Variability and uniformity in Tashlhiyt question word tones
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Tashlhiyt Tamazight (Berber) has been claimed to lack lexical stress (Dell and Elmedlaoui, 1985, 2002; Roettger et al., 2015, but see Gordon and Nafi, 2012). Moreover, recent research on the intonation of Tashlhiyt has unveiled a great deal of variation in tonal placement. This is especially the case phrase-finally, where peaks in statements and polar questions can be realised either on the final or on the penultimate syllable of the word (Grice et al., to appear; Roettger and Grice, 2014). The present paper focuses on peak placement phrase-initially, more specifically in question words, which canonically occur in this position in Berber (Kossmann, 2012; Stoyanova, 2003).

In languages with lexical stress, question words are often realised with a pitch peak on the stressed syllable, interpreted as a pitch accent. In Tashlhiyt, too, question words attract pitch events in the form of peaks. However, these peaks cannot go to a stressed syllable if the language lacks lexical stress. The aim of this study is to identify the factors determining the location of intonational tones on question words in this language.

The present discussion is based on elicited questions from two reading tasks and supported by questions produced during an hour of task-oriented speech. Subjects were 9 native Tashlhiyt speakers (aged 20-28), 2 males and 7 females, living in Agadir, Morocco.

As expected, when question words in direct questions are initial they are usually produced with a pitch peak (most commonly realised as a rise-fall as in Figure 1). There is both inter-speaker and intra-speaker variation in the location of these peaks (Figure 3). For some speakers (3, 4, 6 and 9), pitch peaks vary in location (first or second syllable) across different utterances. For
others, peak alignment is more stable: speakers 1 and 8 consistently produce peaks on the second syllable of multisyllabic words. Crucially, peaks are never realised more than two syllables away from the left boundary of the question word, even in the case of the trisyllabic question word *managu* ‘when’. In contexts in which the question word is embedded (in e.g. polar questions and (meta)statements) no tonal target is present on the word in any of the productions.

When the question word is preceded by the discourse particle *imma* ‘so, now’, peaks occur on the question word rather than on ‘imma’ (Figure 2). This indicates that the peaks on question words are better interpreted as relating to the question word than as a left phrasal edge tone.

Despite variability in the location of left-edge pitch peaks, the tonal melodies on question words in Tashlhiyt can be treated in a uniform manner: it is suggested that a HL tonal event, under certain pragmatic conditions (interrogativity), associates with the question word. The fact that the choice of tune (peak or no peak) is dependent on pragmatic context favours an analysis in terms of a postlexical question tune rather than in terms of a tonal complex that forms part of the lexical representation of the word.

References


