Contact-related variation in tone and tone-alignment patterns

by Mary E. Beckman, Ohio State University

Current descriptions of contact-related prosodic re-organization often refer to categories such as “tone” versus “stress” — terms that we now know apply to very heterogenous groups of prosodic systems which were rather simplistically lumped together in traditional typologies of tone and accent. The dimensions of variation that the traditional typologies probably meant to capture can be translated into the Autosegmental-Metrical (AM) framework by asking two questions about the inventory of tone specifications in a language variety and about the metrical structures to which they attach. First, is the inventory of pitch contours that contrast short utterances in the language variety composed primarily of tones that are specified in the lexicon (so-called “tone languages”) or are most tone shapes morphemes in their own right (so-called “intonation languages”)? Second, what are the constraints that determine tune-text alignment at the lowest levels of the prosodic heirarchy? For example, are some parts of each utterance tune necessarily anchored to rhythmically prominent syllables (so-called “stress languages”), or are all tones anchored exclusively to prosodic group edges or to rhythmically undifferentiated culminative syllables (what Beckman, 1986, called “non-stress accent”)? This talk has two aims. It will briefly review some of the phenomena that have prompted us to recast the typology of prosodic systems in this way, and it will apply the revamped typology to several cases of contact-related variation in languages in East Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean.