What's a prosodic word?
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Most definitions of the prosodic word (PWd) in the literature are deeply flawed. They are either circular, or attempt to correlate the phonological category with ill-defined entities such as 'lexical word' (Prince & Smolensky 1993: 43), 'grammatical word' (Kager (999:111), or "a word in syntactic constituent structure" (Selkirk 2011). I argue in this paper that a principled characterization of the PWd can be provided in a framework that adopts with the tenets of Distributed Morphology (DM) (Halle & Marantz 1993, 1994) and the theory of derivation-by-phase proposed by Chomsky (2001, 2005). DM considers words to be complex objects, syntactically generated by combining two types of root morphemes and category-defining functional elements. Derivation-by-phase is a theory of cyclicity in which phases are chunks of structure sent to the PF and LF interfaces (Spell-out) to be assigned phonological and semantic interpretation.

The heart of my proposal is the hypothesis that a phase-head containing a category-defining head and one or more root morphemes is interpreted at PF as a PWd. For example, if X in (1a) is a phase-head dominating a root (A) and a category-defining element (B), then the exponents of X must be organized as a PWd (1b).

$$(1) \quad a. \ [...A+B..._X{}^0] \quad \Rightarrow \quad b. \ [...AB..._{PWd}]$$

After a PWd is projected at Spell-out, it can be modified in either of two ways. An affix (C) may be either adjoined to or incorporated into the PWd.

$$(2) \quad a. \ [C[...A+B..._{PWd}]_{PWd}] \quad b. \ [C...A+B..._{PWd}]$$

Crucially, an adjoined or incorporated affix always corresponds to an element that has undergone *Morphological Merger* in the sense of Marantz (1988), Embick & Noyer (2001) and Adger (2006). Adjuncts as in (2a) behave like extraprosodic elements or clitics with respect to some phonological processes, while incorporated affixes (2b) exhibit regular PWd-internal phonology. For example, subject agreement prefixes in Mangap-Mbula are invisible to stress assignment (e.g. ti-(ménder), *(tí-me)nder) 'they stand', except when they are attached to a monosyllabic verb (e.g. (tí-la), *ti-(lá) 'they do'). While (1b) and (2b) may contain the same morphological pieces, I demonstrate in this paper that they may display phonological difference that are linked to the difference in derivational history. For example, the configuration in (1b) is often subject to destructive phonological processes that delete or fuse segments, while less destructive processes affect incorporated elements (2b). Luo languages are among those that illustrate the contrast. Ill-formed consonant clusters are repaired by consonant-deletion when a PWd corresponds to elements in one phase (1b), but an incorporated element (2b) triggers gemination.