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Prosody in Endangered Languages: Case Studies from Circassian and Muskogean

This paper will discuss collaborative research on the prosody of three endangered languages. One of these languages, the variety of Kabardian spoken in Turkey, is a prototypical stress language, in which each lexical word has a single syllable that is more prominent than others. These prominent, or stressed, syllables are predictable in their location and are eligible to receive pitch accents in the intonation system. Unlike Kabardian, Chickasaw, a Muskogean language of Oklahoma, has not only predictable stress in all words but also a high tone, i.e. a pitch accent, in certain lexical items. Stress and pitch accent interact with each other and with the intonation system in interesting ways that shed light on the nature of hybrid prosodic systems featuring both tone and stress. Finally, ongoing work on Koasati, another Muskogean language, suggests a richer role for tone in Koasati than in its linguistic relative, Chickasaw, and a lack of compelling evidence for stress. This places Koasati closer than either Kabardian or Chickasaw to the tonal end of the continuum ranging from stress to tone.