

# INTONATION IN BEAVER ATHAPASKAN

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

*Gabriele Müller*

`gabrielemueller@gmail.com`

INSTITUTE FOR LINGUISTICS, UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE

Studies in Athapaskan prosody are numerous but usually focus on word-level phenomena, such as tone or stress. However, there is a beginning interest in studies on Athapaskan intonation (Rice & Hargus, 2005). In this paper preliminary findings from a study of intonation of Beaver Athapaskan are presented. Beaver is a Northern Athapaskan language spoken by about 150 people in Northern Alberta and Northern British Columbia. It is not acquired by children anymore, the majority of speakers being in their sixties or older. The study is based on data (stories, a map-task, a guessing game) from fieldtrips to Northern Alberta, and thus represents one of the four dialects of the language. Since the language has not been written until recently, reading tasks cannot be conducted. Beaver is a polysynthetic language with lexical tone; the Northern Alberta dialect has a marked high tone.

The tonal inventory of Beaver is far from clear, still a provisional survey of tones found in the corpus will be given. A final L% usually marks declaratives, it is also accompanied by a reduced loudness and can for paragraph final utterances be replaced by a final devoicing of (at least) the last syllable. At the right edge of intermediate phrases that are not IP-final H occurs. A falling-rising tune, L-H%, was found in two utterances in the corpus. The function of this tune is yet hard to delimitate, it marks questions that convey surprise or a certain amount of uncredulity. In one of the two occurrences the tune was used on the tonally unmarked word *sas* 'bear' and one instantiation of the tune was found on a high marked word *tsáá* 'beaver'. The falling-rising tune starts with a low target in both examples and rises steeply, an influence of the lexical tones  $H_{lex}$  vs. unmarked cannot be seen here; intonation masking lexical tonal distinctions.

In the maptask game (Anderson et al., 1991), high initial boundary tones %H were found for moves that were labelled as OBJECT-moves (Grice & Savino, 1995), usually when one of the players was protesting that a certain item was not found on his/her map. Figure 1 illustrates an OBJECT-move with a %H in the beginning on a lexically unmarked syllable.

A high plateau on the particle *gúlae* ‘maybe’, which could be analysed as H-% marks questions in a guessing game of the following shape, which was the default way of guessing:

(1) natsáá gúlae?  
big maybe  
‘Maybe it is big?’

(2) nóódaa gúlae?  
lynx maybe  
‘Maybe a lynx?’

The last word *gúlae* ‘maybe’ is marked by a high plateau in the pitch curve, even though the last syllable is lexically unmarked, thus low. Figure 2 shows an instance of the plateau on the particle that is very high, even higher than the lexical H on the preceding syllable, in some cases however, the plateau is on a mid to high level as seen in figure 3.

Even if lexical tone, relatively free word order and discourse particles might not leave much room for intonation in Athapaskan languages (McDonough, 2003), there are still some tunes to be found, especially in data that was collected in rather natural discourse situations.

## References

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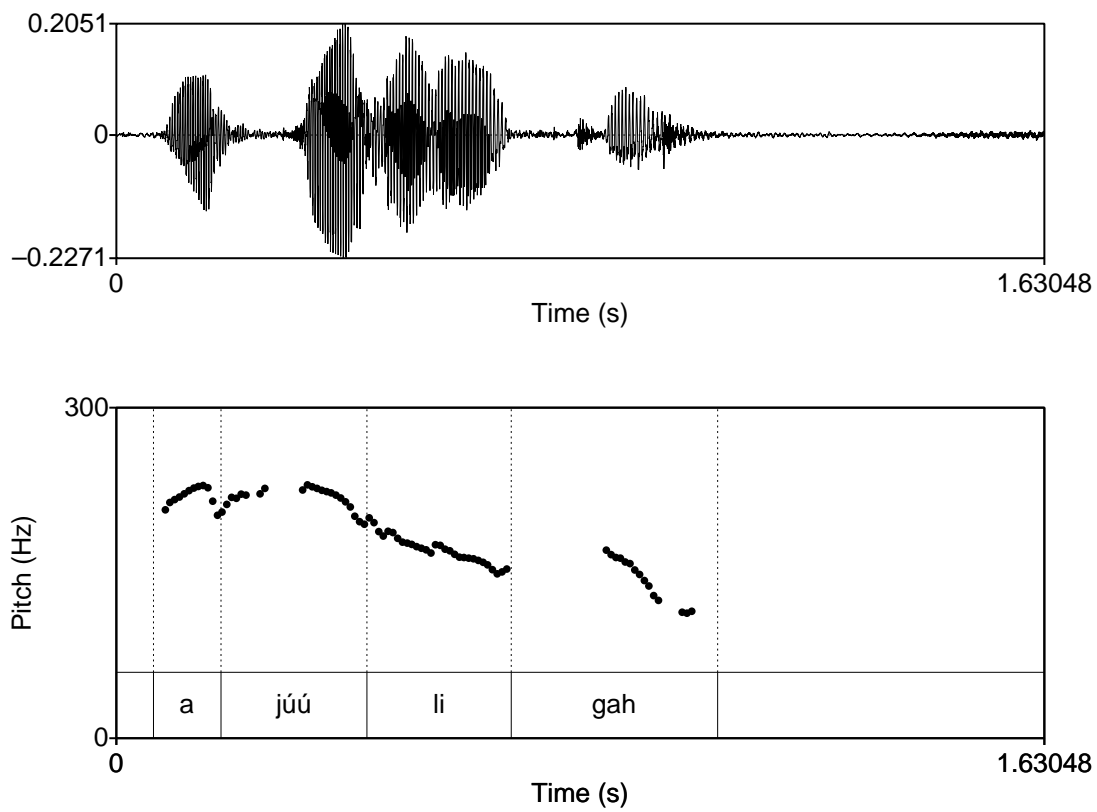


Figure 1: An example of the high initial boundary tone.

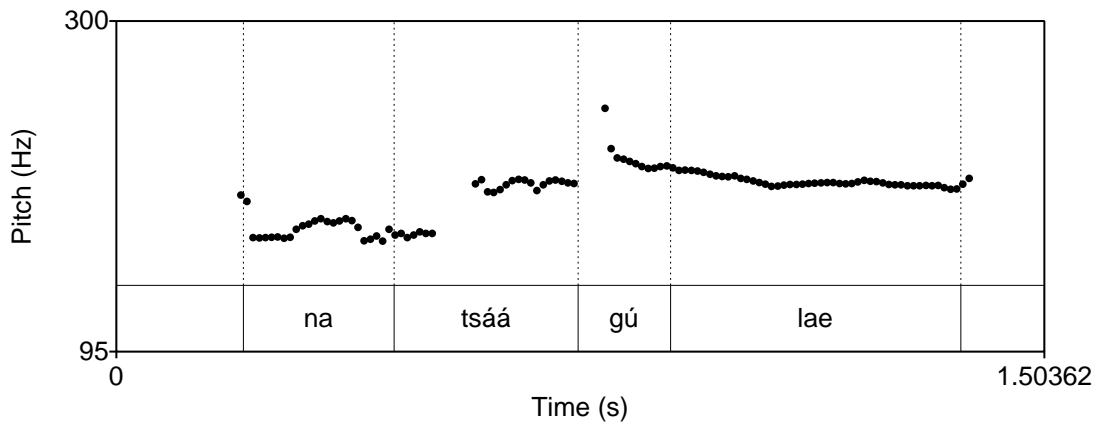
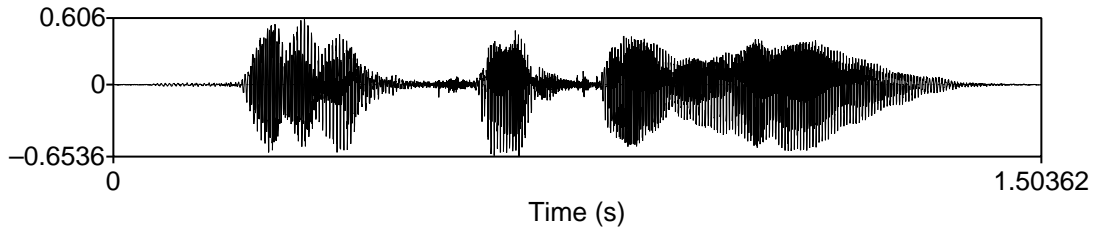


Figure 2: An example of the high final plateau on the particle 'gúlae'.

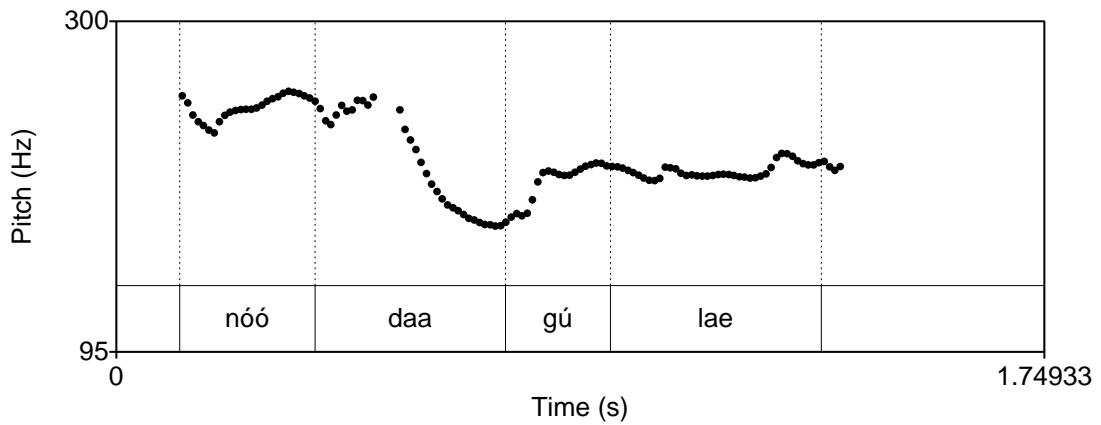
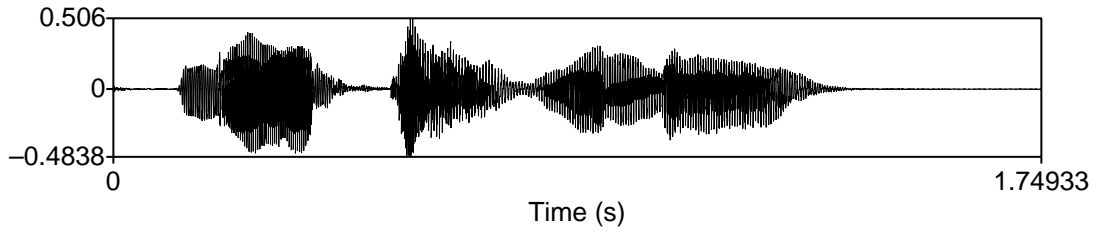


Figure 3: An instance of the same tune on a mid-to-high level.