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: in

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. áчи *áči* 'money', áḵӀа *ák'a* 'woman', áмру *ámru* 'order', áкъӀи *áqi* 'garden', áᴴзо *ā̃zo* 'pitcher', бéка *béka* 'snake', бéкьо *béɫ'o* 'cowshed', цӀицӀи *c̄íc̄i* 'flower', etc.

    b. аᴴцӀӀи *ã̄c̄'i* 'saliva', аᴴде *ãde* 'person', аᴴкӀва *ãk'ʷa* 'stick', аᴴлъи *ãɫi* 'sheep', акьо *aɫ̄'o* 'week', ахи *aχi* 'end', аᴴжи *ãži* 'snow', бакъӀа *baɫ'a* 'side', боцӀӀо *boc̄'o* '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. áгьило *áhilo* 'family', áкъило *áq̄'ilo* 'intelligence', бáгъаче *báʁače* 'ring',

цІо́нолІи *č'ónoɫi* 'goat', etc.

b. а^нкІа́тІи *ãk'át'i* 'horn', ахъе́ло *aq̄élo* 'fireplace', атІа́лІи *at'áɫi* 'flour', цибе́ро *c̄ibéro* 'winter', etc.

c. балагье *balahe* 'misfortune', а^нжите *ãžite* 'axe', и^нкъІатІу *ĩq'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 inflected noun forms (for example, comitative forms such as имахакІена *imaχak'ena* 'with the donkey', микІелокІена *mik'elok'ena* 'with the children).

(3) *Accent patterns of quadrisyllabic nouns*

a. хІу́журукъе *ħúžuruq̄'e* 'hedgehog', гІа́лагъважа *ʕálaʁʷaža* 'rubbish', etc.

b. ава́ракІе *awárak'e* 'prophet', ажа́нехъе *ažáneq̄e* 'strawberry', etc.

c. цІу^нкІулу́кІа *č'ũk'ulúk'a* 'icicle', дакума́те *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 (Tadmagitl'). 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

syllable. In some contexts, this alternation is quite systematic. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the two accentual realizations of эс̄е *es̄e* (genitive of и́с̄и *ís̄i* 'we, excl.') immediately preceding a noun it determines: эс̄е *es̄e* if the following noun has an accent on its first syllable, эс̄е́ *es̄é* if the first syllable of the following noun is not accented:

(4)   *Accent alternation in the realization of* эс̄е es̄e *'our (excl.)'*

a.   эс̄е и́ма *es̄e íma* 'our father', эс̄е чӀи́ли *es̄e č'íli* 'our house', эс̄е а́гьило *es̄e áhilo* 'our family'

b.   эс̄е́ гьани *es̄é hani* 'our village', эс̄е́ мача́лъе *es̄é mačáɫe* 'our wealth', эс̄е́ микӀе *es̄é 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 аᵸде *ãde* 'person' pl. аᵸдо *ãdo* < *ãd(e)-o*), but the interpretation of changes affecting the penultimate syllable too (as in имихи *imíχi* 'donkey' pl. имаха *imaχa*) is problematic.

The CV suffixes marking plural are added to a stem that most of the time coincides with the nominative singular (as in иᵸго *ĩgo* 'window' pl. иᵸго́-ла *ĩgó-la*), but they may also trigger the choice of a special stem (as in щакиба *šakiba* 'bird' pl. щака́-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. мешу́-на *mešú-na*, to be compared with Tindi бесу́н *besún*, Karata бесу́н *besún*, etc.

5.2. Accent deletion in plural formation

Most 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: ахъелӀи *aq̄élī* pl. ахъелӀа *aq̄eīa* 'buttock', ба́кьи *báī'i* pl. бакьа *baī'a* 'intestine', бе́ка *béka* pl. беки *beki* 'snake', бе́кьо *béī'o* pl. бекьа *beī'a* 'cowshed', цӀекӀа *c̄'ék'a* pl. цӀекӀи *c̄'ek'i* 'foot', чило *čílo* pl. чили *čili* 'tooth', чӀи́ли *č'íli* pl. чӀила *č'ila* 'house', гва́ᵸди *gʷãdi* pl. гваᵸда *gʷãda* 'pit', гьа́магъе *hámaʁe* pl. гьамагъо *hamaʁo* 'friend', иᵸкӀо́тӀи *ĩk̄'ót'i* pl. иᵸкӀотӀа *ĩk'ot'a* 'mouse', имихи *imíχi* pl. имаха *imaχa* 'donkey', кеме́ти *keméti* pl. кемета *kemeta* 'swet', ке́то *kéto* pl. кета *keta* 'cat', кӀа́ри *k'ári* pl. кӀара *k'ara* 'lump', кӀе́гьа *k'éha* pl. кӀегьи *k'ehi* 'eye', ла́ᵸги *lā̃gi* pl. ла̄ᵸга *lā̃ga* 'ewe', кьӀа́ми *ʟ'ámi* pl. кьӀама *ʟ'ama* 'page', маха́хо *maχáχo* pl. махаха *maχaχa* 'pear', къӀо́ри *q'óri* pl. къӀора *q'ora* 'board', рахӀа́ти *raħáti* pl. рахӀата *raħata* 'rest', ре́кьӀа *réʟ'a* pl. рекьӀи *reʟ'i* 'hand', рикӀа́лӀи *rik'áʟī* pl. рикӀалӀа *rik'aīa* 'lock, key', ша́ги *šági* pl. шага *šaga* 'pan', тӀа́не *t'áne* pl. тӀани *t'ani* 'nit', тӀи́тӀи *t'ít'i* pl. тӀитӀа *t'it'a* 'fly', гӀада́ти *ʕadáti* pl. гӀадата *ʕadata* 'custom', гӀи́ᵸкӀо *ʕĩk'o* pl. гӀиᵸкӀа *ʕĩk'a* 'hen', etc.

There also a few nouns in which the deletion of an accent present in the singular form constitutes the only plural mark: чана́гъа *čanáʁa* pl. чанагъа *čanaʁa* 'sledge', чуду́ка *čudúka* pl. чудука *čuduka* 'vulture'.

а́кӀа *ák̄'a* pl. а́кӀо *ák̄'o* 'woman' and къача́гъа *q'ačáʁa* pl. къача́гъо *q'ačáʁo* '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: аᵸлъи *ãλi* pl. аᵸлъи́ба *ãλíba* 'sheep', балагье *balahe* pl. балагье́ла *balahéla* 'misfortune', болъо *boλo* pl. болъо́на *boλóna* 'pig', гьаᵸде *hãde* pl. гьаᵸде́ла *hãdéla*

'ear', гьани *hani* pl. гьаⁿди́ла *hãdíla* 'village', хІе̄ма *ħēma* pl. хІе̄ма́на *ħēmána* 'animal, cow', иⁿго *ĩgo* pl. иⁿго́ла *ĩgóla* 'window', кичІо *kič'o* pl. кичІи́ба *kič'íba* 'earring', кІаⁿкьу *k'ãʟ̄'u* pl. кІакьу́ма *k'aʟ̄'úma* 'cheek', лъІаⁿцІо *ʟãc̄'o* pl. лъІаⁿцІо́ла *ʟãc̄'óla* 'voice, noise', кьІаⁿде *ʟ'ãde* pl. кьІаⁿде́ла ∼ кьІаⁿде́ба *ʟ'ãdéla ∼ ʟ'ãdéba* 'leaf', кьІоⁿко *ʟ'õko* pl. кьІоⁿко́ма *ʟ'õkóma* 'shirt', мекІу *mek'u* pl. мекІу́на *mek'úna* 'corner', мешу *mešu* pl. мешу́на *mešúna* 'knife', мукъІу *muq'u* pl. мукъІу́ла *muq'úla* 'knee', никва *nikʷa* pl. никва́ла *nikʷála* 'song', къеⁿда *q̄'ẽda* pl. къеⁿда́ла *q̄'ẽdála* 'wall', къваралье *q̄'ʷaraɬe* pl. къваралье́ла *q̄'ʷaraɬéla* 'difficulty', рацІе *rac̄'e* pl. рацІе́ла *rac̄'éla* 'wrinkle', реше *reše* pl. реше́на *rešéna* 'year', щакиба *šakiba* pl. щака́ла *šakála* 'bird', джиби *ǯibi* pl. джиби́ла *ǯibíla* 'mosquito', гІече *ʕeče* pl. гІече́ба *ʕečéba* 'apple', etc.

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 х̄у́ⁿкІаче *χ̄úk'ače* pl. х̄у́ⁿкІаче́ла *χ̄úk'ačéla* 'shoe' or гІу́ⁿгутІе *ʕúgut'e* pl. гІу́ⁿгутІе́ла *ʕúgut'éla* 'flaw'. When the lexical accent is on the penultimate syllable of the stem, as in ра́гъи *ráʁi* pl. ра́гъи́ла *ráʁíla* 'war', fluctuations are observed: one of the two accented syllables may be perceived as more prominent than the other (ра́гъила *ráʁila*, рагъи́ла *raʁíla*), 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: аⁿде *ãde* pl. аⁿдо *ãdo* 'person', кагъа *kaʁa* pl. кагъи *kaʁi* 'paper, letter', хъІану *qanu* pl. хъІани *qani* 'egg'
– The plural markers *-di* and *-li* have no influence on the accentual pattern of the nouns to which they are added: кваква *kʷakʷa* pl. кваквади *kʷakʷadi* 'obstacle', му́ха *múχa* pl. му́хади *múχadi* 'tale', х̄аба *χaba* pl. х̄ади *χadi* 'news, story', и́ⁿгьвара *íhʷara* pl. и́ⁿгьвади *íhʷadi* 'lake', микІе *mik'e* pl. микІели *mik'eli* 'child', цІеве *c̄'ewe* pl. цІели *c̄'eli* '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, ц̄ехъІа *c̄ēqa* 'heel' has the alternative plural forms ц̄ехъІади *c̄ēqadi* and ц̄ехъа́ба *c̄ēqába*.

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.

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