Looking elsewhere: Word prosody of African-origin words in Afro-Atlantic creoles

This paper is concerned with the description and phonological analyses of word-prosodic systems of Afro-European creole languages that show a correspondence between origin (African vs. European) and prosodic pattern. The Afro-European context in which creoles emerged provided the means for the contact between West African tone languages and European stress-accent languages. Speakers of tone languages were exposed to prosodic features and cues for marking lexical stress and phrasal prominences. As it has been widely known, the great majority of the lexicon of creole languages comes from the lexifier (European) language. So it is not unexpected that these speakers would interpret phonetic cues associated with stress in the lexifier, such as pitch, into a phonological property of the emerging system (Author, 2021; Good, 2008; Steien & Yakpo, 2020). So creoles that present a tone system usually mark the original stress of the lexifier as a culminative H. This accounts for the majority of the lexicon, but what happens to the African origin words? Even though this seems to be of particular interest, few analyses take the African input into account (Author, 2021), even in widely studied creole languages such as Papiamentu (cf. Kouwenberg 2004; Remijsen and van Heuven 2005; Rivera-Castillo and Pickering 2004). At the same time, the creoles for which the African input is indeed analyzed are precisely the ones that show "unexpected" word-prosodic systems where we find a correlation between origin and prosodic pattern. The discussion is based on the evidence of these languages, focusing primarily on Lung'Ie [pre] (Author, 2021), based on my own fieldwork data organized and analyzed using Dekereke (Casali 2020) and Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2017), and also on Saramaccan [srm] (Good 2004b, 2004a, 2009), Nigerian Pidgin English [pcm] (Faraclas 1984, 2003) and Pichi [fpe] (Yakpo 2009, 2019). The Lung'Ie data, for example, shows a clear correlation between word origin and tone pattern in nouns: lexemes with one H are 87% of Portuguese origin and all-Ø lexemes are 92% of African origin (Author 2021). At the same time, these creoles have been shown to present previously unreported results of the contact between different word-prosodic systems (Author, 2021; Good, 2008, 2009). After observing the properties of these word-prosodic systems, I conclude that we will only be able to understand the properties of the word-prosodic systems of creole languages if the we describe and analyze data that includes the African input.

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