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SOME STRUCTURAL PATTERNS OF ÈWÙLÙ LEXICAL TONES

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some structural patterns of word-based tones in Èwùlù from a phonetic-phonological perspective. Èwùlù is an Igbo dialect with two level tones, a high and a low, with a downstep. It is spoken in the northern part of Delta State, Nigeria, alongside many other related varieties referred to as ‘Delta Igbo’. Shedding more light on a number of structural patterns of Igbo lexical tones from a dialectal perspective motivates the current study. In the study, it was found that: (1) regardless of syllable positions, the level high and low tones (with the exception of downstep) are freely distributed lexically, (2) both level tones mark lexical-semantic and tense distinction in nouns and simple verb roots, respectively, (3) high pitch sequence and low pitch sequence occur quite frequently in syllabically complex words, and (4) sequence of level tones may unite to become surface contour tones under the influence of syllabification and segmental OCP. Significantly, the contributions of the present study give some insights into the patterns of lexical tones and their acoustic correlates which typify the tone systems of Benue-Congo to which Igbo/Èwùlù belongs.

Keywords: Èwùlù, Igbo, lexical tones, contour tones, acoustic correlates.