

Levels of prosodic phrasing in Embosi and Chichewa

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The aim of the talk is twofold: it presents a study of the intonation systems of Embosi and Chichewa, proposing a model with a dual register organization to account for the interaction between lexical tones and boundary tones. It also investigates the Prosodic Hierarchy in the two languages. One issue we address is how many levels of phrasing we find in the two languages. A related issue is the role of both syntax and information structure in conditioning the phrasing.

The talk is organized as follows. We begin by presenting the basics of Intonation in Embosi and Chichewa. We show that, in both languages, intonational tones affect the register of lexical tones, and we argue that this superimposition of register tone and lexical tones is best modeled as tonal domain overlap in Optimal Domains Theory. Downstep, another form of intonational register, is best modeled using a metrical approach.

We then turn to the issue of the levels of phrasing motivated by the intonation patterns, beginning with phrasing that are conditioned by syntax. For Embosi, we show there is a single level of phrasing, namely, the Intonation Phrase. It does not dominate a lower level of Phonological Phrase between Phonological Words and Intonation Phrases. In Chichewa, in contrast, we do find evidence for a distinction between the Phonological Phrase and the Intonation Phrase. However, we also find intonation patterns which are conditioned by information structure in both languages, namely, register raising and/or High boundary tones following sentence-initial (contrastive) topics. These patterns raise the following questions that we will propose as discussion questions for the workshop: a- what factors besides syntax influence phrasing? b- how do we fit these information structure-motivated phrases into the Prosodic Hierarchy?