

Do We Need Underlying Representations in Bantu Phonology?

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Bantu languages have long provided evidence of robust morphophonemic alternations of the sort captured by underlying representations (URs) in generative phonology. However, this has not been without complications. In this paper I take a new look at some familiar consonant alternations to ask whether URs are doing the effective job we have assumed. I first look at alternations between [l] and [d], where [d] occurs after [n], [l] elsewhere. While we generally expect these consonants to be in complementary distribution, one Bantu language after another contrasts a smaller group of words with [d] not preceded by a nasal, e.g. Luganda *kù-loop-a* 'to denounce' vs. *ku-dóòb-a* 'be destitute'. Such contrasts, as well as alternations such as *a-láb-à* 's/he sees' vs. *n-dáb-à* 'I see', suggest a rule /l/ → [d] after [n]. However, derivations such as *n-dóòbe* 'loin cloth' → *ka-dóòbe* (not **ka-lóòbe*) 'small loin cloth' (cf. the base verb -*dóob-* be destitute) suggest that [nd] can have two sources /nl/ and /nd/, thereby raising the question of how to analyze tautomorphemic [nd] which does not alternate, e.g. *kù-tuund-a* 'to sell'. After documenting such analytic problems regarding [l] and [d] in a number of Bantu languages, I turn to the alternations created when non-post-nasal Proto-Bantu *p lenites to [h], [w] ~ [y], or [ɣ] in closely related Interlacustrine languages (Haya, Luganda, Lusoga etc.). I will document in detail the [mp] ~ [ɣ] (orthographic *gh*) alternation which is quite robust in Lusoga:

(1)	m̄-p-à	'I give'	vs.	á-gh-à	's/he gives'
	m̄-pét-á	'I bend'	vs.	à-ghét-á	's/he bends'
	m̄-pùlìr-á	'I hear'	vs.	á-ghùlìr-á	's/he hears'
(2)	é-m̄-pùbé	'rat'	→	à-ká-ghùbé	'small rat'
	é-m̄-pàghá	'wing'	→	à-ká-ghàghá	'small wing'
	é-m̄-pèghó	'wind'	→	à-ká-ghèghó	'small wind'
(3)	é-m̄-pàghá	'feathers'	→	é-m̄-pàghá + ghàghá	'lousy feathers'
	è-m̄-pááǰó	'pieces, slices'	→	è-m̄-pááǰó + ghááǰó	'lousy pieces, slices'
	è-m̄-púúmbú	'banana leaves'	→	è-m̄-púúmbú + ghúúmbú	'lousy banana leaves'

However, at the same time there is a smaller group of words (many borrowed) that have [p] when not preceded by [m], e.g. *è-cí-kópò* 'cup', *ò-kú-pápál-á* 'to flutter', as well as exceptions where [p] is maintained in diminutivization and reduplication:

(4)	é-m̄-pítí	'hyena'	→	à-ká-pítí	'small hyena'
			→	é-m̄-pítí+pítí	'lousy hyena'
(5)	è-m̄-páálá	'leopard'	→	à-ká-páálá	'small leopard'
			→	è-m̄-páálá + páálá	'lousy leopard'

While this suggests a contrast between /p/ and /ɣ/, such an analysis runs into similar problems as with /l/ and /d/. An alternative which is being increasingly explored in general phonology is that we should give up on URs and instead posit allomorphs, as in (6).

(6)	'hear'	:	/-pùlìr-/ _n /-ghùlìr-/ (elsewhere)	á-ghùlìr-á, m̄-pùlìr-á	'he/I hear'
	'rat'	:	/-pùbé/ _n /-ghùbé/ (elsewhere)	é-m̄-pùbé, à-ká-ghùbé	'rat/small rat'
(7)	'cup'	:	/-kópò/	è-cí-kópò	'cup'
	'flutter'	:	/-papala/	ò-kú-pápálá	'to flutter'

As seen, non-alternating /p/ would have only one allomorph, including words that have tautomorphemic [mp], e.g. *è-cí-ghùmpú* 'clod'. The rest of my talk will be devoted to showing that URs are a useful tool in the sense of Grev Corbett's canonical approach to typology: They provide an ideal (set of canons) for capturing the relationship between underlying and surface forms from which we can calibrate what actually occurs. The Lusoga case does not meet the canons of an /X/ → Y / Z phonological rule in the sense that the p/ɣ alternation is not (i) phonetically natural; (ii) analytically determinant; (iii) regular. A canonical approach to URs is therefore useful both in capturing generalizations, as well as characterizing the diachronic conditions of their undoing.