The prosody of Fataluku

Fataluku is a Papuan language spoken in the Lautem district of East Timor. Fataluku can be analyzed as a tone language, in which each syllable either has a H tone or no tone. I will discuss the relation between lexical and prosodic words, based on data gathered during my fieldwork. I will show that each prosodic word has only one lexical H tone, and, possibly, an additional H tone inserted by the phonology.

There are three different word classes: class 1 words, which have a H tone associated with the first syllable, class 2 words, which have a H tone associated with the second syllable, and class 0 words, which do not have an associated H tone. Words may be distinguished only by their tones. For example, the third person possessive pronoun /i/ has an associated H tone, and is thus a class 1 word, while the second person plural possessive pronoun /i/ does not have an associated H tone, and is thus a class 0 word.

Prosodic words have only one lexical tone. A prosodic word may correspond to one or more lexical words. For example, sequences of a noun and a verb, or an aspect marker and a verb, typically form a single prosodic word. In this case, the lexical tones of the non-initial words are deleted.

A class 1 or 2 word may correspond to a single prosodic word, but class 0 words cannot form a prosodic word of their own. These include possessive pronouns and conjunctions, which are part of the same prosodic word as the following or the preceding word, respectively.

Besides H tone deletion, there is also a process of H tone insertion. This happens if a long word is followed by another word without a H tone. A long word may be defined as a class 1 word of at least three syllables, or a class 2 word of at least four syllables. In this case, an additional H tone is inserted at the final syllable of the long word.