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Documenting Luyia Together: Noun Tone in Kabarasi

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Kabarasi is an understudied member of the Luyia language cluster of western Kenya, spoken by approximately 250,000 people (2009 Kenya census). This presentation will describe research on the Kabarasi language by Miya Russell from Summer 2020 through Spring 2021. Prior to the onset of our study of Kabarasi, very little research had been done on the language.

The present project focuses on a 700-item wordlist collected in December 2019, which has served as the main database for our ongoing research on the language. Our initial research focused on segmental transcriptions of the words in the database--that is, identifying the correct consonant and vowel sounds. On the basis of these transcriptions, Russell developed a preliminary description of the Kabarasi sound system. Ongoing research has focused on tonal transcriptions of the words in the database. For instance, the nouns *omu-nwa* 'mouth' and *omú-rwé* 'head' illustrate the two possible tonal patterns we have identified on noun stems with one syllable: all low-toned, as in 'mouth', vs. high-toned on the last two vowels, as in 'head'. We have verified the tonal transcriptions of approximately 400 words in the database and have begun to identify the tonal patterns found in the Kabarasi dictionary. In this presentation, we will update prior results reported at the 2020 Fall Forum.