

Ryan Bennett and Robert Henderson
UC Santa Cruz

Accent in Uspanteko, a Mayan language

Uspanteko (Guatemala; ~2000 speakers) is an endangered Quichean-branch Mayan language. It is unique among Quichean-branch languages in that, along with obligatory right-edge stress, Uspanteko has innovated a system of contrastive pitch accent. Word-level accent in Uspanteko is of theoretical interest for several reasons. First, it has a mixed-accentual system, which makes use of both stress and pitch accent. Second, pitch accent has striking effects on prosodic and segmental structure, inducing (for example) stress shift, ablaut, and deletion. Third, pitch accent is closely tied to morphology, and in particular marks possession on nominals. Finally, interactions between tone and vowel length provide strong evidence for lexical strata within the accentual system of Uspanteko.

In this paper we provide a novel analysis of Uspanteko accent, using data drawn from previous research as well as our own recent fieldwork. We propose that the location of pitch accent and stress in Uspanteko can be straightforwardly captured under three assumptions: (i) Uspanteko words contain a single right-aligned iamb; (ii) pitch accent must dock to the head of a foot; and (iii) pitch accent cannot dock to a word-final mora. These assumptions account for default word-final stress, as well as penultimate stress in [CVCV] words bearing pitch accent. Interactions between prosody and segmental structure in Uspanteko are analyzed as the result of further constraints on foot shape, stress assignment, and tone non-finality. Finally, we model accentual cophonologies in Uspanteko using partially-ordered prosodic constraints.