

Word-level and phrase-level replacive tone: an implicational relationship

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This talk focuses on replacive grammatical tone, defined as grammatically conditioned tonal melodies that overwrite lexical tone. Replacive tone (henceforth RT) differs from processes like tone spreading in that the resulting tone patterns have little or nothing to do with the lexical tones of the constituents; the melodies are determined by the morphosyntactic context, with no input from the phonology. This phenomenon is widely attested at the word level, triggered by inflectional features, such as plural on nouns (e.g. Ngiti, Kutsch Lojenga 1994) or tense/aspect on verbs (e.g. Dagbani, Hyman and Olawsky 2004), or by derivational processes, such as nominalization (e.g. Tommo So, McPherson 2013) or detransitivization (e.g. Kalabari Ijo, Harry and Hyman 2014). Less commonly, RT is found at the phrase level, where we find the lexical tone of one or more words overwritten in ostensibly syntactic contexts. For example, in the majority of the Dogon languages, the head noun and intervening modifiers are overwritten with melodies triggered by certain syntactic categories of c-commanding modifiers (McPherson 2014); a case with more diverse tonal melodies (dependent upon syntactic category) is found in Kalabari Ijo (Harry and Hyman 2014).

In every language I have seen with phrase-level RT, there is also word-level RT, but the opposite is not true; that is, there is an implicational relationship between the two. In this talk, I argue that the presence of RT at the word level is a necessary factor in the development of RT at the phrase level. I take as an assumption that systems of phrase-level RT have their diachronic roots in regular phrasal phonology (tone reduction, tone spreading, etc.; see McPherson 2014 and Harry and Hyman 2014 for diachronic explanations of Dogon and Kalabari Ijo replace tone, respectively). At some point, a change occurred that obscured the phonological context, leaving learners with a piecemeal system of tonal melodies in phonologically unnatural contexts. I suggest that if the language had a pre-existing mechanism for RT at the word level, the formerly phrasal phonological system could undergo restructuring, extending the domains for RT from the word to the phrase. If no system was already in place to account for RT, then these would-be phrase-level tone patterns were lost, accounting for the gap in the typology for languages with phrase-level but no word-level RT.

Consider data from Tommo So (McPherson 2013). Like all Dogon languages, word-level RT is prevalent in verbal inflection, often in conjunction with suffixes. See the data in (1). The same overlays ($\{H\}$, $\{L\}$, $\{HL\}$) are found at the phrasal level in the DP. Adjectives, demonstratives, relative clauses, and non-pronominal possessors trigger $\{L\}$ on modified nouns (and other c-commanded modifiers); pronominal possessors trigger $\{H\}$ or $\{HL\}$, depending on mora count of the possessed noun (a sensitivity to phonology, but not the tonal phonology). Examples are given in (2). I argue that this phrasal RT is the result restructuring a system of tone reduction (in conjunction with tone spread from a preceding possessor). Because learners were exposed to clear cases of $\{H\}$, $\{L\}$, and $\{HL\}$ RT at the word-level, they were able to analyze the phrasal alternations as part of the same system.

The implication of this proposal is that word-level and phrase-level RT is essentially the same phenomenon and should be analyzed and modeled using the same tools. I propose a Construction Morphology (Booij 2010) analysis of RT, in which the SYN branch of $PHON \longleftrightarrow SYN \longleftrightarrow SEM$ constructional schemas can reflect either word structure (the typical case for morphology) or phrase structure (as in idioms or particle verbs). This broadens the definition of morphology from strictly “word formation” to any idiosyncratic pairing of sound and meaning, be that a simple lexical item, a word-level morphological process, or a phrase-level phonological idiosyncrasy like RT. In sum, this talk provides a unified analysis of RT while suggesting an

explanation for the asymmetry in its distribution: phrase-level RT systems can only be grammaticalized if learners have preexisting mechanisms for word-level RT.

Data

- (1)
- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| a. | wàlá-gù | ‘farming’ | (lexical tone) |
| b. | wá ^H lá | ‘farm!’ | ({H} overlay) |
| c. | wà ^L lá-gù | ‘don’t farm!’ | ({L} overlay) |
| d. | wá ^{HL} lá-dè | ‘(s/he) will farm’ | ({HL} overlay) |
- (2)
- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. | bàbè tààndú | ‘three uncles’ | (lexical tone) |
| b. | mí ^H bábé | ‘my uncle’ | ({H} overlay) |
| c. | Sána ^L bàbè | ‘Sana’s uncle’ | ({L} overlay) |
| d. | mí ^{HL} ánìgè | ‘my friend’ | ({HL} overlay; lexically /ánígé/) |

References

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