

## **THE SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES OF AMHARIC**

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References to the suprasegmental features of Amharic in the descriptive literature are vague at best, and the few attempts to comprehensively analyze them in the theoretical literature suffer from deficiencies both in terms of the methodology and the conclusions derived from the research. While "stress" has been described as "weak", "variable" and "almost evenly distributed on each syllable", it is not always clear what the use of this label corresponds to in acoustic terms. Some writers have considered syllable duration and vowel quality to be the acoustic correlate of prominence; others have claimed that "stress" is phonetically marked by pitch, whereas a third group has argued that Amharic does not possess word-level stress. Furthermore, work on suprasegmental features above the level of the word is virtually nonexistent.

In this talk I will present my ongoing research on this issue, focusing on the behavior of pitch and pauses. Given its variable nature, the former is unlikely to be the acoustic correlate of stress in the sense of metrical prominence; rather, together with pauses, it may reflect constituent boundaries in prosodic structure. Building on this hypothesis, I will describe some patterns of phonological phrasing, and outline possible implications for topics related to the syntax-phonology interface in Amharic.