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Future directions in the field: A look at Afro-Hispanic prosody

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of Chocó Spanish (CS) neutral declarative intonation. Results show that this Afro-Colombian dialect, in line with other black vernaculars spoken in Latin America and other cases of Spanish in contact, presents a reduced inventory of pitch accents when compared to other varieties of Spanish. Specifically, L+H* (i.e., peak alignment within the stressed syllable) predominates in both prenuclear and nuclear phrase positions, which deviates quite significantly from common Spanish trends, where there is often a distinction between nuclear L+H*/L* and prenuclear L+>H* (i.e., peak displacement to a post-tonic syllable). Conversely, at the intermediate and intonational phrase levels (ip and IP, respectively), CS appears to reflect other native (non-contact) varieties of Spanish, showing H- ip boundaries to indicate the continuation of a thought and L% IP boundaries to signal the conclusion of an idea. Our findings are further compared with results from other contact varieties to show that certain aspects of CS intonation may be conceived as the byproduct of the transmission of second language (L2) intonational features to following generations of first language (L1) speakers.

Keywords: Chocó Spanish; Intonation; Acquisition; Pragmatics/phonology interface; Creoles

1. Introduction

This paper provides an analysis of Chocó Spanish (CS) declarative intonation. CS is the dialect spoken by the inhabitants of the Department of Chocó, Colombia, a region where blacks represent 95% of today's total population (DANE, 2005) and consist of the descendants of the slaves taken to this region during colonial times to work in the rich gold mines of the area.

CS has long been at the center of linguistic debates concerning the genesis and evolution of the Afro-Hispanic Languages of the Americas (AHLAs). On the one hand, a widespread view in creole literature has suggested that this dialect, along with several other AHLAs, may be seen as the byproduct of a (de)creolization process; as such, some of the linguistic features encountered in CS are analyzed as indicators of a previous creole stage (Granda, 1968, 1970;

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Schwegler, 1991, 1999). On the other hand, recent investigations have offered historical and linguistic evidence that contradicts the (de)creolization hypothesis, arguing that this vernacular may be better conceived as the result of advanced second language (L2) acquisition strategies that do not entail any previous creole phase (Sessarego, 2016).

The current article is not primarily concerned with the aforementioned debate; rather, the main objective of this study is to account for the presence of certain intonational patterns found in this variety, which appear to diverge quite significantly from those encountered in other native varieties of Spanish. Nevertheless, the data emerging from the current investigation will add further fuel to the discussion concerning the genesis and evolution of CS and other AHLAs, and for this reason, we decided to analyze them in light of recent models addressing the nature of Afro-Hispanic language formation and contact-induced prosodic simplification (Rao and Sessarego, 2016; Sessarego and Rao, 2016).

This paper contains six main sections. Section 2 contextualizes the study by providing an overview of relevant literature. Section 3 describes our data-collection methodology and techniques of analysis. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 offers a hypothesis to account for our findings. Finally, section 6 summarizes the main contributions of the article.

2. Previous studies on Spanish intonation

2.1. Theoretical constructs

The analysis of declaratives presented in this paper combines concepts central to both AM theory and the Spanish in the Tones and Break Indices (Sp_ToBI) system of phonological labeling intonation (Beckman et al., 2002; Hualde, 2002; Face and Prieto, 2007; among others).[1] According to AM, discourse is organized in the hierarchy of constituents represented in (1).

(1) Relevant levels of the prosodic hierarchy[2]

IP	Intonational Phrase
ip	Intermediate Phrase
PW	Prosodic Word
σ	Syllable

Fundamental frequency (f0) high (H) and low (L) points within or near stressed syllables are anchoring points for phonological targets (i.e., tones, but not in the lexical sense), or *pitch accents*, which can be configured as just one target (e.g., L* or H*, with an asterisk indicating association of a tone with a stressed syllable) or a series of two targets (e.g., L+H*). Lexical items with a stressed syllable (cf. Quilis, 1993), which in turn are capable of bearing a pitch accent, are deemed prosodic words (PWs). Words that possess a stressed syllable but that have a very low f0 level do not exhibit sufficient evidence of a pitch accent and are termed *deaccented* (cf. Rao, 2009).

Schematic representations of the most frequently cited pitch accents in Spanish are provided in Fig. 1. Within each graphic of this figure, f0 movement is tracked with respect to pre-tonic (i.e., first third), stressed (i.e., middle third), and post-tonic (i.e., final third) syllables.

Neutrally articulated prenuclear (i.e., non-final) PWs in the majority of non-contact varieties of Spanish exhibit an f0 low point near the onset of a stressed syllable and then a rise through the stressed syllable that culminates in a peak in the post-tonic syllable. This sequence of changes in f0 evidences the bitonal L+>H*, where > indicates post-tonic peak alignment. A second bitonal prenuclear pitch accent is L*+H, in which f0 stays low throughout almost the entirety of the stressed syllable before rising and peaking in post-tonic position. Prior to the use of > notation, L*+H was the pitch accent used to characterize peak displacement to a post-tonic syllable. The first two prenuclear pitch accents introduced both show post-tonic peak alignment, but certain linguistic contexts may block this possibility; for example, in cases of adjacent stresses, a peak associated with the first stress is forced to align earlier due to the movements connected to the second stress. Prenuclear stress clash is one scenario in which the L+H* pitch accent, where an f0 low-to-high occurs within the confines of the stressed syllable, can be attested. After the peak of the first stress, there is limited time to descend to a low point before ascending to a peak associated with the second stress; thus, another outcome in stress clash conditions is an f0 plateau running through the second stressed syllable, which corresponds with the H* pitch accent.

To this point, we have discussed pitch accent representation in prenuclear position. Concerning nuclear (i.e., final) phrase position, it should be noted that Spanish obeys the *Nuclear Stress Rule* (Chomsky and Halle, 1968), meaning this position holds the highest degree of perceptual salience by default. According to this rule, pitch accents in nuclear position

[1] For recent advances in prosodic representation, see Hualde and Prieto (2015, 2016).
[2] The prosodic foot is a level between the syllable and the word, but is irrelevant to the present discussion and therefore excluded from (1).

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