Prominence in Blackfoot

Blackfoot is a Plains Algonquian language spoken by about 4,315 speakers [5] in southern Alberta and northern Montana. It has a system of syllabic prominence primarily correlated with an increase in F0 [7], as well as increased duration and amplitude. This prominence has been referred to in the literature as stress [8], pitch accent [3, 2, 4], or tone [6].

Blackfoot Nominals

Many Blackfoot noun stems have two allomorphs. One usually occurs word-initially, while the other reflects phonotactically-motivated vowel epenthesis, initial change, or a length alternation. Some roots are suppletive. All Blackfoot forms follow Frantz’s orthographic conventions [1, 3].

Our Approach

We elicited both bare nouns and nouns with the following prefixes, using English as a prompt.

omahk- ‘big’
sik- ‘black’
pok- ‘small, young’

omahk-omitaa ‘big dog’
sik-omitaa ‘black dog’
pok-omitaa ‘small dog’

Post-peninitial accent is attracted to the second syllable when it is heavy.

Voiceless Syllables

Voiceless syllables cannot carry pitch. If accent is predicted to fall on a voiceless syllable, accent shifts one syllable to the left.

How do prefixes affect the prominence patterns of Blackfoot nominals? What can paradigmatic forms tell us about their morpho-phonology?

Findings

Class 1: Bears no lexical accent.
Class 2: One syllable is associated with an accent.
Prefixes like pok- ‘small’ act as a noun class litmus test: accented nouns keep their lexical accent and unaccented nouns are accentuated as determined by the prefix.

Blackfoot Pitch Accent: Insights from Morpho-Phonology
Natalie Weber and Blake Allen
Department of Linguistics, University of British Columbia

References


Acknowledgements

Thanks goes to the 2011/2012 Field Methods class at UBC and especially to Beatrice, who so patiently teaches us Blackfoot. Nitsíkohtahsiipinaan!