

Tone meets stress in the Afro-Atlantic

Social context, typology, outcomes

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Four centuries of African resistance and adaptation to European invasion and enslavement have produced what we may conveniently call the *Afro-Atlantic linguistic area* spanning Atlantic Africa and the Caribbean Basin. The principal language families involved are African Kwa, Benue-Congo, and Atlantic languages on the one hand, and European Romance and Germanic languages on the other. European and African features, including prosodic ones, converge in the Afro-European contact languages of the Afro-Atlantic (Yakpo 2019; Yakpo and Smith 2020).

I show that the prosodic systems of Afro-European contact languages form an areal continuum from Africa to the Americas, roughly corresponding to tone in the east and stress in the west. Mixed systems combining tone with stress, irrespective of their classification as creoles or indigenized colonial varieties, cluster in the Caribbean (Bordal Steien and Yakpo 2020; Yakpo 2021). The prosodic systems of Afro-European contact languages have been shaped by cognitive-linguistic and social factors, leading to the present geography of the areal continuum across the Afro-Atlantic.

Three mechanisms are at work in the creation of the contact prosodic systems of the Afro-Atlantic (Bordal Steien and Yakpo 2020). The most important one is *stress-to-tone mapping*, through which the speakers of African substrates have mapped tone onto the stress patterns of European superstrate lexicon. In doing so, they have exploited *prominence*, i.e. perceptual analogies between the phonetic realizations of stress and tone.

I conclude that the diligent description of prosodic contact in the Afro-Atlantic provides rich new data to contact linguistics, phonological description and theory, and areal typology.

Links

My publications: https://zenodo.org/search?page=1&size=20&q=yakpo&sort=-publication_date

Home: <https://hub.hku.hk/cris/rp/rp01715>

References

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