

The accentual system of Hocank (Winnebago) - a typological rarity

Abstract

It is generally assumed that one of the main functions of placement of primary and secondary stress (if available) is to mark word boundaries. This function can be attributed in particular to so-called fixed stress systems. Languages with a fixed stress location place the primary word stress on the same syllable in each word. This location is independent of the weight of the syllables in the word and is determined with reference to the right or left edge of the word. Primary stress is then fixed either on the first, second, or third, or on the antepenultimate, penultimate, or ultimate syllable. According to Goedemans & van der Hulst (2005a), more than half of the languages of a 500 languages sample belong to this type of accent placement. Interestingly and in accordance with the main function of this type of accent placement, the majority of these languages places the main stress either on one of the first two or on one of the last two syllables of the word. There are only a few languages ($n=12$ (4%)) that place the main stress on the antepenultimate syllable, and there is only one language, Hocank (Winnebago), that places main accent on the third syllable from the left edge of the word. So, with regard to accent placement, it is justified to say that Hocank (Winnebago), a Siouan language of Wisconsin, is cross-linguistically highly unusual.

On the other hand, the typological classification of Hocank given in Goedemans & van der Hulst (2005) is somewhat misleading, since it is implied that syllable weight does not play a role in determining the location of primary stress. This is, however, not the case. If one of the first two syllables is a heavy syllable, the main stress falls on the second syllable (cf. Susman 1943; Miner 1979, 1981, 1990; Helmbrecht in prep.; Hale 1985). This property, however, does not allow classifying Hocank alternatively as language with weight-sensitive stress (cf. Goedemans & van der Hulst 2005b) either. In the proposed paper, I will give a more detailed description of the rules for the location of primary and secondary stress that allow a better typological understanding of the accentual system of Hocank. In addition, I will provide some evidence from other Siouan languages (none of them has main stress on the third syllable from the left) that allow some conclusions about the historical emergence of this still highly unusual accent pattern. As usual with rarissima, it is hard to find a functional explanation except that it is rare because it is functionally unfavorable.

References:

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