

TONAL ANALYSIS OF SENUFO:
SUCITE DIALECT

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INTRODUCTION

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The subject of this dissertation is the study of the tone of Sucite [Sùcìté], a Senufo language of southwestern Burkina Faso, investigated on location by myself between the years 1982 and 1985. This introduction first situates the Senufo languages as a whole both geographically and genetically before discussing the relation of Sucite with the other Senufo languages. It continues with a review of the linguistic research in various Senufo languages and ends with a discussion of why and how the subject of Sucite tone is to be presented in the thesis.

Classification of Senufo within the GUR language group

It has been widely acknowledged by authors such as Lavergne de Tressan (1953), Greenberg (1966) and Westermann (1970) that the Senufo languages belong to the Gur group of the Niger-Congo language family. The Gur or Voltaic languages are located primarily within the basin of the Volta River between the Sahara Desert to the north and the tropical forest to the south. In terms of political boundaries, this area stretches "from the southeast corner of Mali, across northern Ivory Coast, through a large part of Upper Volta [Burkina Faso], northern Ghana, northern Togo, northern Dahomey [Benin] into Nigeria." (Bendor-Samuel, p.141, 1971)

Senufo languages are located in the southwestern corner of this area, bounded to the west by Mande languages, to the south by Kwa languages, and to the north and east by other Gur languages. Their area is split among primarily three countries: Ivory Coast boasts the largest number of speakers (over 700,000) (Mensah, 1983), Mali comes close behind (680,272) (Atlas, 1981) and Burkina Faso has an estimated 100,000 speakers. Northern Ghana also has a few isolated groups.

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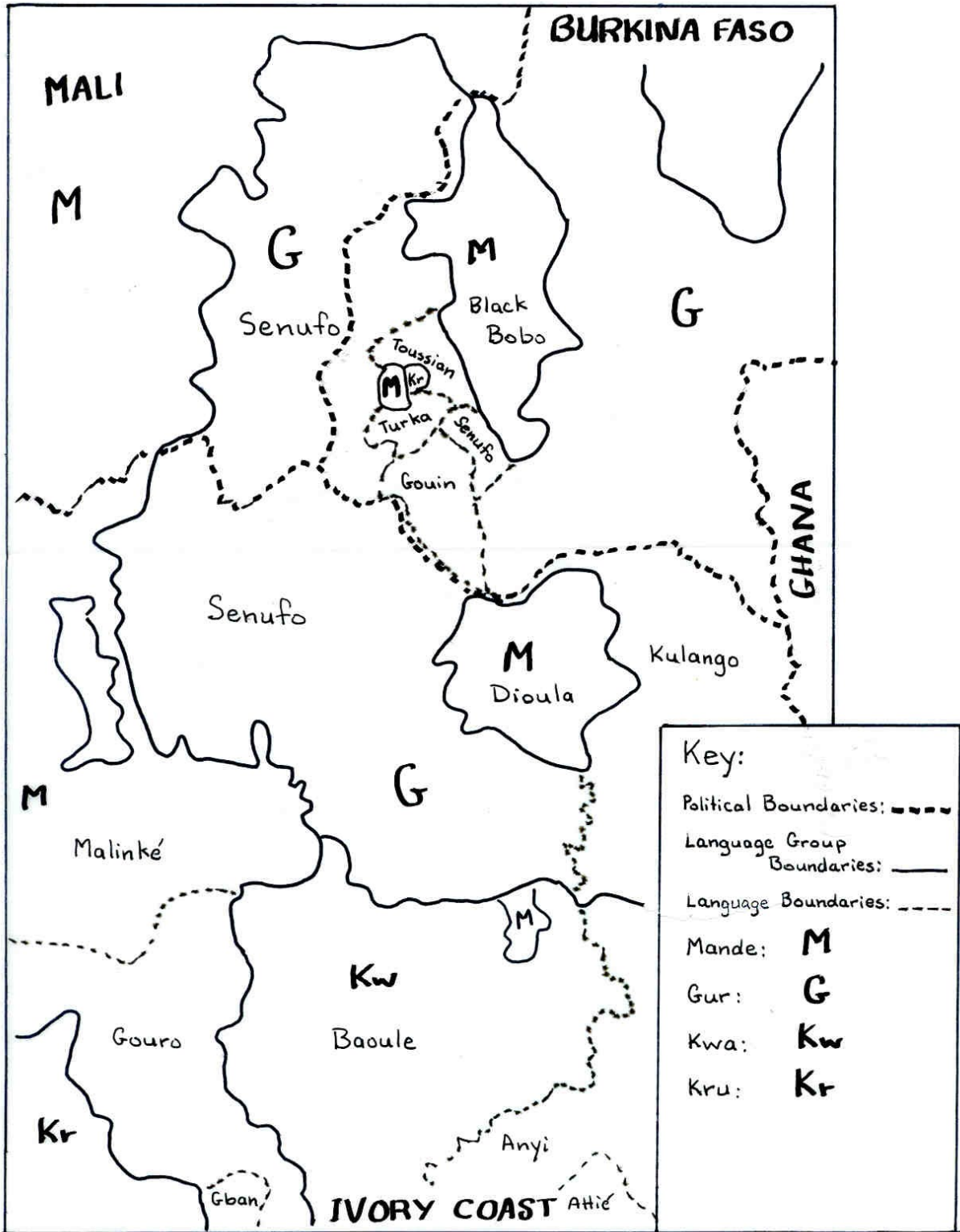
Senufo languages are typical of Gur languages in that they have a noun class suffix system and verbs are marked for aspect (completive and incompletive). In general, the consonant and vowel systems of Senufo languages do not have any particularly striking features¹.

There is a distinct divergence in word order, however. Where most Gur languages are SVO, Senufo languages are SOVAdv². A few other neighbouring Gur languages in Burkina Faso, such as Toussian³, also have this word order.

Tonally, there is no one common pattern throughout Gur languages. Samuel-Bendor (1971) notes, however, that a two tone downstep system appears to be an areal feature cutting across Gur language divisions spreading into the Kwa group. This two-tone areal feature stops short of the Senufo languages. To both the east (southeast) and west of the two-tone set of languages, we find entire blocks of languages with systems of three level tones. The Senufo languages, which are located to the west of the two tone systems, as well as a few other miscellaneous Gur languages bordering on the Senufo area, possess three level tones. On the western side of Senufo land, there are a number of Mande languages which have primarily two discrete tones. If Minyianka, a Senufo language, does actually have only two level tones, as has been reported⁴, it may be due to a more prolonged contact with Mande languages in the far northwestern corner of the Senufo area.

In the far southeastern corner, on the other hand, we find two reported four-tone Senufo languages, Jimini⁵ and Takper⁶, which just happen to be in the vicinity of several four-tone languages of other language groups - Bete (Kru), Attié (Kwa), and Gban (Mande) (See adjoining map for location). Again, it appears that language contact may play an important role in the development of a language's tonal system.

LANGUAGE GROUPS



Map of Senofo with other groups

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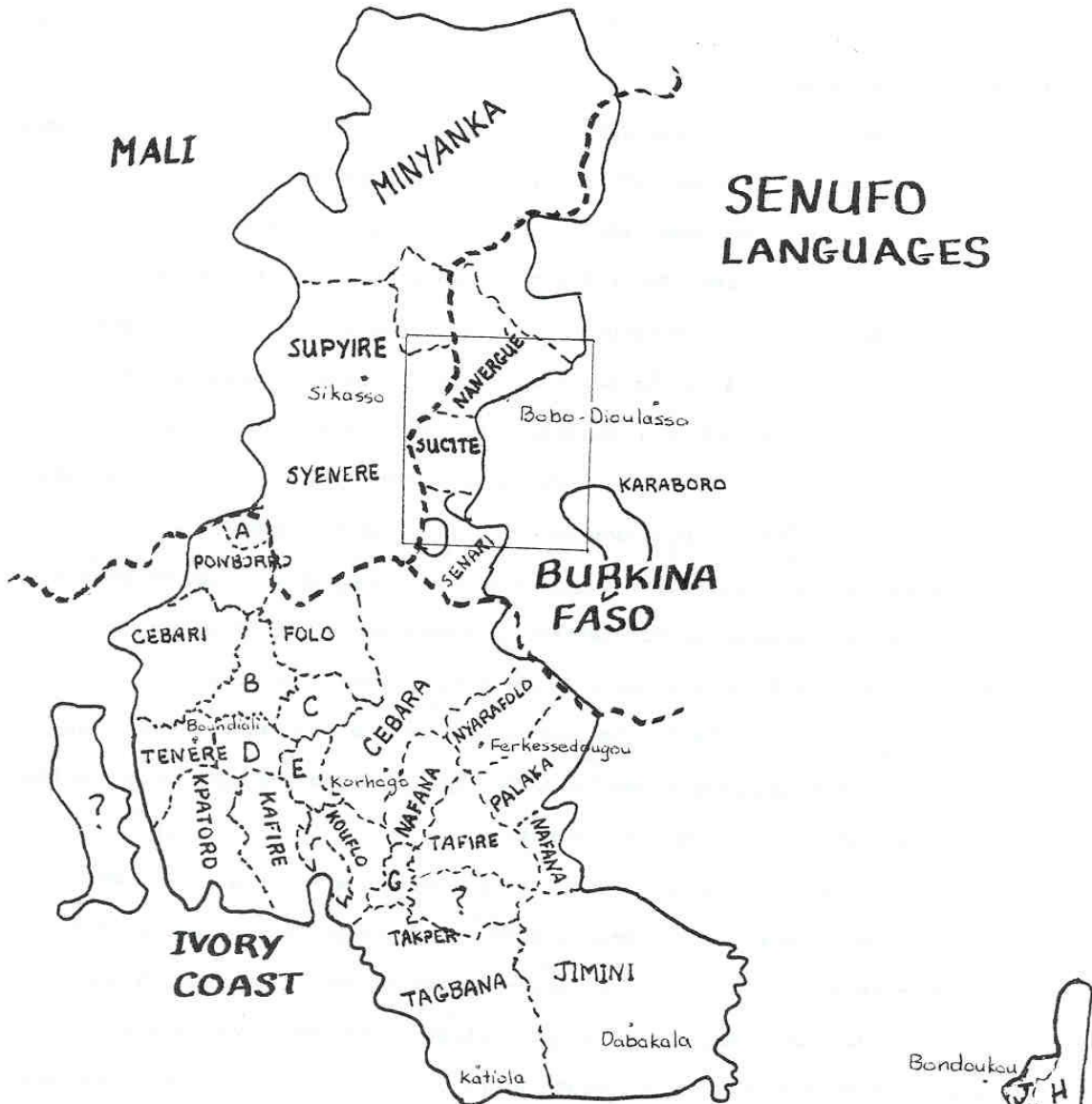
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Further comparative studies in the tonal systems of West Africa could potentially yield very interesting insights as to why and how tonal systems change and shift through the centuries.

Sucite as a SENUFO language (dialect?)

Until the last couple of decades, Senufo language classification was primarily a matter of speculation. In a personal communication to Bendor-Samuel (1968), R. Mills divided up Senufo languages into three dialect groups and labelled them Northern, Central, and Southern Senufo. Bendor-Samuel (1971) apparently agreed with these divisions. Two recent publications, Mensah (1983) and Mills (1984) avoid these geographic labels, but they group the Senufo languages into roughly the same categories as R. Mills (1968), apparently allowing for more fuzziness between group boundaries. In certain cases, individual dialects have not been adequately investigated for accurate classification. Added to that, the complication of multiple names for a number of dialects creates a complex and, as yet, ill-defined linguistic group of languages⁷.

Before my arrival in Burkina Faso in 1982, I only knew of Sucite as "Tagba". Lavergne de Tressan (1953) (and perhaps before him, Tauxier), includes Tagba in his list of 30 Senufo dialects. He had apparently identified two locations for Tagba, one in northwest Ivory Coast and the other in Burkina Faso. He gave no indication of what relation it had to other Senufo languages. I speculated that Tagba might be related to Supyire, the Senufo language directly to the west across the border in Mali. My hunch proved to be correct, as I later discovered. For not only were Tagba and Supyire closely related, but the real name for Tagba, Sucite, was a reflection of the close



- KEY:
- | | | | |
|---|------------|---|--------------------|
| A | Cepiri | F | Fodonon |
| B | Pogara | G | Gbonzoro |
| C | Kasere | H | Fantara |
| D | Gbonzororo | I | Pantara |
| E | Tangara | J | Nafana (Bondoukou) |

Map of Senufo dialects⁷.

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phonological correspondence between the two.

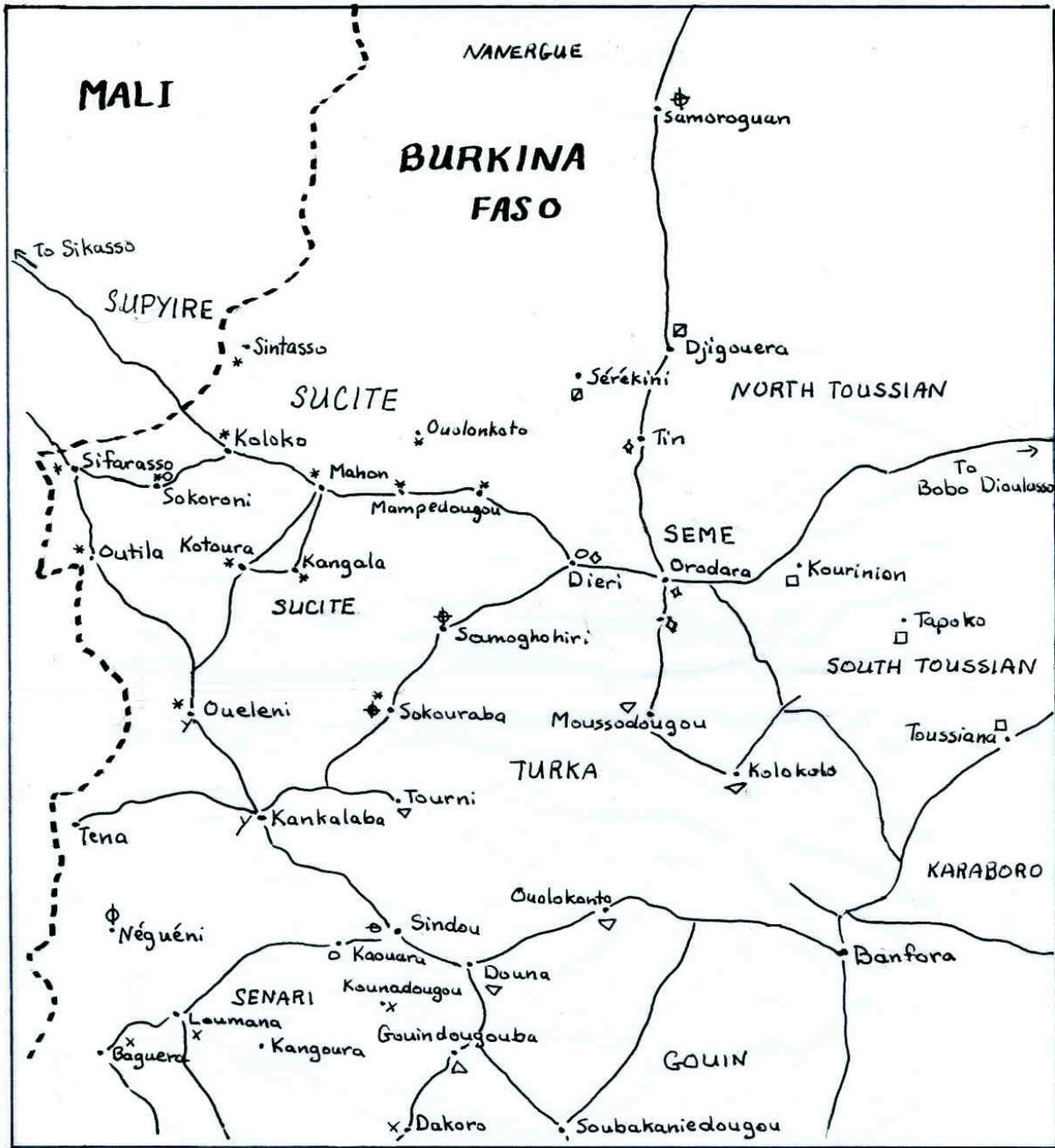
Both Supyire and Sucite belong to the northern grouping of Senufo languages. According to Mill's (1984) map, no distinction is made between the two dialects; both are under the same label, Supyire. Supyire is located in the Sikasso area of southeastern Mali. Sucite is an eastward continuation of Supyire into Burkina Faso. According to legend, the Sucite-speaking people originate in Mali and the Sucite say they speak the same language as the Supyire. In fact, some people in Burkina Faso call their language 'Supyire' rather than 'Sucite'. Chance encounters between individuals of the two groups has shown that the two dialects are quite mutually intelligible.

When speaking to an outsider, a Sucite speaking person will say he speaks Senufo or perhaps Bamana, as non-Senufo outsiders would call him. Another Senufo group to the South will call these people Tagba. The word Tagba is geographical in nature. The Sucite people live on the Tagouara plateau. Sucite is what the people call their own language. Derived from the same root are the words 'sîcâ' (person) and 'sùpîle' (people).

The Sucite-speaking people in Burkina Faso number approximately 25,000 (actual figure unknown). They are located in the Koloko préfecture in the Province of Kéné Dougou about 110 kilometres west of Bobo-Dioulasso in southwestern Burkina Faso. According to authorities in Koloko, there are 32 villages, but this figure is not exact since a few villages are not Tagba, and at least one Tagba village is located outside the préfecture.

The linguistic neighbours of Sucite are Nanergué, a northern Senufo language to the north, Supyire, to the west, and a Central Senufo language to the south known as Senar of Kankalaba (Prost, 1964). To the east and southeast are a number of small and

LANGUAGES OF SOUTHWEST BURKINA FASO



Key: 1 in. equals approximately 10 miles

Sucite: *

Senari (Kankalaba): y

Senari: x

Wara: φ

Natoro: ⊕

Dioula: o

Turka: ▽

Gouin: △

Seme: ◆

Samogho ⊕

North Toussian: ⊠

South Toussian: □

Road: —

Map of Sucite and surrounding languages

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diverse groups: Turka (Gur), Samogho (Mande), Dioula (Mande), and Siamou or Seme (Kru). The latter has eluded classification, though it has been suggested by Person (1966) that Siamou is an isolated Kru language.

After visiting 6 major villages in the area, my partner, Gail Wiebe and I chose to live in Kotoura, a geographically centralized village of approximately 2,000 people. A few civil servants and a couple of Dioula speaking families lived on the periphery of the village but otherwise the village was purely Senufo. The period of language investigation began on arrival on November 25, 1982, and continued until my departure on June 9, 1985.

Senufo language Research

Before the 1950's, tone was not given any importance in Senufo studies. Cheron's (1925) description of Minyanka does not even mention tone. Prost (1964) acknowledges the existence of tones but makes no attempt at transcription.

Serious research of Senufo languages began in the mid 1950's when Conservative Baptist missionaries settled in the Korhogo area of northern Ivory Coast. Their earliest descriptions of Cebara (Mills, 1967?) reflect their realization that tone was an essential part of this major Senufo language. To date, numerous articles may be found on a variety of Senufo dialects⁸ and three theses or dissertations have been written, one on Tyebari (Laughren, 1973), another on Nyarafolo (Boese, 1983), and a third on Fodonon (Boutin, 1981). In addition, at least ten languages/dialects are currently being researched. A single book has been published in recent years; Senufo Phonology (1984) by Elizabeth Mills. All of these resources, published and unpublished, have proved helpful in the analysis of the basic features of Sucite.

The analysis of tone, however, has never been given much space in all of these works. Mills as well as a few others do describe the basic tonal patterns of the languages that they have investigated, but little attempt has been made at a rigorous analysis. Bob Carlson is the first, to my knowledge, to attempt a tonal analysis on a Senufo language. He has written an unpublished descriptive draft of Supyire tone, as well as the article "Downstep in Supyire" (1983). His most recent unpublished paper, Supyire tone (1985), is his first attempt at a more comprehensive analysis, although the scope of his paper does not allow him to present a thorough examination of all tonal behaviour.

Purpose, Approach and Presentation

The purpose of this research is to explore the tonal patterns of Sucite, a dialect which has not previously been investigated. It is hoped that the presentation of these data will further the knowledge of the tonal behaviour of Senufo languages in general.

The scope of this study will be limited to the analysis of the simple non-complex sentence in Sucite. Tone in complex sentence structure and discourse will not be dealt with in detail for reasons of time, space, and lack of sufficient data. However, preliminary observations indicate that tonal rules outlined in the dissertation are not contradicted in complex sentence structures.

Several theoretical tools will be used in the attempt to provide a satisfactory analysis. Firstly, the underlying tones that provide the basis for rules will have to be determined. Research into the possible historical process of tonal development with the help of Clements' proposed feature system, as outlined in Chapter 2,

contributes towards this end.

Secondly, an autosegmental approach to tonal analysis will be undertaken. However, it will be quickly seen that the autosegmental approach, as it has been generally applied with reference to tone, may require some modifications here. In Chapter 3, it will be noted that the assumed Association Convention of Left to Right Linking poses some problems. An alternative solution of Right to Left linking is proposed, discussed, and finally adopted.

In addition, with the help of Clements' proposed feature system, which involves defining tone through the use of both a primary register as well as a subregister level, we borrow some basic concepts from the recent developments in non-linear phonology and propose a double tiered approach to tonal analysis. This concept is first introduced in Chapter 2, and is briefly discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, while a more thorough presentation of a double tiered approach for tonal analysis can be found in Chapter 5.

Finally it will be noted in Chapters 5 and 6 that rule ordering is crucial for the proper application of tonal rules. Certain lexical rules will have to take place before other rules such as rules spreading tones from one morpheme to another.

The presentation of data will be organized according to chapter. The first chapter will present the basic facts about the Sucite language, including preliminary information about tonal behaviour. The second chapter will examine verb tone and morphology, while Chapter 3 will focus on non-complex noun tone and morphology. Chapter 4 will examine how the tonal environment in which the verb or verbal particle is placed, affects their tone, while Chapter 5 will concentrate on tone in complex nouns and noun phrases. Chapter 6 will complete this description by describing the

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tonal behaviour of adverb phrases and of the sentence as a whole. The noun class clitic, whose tonal behaviour can alter tone in the sentence in unexpected ways, will be the focus of attention here.

NOTES

1. For a general survey of Gur languages, see Bendor-Samuel (1971).
2. A discussion concerning the historical implications of word order in Senufo can be found in "Word Order Change and the Senufo Language", Garber (1980).
3. For descriptions of Toussian, see Prost (1964) and Burdon (1984).
4. Eunice Pike, upon preliminary investigation, suggested that Minyianka has two level tones and one falling tone.
5. Information from Mensah (1983) indicates that Jimini is a four tone language. However, Mensah, himself, questions the reliability of his source, which, unfortunately, he does not name. Wolfgang Stradner, a linguist working on Jimini wondered if Jimini might be underlyingly a two tone language. To my knowledge, little serious analysis of tone has been undertaken in Jimini.
6. For a phonological description of Takper, a Tagbana dialect of Senufo, see Herault (1973).
7. References for linguistic maps and classifications of Senufo dialects include the following: Lavergne de Tressan (1953), Westermann (1970), Bendor-Samuel (1971), Boutin (1982), Mensah (1983), and Mills (1984).
8. The reader is asked to refer to the 'Bibliography of Senufo Languages' located at the end of this dissertation for a full list of published and unpublished material on Senufo languages.

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