On the location of pitch accents

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The term 'pitch accent' (PA) is here used in the sense of a postlexical tone melody that is inserted in a specific location in the sentence (fragment). There are two broad approaches to the question where PA's go:

1. Metrically defined locations. This view is part of Pierrehumbert (1980) and is explicit in the name for her approach introduced by Bob Ladd, the Autosegmental-Metrical model. A common formulation for English is that the PA location is mediated by the prominence levels of the syllables in the sentence, as expressed by the headedness of the hierarchical set of prosodic constituents. The metrical approach may be restricted to broad-focus sentences, with narrower-focus covered by focus-to-accent rules.

2. Rule-based locations (cf Gussenhoven 2011). Relevant parts of the grammar in English:

(i) phonology   (a) PA goes to the primary stress of a word and any earlier secondary stress.
                  (b) PA is deleted between PAs within the phonological phrase.
(ii) morphology (a) PA is deleted from the second constituent of a compound.
                  (b) PA is deleted before PA in a Class-II formation.
(iii) syntax   PA is deleted on predicates adjacent to an argument with PA in eventives.
(iv) Information structure: PA is deleted on post-focal (and pre-focal) words.

I will discuss the metrical approach from the perspective of English as well as languages that fail to show any evidence of metrically defined PA locations, like Nubi and Persian. Although Persian has been described as having PAs in metrically defined locations (Kahnemuyipour 2013), the evidence for the prosodic constituents concerned is the accent location itself (Rahmani 2019). The non-metrical case for Persian is particularly striking. First, the location of PA, an H-tone, in the word is not a stressed syllable by any of the usual criteria and its location has no relation to the foot or any other prosodic constituent. Second, besides a sensitivity to information structure, the generalizations for PA locations on words are syntactic.

Rule-based locations in Persian:
(i) syntax.   (a) PA goes to the last syllable of the last word in a nominal constituent.
               (b) PA goes to the last syllable of the first word in a verbal constituent.

I will point out similarities between the rule-based PA distributions in Nubi and Persian with that of English, and will argue that a metrical representation mediating between the rules and the locations is unnecessary in English.

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