

Something different from the pitch: evidences against the monogenesis of the suprasegmentals from the Eastern Tibetic languages

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Abstract

This paper provides various suprasegmental features in the Tibetic languages spoken in the easternmost Tibetan area, i.e. Sichuan-Gansu border region, called Eastern Tibetic languages (henceforth ETL). The analysis shows a new type of tonogenesis in the field of the Tibetan linguistics. Most of the materials discussed here are based on my first-hand data collected for this decade.

The members of the ETL to be mentioned in the paper are: Cone ཙ་མེ་ 卓尼 (kLuchu ལུ་མུ་ 洮河畔 + Nyinpa ཉིན་པ་ 尼巴), Thewo ཅེ་བོ་ (stod ལྷོད་ 鉄布 + smad ལྷུད་ 下迭部), mBrugchu འབྲུག་མུ་ 舟曲 (Ongsum ཨོང་གསུམ་ 八楞 + dGonpa དགོན་པ་ 拱坝), dPalskyid དཔལ་སྐྱིད་ (dPalskyid དཔལ་སྐྱིད་ 巴西 + Babzo བབ་བཟོ་ 包座), Khodpokhog རོད་པོ་ལོག་ 九寨沟 (gZitsakhog གཟི་མེ་ལོག་ 九寨沟风景区 + nKhyungkyog འབྲུང་རྟོག་ 中查), Sharkhog ཤར་ལོག་ 松潘岷江畔 (stod ལྷོད་ 川主寺以北 + smad ལྷུད་ 大寨、黄龙) and Khromjekhog ལྷོ་མེ་ལོག་ 牟尼沟 [subgroup names in parantheses]. There are several previous works on these languages such as Nagano (1980), Lin (2002), Sun (2003b) and rNam-rgyal Tshe-brtan (2007), which merely treat one language group or variety without any areal perspectives. On the other hand, Sun (2003a) provides many sorts of the suprasegmental system of whole Tibetic languages including some ETL varieties, but according to his analysis, the tone is always related to the pitch. This is different from my analysis to introduce a phonation-type register. Thus, I will provide an overall picture of the suprasegmental system of the ETL from a macroscopic perspective.

The suprasegmentals in the ETL are various but their origin may be only one system which is different from the well-known and widespread pattern of tonogenesis in the Tibetic languages especially Central and Khams. In the ETL, it is only Cone which has a pitch distinction in its phonology. On the other hand, mBrugchu has no suprasegmentals which function in the phonology but it has a phonetically clear realisation of "breathy voice." Other ETL varieties often have a "creaky voice," which basically function as a phonological aspect called "register distinction" in my analysis, for example, Suzuki (2008).

The paper attempts to explain these differences with a different idea of tonogenesis: "registrogenesis." This idea has been applied for several languages (Ratree & Jongman 2002), but the term "register" used by the present author is based on the definition proposed by Zhu (2010). The register in Zhu (2010) is defined with the difference of phonation without any relation to the phonological pitch height. In other words, the main phonetic characteristics of suprasegmentals belong to the phonation type. In this theory, the original pitch height would have been high for any kinds of initial simplexes as a default, as attested in many varieties of Amdo Tibetan, but there occurred many changes in initial complexes, which reflected to various phonation types (creaky, breathy, or tense, lax, etc.). Because the pitch and the phonation type are independent from each other, they two can co-occur in one language system, as in Wu of the Sinitic languages. In the ETL, these two features do not co-occur and the difference of phonation types can change their phonetic quality so that the pitch can be generated by losing various phonation realisations.

With this theory, we can understand the phonetic phenomenon attested in the ETL that a word can be pronounced either in high pitch or in low pitch, for *the pitch height is not fundamental feature* of the suprasegmentals in many varieties of the ETL. In addition to this, we can explain how a archaic resonant (always voiced) simplex has been pronounced in *high* pitch. Contrarily, a breathy voice often induces low pitch and a creaky voice can induce high pitch, but the pitch height is hardly essential to the phonological treatment. Instead, the most important feature is a voice quality, which can be distinguished from non-breathy or non-creaky voice.

From the viewpoint of the development from the phonation to the pitch, the order of each ETL may be:

- 1) the most primitive, i.e. phonation-like languages : mBrugchu (Ongsum + dGonpa) ;
- 2) more phonation-like languages : dPalskyid (dPalskyid + Babzo), Khodpokhog (gZitsakhog + nKhyungkyog) and Thewo (smad) ;
- 3) less phonation-like or more pitch-like languages : Thewo (stod), Sharkhog (stod + smad) and Khromjekhok ;
- 4) pitch-like languages are Cone (kLuchu + Nyinpa).

Note that all the suprasegmental patterns in the ETL do not originate from the well-known tonogenesis but from the various innovation of the register-based tonogenesis.

As an appendix, the paper provides a detailed toponym list of the language area of each ETL.

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