

## Towards an intonational typology of Sora

### Abstract

Previous reports on the phonological and prosodic structure of Sora, a Munda language (Austroasiatic family) spoken in eastern India., e.g., Donegan (1993), Donegan and Stampe (1983, 2002, 2004), shows a trochaic pattern intonationally and that this canonically embodies the effects of language contact on word- and phrase-level intonation. This hypothesis, known as rhythmic holism, asserts that a Munda languages allegedly shifted their prosodic profile from an original iambic pattern typifying the Austroasiatic family—and the Mainland Southeast Asian area as a whole—to a new, secondary trochaic pattern that supposedly defines languages of the South Asian area. Horo and Sarmah (2015) and Horo (2017) show that in disyllables, Sora in fact instantiates a clear iambic pattern. The present study reports instrumental data on the intonational/prosodic structure from Sora polysyllabic forms (3+ syllables) in support of the assertion that Sora in fact remains an iambic language, and that claims to the contrary are not supported by the instrumental phonetic data.

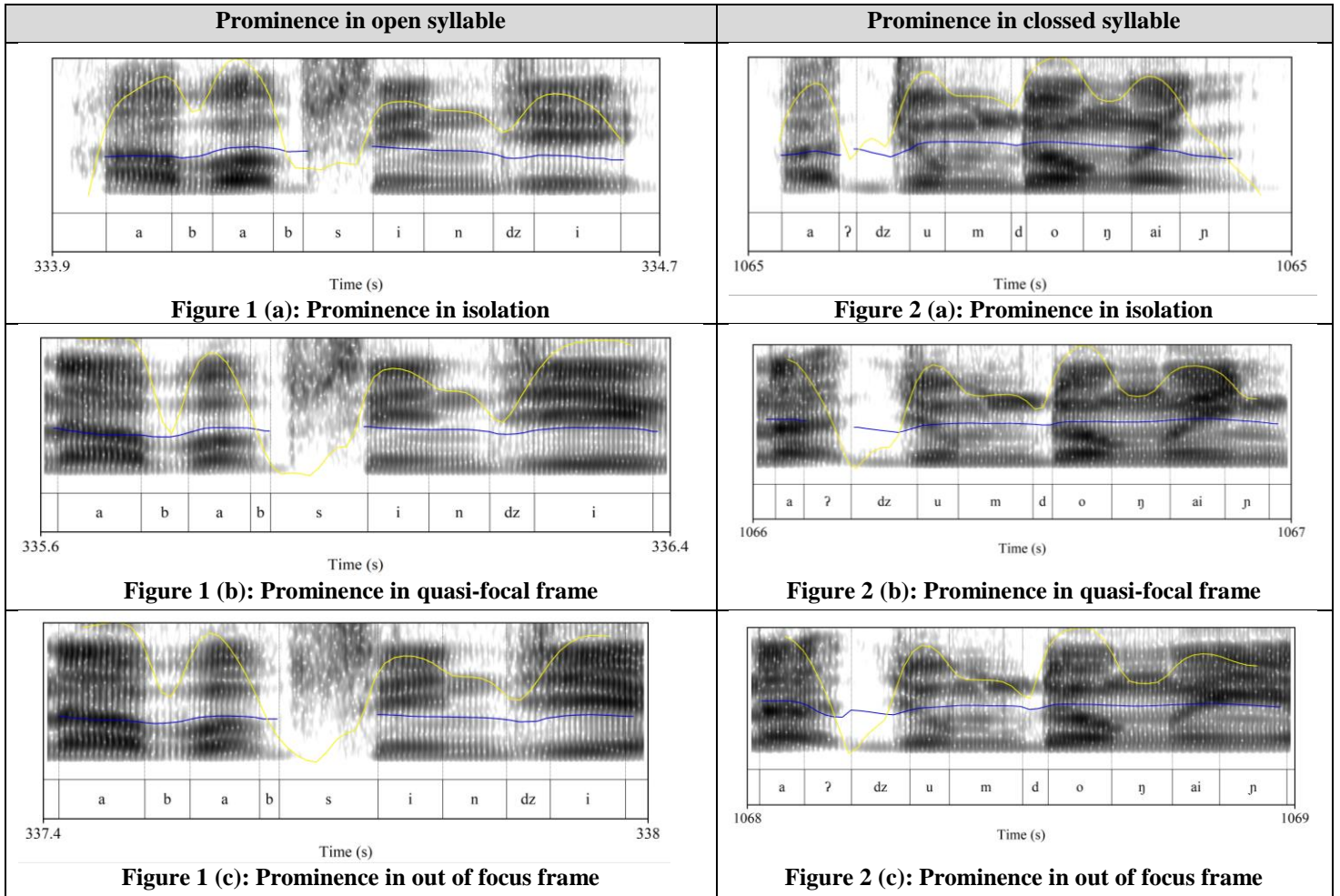
This preliminary study is based on a comparison of 75 longer words and short phrases and sentences ranging from 3-7 syllables, and involves speakers of the two main varieties of Sora, one spoken in Odisha state, one in Assam, India. For all speakers, these forms were recorded i) in isolation, ii) in a quasi-focal frame and iii) in an out of focus frame to control for the possible effects of utterance declination and contrastive focal intonation on the forms, and to determine whether structures that are morphologically and syntactically ‘words’ (however defined prosodically or phonologically) compare to similar sized likewise defined ‘phrases’ and ‘sentences’.

Our results clearly indicate that Sora retains its older ‘iambic’ pattern in its intonational structure. Specifically, in 3 and 4 syllable words, prominence—encoded by a conspiracy of acoustic cues such as pitch, intensity and duration—is on the final syllable if open, but on the penult if the final syllable is closed. That is, areal features appear to play no role on the prosodic features of Sora despite strong claims to the contrary, while syntactically clear areal influence can be indicated, e.g., shift to verb-final clause structure, use of grammatical case marking, etc. Prosodic structure therefore can remain independent of other domains with respect to the effects of language contact. The present paper is the first step into refining our understanding of the intonational typology of Munda languages as whole, and of Sora in particular.

### References

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Figures and Examples



1. *ababsindzi*                      Sora  
    3POSS-thumb-PL              Gloss                      [a-babsi-ndzi]  
    Thumbs                              English
  
2. *aʔdzumdoŋaiŋ*                  Sora  
    feed-PHB-1SG.UND            Gloss                      [aʔdzum-doŋ-aiŋ]  
    Do not feed me                  English