

Ambonese Malay is toneless and stressless

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An investigation of the sentence prosody of Ambonese Malay revealed that the alignment of sentence-final pitch peaks is neither consistent with an assumption of word stress nor with an assumption of phrase-final pitch accents. The phonetic facts deviate in crucial ways from those for Dutch words with penultimate stress and those for phrase-final pitch accents in French. Moreover, the Ambonese Malay pitch peaks fails to vary systematically with the information status of the phrase-final word. The conclusion is drawn that the language lacks foot structure, that its two IP-final intonational melodies of the language, a rise and a rise-fall, are phrase-final boundary tone complexes which do not associate with any syllable, and that their meanings are purely ‘final declarative’ vs. ‘other’, with no signalling of information structure. The rise-fall is approximately timed so as to occur within the last word of the IP. Minimal stress pairs that have been offered in the literature in fact contrast the phoneme /a/ and a segmentally distinct weak /ǎ/, which contrast that also appears in positions that have been claimed to have no stress.

The case is taken as a starting point for a brief discussion of word prosodic structure, in which lexical and postlexical tone and stress are shown to occur together, in isolation or not at all. Ambonese Malay is an example of the most non-complex case in the classification, while Limburgish dialects are examples of the most complex kind.

Maskikit-Essed, Raechel & Carlos Gussenhoven (forthcoming). No stress, no pitch accent and no prosodic focus: The case of Ambonese Malay. *Phonology* 33.