

Phrasing, prominence, and morphotonology: How utterances are divided into tone groups in Yongning Na

Alexis Michaud

International Research Institute MICA, HUST - CNRS/UMI-2954 - Grenoble INP

Abstract

Yongning Na is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in an area straddling the border between Yunnan and Sichuan, in the vicinity of lake Lugu.¹ This presentation addresses a central part of its tone system: how a sentence is divided into tone groups.

The Yongning Na tone system is based on three levels (L, M and H). It comprises a host of rules that are specific to certain morphosyntactic contexts. This large set of rules constitutes the core of the tonal morphology of Yongning Na, and represents the bulk of what language learners must acquire to master this tone system. Different rules apply in the association of a verb with a subject or an object, the association of two nouns into a compound, that of a numeral and classifier, or that of a word and its affixes, for instance. The tonal computation takes place within a domain referred to here as the *tone group*. This computation is conducted independently for successive tone groups. The division of the utterance into tone groups is a central part of Na prosody; several options are generally open, and the choice among them has important implications in terms of the utterance's information structure. Prominence (conveying information structure) and phrasing (reflecting syntactic structure) interact in the division of an utterance into tone groups. There is therefore no hard-and-fast correspondence between syntactic structure and the division into tone groups. Speakers may choose to integrate large chunks of speech into a single tone group, resulting in a stronger integration; or they may divide the utterance into a number of tone groups, with the stylistic effect of emphasizing these individual components one after the other.

This presentation examines detailed examples from narratives, bringing out general tendencies. Special attention is paid to cases that provide insights into how divisions into tone groups become habitual, and eventually become lexicalized: (i) the manner adverbials /tʂ^huɾniɿ/ 'in this way, thus' and /t^hvɿniɿ/ 'in that way', which constitute a tone group on their own in the majority of cases; and (ii) compounds that resist the tendency towards integration into a single tone group.

The data sets on which the analysis is based are available from the Pangloss Collection, at the following address:

http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/archivage/languages/Na_en.htm

¹ Publications about Yongning Na include: Lidz 2007, 2010, 2011; Michaud 2008, 2012, 2013; Lidz & Michaud 2008; Michaud & Latami Dashi 2011.

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