

“Phonological profile changes in the Macro-Sudan Belt: The antagonism between ATR and interior vowels”

Rolle, Lionnet, & Faytak (2020) present a fine-grained areal distribution of two vocalic properties in the Macro-Sudan Belt (MSB -- Güldemann 2008): advanced tongue root (ATR) harmony and interior vowels (i.e. non-peripheral vowels [ɪ ʊ ɜ ə ʌ ...]). Their study determined that these two properties are antagonistic at both the level of individual languages (languages in the MSB tend to have either one or the other, rarely both), as well as at the areal level (ATR-harmony languages and interior-vowel languages are largely in complementary geographic zones). The focus of this talk will be examining diachronic phonological profile changes which take place as language families spread into and out of these geographic zones. We will focus on these meso-areas: a West African ATR zone (Côte d'Ivoire to Nigeria), an East African ATR zone (centered around South Sudan), and a Central African ATR-deficient zone in between, where phonemic and allophonic interior vowels are disproportionately prevalent. Our talk will catalogue the precise ways which phonological profiles are altered to comply with local areal patterns, and demonstrate how the aforementioned zones act as strong magnets.