

Adjacent high tones at word- and phrase level in Tswana

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In the Southern Bantu language Tswana the obligatory contour principle (OCP, Leben 1973) is an active restriction to the effect that adjacent underlying high tones are disfavored. OCP violations are resolved differently depending on (morpho-)syntactic constituency. A first aim of the study is to exemplify, based on published and own data, how OCP violations are resolved in this language at different (morpho-)syntactic levels. A second aim is to discuss whether the same surface phenomenon that emerges at different (morpho-)syntactic levels, namely tone preservation, should be accounted for differently, depending on the level on which it occurs. This addresses the more general question of the workshop whether word and phrase-related tonal processes are substantially different from each other.

Different strategies can be found to resolve OCP violations in Tswana (underlying high tones are underlined in the examples, realized high tones are marked by accents, low tones are unmarked). High tones of subject prefix and verb stem are both realized when occurring adjacently, as in (1a). The same can be observed for adjacent high tones of object prefix and stem in (1b). In sequences of adjacent high tones across certain word-internal junctures, however, high tone deletion takes place, as in (1c). Across word boundaries, the second high tone in a sequence of adjacent high tones is realized at a significantly lower pitch, indicated by means of an exclamation mark in (1d). Across phrase boundaries, both adjacent high tones are realized, as in (1e).

(1) Adjacent high tones in Tswana (Mmusi 1992: 70, 112, 93; Zerbian & Kügler 2015)

- a. *ó-réká nama* (SC1-buy meat) ‘S/he is buying meat.
- b. *go-é-rékisa* (SC15-OC9-sell) ‘to sell it’
- c. *ó-ká-réká* (SC1-ASP-buy) ‘S/he is able to buy.’
- d. *Ba-rwá 'bá-thúśá ba-lemi.* ‘The sons help the farmers.’
NP2-son SC2-help NP2-farmer
- e. *Ntšá)PP PP(yá-gágó é-jélé di-jó tsá-mé.* ‘Your dog has eaten my food.’
NP9.dog POSS-2SG SC9-eat.PST NP8-food POSS8-1SG

Four different responses to OCP violations thus emerge from the data. Mmusi (1992) suggests an analysis according to which the separately linked high tones in (1a and b) are fused into one (see also Kisseberth & Mmusi 1990). For (1c), she suggests a rule of left-branch delinking to rectify the OCP violation that is created by the adjacency of the prefix *-ká-* and the high-toned verb stem. In (1d), downstep takes place. The OCP violation across phrase boundaries in (1e) is not resolved.

What emerges from the data is that violations of the OCP are resolved differently at different levels of prosodic constituency, such that each strategy can be linked to a specific prosodic constituent (which will be elaborated on in the talk). A phonetic preservation of high tones occurs at two different levels, namely within word (1a+b) and across phrase boundaries (1e).

Tone preservation as a word-level process, as in (1a +b), has been analyzed by means of fusion (Mmusi 1992). A similar analysis does not suggest itself for tone preservation across phrase boundaries, as in (1e), because it seems difficult to find independent evidence for tones fusing across phrasal boundaries. Different analyses would thus be necessary to account for the same surface phenomenon, supporting the view that tonal alternations (or rather non-alternations in this case) at the phrase level are different from tonal alternations at the word-level. The alternative is a unified approach according to which OCP violations are tolerated at two levels in Tswana grammar, namely at the word-level and at the phrasal level. The talk will discuss both approaches.

References

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