

## Accentlessness in Western Austronesian is innovated, not inherited

The predominant framework in studies of intonation, Autosegmental-Metrical phonology (Pierrehumbert 1980) seeks to decompose recurring pitch patterns into tonal sequences that align either with prosodic domain edges (boundary tones) or prominent syllables (pitch accents). In languages with final stress, there is ambiguity between whether tones aligned to the final syllable are pitch accents vs. boundary tones. While many analyses see these final syllables as accented, Kaufman and Himmelmann (2023) cite several languages in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines for which they claim that there is no prominent syllable, and that all tonal elements are best analyzed as boundary tones based on tonal alignment data. Furthermore, these boundary tones include tonal sequences such as HL% which are typologically common sequences for pitch accents (as, H\*L, for example) rather than for boundary tones.

Given that the “Western Austronesian” area that Kaufman and Himmelmann attribute the ‘accentless’ structure to is comprised of several subgroups in the higher phylogeny of Malayo-Polynesian (and thus Austronesian as a whole), it is worth asking: is accentlessness directly inherited, or was accent lost in this group?

This paper argues that accentlessness was innovated in Western Austronesian, as the last step in an overarching trend of tonal anchoring moving rightward (A→B→C→D in Figure 1). This trend has left several intermediate stages both in the Formosan languages of Taiwan and the Western Austronesian area, and has its source in an asymmetry in tonal alignment that causes pitch peaks to surface variably with delay (Mücke et al. 2008; Macaulay 2021 for Formosan). This argument will be supported by phonetic and phonological data from Formosan, including a novel analysis of peak alignment to serve as a comparison to the existing Western Austronesian data. The analysis also provides an alternative to Smith’s (2023) two-path account of Austronesian prosody (B→A + B→C), which allows for a simpler type A model of Proto-Austronesian, and includes a path to Western Austronesian based on the same principles as the shifts within Formosan.

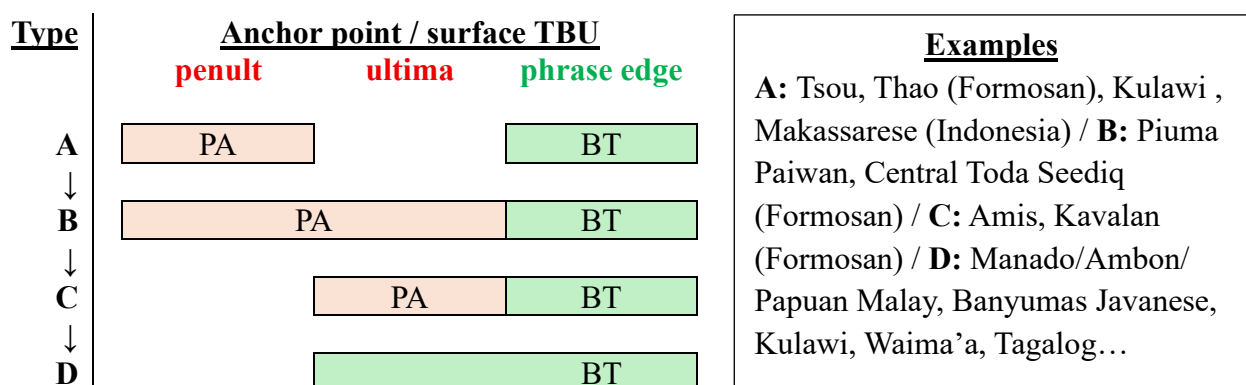


Figure 1: Distribution of intonational elements by anchor point

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