

The typology of tone in Cushitic: a plea for morphological tone as a type

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There is some controversy over whether Cushitic languages have tone (Appleyard 1991, Hayward 1991 for Afar; Owens 1980 for Oromo; Hetzron 1997: 483-489 and Joswig 2006 for Awgni) or accent (Hudson 1973; Biber 1982) with a sort of compromise that some languages are proposed to be of the pitch-accent type (Hyman 1981 for Somali, Banti 1988 for Oromo and Somali), or to be underlyingly accent but tonal in realization (Pillinger 1988). The properties of Cushitic language are of interest to the discussion of tone against accent (Hyman 2006) but this discussion does not do justice to the peculiarities that many Cushitic languages share such as:

- 1. a minor role for tone/accent in the lexicon*
- 2. many lexical elements with no tone/accent*
- 3. a high functional load for tone in grammar*
- 4. grammatical morphemes with High tone require preceding syllable(s) to be High, others to be Low.*

Tone is essential in case marking, is linked to lexical categories and part of several grammatical suffixes, in particular demonstratives, possessives. I will propose that Cushitic tone is better characterised as being morphological, following a suggestion by Sasse (1981: 205) and argue that this characterisation explains better the peculiar behaviour. I then contrast Cushitic tone against Bantu languages for which functional load of tone in the lexicon is reduced and investigate how they differ.