

Prosodic convergences and divergences in African varieties of French: Some explanatory hypotheses

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Recent studies on the African varieties of French allow to formulate the hypothesis of a structural transfer of the prosodic systems of the L1 speakers to the French variety that they practice (Bordal & Lyche 2012). It has been shown that the prosodic system of the French of Africa reproduces one of the speaker's L1 without being a fair tracing. The varieties of African French confirm the existence of a multiplicity of prosodic systems (Centrafrique, Mali, Cameroon, Ivory Coast). Differences are observed in phonetic implementation of tones between these varieties, but they seem to converge in privileging the lexical system. The post-lexical prosody underlying Standard French tends to disappear in these varieties.

The analysis of the French spoken in Burundi (FBI) adds a new dimension to what has been observed in the other varieties, and urges to address the issues of convergence and divergence between African varieties. The FBI is in direct contact with Kirundi (the L1 of the local speakers), a tone language. But, unlike these varieties, the FBI can be analyzed as a post-lexical system. Indeed, the speakers of the FBI segment their oral productions in larger units than the prosodic word. In addition, the accentual unit is subjected to phonological and syntactic rules also observed in the realization of the accentual phase (SA) in the standard French, as the constraint ALIGN-RIGHT (H*, AP), the constraint * CLASH and the ALIGN-XP constraint. However, unlike standard French, the FBI is insensible to the rhythmic processes underlying the realization of the tone /LHi/ to the left boundary of the SA: the barytonic forms are almost non-existent. Our work therefore proposes some assumptions of typological and sociolinguistic approaches to African varieties, in order to help establish their mapping across the African French-speaking space.