Tone languages such as Mandari Chinese (Ku, 1999) or the Bantu language Chichewa (Oettinger, 2003) display tonal patterns beyond the lexical level when some part of the utterance is in focus. Amole (1992) describes the Gbe language Ewe to utilize morphosyntactic means to signal focus without making any reference to prosody. The question arises whether there are typological commonalities with regard to prosody across different types of tone languages when signaling focus. Möhl k (1971) makes reference to ‘expressive prosodies’ in Ewe which serve to emphasize a word or phrase or intensely the main meaning. We tested for these ‘expressive prosodies’ by comparing the phonetic realisation of the high-ranked vs low-ranked focus marker (FM) in subject focus condition and ex-situ object focus utterances to see if the language also makes use of prosodic (durations or pitch) cues to highlight or structure information. While duration appears to mark phrasal boundaries after the focussed constituents, FO measurements of controlled tonal patterns were inconclusive as of now and thus are not discussed here.

We selected 6 tonal structures for further investigation and restricted our analysis to the following 3 conditions:

1. S + V (out of the blue) (36 utterances)
2. S + FM + V (subject focus) (36 utterances)
3. 0 + FM + S + V (object ex-situ focus) (39 utterances)

Our (preliminary) results indicate that there are no pitch cues that aid in signaling focus or structuring information. Durational cues however appear to play a significant role in structuring the information.

Linguistic Facts of Ewe

Prosodic Edge Marking in Ewe
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Abstract

Tone languages such as Mandari Chinese (Ku, 1999) or the Bantu language Chichewa (Oettinger, 2003) display tonal patterns beyond the lexical level when some part of the utterance is in focus. Amole (1992) describes the Gbe language Ewe to utilize morphosyntactic means to signal focus without making any reference to prosody. The question arises whether there are typological commonalities with regard to prosody across different types of tone languages when signaling focus. Möhlk (1971) makes reference to ‘expressive prosodies’ in Ewe which serve to emphasize a word or phrase or intensely the main meaning. We tested for these ‘expressive prosodies’ by comparing the phonetic realisation of the high-ranked vs low-ranked focus marker (FM) in subject focus condition and ex-situ object focus utterances to see if the language also makes use of prosodic (durations or pitch) cues to highlight or structure information. While duration appears to mark phrasal boundaries after the focussed constituents, FO measurements of controlled tonal patterns were inconclusive as of now and thus are not discussed here.

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Linguistic Facts of Ewe

Tones (2): HF and non-HF

(HL, LM, rising, falling)

Syllabic Structure: V, CV, CCV

Vowels: (/a e i o u /

+n realized variants (no contrastive length)

Consonants (28):

A: l, d, g, b, d, v, z, b

B: p, t, k, b, f, s, x

C: m, n, j, w, r, y

Results Duration Measurements

For each utterance, segment durations were calculated. For each identical condition, the mean and the standard error was computed and graphed. Note that the S is graphed in green, the V in blue and the O in grey. The focus marker on the S or O is plotted in red while the final vowel of the utterance is graphed in yellow.

Observations

1. utterance final vowel [yellow bar] generally lengthened when O onset is a consonant

2. word initial vowel of O (dark grey bars) indicates lengthening of vowel when following another vowel

Interpretation

1. Final lengthening at right edge of utterance (prosodic phrase)?

2. Vocalic onset elongated in context of preceding vowel

Comparison S Focus and O Focus (ex-situ)

The durations were automatically calculated from the segmentation file. Mean durations with standard error bars were plotted:

Results

Linear Mixed Effects Model Anova on the duration of the focus marker in [S+FM] vs [O+FM] utterances shows a significant effect

(p = .05, F = 15.77) indicating that the focus marker in the focused object is produced relatively longer than in the [S+FM] condition.

Theoretical Implications

There appears to be evidence for Möhlk’s ‘expressive prosodies’ in the speech of this one speaker:

• The focus marker can have the perceptual effect of emphasis.

• In [S+FM] vs [O+FM] phrasing into two separate intermediate level phrases?

• Lengthening can have the perceptual effect of the restructuring of sentences

In [S+FM] vs [O+FM] phrasing into two separate intonational level phrases?

Questions

1. Why redundant marking via use of prosody when having a specific marker for focus and

2. Hypsthetic movement

2. Can the results be interpreted to mean that Subject focus is ex-

3. situ, not?

Conclusions

1. There appears to be evidence for Möhlk’s ‘expressive prosodies’ in the speech of this one speaker: lengthening can have the effect of the percept of increased salience resulting in the interpretation of emphasis.

Planned recordings of same speaker with more materials

2. Our findings (that S and O in focus position are ex-situ) seem to support the Narrative Hypothesis (Fiedler & Schwarz, to appear).

It suggests that high-ranked focus constructions in Ewe can be regarded as bi-culled, consisting of an NP as first and a narrative clause as second clause.

References


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