INTERACTION OF TONE AND INTONATION IN LHASA TIBETAN: A WORKING HYPOTHESIS. IRINA MONICH

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Whether or not phonological tone exists in Lhasa Tibetan (LT) and, if the answer is positive, how many tones are phonologically distinctive in this language, has been a subject of considerable controversy (Kjellin 1972, Duanmu 1992, Meredith 1990 to name a few). As many as 8 lexical tones have been proposed and as few as none. According to the hypothesis advanced here, the reality has been obscured by the fact that Lhasa tonal contour is produced by the interaction of lexical and intonational modules of grammar. This talk examines interaction of these two components and suggests a plausible direction for an account¹.

Tibetan tonal system: I am in agreement with those researchers that propose that LT has a simple 2-tone system. The value of each syllable's lexical tone corresponds diachronically to the voicing features of the syllable's onset: H_{lex} generally developed from voiceless onsets while L_{lex} from voiced ones. The T_{lex} appears only on the initial syllable of the word (tonal distinctions are neutralized on all following syllables) and is followed by an H tone. This next tone is assigned to stressed syllables and thus is an exponent of metrical prominence (accent or stress). Since LT prosody is based on syllabic trochee meter, this tone (which I will indicate as *H) is associated to the initial syllable. However, as a repair of tonal crowding (due to the presence of the lexical tone), it de-links and re-associates to the 2nd syllable within the foot if it is available.

Dephrasing: The $T_{lex}+^*H$ sequence appears once per domain that I will call αP. A lexical item may be merged into the αP formed by the preceding lexical item (under certain syntactic conditions) in the process losing this tonal sequence. This way a sort of "deaccentuation" is achieved for functional or semantically impoverished lexical items or for those that represent old, redundant, presupposed or predictable information (see Jun (1993) for a similar phenomenon in Korean as well as Pierrehumbert & Beckman (1988) for Japanese). Some lexical items, when "de-phrased" in this manner, acquire purely functional properties. For example, words 'de. "this" and chig. "one", when dephrased, are interpreted as definite and indefinite articles correspondingly (compare 2(a) and 2(b)); similarly, locational nouns in Dative are dephrased when used as postpositions (compare 3(a) and 3(b)).

2. a)
$$(_{\alpha P} \text{ d}\epsilon b)(_{\alpha P} \text{ ci?})$$
 "one book" b) $(_{\alpha P} \text{ par - ci?})$ "picture.INDEF" $H_{lex}*H$ (L)

3. a) $(_{\alpha P} \text{ nan- la})$ "inside.DAT" b) $(_{\alpha P} \text{ lingä: -nan - la})$ "park.GEN inside.DAT" $('' \text{ at home"})$ $H_{lex}*H$ (L) (L) ("in the park")

Full lexical items may be dephrased as well when they represent predictable or redundant information. For example, the word *ming.la* "name" in (4a) or the word *nyo*. "buy" in (4b):

¹ Among other simplifications, I am ignoring boundary tones of larger constituents for the purpose of this abstract.

² Tones in parenthesis are those assigned by default. The square parenthesis here indicate foot structure.

Pitch accents and pitch range: LT does not have an inventory of intonational Pitch Accents the way that English does. Instead of supplying the pitch contour with particular tonal elements, the intonational module of LT grammar modifies the height of the accent peak (*H) associated with the stressed syllable. The pitch range is boosted in αP containing focused and emphasized items, as well as new topics.

This view of LT intonation can help explain several phenomena that have been observed in this language. Denwood (1999) reports that when verbs are placed in narrow focus, some syllables of the stem (those which *may* carry H-tone) are pronounced in high pitch. On the other hand, according to Denwood as well as Sprigg (1954), topics placed after the verb, i.e. right-dislocated arguments, are pronounced in low flat pitch. Having conducted my own investigation, I conclude that tonal distinctions are preserved in right-dislocated arguments but the pitch range is contracted sharply after focus. According to my observations, old preverbal topics also peak low and have limited tonal range. I interpret these findings as indicating that even though these items form their own αPs, either no pitch accent is assigned to their metrically prominent syllables or a kind of pitch accent that contracts the range of the peak instead of boosting it (indicated by the H with * in parenthesis).

5. a)
$$(_{\alpha PFoc}$$
 ji gi - taŋ- gi - rɛ:) b) $(_{\alpha PPre-Foc}$ ji gi - tɛ-da) $(_{\alpha PFoc}$ taŋ- gi - rɛ:) c) $(_{\alpha PFoc}$ taŋ-gi - rɛ?) $(_{\alpha PPostFoc}$ ji gi:) $(_{\alpha PFoc}$ taŋ-gi - rɛ?) $(_{\alpha PFoc}$ taŋ-gi -

We can account similarly for the differences between realization of tonal contour in polar and wh-questions. In (6a) the wh-pronoun is in focus while the predicator is postfocal. At the same time (6b) is a polar question with the verb in focus. This difference is correspondingly reflected in the focal PA being assigned to the wh-word in (6a) but to the predicator in (6b).

Summary: I advocate the position that tonal contour of an LT sentence is produced by interaction of several components. Leaving aside the question of boundary tones, I was able to identify the following contributing factors: 1) LT has a 2-value lexical tone system; 2) metrical prominence in a word is cued in with an H-tone; 3) a lexical item may be "dephrased" by merging into the phonological domain to its left (provided certain syntactic conditions are observed); 4) intonational pitch accents may boost or contract the tonal peaks based on the informational structure of the sentence. My current work is aimed to verify empirically the hypothesis advanced here and to flesh out the details in more precise theoretical terms.

REFERENCES

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