

Toneless syllables (TBUs)



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Two understandings of what is toneless syllable / mora

- underlyingly toneless TBU: if a tonal span extends to more than one TBU, it can be said that the toneme is associated with the first one, and the other TBUs are underlyingly toneless;
- superficially toneless TBUs: they remain extratonal superficially.
- Both types of toneless TBUs have the same impact on the Tonal Density Index (more toneless TBUs, lower is the tonal density).

Underlyingly toneless TBUs

Such syllables can be:

- 1) remain toneless on the surface (i.e., they are not incorporated into tonal spans);
- 2) incorporated into a tonal span.

If toneless syllables remain extratonal

- they are realized with a default tone (which does not represent a toneme in the language): mainly in the privative tonal systems; L tone in Lhasa Tibetan;
- their pitch may vary, depending on intonation;
- other strategies?

If toneless syllables are incorporated into tonal spans

Different strategies:

- a neighbouring toneme (most often, the preceding one) is spread on the toneless syllable(s), e.g. Bambara;
- the pitch of a toneless syllable depends on the neighbouring toneme (most often, the preceding one), although not identical with it, e.g. Standard Chinese;
- other strategies?