Tonal Behaviour in the Northern Mao Possessive Construction: Downstep and Double Downstep?
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Introduction
- Double downstep (register lowered twice) only attested in Dschang and Kikuyu. We look at an apparent case in Northern Mao.
- We could treat downstep as phonetic, but in N. Mao, it appears to be phonological. For details of analysis, using Register Tier Theory (Snider), see handout.
- In N. Mao, one lowering is diachronic and now appears as a non-productive frozen form, the other is synchronic and affects the phrase.

Diachronic boundary tone meets floating tone
Modifiers are placed before modified nouns. Final vowel deleted > tone floats. Modifier (and citation) Nouns: H, M, L, HL, MH, ML, LH.
Modified nouns: M, ML, L. Note: each noun has about 4 distinct melodies! Historically H, Ø and L plus low boundary tone l at right edge. Not productive. Synchronic tones can be downstepped from floating tone of modifier.
Underlying H is lowered to M (diachronically), then downstepped by floating l (affects the rest of the noun phrase). This means H effectively lowers twice to L. Diachronic boundary tone meets floating tone

Downstep of ML
Double downstep?
H>M>IM

Conclusion
- The two processes of lowering (from the right) and downstep (from the left) came into the language at different times.
- In between the two, phonologization occurred - the lowered tone was reinterpreted as another tone. The boundary l register tone (on the right, marking the construction) caused lowering. Then the tones were reinterpreted as another tone: H > M, IM > L. Synchronically, downstepping from a floating low tone (from the deleted vowel on the left) takes place on the reinterpreted tone and following tones in the phrase.
- So not really double downstep – but interesting!

M tone is downstepped if the first word has a HL melody

Intervals in semitones
Double downstep?

Tonogenesis?