Paradigms and Questionnaires: studying the verbal tone system of a Bantu language

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This paper describes a methodology for studying the verbal tonal systems of Bantu languages, emphasizing techniques for constructing paradigms and identifying the types of data that should be collected by researchers in order to produce comprehensive descriptive analyses. In the simple approach advocated here, which is not new but which also has not been articulated in print before, the researcher surveys a number of properties that are known to influence the realization of tone in Bantu in order to determine which ones trigger tonal alternations. On the basis of this survey, the researcher can then construct systematic questionnaires for data collection in which the appropriate grammatical factors affecting surface tonal patterns are permuted. The main thrust of this paper is delineating these factors known to influence tonal outputs in Bantu languages, providing background on the micro-typology of Bantu verbal tonal systems and discuss- ing how these considerations impact the data-gathering process.