

Vowel emergence driven by the tune. Evidence from Tashlhiyt Berber

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Communicative functions are often signaled by intonation. Intonation is mainly manifested by means of tonal movements, i.e. a dynamic modulation of vocal fold vibration during the production of voiced segments, such as vowels. Tashlhiyt, a Berber dialect, is notorious for its typologically rare phonotactic pattern of having words and even whole utterances that have no vowels and consist entirely of voiceless segments (e.g. /tsskʃftstt/ 'you dried it'). This talk will discuss how the phonological system of Tashlhiyt resolves the conflict between the necessity to realize intonation and the lack of voiced segments. I will show that under certain conditions, vowel-like elements emerge in order to bear tone. Thus, Tashlhiyt shows that the functional pressure to realize tones can drive the segmental make-up of utterances. This phenomenon points to a dynamic interaction of two levels of linguistic systems (segments and intonation) that are traditionally described as separate, largely independent layers. It further points to a so far unknown evolutionary pathway to vowel origination.