

The African “lax” question prosody: a follow up

(Workshop 3: Areal Phenomena in Northern Sub-Saharan Africa)

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Abstract

African prosodic markers are quite diverse with a variety of high-pitched markers (downdrift reduction, raising of the last H, reduction or cancellation of final lowering, H tone or rising intonation) and of non high-pitched markers (L tone or falling intonation, polar tone, final lengthening, breathy termination, shortening of the penultimate syllable, open vowels). Some of these markers (L or falling intonation, final lengthening, breathy termination and [open] vowels) occur in various combinations in languages from various families throughout the Sudanic belt. We proposed that they are various facets of a "lax" prosody which might have a single historical origin (Rialland 2008, 2009, Clements and Rialland, 2008).

This « lax » question prosody is an areal phenomenon which is not limited to the Niger-Congo phylum but is found in three different language phyla across the "Sudanic belt", the vast savanna region extending from the Atlantic ocean to the Ethiopian-Eritrean highlands. Its geographical extension brings additional arguments in favor of considering the "Sudanic belt" as a linguistic area. (Clements and Rialland, 2008).

In this talk, we will provide an updated overview of the « lax question prosody » as a feature of the Sudanic belt, taking into account new data and developments.

Keywords: typology, linguistic area, question