Huichol (Wixárika) Word Accent: Typology, Interactions, and Implications

Abstract

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The analysis of systems of tone, stress, and intonation in the world's languages is a center of debate in modern phonology. While prototypical cases of stress languages such as English and tone languages such as Yorùbà are well understood, languages on the peripheries of these prototypes, especially those with interactions between tone and stress systems, often pose challenges to researchers and theorists.

The interaction between stress and tone in Huichol (Uto-Aztecan) of western Mexico, can be understood by van der Hulst's (2014) concept of ACCENT, a lexically underlying mark of prominence. Huichol is an accentual language with one accented mora per word. The only phonetic correlate (or "exponent" (Hyman 2014)) of accent in Huichol is privative tone—accented moras are assigned H tone. Thus, Huichol can be typified as a tone-accent language. This analysis is based on both published and original Huichol-language data. A clear example of lexical accentual contrast is shown in the examples below:

(1)	a.	tàmé	(2)	a.	nèʔénà	(3)	a.	nàká
		tooth			hear.1SG			ear
		'tooth'			'I hear'			'ear'
	b.	támè		b.	nèʔèná		b.	nákà
		1PL			hear.1SG.FUT			(vulgar word)
		'we'			'I will hear'		

(Banerji and Carrillo 2014)

In (1), the two words with segmental material /tame/ have different meanings based on the placement of the accent—the phenomenon Iturrioz, Ramírez, and Pacheco (1999) called "lexical stress accent". This example provides evidence for the presence of differing accent in underlying forms of these two words, as they were produced in isolation of any other linguistic material. It suggests that, at least in a certain subsection of the lexicon, Huichol uses accent to distinguish between different words with the same segmental material.

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(2) gives evidence for the distinctive use of tone to serve a grammatical purpose[1] (an areal feature of Mesoamerica, cf. Campbell, Kaufman, and Smith-Stark (1986)), which in this case is verb tense; the contrast between high tone on penultimate and final results in the distinction between present tense and past tense for the verb *ʔena* 'to hear'.

Conventional definitions of lexically distinctive word accent hold that it is both obligatory and culminative. The condition of OBLIGATORINESS holds that every lexical domain will contain at least one syllable marked for particular prominence. The condition of CULMINATIVITY holds that all words will contain exactly one syllable marked for primary stress. This entails that languages with words containing more than one stress will have a mechanism for assigning one—and only one—word-level prominence.

Accent, with the tonal correlate of H(igh) tone, is both obligatory and culminative in Huichol. The prosodic word in Huichol maps roughly to a word root with clitic affixes, and no entry in the corpus lacks at least one high tone per prosodic word. This would suggest that H tone, and therefore accent, is obligatory. Culminativity is similarly shown through the demonstration of morphemic boundaries. Through this discussion, Huichol is demonstrated to have two classes of affixes: the first contains those which retain their accentual structure, resulting in a lexical word consisting of more than one prosodic word, while the second contains those which do not retain their accentual structure, where the resultant word consists of only one prosodic word.

References

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[1]It is important to note that 'we' is monomorphemic in Uto-Aztecan languages.