Disentangling tone, intonation and register in selected African tone languages
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Most sub-Saharan African languages are tone languages, and the investigation of their tonal systems has been a fruitful area of research for many years. Indeed, the foundations of autosegmental theory were laid by linguists analyzing African tonal systems (e.g., Leben 1973, Goldsmith 1976). Perhaps because of the successes of the autosegmental approach to lexical tone, other factors that influence pitch realization – like intonation and register – have tended to either be ignored or analyzed in terms of tone. The collection of papers in Downing & Rialland (2017) represents the rare exceptions.

In this talk, I will survey three types of pitch phenomena which have been analyzed in lexical tonal terms: depressor tone, phrase-final High tone and phrase-final Low tone. For each case, after giving a brief introduction to the tonal system of the representative language, I will argue that what has been analyzed in tonal terms in some work on the language is best analyzed in terms of register or intonation. Data will be drawn from Zulu (depressor tone = depressor register?), Somali (grammatical High = phrase-final High?), and a variety of Bantu languages (phrase-final lowering = Low tone or intonational Low?).