

## Description of Surface Tone in the Limbum Verb Phrase

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### 1. Introduction

The Limbum language is spoken in Donga-Mantung Division of North West Province. It is classified by the Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM) (1983:7) as belonging to the Northern sub group of the Eastern Grassfields languages.

Limbum has three phonemic level tones: H, M and L. It also has five glides: HL, HM, LM, ML and LL (low falling). In context, the contrast between L and LL is neutralized.

The great majority of Limbum words are monosyllabic. However all combinations of level tone patterns can occur on disyllabic nouns except for the LH pattern. This is explained by a tone lowering rule which states that a surface L tone lowers the following H tone to M (Mfonyam:8).

In this paper, tones are marked in the following way:  $\overset{H}$ ,  $\overset{M}$ ,  $\overset{L}$ ,  $\overset{H}{L}$ ,  $\overset{H}{M}$ ,  $\overset{L}{M}$ ,  $\overset{M}{L}$ ,  $\overset{L}{L}$ . In syllables having a nucleus of two vowels, the tone is marked only on the first vowel.

### 2. The Scope of This Study

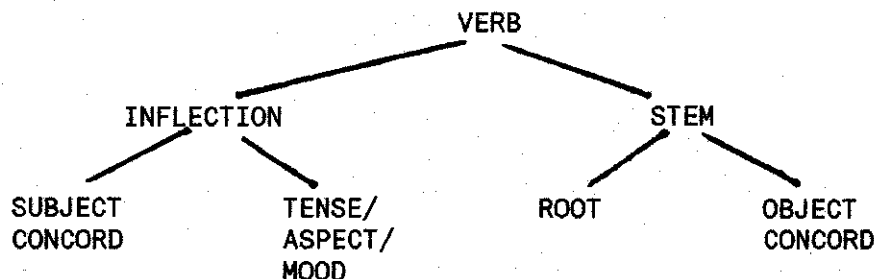
The study done by this researcher was of the tone patterns found in the verb phrase, and is concerned with the surface tones. It does not include a discussion of historical or underlying tones. It will describe the structure of the verb phrase, the tones of the different types of constituents of the phrase, and the alternations observed.

### 3. The Verb Phrase Structure

In Limbum, the normal constituent order within a clause is

S(ubject) + P(redicate) + O(bject) + M(odifier)

The following tree diagram shows the structure of the Limbum verb phrase.



#### 3.11. Subject Markers

All Limbum pronoun forms are written as separate words. They take either high or low tone, and are as follows:

Personal Pronouns

	Singular	Plural		
		Exclusive	Inclusive	
			Dual	Plural
1st person	mê/m̃	wèr	sò	sèe
2nd person	wè/â	wèe		
3rd person	é	wówèe		

Mè dù ntāa.	'I went to the market.'
Wè dù ntāa.	'You went to the market.'
E dù ntāa.	'He went to the market.'
Wèr à dù ntāa.	'We (excl) went to the market.'
Sò à dù ntāa.	'We (dual incl) went to the market.'
Sèe à dù ntāa.	'We (plural incl) went to the market.'
Wèe à dù ntāa.	'You went to the market.'
Wówèe á dù ntāa.	'They went to the market.'

Singular forms of the personal pronouns stand alone as the subject, but the plural pronoun is followed by a concord marker (see below).

The alternate shortened forms of the 1st and 2nd person singular subjects occur in the continuous aspect and future tenses:

M bé dù ntāa.	'I will go to the market.'
A bé dù ntāa.	'You will go to the market.'
M cē dù ntāa.	'I am going to the market.'
A cē dù ntāa.	'You are going to the market.'

### 3.2 Subject Concord

Van Reenan (nd) has described the somewhat limited system of concord in Limbum as having four genders, each including a singular and plural class. The subject concord markers for these classes are given below, and their correspondence to Proto-Bantu (PB) classes is indicated.

<u>Gender</u>	<u>PB class</u>	<u>Sg subj</u>	<u>PB class</u>	<u>Pl subj</u>
A	1,1a	ā	2	ví
B	5	yí	6	ví
C	7	lí	8	mí
D	9	ā	10	yí

#### Examples

Gender A sg.	Yā sín ā bū.	'My bird is lost.'
pl.	Wāp bsín ví bū.	'My birds are lost.'

Gender B sg.	Lá rkîŋ lí bǔ.	'My pot is lost.'
pl.	Má mkîŋ mí bǔ.	'My pots are lost.'
Gender C sg.	Yá cê' yí bǔ.	'My cloth is lost.'
pl.	Wá bcê' ví bǔ.	'My clothes are lost.'
Gender D sg.	Yâ ngùp à bǔ.	'My fowl is lost.'
pl.	Yá ngùp yí bǔ.	'My fowls are lost.'

A noteworthy observation in this paradigm is that the plural form of gender D takes the same form as the singular of gender C. Nouns occurring in the gender D group are not inflected for plural form, and take a singular concord marker. However the marker is different from the gender D singular concord marker.

When there is no independent clause subject, the same concord markers are used except for Gender A nouns, where the singular concord marker is é. This is the same as the third person singular personal pronoun (see above).

Gender A sg.	E bǔ.	'It is lost.'
pl.	Ví bǔ.	'They are lost.'
Gender B sg.	Lí bǔ.	'It is lost.'
pl.	Mí bǔ.	'They are lost.'
Gender C sg.	Yí bǔ.	'It is lost.'
pl.	Ví bǔ.	'They are lost.'
Gender D sg.	E bǔ.	'It is lost.'
pl.	Yí bǔ.	'They are lost.'

Again, the plural concord marker for gender D takes the gender C singular marker.

#### 4. Object Markers

Direct Object personal pronouns and gender markers are the same as subject pronouns except for the 3rd person singular which takes the form ye.

Ŋkarà à lìp mē.	'My friend beat me.'
Ŋkarà à lìp wē.	'My friend beat you.'
Ŋkarà à lìp ye.	'My friend beat him.'
Ŋkarà à lìp wēr.	'My friend beat us (excl).'
Ŋkarà à lìp sō.	'My friend beat us (dual incl).'
Ŋkarà à lìp sēe.	'My friend beat us (plural incl).'
Ŋkarà à lìp wēe.	'My friend beat you.'
Ŋkarà à lìp wowēe.	'My friend beat them.'

Concord markers for the direct object are the same as for the subject markers except for the gender A and D singular marker, which changes from é to yé.

Mè lìp yé. 'I beat it (the bird).'

## 5. Tonal Melody of Verb Roots

Monosyllabic Verbs are either high, low or low falling tone.

H - tá	'shoot'
L - vù	'come'
LL - dū̀	'go'

Disyllabic Verbs take only two tone patterns: HH and LM.

HH - bépsí	'spoil'
LM - bêesī	'answer'

When a verb is used as an infinitive, the prefix r- is added to the root. The tone of the HH verb root remains the same. The tone of the LM verb root changes to LH.

Mè̀kòŋ à rbípshí..... from bípshí  
I want to ask....

Mè̀kòŋ à rìèsé... from lèsē

## 6. Tense/Aspect/Mood Markers

### 6.1 Tenses.

#### 6.1.1 Past tenses

The Limbum Verb tense system includes three past tenses, marked by a tense particle which precedes the verb. A fourth tense unmarked by any segmental particle indicates action completed at the present moment.

Variations in tone patterns are realized differently depending on the syllable structure of the verb. For this reasons the paradigms illustrating the following markers include verbs of the following syllable patterns: CV, CVV, CVC, CVCV. A low and high tone example of each syllable pattern is given. The LL tone pattern also occurs on verbs with an open syllable pattern.

Tone patterns remained the same with the use of either high or low tone subject concord markers.

#### 6.1.1 Today past (P1) bā

E bā dū̀.	'He went.'	(today)
E bā vù.	'He came.'	
E bā tā.	'He shot.'	
E bā bū̀.	'He shouted.'	
E bā kápī.	'He harvested.'	
E bā līp.	'He beat.'	
E bā kūpsē.	'He changed.'	
E bā lèsé.	'He forgot.'	

#### 6.1.2 Near Past (P2) mē

E mē dū̀.	'He went.'	(near past)
E mē vù.	'He came.'	

E m̄ tā.	'He shot.'
E m̄ bū̀.	'He shouted.'
E m̄ kápī.	'He harvested.'
E m̄ līp̄.	'He beat.'
E m̄ kúpsē.	'He changed.'
E m̄ lēsé.	'He forgot.'

Note that following a mid tone subject concord marker, a low tone verb becomes mid-falling and a high tone changes to mid tone. On a disyllabic word with the LM pattern, the tone pattern changes to MH. High tone verbs which occur clause final also add another syllable which takes the form of the mid tone vowel i.

E m̄ kápī. 'He harvested.'  
 When the verb ends in a  
 glottal stop, the vowel of the syllable is repeated.

E m̄ tū'ū. 'He fetched.'

#### 6.1.3 Remote Past (P3) m

The remote past marker takes the tone of the immediately preceding word.

E m dù.	'He went.'	(remote past)
E m vè.	'He came.'	
E m bū̀.	'He shouted.'	
E m tā.	'He shot.'	
E m kápī.	'He harvested.'	
E m līp̄.	'He beat.'	
E m kúpsē.	'He changed.'	
E m lēsé.	'He forgot.'	

#### 6.1.4 Simple Past (ps)

E dù.	'He has gone'.
E vè.	'He has come.'
E tā.	'He has shot.'
E bū̀.	'He has shouted.'
E kápī.	'He has harvested.'
E līp̄.	'He has beaten.'
E kúpsē.	'He has changed.'
E lēsé.	'He has forgotten.'

In these tenses the low tone verb remains low and the high tone verb takes a falling tone. On a monosyllabic verb with a long vowel this is realized as a HM falling tone, as in:

E tóō. 'He called.'

An exception to this rule occurs when the verb is an open syllable with a short vowel; in this case the level mid tone is retained.

On a disyllabic word the HM pattern spreads over the two syllables. A

disyllabic word with the pattern LM takes a high falling tone on the final syllable.

Note: In clauses with a direct object, verbs which take a falling tone become level. This needs further investigation.

## 6.2 Future Tenses

The Limbum verb system has a pattern of four future tenses.

### 6.2.1 Simple Future bé

E bé dù.	'He will go.'	(simple future)	= F0
E bé v̄à.	'He will come.'		
E bé tā.	'He will shoot.'		
E bé bùu.	'He will shout.'		
E bé k̄āpī.	'He will harvest.'		
E bé l̄ipī.	'He will beat.'		
E bé k̄ūpsē.	'He will arrive.'		
E bé l̄èsé.	'He will forget.'		

### 6.2.2 Today Future bé l̄ò

E bé l̄ò dù.	'He will go.'	(today future)	= F1
E bé l̄ò v̄à.	'He will come.'		
E bé l̄ò tā.	'He will shoot.'		
E bé l̄ò bùu.	'He will shout.'		
E bé l̄ò k̄āpī.	'He will harvest.'		
E bé l̄ò l̄ipí.	'He will beat.'		
E bé k̄ò k̄ūpsē.	'He will change.'		
E bé l̄ò l̄èsé.	'He will forget.'		

### 6.2.3 Near Future bé f̄ū

E bé f̄ū dù.	'He will go.'	(near future)	= F2
E bé f̄ū v̄à.	'He will come.'		
E bé f̄ū tā.	'He will shoot.'		
E bé f̄ū bùu.	'He will shout.'		
E bé f̄ū k̄āpī.	'He will harvest.'		
E bé f̄ū l̄ipí.	'He will beat.'		
E bé f̄ū k̄ūpsē.	'He will change.'		
E bé f̄ū l̄èsé.	'He will forget.'		

### 6.2.4 Far Future bé k̄ē

E bé k̄ē dù.	'He will go.'	(far future)	= F3
E bé k̄ē v̄à.	'He will come.'		
E bé k̄ē tā.	'He will shoot.'		
E bé k̄ē bùu.	'He will shout.'		
E bé k̄ē k̄āpī.	'He will harvest.'		
E bé k̄ē l̄ipí.	'He will beat.'		
E bé k̄ē k̄ūpsē.	'He will change.'		
E bé k̄ē l̄èsé.	'He will forget.'		

In all future tenses, low tones remain low and high tones are lowered to mid tone.

### 6.3 Aspect Markers

Several aspect markers also occur preceding the verb in the verb phrase.

#### 6.3.1 Continuous Aspect cē

E cē dū.	'He is going.'
E cē vè.	'He is coming.'
E cē tā.	'He is shooting.'
E cē bùu.	'He is shouting.'
E cē kápī.	'He is harvesting.'
E cē līpī.	'He is beating.'
E cē kǔpsē.	'He is changing.'
E cē lèsé.	'He is forgetting.'

The continuous marker cē can drop out of the sentence:

Mè<sup>-</sup> kòŋ énc̄ à sán sún mè àmbò wè mū cāa rwa'.  
I want that you write tell me as you P2 pass book.  
(whether you passed your exams)

In this case the low tone verb keeps its low tone, as it normally would following the marker cē. However the mid tone of the marker has caused the normally low tone of the pronoun to rise.

A similar thing happens with the future tense:

Yí fūu à yànsè wé cē sēŋ būu, nfè' à bānè cāa.  
It comes-out at tomorrow you are regretting things, time had already passed.  
(It will turn out that tomorrow you will regret these things, meanwhile the change to do something has passed.)

The expected form here for the future would be:

.....à bé cē sēŋ būu.....  
.....you will be regretting things.....

Here the low tone pronoun has changed to high, evidently taking the tone of the future particle bé. It is not clear from this example how the verb tone is affected, since the continuous particle ce intervenes.

A further group of four aspect markers occurring before the verb take the same tone patterns as the continuous aspect. These are ké 'habitual aspect', bó 'obligative future', bá 'obligative past', and bíi 'anticipatory'.

#### 6.3.2 Habitual Aspect ké

E ké dū.	'He always goes.'
E ké vè.	'He always comes.'
E ké tā.	'He always shoots.'

É ké bùu.	'He always shouts.'
É ké kápī.	'He always harvests.'
É ké līpī.	'He always beats.'
É ké kūpsē.	'He always changes.'
É ké lēsé.	'He always forgets.'

### 6.3.3 Obligative future bō

É bō dù.	'He should go.'
É bō vè.	'He should come.'
É bō tā.	'He should shoot.'
É bō bùu.	'He should shout.'
É bō kápī.	'He should harvest.'
É bō līpī.	'He should beat.'
É bō kūpsē.	'He should change.'
É bō lēsé.	'He should forget.'

This marker usually occurs in clauses introduced by the conjunction tē 'so that'.

### 6.3.4 Obligative past bā

É bā dù.	'He would have gone.'
É bā vè.	'He would have come.'
É bā tā.	'He would have shot.'
É bā bùu.	'He would have shouted.'
É bā kápī.	'He would have harvested.'
É bā līpī.	'He would have beaten.'
É bā kūpsē.	'He would have changed.'
É bā lēsé.	'He would have forgotten.'

### 6.3.5 Anticipatory bí

É bí dù.	'He is still to go.' (has not yet done so)
É bí vè.	'He is still to come.'
É bí tā.	'He is still to shoot.'
É bí bùu.	'He is still to shout.'
É bí kápī.	'He is still to harvest.'
É bí līpī.	'He is still to beat.'
É bí kūpsē.	'He is still to change.'
É bí lēsé.	'He is still to forget.'

The final three markers are kēr 'iterative', bē 'experiential', and kū 'verb focus'. The tone pattern they take is that of the P1 and P2 particles.

### 6.3.6 Iterative kēr

É kēr dù.	'He went again.'
É kēr vè.	'He came again.'
É kēr tā.	'He shot again.'
É kēr bùu.	'He shouted again.'
É kēr kápī.	'He harvested again.'
É kēr līpī.	'He beat again.'
É kēr kūpsē.	'He changed again.'



E k̄er l̄esé. 'He forgot again.'

### 6.3.7 Experiential bē

E bē dū. 'He has ever gone.' (has done so at some time)  
E bē vū. 'He has ever come.'  
E bē tá. 'He has ever shot.'  
E bē bū. 'He has ever shouted.'  
E bē kápí. 'He has ever harvested.'  
E bē ɽɽ. 'He has ever beaten.'  
E bē kúpsé. 'He has ever changed.'  
E bē l̄esé. 'He has ever forgotten.'

### 6.3.8 Verb focus kū

E kū dū. 'He just went.'  
E kū vū. 'He just came.'  
E kū tá. 'He just shot.'  
E kū bū. 'He just shouted.'  
E kū kápí. 'He just harvested.'  
E kū ɽɽ. 'He just beat.'  
E kū kúpsé. 'He just changed.'  
E kū l̄esé. 'He just forgot.'

## 6.5 Conditional clauses

The marker of a conditional clause falls in the verb phrase structure, as shown in the following sentences:

Verb:  
dá'sé A ká' dā'sé, é n̄ɽ mbé kēɽ....  
When they disbursed, he got into boat...

túr ɽwè à ká' túr ritū nè mè, mè bē kè túr ritū à ryé yē fón.  
If a person has shame for me, I will have shame to see him too.

The particle ka' takes a high tone in some contexts, and in others it takes a mid tone. It is still to be discovered whether the tone difference is one of semantics ("when" vs. "if"). In the above examples, the high tone ká' causes the following high tone verb to become mid, while a high tone verb remains high following the mid tone ka'. A low tone verb remains low following the high tone ká' and changes to mid following the mid tone ká'.

Verb:  
dū A ká' dū bā', á cē yē nè mcē.  
When he went reached, he spit him with spittle.

mì L̄or b̄er n̄ɽsī té b̄uu àmbò ɽwá'....kā' mī, à bó yūu àgho.  
Take put keep so things as paper...when finish, you should buy with (it).

## 6.6 Subjunctive clauses

Certain clauses take what I am for now calling the subjunctive mode. This mode is indicated by a low tone verb becoming mid tone, and the high tone verb remaining high. Some such clauses are introduced by the particle éne "that".

Mè fā yī mbāa éné é dū fá nè yī mâ.  
I gave her money that she go give to her mother.

The mid tone of the verb dù is in contrast with a Ps tense tone of low on a low tone verb; the high tone of the verb fá contrasts with a Ps tense mid tone on verbs with the CV syllable pattern.

The subjunctive tone also occurs when there is no particle preceding it, as in a command:

N4 Lōr bēn nōnsī té būu àmbò nwà'....kā' mī, à bó yūu àgho.  
Take put keep so things as paper...when finish, you should buy with (it).

Again all three low tone verbs take mid tone.

In the following example, the expected low tone following the high tone particle ká' "when/before" changed to a mid, possibly because of a subjunctive mode:

Mē kōn éné à kwā'shī nkàrà' báā, ká' bēesī mè.  
I want that you think times two, before reply me.

## 7. Negation

The negative marker ka' occurs at the end of a clause. when the verb takes a Today or Near Past or any future tense, it takes a H tone:

Mè bā dū ká'. 'I did not go (today).'  
Mè mā dū ká'. 'I did not go (near past).'  
M bé dū ká'. 'I will not go (simple future).'  
M bé lò dū ká'. 'I will not go (today future).'  
M bé fū dū ká'. 'I will not go (near future).'  
M bé kē dū ká'. 'I will not go (far future).'

When the verb tense is a Far or Simple Past, it takes a M tone:

Mè m dū kā'. 'I did not go (far past).'  
Mè dū kā'. 'I have not gone (simple past).'

The presence of the negative marker does not affect tones of the verb phrase, except that the ML tone of low tone verbs in the today past and near past tenses become a level M tone.

## 8. Aspectless Clauses

In the above data, the only tense, aspect or mood which is unmarked by a segmental particle is the simple past tense, as in:

E dū. 'He has gone.'

In this context the low tone verb remains low. However in larger discourses, low tone verbs occurring in verb phrases unmarked for tense occur with the mid tone. Note the following examples.

lāa 'said' -> Áwé é lāa bēe á cútè à nshè.  
'Then he said people should sit down.'

ghōnī 'bless' -> E ghōnī, á fá nè bkār ví.  
'He blessed (it), and gave to his friends.'

kwè' 'pick up' -> Wèè à m kwè' bbèr à mḱkää bsè'?'  
'You picked up remains in baskets how many?'

The first two examples occur as the initial clauses of a complex sentence; the last example is the final clause of a complex sentence. The same change to mid tone takes place following what I call the serial clause pronoun á, which indicates same-subject as the previous clause(s). eg.

gāpshī -> ....á gāpshī nè bēe ánà.  
'...and divided (it) to those people.'

Here the low-mid pattern of a two-syllable verb changes to mid-low.

In describing the reason for this change of tone, the language consultant said that when the tone is mid, it means the story is continuing; when the tone is low, the story is just beginning, or a definitive conclusion has been reached.

In a narrative text, each new sentence typically begins with a clause containing the P3 marker m, and the low tone verb takes a low tone. Additional clauses in a complex sentences take no aspect marker.

E m mà'shī wówèè, á nḱḱ mbē kēḱ, á tōo neḱḱū rò.  
He P3 left them, and enter into boat, and cross other-side stream.

Sentences with a high tone verb remain high, as for the Ps tense. In addition, the high tone CV pattern verbs also remain high:

N3 E dū á fá, á sún ye, é byímè.  
She went and gave, and told her, she accepted.

## 9. Miscellaneous observations

### 9.1 Clause-final falling tones

In certain sequences of action, several clauses will be joined by the

serial pronoun á. There is sometimes a falling tone on the verb to which I have not yet been able to assign a meaning. Compare the following sentences.

...é vū á súŋ mē énc é byímé.  
...she come and tell me that she accepts.  
(should)

E dū á fá, á súŋ yē, é byímé.  
She went and gave, and told her, she accepted.

The first sentences is a command; the second sentences narrates the actual fulfilment of that command.

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