

Lexical lack of accent and dephrasing in Northern Bizkaian Basque

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In Northern Bizkaian Basque (NBB), syntactic phrases composed of unaccented words cannot constitute independent phonological phrases, unlike accented words (Elordieta 1997, 1998, 2007a,b; Jun and Elordieta 1997; Gussenhoven 2004; Selkirk and Elordieta 2010; Elordieta and Hualde 2014). This pattern violates the constraint MATCHPHRASE, which maps syntactic maximal projections onto phonological phrases (Selkirk 2011; Elfner 2012, 2015; Elordieta 2015; Bennett et al. 2016). Elordieta and Selkirk (2018) propose an explanation for the prosodic deficiency of unaccented words based on the idea that unaccented words lack a prosodic head, and that words lacking a head cannot be the heads of phonological phrases, either (Selkirk 2007). Absences of heads induce violations of a family of prosodic well-formedness constraints demanding prosodic constituents to be headed: π :HEAD (ω :HEAD and φ :HEAD for prosodic words and phonological phrases, respectively). Another constraint family calls for a prosodic constituent head to bear a tone: HEAD- μ (π):TONE (HEAD- μ (ω):TONE and HEAD- μ (φ):TONE for ω s and φ s, respectively). Egyptian Arabic, where each ω bears a tone (Hellmuth 2007), exemplifies the role played by HEAD- μ (ω):TONE when this constraint is highly ranked. The insertion of a pitch accent on the head of a φ in English would constitute an example of HEAD- μ (φ):TONE at work (Ladd 1998/2006, Truckenbrodt 2006, Féry and Samek-Lodovici 2006, among others). Epenthesizing a tone to satisfy the constraints ω :HEAD, φ :HEAD and HEAD- μ (φ):TONE is not possible in NBB, due to highly ranked DEP-TONE. The impossibility for syntactic XPs composed of one or more unaccented words to constitute independent φ s can be explained if the prosodic well-formedness constraints φ :HEAD and HEAD- μ (φ):TONE dominate MATCHPHRASE. The unaccented words must therefore group in a φ that contains an accented word, that is, a φ with a headed ω , in order to be parsed in a legitimate φ .

We have carried out an experiment aiming to document the prosodic behavior of unaccented words in different syntactic configurations but with the same linear sequencing [NB: A=accented word; U=unaccented word; - = boundary between syntactic arguments]: (a) AA-UA; (b) AA-U-A; (c) AAU-A; (d) AAUA. The results show that U-words group with the following A-word systematically, separate from the preceding A-words (i.e., φ (UA)), even crossing boundaries between syntactic arguments as in (b) and (c). The phrasing φ (UA) implies many violations of MATCHPHRASE in (b) and (c), even more than for (a) and (d), but such phrasing prevails due to the low ranking of MATCHPHRASE and the higher ranking of the prosodic well-formedness constraints discussed above.