

## **A Moraic and a syllabic H-tone in Yucatec Maya**

Carlos Gussenhoven and Renske Teeuw  
Radboud University Nijmegen

There are three reasons why the tones of Yucatec Maya are of interest. The first is a very general one. Recent practice in intonation analysis is showing signs of losing itself in a phonetically detailed categorization of pitch movements which fail to capture the tonal grammar of the language under investigation. Yucatec Maya has a simple system of lexical and postlexical tones which adequately illustrate the notion of a tonal grammar, i.e. a statement of the contrasts of the language. The second reason is that while the phonetics of the language is very similar to that of European languages, the functions of the tones are very different. Most strikingly, there is no phonological or phonetic expression of focus. The case illustrates how we cannot expect to be able to perceive prosodic categories like ‘accent’ or ‘stress’ in languages we don’t know. The third reason may be more controversial: the claim is made that Yucatec Maya uses the Tone Bearing Unit contrastively. While the language uses the syllable as its Tone Bearing Unit (i.e. associates tones with syllables), lexically contrastive H-tones which are pre-linked to moras are needed to account for the word prosodic contrasts. Moraic H-tones define what have been described re-articulated or glottalized syllables. This investigation was based on the speech of four male speakers from a single area in eastern Yucatan. They were provided with a written corpus of sentences, which they recorded in separate sessions in various locations in the San Francisco Bay area in the autumn of 2005, where they lived as migrant workers.