

## A new approach to Yawa-Saweru prosody

Yawa and Saweru together form a small group of closely related lects spoken over central Yapen island in New Guinea. The currently available descriptions of Yawa-Saweru analyse the lects as having complex systems of lexical stress.

In Jones (1986), stress in Yawa Sarawandori is described as lexically determined and contrastive. However, Jones also mentions there is a considerable amount of stress perturbation across all word types – that is, the position of stress in a certain word can vary depending on the phrase or clause in which it occurs. However, Jones (1986: 20-21) does not determine the conditions or rules for this perturbation of the stressed syllable:

At the present stage of analysis, no rules have been formulated for stress perturbation. [...]it is clear that there is not a straightforward phonological rule. Many words undergo stress perturbation, while many other phonologically similar ones do not. It appears that morphological classes need to be compiled for words that undergo identical stress perturbation. This is a task yet to be done.

For Saweru, Donohue (2004) constructs a complicated set of rules of binary and ternary feet with initial, penultimate and antepenultimate stress within the foot, to account for the many different stress patterns that he identifies. Donohue concludes that both foot length and the position of stress are lexically determined. While this system covers for the attested stress patterns, Donohue notes that another system with weak local parsing and extrametrical syllables would work as well, but is “no less arbitrary than the model proposed” (Donohue, 2004: 10).

The complexity and equivocation in these descriptions call into question the validity of a lexical stress analysis of the languages. In this talk, I will propose a new analysis of Yawa-Saweru prosody, arguing that there is no such thing as lexical stress in Yawa-Saweru. Rather, I will present evidence that what has before been perceived as lexical stress is actually the implementation of a strong phrasal intonation system in which each intonational phrase has a single most prominent syllable for which both fundamental frequency/pitch and duration play a role. Information status and grammatical features determine the size of the intonational phrase, and pragmatics and dependence-finality determine the pitch contour and the position of phrasal stress. This new approach allows for a more straightforward and unequivocal explanation to the attested variance. These findings contribute to the increasing body of work (such as Himmelmann 2018) that draws attention to the widespread presence of stress-less languages in Indonesia, providing new insights and better understanding to the typology of stress.

### References

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