

Towards a Typology of Postlexical Tonal Neutralizations

Larry Hyman

Specialists of accentual systems are well aware that word-based prominences often neutralize, and hence fail to receive full phonetic realization at the phrase level. At the same time, specialists of tone systems are equally aware that lexical tonal contrasts may also be neutralized at the phrase level by a number of processes, some of which are quite suggestive of “accentual “ behavior. In this talk I attempt to provide a typology of postlexical tonal neutralizations. I begin by distinguishing the different domains within which such processes take place, e.g. derived word and clitic group formations, phonological phrases, intonational phrases. I then address the nature of the neutralization phenomena themselves. These include (i) assimilatory processes; (ii) reductions; (iii) overwriting (by morphology, syntax or intonation). Of particular interest will be systems such as Kalabari, an Ijoid language spoken in Nigeria, that exhibit reduction + melodic overwriting. In this head-final language, the five different tone patterns of verbs merge whenever they are preceded by an object, whose last tone spreads onto the verb. Within the noun phrase, the five tone patterns of nouns also merge when they are preceded by a modifier, but in this case the modifier assigns an unpredictable tone melody: LH after a demonstrative, HL after a nominal possessor, HLH after a pronominal possessor, L after a numeral. In the course of the discussion I will first sort out the different kinds of postlexical neutralization processes that occur (and in which environments) and, second, present the typological generalizations which emerge. For example, one clear tendency is for the head N or V of a syntactic construction to undergo modification in both head-initial and head-final languages. While this is clear in the case of tonal reduction and tonal overwriting, I consider how this generalization interacts with the tendency for tonal assimilations to be perseverative (vs. accentual phenomena, which are often anticipatory). Since non-assimilatory processes typically involve a nonhead trigger and a head target, and since tonal assimilations are typically perseverative, there should thus be few cases of postlexical tonal neutralization by assimilation in head-final languages. Since there is some ambiguity and disagreement concerning the prosodic analysis of certain languages, e.g. the different dialects of Japanese, an accurate typology may ultimately be useful in determining whether a given language is tonal vs. accentual.