Tonal crowding in the intonation systems of tone languages: typology and case studies

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Languages tend to avoid crowding of phonological tones. Various strategies to mitigate tonal crowding are observed cross-linguistically, including temporal shifting of tones, phonetic rescaling of tone targets, lengthening of the segmental backdrop for tones, and tone replacement or deletion. These strategies are observed for tones attributed to different sources, both lexical and intonational, and with either matched (i.e. H + H, L + L) or opposed phonological values (i.e. H + L, L + H). Drawing on a combination of published descriptions of a broad sample of languages and case studies of three (two Muskogean languages, Chickasaw and Koasati, and a Tukanoan language, Kubeo), this talk will examine the typology of responses to tonal crowding between lexical and intonational tones, building on recent work by Gussenhoven (2018) on the interaction between intonational boundary tones and other tones. Results indicate a variety of mechanisms for coping with tonal crowding, where the source and level of tones is largely predictive of resolution strategies.