The syntax-intonation interface in Malagasy

Existing literature on the intonation of Malagasy (VOS) has come to conflicting conclusions. In broad-focus declaratives, Barjam (n.d.) suggests an L+H* pitch accent at the right edge of both the subject and the predicate, while Frascarelli (2010) found an L*+H pitch accent only on the right edge of the predicate. The present study resolves these two conflicting accounts by acoustically analysing the intonation of ten native speakers of Malagasy under the Autosegmental-Metrical framework. The goal was to determine the syntactic constituents bearing intonation in Malagasy and their corresponding pitch accents, phrase tones, and boundary tones. Participants read seven Malagasy sentences with six different structures: verbs with one, two, or three arguments, clefted subjects, wh-questions, and sentences with adverb phrases. These different structures were chosen to test which constituents bear pitch accents. In total, 60 utterances were analysed and tagged using Praat.

Results indicate that both the subject and the predicate do bear pitch accents. In declaratives (both broad-focus and clefted), the most common pitch configuration was L+H* L- on both constituents and an L% boundary tone. In wh-questions, the wh-word also bore L+H* L-; however, the tonal configuration of the predicate was an upstepped L+iH* iH%. The results of this study mostly confirm the findings of Barjam (n.d.) by showing that intonation is borne by the subject and predicate in Malagasy, most commonly with the L+H* L- pitch configuration. Additionally, it expands our knowledge of Malagasy prosody by providing us with new information about the intonation of clefted constructions and wh-questions.
References
