
a. boy	boy (tone here is flat and could be equated to stress)
b. böy	pet name for boy child, a boy child, servant as in the word “böy-böy”
ii- a. māmí	mother,
b. māmí	pet appellation for woman or girl, personal name
lii- njō	free thing, anything got without labour
iv- bābá	(v.) to carry on the back, (n.) old person who prepares charms
v- pǎ (from papa)	father
vi- mǎ (from mama)	mother
Vii- bō	(vocative word) my friend

Vowel lengthening is therefore distinctive as in the above examples. Genuine lengthening is noticed on some words:

Tòróóki	tortoise
Gààrí	gari

Behaviour of Tones in Compounds

The above cases are cases in which words have what can be called “inherent tone patterns.” Tones in CamP are the more important with derived

tones, that is, when tone can vary from the one situation of use to the other either for morphological or grammatical purposes. This is the case with compounding and reduplication. Notice in passing that in matters of vocabulary, CamP mostly uses description to render abstract nouns. Hence, something must be present in the language to distinguish the compound acting as an abstract noun from its source word group. Consider the following pairs, where tone plays a grammatical function:

	CamP word	Gloss
(7)	a. big mop	large mouth
	b. big-móp	boosting, bragging
(8)	a. long eye	long eye
	b. lònġ- éye	covetousness
	c. for lònġ-éye	to covet something
(9)	a. bad hat	a bad heart
	b. bàd- hát	wickedness
	c. fo bàd- hát	to be wicked

The above compounds come from the noun phrases where we have the sequence [adjective + noun]. In (7a), “big mop” means “large mouth.” But in (7b), we have “big-móp” which means “boosting.” In (8a), we have “long eye,” which is simply descriptive of an eye that is long. “Lònġ-éye” in (8b) means “covetousness” and its corresponding verb form is “for lònġ- éye” (to covet). The very contrast is noticed in (9a), (9b) and (9c) for “bad hat” (bad heart), “bàd-hát” (wickedness), “for bàd-hát” (to be wicked). Except for (7), the abstract noun in turn gives birth to an abstract verb form. “To boost” in CamP is rendered through the expression “for make mop”.

A consideration of the above tonal variations shows that the low-high pattern is generally placed on nominal forms to mean “the act of being something.” This is important in CamP lexicology because it marks the category “abstract word.” The tone is what shows that they are compound nouns and not simply nouns pre-modified by adjectives. Below are other pairs, involving verb phrases:

(10)	a. for lok mop	to shut someone's mouth
	b. lòk- móp	miracle, miraculous, wonder, wonderful
(11)	a. for nak skin	to belabour oneself
	b. nàk- skín	waste of time
	c. for nàk-skín	to waste one's time
(12)	a. for spoil skin	to destroy the body
	b. spòil- skín	sexual intercourse
	c. for spòil- skín	to have sex
(13)	a. for tie heart	to tie a heart (non-existent in the language, though), <i>also</i> to be courageous and enduring
	b. tiè-heárt	courage
	c. for tiè-heárt	to be courageous, to have fortitude
(14)	a. for open eye	to open the eye
	b. opèn-éye	bullying
	c. for opèn-éye	to bully

(10a), (11a), (12a), (13a) and (14a) are of the form verb + noun object. They have no tonal properties, as they are rendered literally as it is the case in English. (10b), (11b), (12b), (13b) and (14b) are nominal forms tonally derived from the verb-noun sequences. The low-high tone pattern in CamP is, therefore, used to derive abstract nominals from predicates. (11c), (12c), (13c) and (14c) are abstract verbs derived through the process of conversion from abstract nouns. Consider (15) below:

(15)	a. under box	under the box
	b. ùndèr-bóx	best dress often kept for special occasions

(15a) is the case of prepositional phrase made up of a preposition plus its noun complement. (15b) is derived from the prepositional phrase through the use of the low-high tone pattern. We conclude from the above that the low-high tone is a derivative tone pattern used in the process of nominalization.

The nominal compounds so derived are metaphorically related to their corresponding literal forms. From a verb like “for cry die” (to mourn), we will have “krài-dái,” act of mourning (death celebration/funeral) and from an adjectival phrase such as ‘las fight’ (last fight), we will have “(for) làs-fight” (in the final analyses). This process could also mean person who does something as seen below:

(16)	a. boy di lan	a boy is learning
	b. làn-bóy	apprentice
(17)	a. for chop chia	to succeed to a throne
	b. chòp-chía	successor
(18)	a. for fan palava	to look for trouble
	b. fàn-pàláva	trouble maker, fault finder

The above derivations are nominal compounds formed from predicates. The following nominals in (19b) and (20b) describe things used for doing something.

(19)	a. for pis for pot	urinate in a pot (verb + PP)
	b. pìs-pót	pot/container in which to urinate
(20)	a. hole for shit	hole for excreting (Noun + PP)
	b. shít-hóle	anus (hole used for excreting)
(21)	a. chòp-chóp	gourmand
	b. chòp-fáyà	person who fights relentlessly
	c. chop time	time for food/break
	d. chop die	person who dies for food
	e. Chópchóp	personal name

(21) manifests its own set difficulties. (21a) and (21b) have the same pattern. (21c) and (21d) also have the same pattern. (21a) and (21b) could be derived from the verb “for chop” (to eat). “Chòp-chóp” describes someone who “chops” (eats) and “chops”. “Chòp-fáyà” is one who eats “faya,” as seen in “e don chop faya” (He has sworn to see the end.) (21c) and (21d) are derived from the noun “chop” (food) as seen in the gloss. Hence, when the first word

in a compound is a noun, there is no tone marking. (21e) is a personal name with a completely different tone pattern. We can conclude that in CamP nominal compounds, if the first word is a verb or adjective, it takes a low tone and if it is a noun, there is no tone marking. Hence, the low tone marks particular grammatical sources (complementation for verbs and modification for adjectives) of the compound word. This distinction is further buttressed by (22):

(22)	a. a giv am for yi	I give RP to him - "I gave it to him"
	b. a giv am for yi masa	I give it to his boss - "I gave it to his boss."

The distinction between "yi" in (22a) and "yi" in (22b) is tone. The noun form "yi" (him) has a flat tone and the adjectival form "yi"(his) has a low tone, thereby marking modification. Another noticeable phenomenon in CamP is the realisation of some English loans with a distinctive pattern, which is not stress, as seen below:

(23)	Móní	money
	Pàtí	party
	Márí	marry
	Mòtó	motor
	Tòrí	story
	Mònkí	monkey
	Wàtá	water
	Ràpá	rapper
	Bàmbú	bamboo
	Kòfí	coffee
	Dòtí	dirty
	Kòvà	cover
	Jèlòsí	jealousy

The above words are realised using tones, as they vary prosodically from their English source-words. "Intoning" an English loan word is to be seen in this instance as a pidginisation process. This means that a word is borrowed from English and is pidginised to fit in the CamP tone system. Though these words have no contrast contexts, they have a CamP tone pattern.

Reduplication and tones:

How does tone function with reduplication in CamP? This will be discussed under three categories: inherently reduplicated forms, aspectual

reduplicated forms, and forms used for intensification and limitation as discussed in Sala (2012). Consider (24) below:

(24)	a. sǎn-sǎn	sand
	b. wò-wó	ugly
	c. bìá-bíá	hair
	d. njámà-njámá	vegetable
	c. pàlà-pálá	wrestling
	d. chùkù-chúkú	thorns

The words in (24) are classified as inherently reduplicated because they are made up of bound morphemes. Their tone pattern is low-high.

(25)	a. for wàkà-wáká	to move from place to place
	b. for bròke-bróke	to shatter into pieces
	c. for tèar - téar	to tear into pieces

In (25), reduplication has a repetitive and distributive aspect. This is lexicalized in English in *break* and *shatter*. Their tone pattern is low-high for monosyllabic words and lowlow-highhigh for disyllabic words. Hence, “wákà,” which has a high-low tone, now takes a lowlow-highhigh tone pattern in a reduplicated transformation.

(26)	a. sharp-sharp morning	very early in the morning
	b. Some fine-fine woman	a very beautiful woman
	c. For hala trong-trong	to cry out very loudly
	d. wàtá-wátá soup	very watery sauce
	e. for wákà náyò-náyò	to go very gently

In (26), reduplication is used for intensificative purposes. The difference between *sharp morning* (early in the morning) and *sharp-sharp morning* (very early in the morning) is that of intensification. Here, there is no derived tone as the words maintain their original tone patterns.

(27) a. Pear na fifty-fifty	The pears cost fifty francs each
b. Wuna enter one-one.	You come in one after the other

In (27), reduplication is used to mark a one-to-one mapping, where in a group of people or things, the speaker is considering the individual for some action. This is expressed in English by such expressions as *each* and *after the other*. Here, there is no tone marking.

From the analyses, we have seen that the tone pattern observed by a reduplicated transform is [low-high] or [low low-high high] for disyllabic words. These patterns are used to mark the distributive and the repetitive aspects. This change is irrespective of the tone on the original word. We also concluded that there are no tonal changes when reduplication is for emphasis, for the superlative and for intensification. The tone of the original word is maintained. This means that it is CamP competence to know when to alter and when not to alter the tones in a reduplicated transformation.

Distinctive co-habitation of stress and tone

Some CamP words are already observing an interesting phenomenon where the tonal realisation and the stress realisation are cohabiting, at times to distinguish meaning.

(28) a. “mári” and “marry”	E dong mári someman. (She has got married to someone.) - You dong marry? You fit marry now.
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“Mari” is used in the transitive sense and “marry” is used intransitively. But “mári” could be used intransitively, whereas “marry” cannot be used transitively.

b. Mòtó and moto	“You dong get mòtó/motor?” Both forms are used interchangeably
c. Bètá and “better”	Bètá man (a real person); A dong better. (He has improved/is convalescing/His illness is subsiding)

It is seen that “bètá” is used as an adjective and ‘better’ is used as a verb. It is stilted to say “?better man” or “?E dong bètá” in CamP.

d. “For tie-héart” and “for tie heart”	“to be courageous”: These are used interchangeably.
e. “Bità” (deliberate statements to hurt someone) and “bitter” (bitter)	“Bità” is a noun and “bitter” is an adjective, though we also have “bità kola” in CamP.
f. “Country” and “kòntri”	“E dong go country” (He has gone to the village.) “Kòntri granut” (a local breed of groundnuts known to be more tasty); “How e kòntri so?” (Why is he this primitive?) “Country” is used as noun to mean ‘village’ while “kòntri” is used as adjective and as an adjectival verb.
g. a. lóng	house (colloquial usage)
b. long	long (adjective)

In the above cases, some tonal forms and stress forms of the same words do not just exist gratuitously, but express linguistic distinctions, such as part of speech and meaning. CamP therefore uses stress and tone alternately to beef up its word stock of English loans. Apart from cases of synchronic tone contrasts, we have also seen cases of inherent and derived tones in CPE. The derived tone is a productive lexical process in CamP compounding and reduplication. Certainly, an important grammatical process in a language cannot be “insignificant” in that language, as asserted by Mbassi-Manga (1976). Immediately a process is used to mark grammatical distinctions in a language, it will not die soon. CamP may not be a tone language from the real sense of the qualification, but tone is significant in CamP by constituting part of the competence in CamP speech.

CONCLUSION

A number of contentions result from Mbassi-Manga’s statements. If his prophecy were anything to believe in, one will not expect to find tone marking in CamP thirty years after he published his paper. I have shown that, from synchronic observation, tone is still an important distinctive lexical and grammatical tool in CPE, in spite of the rise in educational level, the depidginisation process and a better *ascertaining* and *fixing* of CamP reported strongly in Ngefac & Sala (2006) and in Sala & Ngefac (2006). Again, thirty years afterwards, we are not counting tonal changes amongst the numerous changes that have occurred in CamP at the levels of syllables and vowel change. Changes have therefore been segmental. Non-segmental changes

have not, at least, been reported yet. Again, CamP may not be a tone language (maybe because of the varied provenance of its linguistic resources), but this does not make tone insignificant in the language. Tone may be significant when it is contrastive in individual lexical items. Yet, tone should not be contrastive in all lexical items for us to call the particular language a tone language. In the so-called tone languages, we cannot also find contrastive pairs for all words. We cannot also say that, for those languages, in the non-contrastive lexical items where pitch is realized, pronunciation is according to stress. A regular, predictable tone pattern is not necessarily syllable-timing. The distinctive co-habitation of tone and stress in some English loans shows that a pidgin may use both prosodic features alternately for lexical and grammatical intents.

Tones, as well as stress, are significant in CamP because of its hybrid nature. The point therefore is not declaring whether CamP uses tone or stress, but showing how the language has appropriated both prosodic features and is using them for linguistic distinctions. With the confluence announced for CamP and CamE *in* Ngefac & Sala (2006) and *in* Sala & Ngefac (2006), tones are what still keep both languages apart phonologically. This must be taken seriously in proposing a CamP writing system.

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