Word stress, pitch accent and word order typology

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The idea that word stress location and word order are correlated has been around since Bally’s (1944) study of French and Germanic languages (cf. Donegan and Stampe 1983 for Munda and Mon-Khmer; Plank 1998 for an overview of the studies on the correlation between stress and morphosyntax). However, these studies discuss a limited number of languages. The typology of word-stress location by Goedemans and van der Hulst (2005), together with that of word order by Dryer (2005, 2013), give us detailed data for investigating the correlation between word-stress location and word orders in the world’s languages. Tokizaki (2011) and Tokizaki and Kuwana (2013) show that languages with lefthand stress tend to have head-final word order (stem-suffix, genitive-N, NP-postposition, OV, adverbial subordinator-clause) while languages with righthand stress tend to have head-initial word order (prefix-stem, N-genitive, preposition-NP, VO, clause-adverbial subordinator).

One of the problems with the study of correlation between stress and word order is the definition of stress or accent in languages with pitch accent or tone. Altaic languages including Turkic, Mongolic and Japanese are a challenge to our hypothesis that languages with head-final word order have lefthand stress. I argue that these languages have word-initial stress as the primary accent and righthand pitch accent as the secondary accent (cf. Schiering and van der Hulst 2010; Duanmu 2008). Then, these languages also support our hypothesis about the correlation between stress and word order. I also discuss the possibility that tone languages such as Chinese and African languages can be included in the general idea of word stress and word accent.

References