The Prosodic System of Japanese as a Subtype of Tone System: Evidence from Prinmi

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Except for a few varieties, the Japanese language has developed a tonal system commonly referred to as 'pitch-accent', or simply 'accent' (Shibatani 1990). As pointed out by Hyman (2009), the term 'pitch-accent' has been used as a rubric in describing a number of languages that do not share a coherent system. While it is true that the prosodic system of Japanese differs essentially from that of Swedish, Serbo-Croatian or other so-called 'pitch-accent' languages, I contest, based on evidence from Prinmi, Hyman's conclusion of non-existence of a subtype of tone language for Japanese.

Prinmi is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in southwestern China. Like most minority languages, it is facing increasingly critical endangerment under an on-going language shift to Mandarin. The varieties of Prinmi in Yunnan exhibit tonal features akin to those observed in Japanese, viz. the tonal system is: (i) obligatory, (ii) culminative, (iii) privative, (iv) weight insensitive, and (v) continuously deployed in distribution over an underlying domain which is independent of the syllable and the word. The final feature means that all the positions in the underlying domain have the potential to bear the marked tone (the bold H). These features are demonstrated with the tonal patterns found in Tokyo Japanese, Kyoto Japanese and Prinmi below. If the marked tone spreads, the spreading is indicated by a zigzag underline.

Tokyo Japanese		1-mora	2-mora	3-mora	4-mora
	Tone I	H	L-H	L-H-H	L-H-H-**H**
	Tone II	**H**	**H**-L	**H**-L-L	**H**-L-L-L
	Tone III		L-**H**	L-**H**-L	L-**H**-L-L
	Tone IV			L-H-**H**	L-H-**H**-L

Kyoto Japanese		2-mora	3-mora	4-mora	5-mora
	Tone I	H-**H**	H-H-**H**	H-H-H-**H**	H-H-H-H-**H**
	Tone II	L-**H**	L-L-**H**	L-L-L-**H**	L-L-L-L-**H**
	Tone III	**H**-L	**H**-L-L	**H**-L-L-L	**H**-L-L-L-L
	Tone IV		H-**H**-L	H-**H**-L-L	H-**H**-L-L-L

Prinmi		Monosyllable	Disyllable	Trisyllable	Quadrisyllable
	Tone I	**H**(L)	**H**-L	**H**-L-L	**H**-L-L-L
	Tone II	**H**	**H**-H	**H**-H-L	**H**-H-L-L
	Tone III	L**H**	L-**H**	L-**H**-L	L-**H**-L-L
	Tone IV		L-**H**	L-**H**-H	L-**H**-H-L

This paper will advance an analysis which recognizes all the tonal dialects of Japanese under the same subtype of tone system, although this subtype has been detected thus far only in Japanese and Prinmi.

References
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Shibatani, Masayoshi. 1990. *The Languages of Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.