Lexical and grammatical tone in Abui (Timor-Alor-Pantar)

This paper discusses the distribution and function of tone in Abui, a Papuan language of the Alor branch of Timor-Alor-Pantar family. The paper revises and elaborates previous statements about the tonal phonology made in Kratochvíl (2007), summarizing the findings of Delpada (2016).

The paper shows that there are at least found different tone contours (Low, Mid, High, and Falling) whose distribution is not fixed lexically but alternates with inflection and syntactic environment. This is well illustrated in (1), where the citation of a root shows a different pitch contour from the root in different morphological (inflectional: person, aspect; derivational: inchoatives, compounding) and syntactic environments (focus, phrasal boundaries).

The distribution of pitch contours is not predictable from the segmental make-up of a root, and the pitch therefore has to be considered lexicalized. On the other hand, certain regularities exist in sensitivity of the peak alignment to the length of preceding syllables and minimal pairs are relatively sparse. We will argue that Abui is a low-density lexical tone language, which means that tone is lexicalized only with certain syllables, although we have not developed an abstract model yet.

We will also discuss the intriguing parallels between Abui and the related Fataluku (Heston 2015) and address the typology of the Abui system in relation to complex tonal systems discussed in Hyman (2014) and Kingston (2010).

Keywords: lexical tone, grammatical tone, Timor-Alor-Pantar, tonogenesis

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		Citation form		
(1)	ʔafu	[ʔɑfʊ́]	*afu*	'fish*'*

	Possessive inflection			
ne- + ʔafu	[nɛʔɑfʊ́]	*ne-afu*	'my fish*'*

	Presentative copula			
ʔafu + =e	[ʔɑfʊ.ɛ́]	*afu-e*	*'it is a fish'*

	Inchoative construction			
ʔafu + -di+i	[ʔɑfʊ.dí:]	*afu-di-i*	'it became a fish*'*

	Inchoative construction + priorative aspect			
ʔafu + -di+i +te	[ʔɑfʊ.dí:tɛ̀]	*afu-di-i-te*	'let it become a fish*'*

	Right-headed compounds			
so:ŋ + ʔafu	[sɔ:ŋʔáfʊ̀]	*soong-afu*	'pufferfish sp., lit. jackfruit fish*'*
suwa:j + ʔafu	[sʊwá:jʔafʊ̀]	*suwaai-afu*	'whale, lit. whale fish*'*

	VP focus			
[ʔafu_OBJ + ma:l_V]_VP	[ʔɑfʊ má:l]	*afu maal*	'(we are) cooking fish*'*

	Object focus			
[ʔafu_OBJ + ma:l_V]_VP	[ʔɑfʊ́ mà:l]	*afu maal*	'a <u>fish</u> is being cooked, not…*'*