

Tone and stress as agents of cross-dialectal variation: the case of Serbian Draga Zec (Cornell University) and Elizabeth Zsiga (Georgetown University)

In this paper we focus on hybrid prosodic systems, those that subsume both tone and stress. Our goal is to investigate the dimensions of cross-dialectal variation in prosodic systems of this type. The case at point is the set of Štokavian dialects of Serbian whose prosody is characterized by the interactions of tone and stress, yet the nature of these interactions varies considerably across regional idioms. We argue that this broad variation can be attributed either to the agency of the metrical component, or to the agency of the tonal component. That is, the two components act as independent agents of the prosodic system, each shaping it within the bounds of its specific phonological organization.

Stress-based interactions are largely responsible for the principal division of the Štokavian dialects into the Old- and Neo-Štokavian (Standard Serbian) subgroups. Stress invariably coincides with H(igh) tone in Old-Štokavian, and falls one syllable to its left (when such a syllable is available) in Neo-Štokavian. In both, the position of H remains fixed to its underlying sponsor. Thus, while the Old-Štokavian has only Falling accents, those in which stress and H converge on the same syllable, the Neo-Štokavian also has Rising accents, with stress and H occurring on separate, yet adjacent, syllables (e.g., Inkelas & Zec 1988). However, in addition to the Old- and Neo-Štokavian, we also find intermediate cases, with only partial separation of tone and stress (Ivić 1985). Among such “intermediate” dialects are those in which stress coincides with H in all cases except when (i) the H-toned syllable is word-final; or (ii) the syllable preceding the H-toned one contains a long vowel (and attracts stress). While the distinction between Old- and Neo-Štokavian is due to the leftward alignment of stress, the remaining distinctions are due to constraints mandating nonfinality and weight-to-stress. The resulting dialect continuum can thus be attributed to the agency of metrical constraints, which are solely responsible for the emergence of Rising accents, considered in the dialectal literature as an innovative prosodic feature.

Tone-based interactions that lead to dialectal differences arise in response to tone crowding that involves lexical H and intonational L%, with the further impact of “domain generalization,” whereby the effects of tone crowding at the right edge of an intonational phrase generalize to smaller domains that lack the original trigger. We focus on four Neo-Štokavian regional idioms: Novi Sad (NS, spoken in the north), Belgrade (B, spoken in the capital), Valjevo (V, central west), and Čačak (C, southwest) idioms. Based on an acoustic study, we investigate the phenomenon of “retraction to stress,” in which a lexically specified H tone retracts to a preceding stressed syllable. What we find is that, in B, V, and C, a word-final H retracts when occurring at the right edge of an intonational phrase, yielding to L%; in NS, however, lexical H wins, and L% is not realized. Further dialectal divisions come from modes of extending H retraction to smaller domains. While retraction occurs only phrase-finally in B, it is also word-final in V, and both word-final and word-internal in C. These four Neo-Štokavian idioms thus form a tone-based dialect continuum, providing further evidence for “domain generalization” as an important phonological process, as argued in Becker (1977), Hyman (1978), and Myers & Padgett (2014).

Stress-based interactions belong to the lexical, and tone-based interactions belong to the postlexical stratum of the grammar. In the former, the place of H is fixed, with stress separated from H due to the effect of metrical constraints. In the latter, the place of stress is fixed in its lexically assigned position, with H gaining mobility in the context of tone crowding. In both cases, the emerging dialect continua relate to the Rising accents, which arise as a new accent type at the lexical stratum, and are potentially neutralized with the Falling accents at the postlexical stratum.