

Prosodic “Systems” of Juba Arabic

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Juba Arabic (JA) is an Arabic-based pidgin (partially creolized among some group/generations), mainly spoken in urban areas of Equatoria, Southern Sudan. The present study is based on my research with Pãri and Tenet youths in Juba (2009 – 2010).

JA distinguishes pitches (Low or High) which are phonetically assigned to syllables, and the representation of stress is basically redundant and phonetic. This general analysis is my own, following the analysis of Nubi by Gussenhoven (2006), and opposed to the traditional JA accent descriptions as stress accent language.

JA has mainly three independent prosodic “systems”, as a result of heavy language contact with Arabic and local languages of Southern Sudan.

1. Most of the lexicon has underlying representation as pitch-accent, saying typologically, with the parameters [+culminativity, -obligatoriness] (Hyman 2006) as in (1) (´ for High, ` for Low, ^ for Falling pitch representation).

(1) Pitch-Accent type lexicon (PA-type)

1 syllable: ´sâ ‘watch’, ´sá ‘true’.

2 syllables: ´gára ‘gourd’, jà´mâ ‘people’, ´wàtá ‘ground’.

3 syllables: ´séjèrà ‘tree’, gí´yáfà ‘beautiful’, sèrè´gèl ‘earthworm’, ´gàmàrá ‘moon’.

4 syllables: ´médèrèsà ‘school’, zè´lábìyà ‘a kind of doughnut’,
gèbè´lìyà ‘tribalism’, mùsùtù´rà ‘toilet’, ´àtèrèsá ‘deaf’.

PA-type word is de-accented by suffixing, compounding or reduplication as in (2).

(2) ´séjèrà ‘tree’ -´ất {plural marker} -> ,sèjè´r-ất ‘trees’

´móyò ‘water’ ´énà ‘eye’ -> ,mòyò-´énà ‘tear’

bè´rédu ‘washing’ ´jénà ‘child’ -> ,bèrèdu-´jénà ‘washing a child’

´dúfà ‘generation’ ´dúfà ‘generation’ -> ,dùfà-´dúfà ‘same generation’

2. A few of the lexicon (most of them are borrowings from local vernacular languages) have underlying tones which are assigned to each syllable, as in (3).

(3) Tone-type lexicon (T-type)

All H: dǎŋgá ‘bow’, bǎŋgírí ~ gwǎŋgírí ‘cheek’.

All L: kwètè ‘durra beer’, mèdè ‘school (slang < ‘médèrèsà)’.

Mixed: àlíwára ‘old-clothes’, lúkúlúli ‘bat’, kàpápàràt ‘butterfly’.

Some of the T-type words are suffixed a plural (PL) marker -jin (-jín/Low__, -jìn/High__), which is borrowed from Bari language, a major vernacular language spoken in Juba.

- (4) kwètè ‘durra beer’ kwètè-jín ‘durra beer-PL’
mèdè ‘school (slang)’ mèdè-jín ‘school-PL (slang)’
dǎŋgá ‘bow’ dǎŋgá-jìn ‘bow-PL’
àlíwára ‘old clothes’ àlíwára-jìn ‘old clothes-PL’

3. Verbal reduplication has a special prosodic representation, all syllables of the first reduplicant have High, and for the second reduplicant, all syllables are Low.

- (5) límù ‘to collect’ límú-lìmù ‘to collect repeatedly’
sérègù ‘to steal’ sérégú-sèrègù ‘to steal repeatedly’
ásùrùbù ‘to drink’ ásúrúbú-àsùrùbù ‘to drink repeatedly’
gálgàl ‘to complain’ gálgál-gàlgàl ‘to complain repeatedly’

In conclusion, I regard the prosodic systems of JA as a kind of “Split Prosody”, defined as one in which “*the majority of its words are marked for pitch accent but an important minority are marked for tone* (Good 2004: 11)”. This is a kind of linguistic mixture or “bricolage”, and this may be the first example of it among Arabic varieties.

References

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