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CONTENTS

Measurements of Formant Frequencies of Urdu Fricatives
Mohammad Ansari ............................................................................ 1

The Verb ‘Tobe’ in Banjara and Telugu: A Morpho-Syntactic Study
K Balu Naik .................................................................................... 22

Function Driven Noun and Adjective Forms/Shapes in a Lexicon
Muddam Srikanth ........................................................................... 37

Tense Aspect and Case System Of Banjara Language;
K Balu Naik .................................................................................... 49

Socio-Economic Status of Tribal in India
V Kishore ........................................................................................ 60

Phonological Adaptations and Syllable Structure of Telugu SMS
Texts in Computer Mediated Communication
Dr. G Anjaneyulu ............................................................................ 80

English Monophthongs as Articulated by Students of Engineering:
A Linguistic Study
Ms. K Jaya Sheela ........................................................................... 93

Tonic Prominence in Accordance with Meaning and Grammar:
A Linguistic Study on Telugu and English
Dr. P. Lakshmi Narasa Dasu ........................................................ 107

Lexical Equivalents and Grammatical Markers in Telugu and
Kannada Proverbs
Kalloji Susheel kumar .................................................................. 117
TONIC PROMINENCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH MEANING AND GRAMMAR: A LINGUISTIC STUDY ON TELUGU AND ENGLISH

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Abstract
This paper proposes to analyze some points in relation to the connection between grammar and tonicity in Telugu, a Central Dravidian language, spoken in Andhra Pradesh, India. It deals with the new and given aspect of tonicity, and how some grammatical elements are phonologically put into focus through tonic prominence. The paper also deals with the content and grammatical distinction in relation to the choice of marked or unmarked tonicity. As in English, Telugu also shows the similar content and grammatical distinction, but at the level of morphemes. Since the entire verb group in Telugu is realized as a single word, the content and grammatical morphemes are combined together as a single word in a clause. Unlike in English, it seems that almost every grammatically valid element has the potentiality to attract tonic accent in Telugu. Here, this potentiality will be analyzed in accordance with the context. On the whole, this paper\(^1\) will draw a comparison in relation to tonic prominence in the two languages.

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\(^1\) This paper is a part of my ongoing PhD thesis. This work is based on the auditory and acoustic study of speech samples of some Telugu speakers and my knowledge of Telugu as a native speaker.
New and Given Aspects

Tonicity deals with new and given aspects of information in a tone group. The new element tends to get tonic accent in order to bring it into focus according to speaker’s meaning. In Telugu, statements and commands are generally spoken on simple tone (falling), and so the new or given meaning is determined by the tonicity of the simple tone. But yes/no type and wh-type (sometimes) questions are spoken on compound tone (Falling and Rising). In this case, the tonicity of the falling tone is concerned with new or given aspect of meaning, and the tonicity of rising tone, which is always on the final syllable in a tone group, does not have any significance regarding new and given meaning but for the mere function of questioning. Let us consider the examples in Telugu and English.

1) /F + R aKKA ki phon ce:sa:VA:/ (here, ‘akka’ is the ‘new’ item in the question)
   Sister to phone did you
   English: /R did you phone (our) SISter/

2) /F + R aKKA ki ce:sa:va: phoNU/ (word order is changed)
   Sister to did you phone
   English: /R did you phone (our) SISter/

3) /F + R Eppudu vastunna:ru mi:RU/ (echo question)
   When coming are you
   English: /FR WHEN are you coming/ (echo question)

The comparison between (1) and (2) shows that even the word order change does not bring any change in the tonicity of final syllable of a tone group.
A Linguistic Study on Telugu and English

2 Grammatical Elements and Tonic Prominence

In Telugu, it seems that every grammatically valid element has the potentiality to attract tonic accent. For example, the morpheme of continuative aspect ‘tu’(ing) is tonic potential (see the example 11). The emphatic morpheme ‘e’ in Telugu can give the meaning of some adverbs and so the element is tonic potential in certain context. Let us consider (4) and (5).

4) //Atanu pariksha ra:stunna:du// (gives the meaning ‘not she’)

He exam write+ing+be+tense+SR+DM

English: // HE is writing the exam// (gives the meaning ‘not she’)

2 Notation: In this paper, // (double slash) indicates tone group boundary, capital letters in the tone groups indicate tonic syllable, F and R indicate falling and rising tones respectively and vowel length is indicated by colon (:). SR is subject reflexive and DM is declarative marker. The phoneme ‘d’ in my orthographic transcription is voiced alveolar plosive.

3 It is assumed that any element which can have a grammatical status in a clause or a sentence may be called a ‘grammatical element’ or ‘grammatically valid element’, i.e. any important item that goes into the construction of a sentence. So the notion includes all types of grammatical identities at the level of words (noun, verb, adverb, adjective, etc), morphemes (affix, clitic, etc), and even a feature (+length, in some cases) if it represents a grammatical identity. So it includes both function (i.e. grammatical) and content elements. I have brought the discussion of ‘grammatical element’ for the sake of understanding tonic potentiality in Telugu. The term ‘grammatical word’ is not to be confused with ‘grammatical element’. Grammatical words are the important elements to the structure of a sentence. Grammatical and content distinction is also discussed in this paper for the sake of identifying marked or unmarked tonicity.
5) //ataNE: pariksha ra:stunna:du// (morpheme ‘e’ gives additional meaning ‘only’, ‘very’, or ‘himself’ depending on the different situations)

English: //HE only is writing the exam// (no other is writing)

or // the VEry man is writing the exam// (whom we talked about)

or // he HIMself is writing the exam// (not because of his father’s force)

The example (5) shows that there is an additional adverbial/reflexive element present in the clause. The morpheme ‘e’, in some cases (as shown in the English examples), can be substitution for the adverbs ‘only’, ‘very’, and emphatic reflexive ‘self’. The difference in the meaning is dependent on the context.

Sometimes even a feature of length can represent a grammatical element. The very syllable, in which the length is present as a meaningful element, can be tonic potential in accordance with the context. Let consider the example below.

6) //ataNU: pariksha ra:stunna:du// (the vowel length gives additional meaning ‘also’) He (also) exam write+ing+be+tense+SR+DM

English: //HE is also writing the exam //

In this case, the vowel length functions as the adverb ‘also’. If we want to say ‘exam also’, we can say //atanu pariKSHA: ra:stunna:du// or with the adverbial substitution ku:da (also), // atanu pariksha KU:da: ra:stunna:du/>. 
A Linguistic Study on Telugu and English

2.1 Content and Grammatical Morphemes

In Telugu, it seems that the grammatical and content distinction is operated at the level of morphemes. For example, the sentence ‘atu\n\npa\n\npika\n\nsha ra:\n\nsta\n\nn\n\nna:du’ contains three words according to Telugu spoken and writing systems.

Let us look into the example

7) Telugu: atunu pariksha ra:s- tu- (u)nn -a: -d -u
   Gloss: he exam write-ing- be- tense SR⁴ DM
   Meaning: he is/was writing the exam.

In this example, ‘Atanu’, ‘pariksha’ and ‘ra:s’ carry the content information. The remaining morphemes, which are the part of verb group, carry the grammatical information.

 tu — ing (continuative), un — be,
a: — tense (non-future), d — SR (subject reflexive of ‘he’)
 u — Declarative Marker (when I, we, they, you or he is the subject in a clause)

2.2 Marked or Unmarked Tonicity

The choice of marked or unmarked tonicity in a tone group is related to the distinction between grammatical and content words. The final content word in a tone group is generally assumed to be tonic potential for unmarked cases of tonicity. The remaining cases are considered to be the cases of marked tonicity. In Telugu also,

⁴ Earlier works in Telugu treated SR and DM together as SR. I opine that they should be separated according to their functional difference; because each morpheme, when attracts tonic accent, gives emphasis on its particular function according to the situation. The Declarative marker also, according to its function, gets tonic accent in order to emphasize on the declaration itself. See the examples (11 – 15).
the same system of tonicity can be applied at the level of morphemes. The final content morpheme in a tone group takes tonic accent in unmarked cases. In a contrastively emphatic context, let us consider a comparison between Telugu and English with some semantically equivalent examples.

8) //Atanu pariksha ra:stunna:du// (marked and gives the contrastive meaning ‘not she’)

English: //HE is writing the exam// (marked and gives the contrastive meaning ‘not she’)

9) //atanu PAriksha ra:stunna:du// (marked and gives the contrastive meaning ‘not a letter’)

English: //he is writing the eXAM// (unmarked, the final content word has the tonic)

10) //atanu pariksha RA:stunna:du// (unmarked, the final content morpheme has the tonic)

English: //he is WRIting the exam// (marked and gives the contrastive meaning ‘not playing’)

The difference in the choice of marked or unmarked tonicity in the English example (9) and Telugu example (10) is dependent on the finality of content morpheme/word. Let us consider the following examples to understand the necessity of distinguishing between grammatical and content phenomenon at the level of morphemes in Telugu language.

11) //atanu pariksha ra:sTU:nn:du// (gives the sense of emphasis on the continuative aspect)

English: //he IS writing the exam// (but not // he is writING the exam// since tonicity in English operates at word level but not at morpheme level)
A Linguistic Study on Telugu and English

12) //atanu pariksha ra:stuUNna:du// (gives the contrastive meaning to the negation)

English: //he IS writing the exam//

13) //atanu pariksha ra:stunNA:du// (the accented element contains tense morpheme ‘a:’ which structurally indicates both present and past tense here. Hence the choice of contrastive meaning is dependent on the context.

English: //he IS/WAS writing the exam// (gives the contrastive meaning in terms of tense)

14) // pariksha ra:stunna:DU: // (here, Subject Reflexive is accented to give contrastive meaning to SR ‘d’, voiced dental plosive (she). The pronominal can be dropped in Telugu since the SR is available in the verb group)

English: //HE is writing the exam// (gives the contrastive meaning ‘not she’)

15) //atanu pariksha ra:stunna:DU: // (gives the meaning of emphasis on declaration where the speaker intends to emphasize on a mutually known thing.

English: //he is writing the eXAM// or //he is WRIting the exam// (the meaning of emphasis on declaration, in English, may be associated with a high falling tone.)

Note that the Telugu examples (14) and (15) show the similarity of tonic prominence with different meanings in the different contexts. It seems that the SR and the DM individually have phonemic identity at phonological level and these two elements together may be realized as a syllable for prosodic purposes. The meaning, whether the speaker is focusing on the SR or the DM, is dependent on the context of situation.
2.2.1 Complex verb group and Tonicity

Telugu has extensive use of complex verbs. Complex verb groups generally contain some combinations like noun + verb, verb + verb, verb + reflexive, etc. Marked or unmarked tonicity in such groups depends on the semantic value of morpheme/word in the verb group. Unmarked tonicity is generally attracted to the element with more semantic (content) value. The element with lesser semantic value is a dependent on the other for its complete sense of meaning.

The following (16) and (17) are the examples of a Verb group: Noun + Verb combination

16) //a:me NIdra po:indi// (unmarked, ‘po:vu’(go) is dependent on ‘nidra’ (sleep))

She sleep went

English: //she SLEPT// (unmarked)

17) //a:me nidra PO:indi// (marked, additional meaning of emphasis on the action)

English: //she DID sleep// (marked, additional meaning of emphasis on the action)

Here, both ‘nidra’ (sleep) and ‘po:vu’ (go) are content morphemes. Since ‘nidra’ has more semantic value in the information, the example (16) is said to be the instance of unmarked tonicity. The example (17) can also be ambiguous if its context is not available to the listener.

18) //A:me nidra PO:indi// (unmarked, here, ‘nidra’ (sleep) is the part of noun group) Her sleep went
A Linguistic Study on Telugu and English

English: //her sleep is disTURbed//

The ambiguity of meaning in (17) or (18) can be understood both at the level of grammar and intonation (in terms of marked or unmarked system tonicity). Here, the ambiguity is also because of ‘a:me’ (she or her). In such cases, tonicity also plays a role to distinguish between noun groups and verb groups in a clause.

Conclusion

All the above discussed are the possible instances in Telugu according to situational context. Grammatical element is taken as the primary identity to analyze the potentiality of tonic accent, since grammatical identities at the word level, morpheme level and feature level, have the potentiality of tonic accent in accordance with certain context. Coming to the marked or unmarked choice of tonicity, the earlier works in Telugu have not shown the content and grammatical distinction at the level of morphemes. According to the empirical evidence I have, I assume that the analysis of the tonicity in relation to grammar is acceptable.

References


