Morphological focus and pitch prominence in Tundra Yukagir

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Tundra Yukaghir

- Remnant of the Yukaghir language family (isolate?), spoken all over NE Siberia till 17th century
- Currently (field data 2010) ca. 60 speakers in the Tundra west of the Lower Kolyma River
- Eurasian type: SOV, agglutinative, non-finite subordination, residual vowel harmony

Research Questions and Methods

- enhancing
- expanding
Retrospects:

Pitch movements with different types of focus marking

In all types of focus marking (focus case, particle μa(r)=, zero), there is a prominent falling pitch on the focused constituent, followed by low pitch level (unless a boundary tone interferes):

Focus case & agreement (focus on S/O)

Apanala:-le jaqte-te-l.  
old woman-FOC sing-PUN-SUB.FOC  
[‘Who is going to sing tomorrow?’] ‘The old woman will sing.’

Zero marking (focus on non-S/O term)

Tudel awja: kelu-l.  
yesterday come-NEUT.INTR.3SG  
[‘When did your father arrive?’] ‘He arrived yesterday.’

Particle μa(r)= (focus on verb)

Adil qa:idle-te meriunjie-m.  
young man well-ACC VFOC=hear-NEUT.TR.3sg  
[‘How does that young man feel about wolves?’] ‘The young man is afraid of wolves.’

First results on focus and prosody

The role of contrast?

No detectable F0 differences between foci in non-contrastive and contrastive contexts

Apanala:-le jaqte-te-l.  
old woman-FOC sing-PUN-SUB.FOC  
‘The old woman will sing.’

No contrast: Will the girl sing tomorrow?

Contrast: Will the girl sing tomorrow?  
No, not the girl …

Retrospects and Prospects

Retrospects:

- Morphologically marked focus on S/O is redundantly prosodically marked.
- The same type of pitch prominence is found on foci which are not morphologically marked and on focused verbs.
- Contrast plays no role in pitch prominence assignment.
  - Falling pitch followed by low pitch level accompanies focus in TY across different types of focus marking

Prospects:

- expanding analysis: duration and intensity in addition to F0
- enhancing data set: further variables, corpus data, perception experiments