

SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC COMPLEX TONE IN ENDANGERED TENYI LANGUAGES

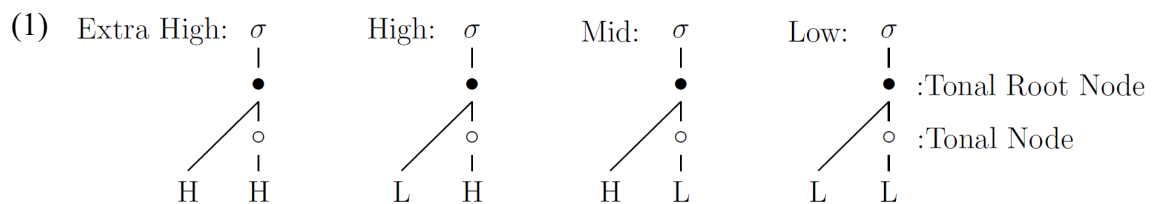
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The languages in the northeast of India in the eastern Himalayan range are rather poorly documented and the availability of linguistic studies for these languages is next to nothing compared to many other languages of the world. The main reasons for this are geographic isolation and economic backwardness, and historic as well as extant abandonment from authorities in control. Apart from digitally archiving endangered language data, I also study the diachronic changes in both the tones and non-tonal elements of the related languages of Tenyidie and reconstruct a proto-Tenyi language with an attempt to establish the relationship of the languages and variants into a traditional language family tree.

The Tenyi languages are tonal languages employing at least four lexical tones. Any language having more than two tones in the inventory is considered a complex tone system, and only very few languages have been documented to have more than three tones. The phonological study of complex tones itself is still at a nascent stage. My previous work (2021, 2022) showed that Tenyidie tones, while appearing complicated and unpredictable, can be neatly studied with hitherto available phonological tools with the proposition that tones can (and should) be split into smaller units. The tonal model I proposed with these tonal units is shown in (1).



This proposal, and the model that I used, is also being borne out by the newer languages that I am looking at the moment, with support especially from Sopvoma [Mao] where the patterns of tone change are different but still bears out the tonal model used for standard Tenyidie. The comparison of tonal data between Tenyidie and Sopvoma also provides evidence of how tone in these languages could have evolved from a simple two-tone system with cues again supporting the atomisation of tones into smaller features.

The comparisons, reconstructions and the archival of these languages are done with a curated version of the Leipzig-Jakarta list (Haspelmath and Tadmor 2009).

Reference:

- Haspelmath, Martin and Uri Tadmor (eds.), 2009. *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Meyase, Savio, 2021. 'Polarity in a four-level tone language'. *Phonology* (38).
- Meyase, Savio, 2022. *Tenyidie Tone*. PenThrill Publications.