The accentuation of Northern Akhvakh nouns in the nominative case
(Ударение имен существительных в именительном падеже в северном диалекте ахвахского языка)

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1. Introduction

Accentuation constitutes the least studied aspect of the phonology of Andic languages. Descriptions of Andic languages typically mention the weakness of the contrast between accented and unaccented syllables and the mobility of accent, without however providing precise information about the factors that determine accent assignation. This paper presents the first results of a study of the accentuation of Northern Akhvakh. The conclusions put forward rely mainly on a corpus of about 3600 sentences recorded by Indira Abulaeva, and on her native speaker’s judgments about the existence or absence of prosodic contrasts between word forms with identical or similar segmental shapes.

2. Accented vs. accentless words in Northern Akhvakh

At early stages of my field work on Northern Akhvakh, I found the transcription of accent particularly problematic, but I eventually came to the conclusion that the difficulties I experienced were not due to the alleged ‘weakness’ or ‘versatility’ of Andic accent. In Northern Akhvakh, the contrast between accented and unaccented syllables may be as sharp as in typical word accent languages such as Russian or Spanish. The difficulties were rather due to the fact that, in addition to a complex system of morphology-driven alternations, the identification of the accentual patterns of Northern Akhvakh is complicated by characteristics of the prosodic system that depart from the accentual prototype and are to some extent reminiscent of phenomena observed in tone languages. Once these atypical aspects of the accentual system of Northern Akhvakh are acknowledged, the transcription of accent and its analysis do not raise any particular difficulty.

Northern Akhvakh is a typical word accent language in that, with the only exception of morphologically complex words whose accentual pattern may include secondary accents, the number of possible prosodic patterns for words with a given number of syllables never exceeds the number of syllables: there are two possible patterns for two-syllable word forms, three possible patterns for three-syllable word forms, etc. What is atypical is the realization of one of the possible patterns:
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isolation, Northern Akhvakh word forms may show, either an accent on a non-final syllable, or no accentual contrast at all.

In Northern Akhvakh, words with a prosodic realization of the type expected in a word accent language coexist with accentless words perceived exactly like words with an entirely low tone contour in a tone language. The problem is that, in such words, syllables preceding strong consonants or including long vowels may give the impression of having some prosodic prominence; it may also happen that, depending on the intonation with which they are uttered, such words give the impression of having a weak accent on their initial syllable, or on their final syllable.

In other words, at least in the case of Northern Akhvakh, the weak or versatile accents repeatedly mentioned in the literature on Andic languages are not accents at all, and words one may be tempted to identify as including such accents at an early stage of the analysis are in fact accentless words. 'Weak accents' are nothing more than the by-product of phenomena (vowel length, consonant strength, or intonation) independent from phonological accent. In a language such as Northern Akhvakh, prominence effects following from such phenomena are easy to dissociate from accent in words that really have an accented syllable, but in words that have no phonological accent, they are easily misinterpreted as accompanied by a weakly realized accent. This is the reason why, in the Akhvakh-Russian dictionary (in which the existence of accentless word forms is not acknowledged), the accentual pattern of words that really have an accented syllable is in general identified correctly, whereas there is no consistency in the identification of an accent in word forms that I identify as accentless.

3. The accentuation of nouns in the nominative singular

In accordance with the general principle stated in section 2, disyllabic nouns have two possible accent patterns: ó o (with an accent on the 1st syllable) and o o (accentless):

(1) Accent patterns of disyllabic nouns

a. अचि अधि ‘money’, अकिल अकिल ‘woman’, अमु अमु ‘order’, अक्ल अक्ल ‘garden’,
अम्ल अम्ल ‘pitcher’, बेका बेका ‘snake’, बेक्यो बेक्यो ‘cowshed’, ज्ञीजिजिजिजि ‘flower’,
etc.

b. अहितिहित अच अच ‘i saliva’, अहिदेह अद ‘person’, अहिकिद अकिद ‘stick’, अहिल अल ‘sheep’,
अक्लो अक्लो ‘week’, अक्ल ‘end’, अहिजिजिजिजिजि अजिजिजिजि ‘snow’, बाक्रा बाक्रा ‘side’, बोछो बोछो ‘moon’, etc.

Trisyllabic nouns attest the three possible accent patterns ó o o (with an accent on the 1st syllable), o ó o (with an accent on the 2nd syllable), and o o o (accentless):

(2) Accent patterns of trisyllabic nouns

a. अहियो अहियो अहियो ‘family’, अक्लिल अक्लिल ‘intelligence’, बाहौवी ‘ring’,

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<th>ñîîòîëè â'înoë ‘goat’, etc.</th>
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| b. a'âk'átî li âk’âti ‘horn’, ахъёло aqêlo ‘fireplace’, атлîli at‘âši ‘flour’, 
  ёнбёро çibéro ‘winter’, etc. |
| c. балагье balahe ‘misfortune’, атжите ažite ‘axe’, иткълатî yq’at’u ‘walnut’, 
  щакиба šakiba ‘bird’, etc. |

Among quadrisyllabic nouns in the nominative singular, the accentless pattern is 
not attested, but this cannot be analyzed as a phonological constraint, since 
accentless word forms consisting of four or more syllables are easy to find among 
infl ected noun forms (for example, comitative forms such as имахак’ена imahak’ena 
‘with the donkey’, мицелок’ена mik’elok’ena ‘with the children’).

(3) Accent patterns of quadrisyllabic nouns

a. хлъ’журъе húžuruq’e ‘hedgehog’, глалагъважа ñálav’âža ‘rubbish’, etc.

b. аварак’е awárak’e ‘prophet’, аджанеъе ažaneğe ‘strawberry’, etc.

c. ёлъ’к’улъík’a ‘icicle’, дакум’ате dakumáte ‘document’, etc.

My identification of the prosodic patterns of Northern Akhvakh words is very 
different from that proposed in Kibrik & Kodzasov 1990 and Kodzasov 1999. I agree 
with Kodzasov on the recognition of word forms with a flat prosody (or as he puts it, 
with a low tone pattern), which I consider crucial for a proper understanding of 
Northern Akhvakh prosody, but I do not recognize the existence of syllabic melodies, 
and the number of possible prosodic patterns I identify is much lower, with in 
particular two possible patterns for disyllabic words (accented on the first syllable 
and accentless) instead of the seven different patterns (HH, LL, HL, HF, RH, RF, RR) 
put forward in Kibrik & Kodzasov 1990: 323, Kodzasov 1999: 999. This discrepancy 
cannot be a matter of dialectal variation, since our analyses are based on the speech 
of informants from the same village (Tadmagit’). In fact, the data provided by 
Kodzasov include no evidence supporting the recognition of more than two 
phonologically distinct prosodic patterns, which suggests that most of the 
distinctions he mentions are simply allophonic variations, possibly conditioned by 
 factors such as the influence of consonant types on the fundamental frequency.

4. Some theoretical considerations

At this point a few words are in order about the theoretical status of the 
accentless word forms of Northern Akhvakh.

I came across no context in which it would be possible to recognize a contrast 
between accentless words and words accented on their final syllable, but words 
occurring in some contexts (in particular, when quoted in isolation) with an 
accentless realization are found in other contexts with an accent on their last
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syllable. In some contexts, this alternation is quite systematic. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the two accentual realizations of э̄е ēe (genitive of иӣи ́эи ‘we, excl.’) immediately preceding a noun it determines: э́е ēe if the following noun has an accent on its first syllable, э̄е ēe if the first syllable of the following noun is not accented:

(4) Accent alternation in the realization of э̄е ēe ‘our (excl.)’

a. э̄е и́ма ēe íma ‘our father’, э̄е чи́йи ēe číli ‘our house’, э̄е áгы́ло ēe ́hlilo ‘our family’

b. э̄е гыани ēe hani ‘our village’, э̄е мача́льye ēe mačále ‘our wealth’, э̄е микle ēe mik’e ‘our’ child’

This alternation strongly suggests analyzing accentless words as underlyingly accented on their last syllable, and accounting for their accentless realization by means of a contextual accent deletion rule. However, the accentual system of Northern Akhvakh has other particularities hardly compatible with this explanation. Crucially, in contexts in which otherwise accentless words take a final accent, words accented on a non-final syllable may take a second accent on their final syllable. Analyzing this additional final accent as the reactivation of an element present in the underlying accentual representation of the word would raise theoretical difficulties equivalent to those following from the recognition of accentless words. Moreover, morphology-driven accent processes are much easier to describe if accentless words are not interpreted as underlyingly accented on their last syllable. Consequently, it seems to me preferable to posit that the accentual patterns observed in isolation directly reflect the accentual structure of words as determined by the interaction of lexical information and morphological rules, and that rules conditioned by syntactic structure and / or information structure may introduce additional accents attached to the last syllable of words.

5. Accent alternations in plural formation

The inflection of Northern Akhvakh nouns involves two distinct sets of accentual processes: accentual processes in plural formation (nominative singular → nominative plural), and accentual processes in case inflection (nominative singular → oblique stem singular, nominative plural → oblique stem plural, and oblique stem → case-marked noun forms). This paper is limited to accentual processes in plural formation.

5.1. General remarks on plural formation

Apart from a few exceptional cases of plural formation involving no change in the segmental shape of the noun – see section 5.2 below, two types of plural formation can be distinguished in Akhvakh: plural formation may involve a vowel change affecting the last syllable or the last two syllables of the nominative singular, or the addition of a CV suffix.
Most plurals marked by a vowel change can easily be accounted for by positing a vocalic suffix triggering deletion of the last vowel, since the change is limited to the vowel of the last syllable (as in aɪ̞de āde ‘person’ pl. aɪ̞do ādo < ād(e)-o), but the interpretation of changes affecting the penultimate syllable too (as in imíxi imíçi ‘donkey’ pl. imáxa imáxa) is problematic.

The CV suffixes marking plural are added to a stem that most of the time coincides with the nominative singular (as in і̞г̄о īgo ‘window’ pl. і̞г̄ω-ла īgó-la), but they may also trigger the choice of a special stem (as in шакиба šakiba ‘bird’ pl. шакá-ла šaká-la). Note that both internal reconstruction and comparison with the other Andic languages suggest that, diachronically, some plural forms analyzable as involving a CV suffix result from the reanalysis of plural forms that originally involved a V suffix added to a stem ending with a consonant, for example мешу mešu ‘knife’ pl. мешу-на mešú-na, to be compared with Tindi бесън besún, Karata бесън besún, etc.

5.2. Accent deletion in plural formation


There also a few nouns in which the deletion of an accent present in the singular form constitutes the only plural mark: чанагъа чанагъа pl. чанагъа чанагъа ‘sledge’, чудука чудука pl. чудука чудука ‘vulture’.

áл’a ak’à pl. а́л’о ak’o ‘woman’ and къача̄гъо къача̄гъо pl. къача̄гъо къача̄гъо ‘bandit’ constitute exceptions to the regularity according to which nouns forming their plural by means of a vowel change and including an accent in the nominative singular lose their accent in the nominative plural.

5.3. Accent addition in plural formation

All plural suffixes consisting of a consonant followed by an a (and only those including an a) trigger the addition of an accent falling on the last syllable of the stem: ай̞лъи оли pl. ай̞лъиба ай̞лъиба ‘sheep’, балагъе балагъе pl. балагъе балагъе ‘misfortune’, больо больо pl. больо больо ‘pig’, гъа̄де гъа̄де pl. гъа̄де гъа̄де 'hădēla

In all the above examples, the suffixes triggering the addition of an accent falling on the last syllable of the stem are added to nouns whose nominative singular form is accentless. When the same suffixes are added to nouns including an accent in the nominative singular form, both accents are retained, which constitutes another departure from the accentual prototype. Both accents are clearly perceived when the accent introduced by the suffix is not adjacent to the lexical accent, as in ху́нкăча  ху́нкăча  пле.  ху́нкăча́лă  ху́нкăча́лă  ‘shoe’ or  гу́гут’е  pl.  гу́гут’е лăгăра  ‘flew’. When the lexical accent is on the penultimate syllable of the stem, as in пăз’и  pl.  пăз’ила  пăз’ила  ‘war’, fluctuations are observed: one of the two accented syllables may be perceived as more prominent than the other (пăз’ила  пăз’ила,  паргъила  паргъила), but it may also happen that both are perceived as equally prominent. Further research will be necessary before putting forward a more precise description of this situation.

5.4. Plural formation without accent changes

In all cases other than those considered in sections 5.2 and 5.3, no accent change accompanies plural formation:

– Accentless nouns that form their plural by vowel change remain accentless in the plural:  ал‘де  а́лде  pl.  а́лдо ‘person’,  кагъи  кава  pl.  кави  ‘paper, letter’,  хъяна  qани  pl.  хъяна  qани  ‘egg’

– The plural markers -ди and -ли have no influence on the accentual pattern of the nouns to which they are added:  кваква  кваква  pl.  кваквади  квак’ади  ‘obstacle’,  муха  муха  pl.  мухади  мухади  ‘tale’,  хаба  хаба  pl.  хади  хади  ‘news, story’,  и’лăвăра  ил’ара  pl.  ил’ади  ‘lake’,  мике  мике  pl.  миклĕ  мик’лĕ ‘child’,  єлеве  єлеве  pl.  єлеве  єлеве  ‘host’,  etc.

It is interesting to observe that, when nouns have two alternative plural forms, each of them has the accentual pattern predictable from the accentual properties of the type of plural formation involved. For example,  ѓехъа  ше́ка  ‘heel’ has the alternative plural forms ѓехъиáди  ше́кади and ѓехъаба  ше́кда.
6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the accentual structure of Northern Akhvakh nouns in the nominative singular and nominative plural forms. This analysis makes apparent two characteristics of Northern Akhvakh which depart from the situation typical of word accent systems: the existence of a class of accentless word forms, and the possible coexistence of lexical accents and accents introduced by morphological rules, even if they fall on adjacent syllables.

References


