Diachronic Morphophonology: 
Lexical Accent Systems

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Workshop Proposal

Languages such as Russian, Modern Greek, and Lithuanian have lexical accent, according to which the single surface accentual peak (or ictus) results from the accentual properties of its constituent morphemes and the prosodic phonology of the language (Revithiadou 1999, 2001). As this definition itself makes clear, the factors that determine the surface distribution of the ictus are complex. While the archaic Indo-European languages (Sanskrit and Ancient Greek above all) support the reconstruction of lexical accent for the proto-language, the nature of this system, and its relation to morphophonological vowel alternations (ablaut), have been a central occupation of Indo-European linguistics for well over a century (e.g. Hirt 1895, 1900, Pedersen 1926, Kuiper 1942, Schindler 1972a, 1972b, Eichner 1973, Schindler 1975). In recent years, moreover, increasing attention has been paid to the question of how the insights of this research program can be reconciled with advances in the application of morphophonological theory to lexical accent systems (Kiparsky 2010, Kümmel 2014, Kiparsky forthcoming, with further literature below).

Given these complexities, it is thus not surprising that over time, lexical systems are often replaced by systems in which the ictus is determined solely by prosodic structure. Such a change took place in Germanic, for instance, as it replaced the older system of lexical accentuation known from Sanskrit and Ancient Greek with word-initial ictus. The Italic languages inherited a lexical accent system (Vine 2012), and then underwent a similar fate, first shifting to word-initial ictus, which in turn was replaced in Latin by the antepenultimate rule (Mester 1994). Loss is not a given, however, as Russian still maintains a lexical accent system (although it has undergone changes from its postulated Proto-Indo-European ancestor). Interestingly, we can in some case witness changes-in-progress, for instance within Sanskrit, we can observe certain lexical items within inflectional classes following a newer prosodically-determined accentuation in contrast to the older system of lexical accentuation (Lundquist 2014).

This workshop aims to investigate diachronic prosodic change within lexical accent systems —to explore how and why the accentual properties of individual morphemes change and what factors contribute to the diachronic (in)stability of lexical accent. We invite submissions on all aspects of this issue, including but not limited to:
• How do lexical accent systems arise diachronically (Kabak and Revithiadou 2009)?
• While loss of lexical accent systems is in some ways unsurprising, what makes this change unsurprising?
• What role does prosodic structure (e.g. moraic and foot structure) play in lexical accent systems over time—does it foster change in ictus distribution (e.g., Wheeler’s Law, Law of Limitation)? Can it impede it?
• What role do phrase-level phonological processes such as tonal crowding (Gordon 2014) play in accentual change?
• What is the relationship between ictus shifts and lexicalization (that brings with it a loss of compositional semantics and compositional morphological structure)?
• What is the relationship between suffix productivity and/or frequency and ictus shifts? For models that assume that prosodic properties (e.g. accented or unaccented) are part of a morpheme’s lexical representation, how does productivity influence the representation?
• What is the relationship between frequency and the lexical representation of a morpheme’s prosodic features? How do frequency and ictus distribution interact diachronically?
• What is the relationship between accent and ablaut, and how are ablaut patterns affected by changes in the accentual system?
• How are changes in accent and ablaut modelled within a “paradigmatic” approach vs. a “compositional” approach (Kiparsky 2010, forthcoming)?
• How are shifts in surface ictus influenced by mechanisms of learning?
• What is the role of language contact in triggering shifts in ictus distribution (e.g. Salmons 1992)?
• How does division of labor between morphology and phonology in lexical accent systems change over time?

References


