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Tone in Mao

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Abstract:

Mao belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family, spoken mainly in the Senapati district of Manipur, North Eastern region of India. Mao is a Subject, Object, Verb (SOV) word-order language. This language is not much studied so far. This paper attempts to study the tone system in Mao with the help of tone category put forward by Pike (1948), established the tone by analysis from Mao we find that there are two tones viz; contrastive tones and variation of tones.

Key words: Tone, register tones, contrastive tones, phonological conditioning variant, morphological conditioning variant

1. Introduction

A tone language is defined by many scholars, for instance, Moira Yip (2002) defined a tone language as “A language is a ‘tone language’ if the pitch of the word can change the meaning of a word”. The principal phonetic features of tones are identified in the domain of distinctive pitch level of a syllable. Hence, “a tone language must have pitch that is significant and lexical (Pike, 1948)”. Significant pitch distinguishes the meanings of utterances, and when pitch is lexical, it distinguishes the meanings of words. Thus, a tone language is a language in which pitch made contrast the same spelling of an individual lexical words. Significant pitch may be found in non-tone languages, for instance, English, but in such languages the semantics differences apply to the phrases as a whole. In other word, each syllable of a tone language bears at least one significant pitch unit. So there is one-to-one correlation between the number of syllables and the number of tones in any specific utterances; whereas, in non-tone languages such type of correlation between pitch and syllable does not seems to be existed.

Generally, tone languages are not always alike in their tonemic functions in the grammatical system of language. They are generally distinguished into two classes, viz, level or static tone language (where the pitch of syllable does not rise or fall in time of utterance) and contour (gliding or dynamic) tone language (where there is perceptible rise or fall or some combination of both respectively) in time of utterance.

Mao may be referred to as a register tone language, It is because, pitch of syllable does not rise or fall during the time of sound production. Moreover, in the pattern of their combination, various tones can freely be assigned to any individual syllables without restricting the number of occurrence throughout the entire word.

2. Types of Tone in Mao

Normally, Mao syllable has at least one or more tonemes and there is one to one correlation between number of syllables and the number of tonemes in every specific syllable utterances. Presently I have identified four register tones out of which two are in high tone such as extra-high tone and high tone, and the other two are mid tone and low tone. These four tones are marked as shown in (1. a-d).

- | | | | |
|-----|----|-----------------|------------|
| (1) | a. | Extra-High tone | ! |
| | b. | High | ≡ |
| | c. | Mid tone | (unmarked) |
| | d. | Low tone | ∃ |

Extra high tone is characterized by double strikingly high pitch. This tone is basically a high tone. Examples are given below:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---------|-----------------|
| (2) | a. | mo! | ‘sweet’ (taste) |
| | b. | kra! | ‘white’ |
| | c. | kho!ki! | ‘dry fish’ |

High tone is characterized by single strikingly upright a high pitch. In the example (3) show that this tone is primarily high tone but slightly low than the extra high.

- | | | | |
|-----|----|------|-----------|
| (3) | a. | oko≡ | ‘stem’ |
| | b. | obe≡ | ‘arm’ |
| | c. | bu≡ | ‘sitting’ |

Mid tone is generally a normal speaking pitch of Mao language. From the example (4) show that this level pitches does not rise or fall.

- (4) a. mozi 'straight'
- b. liji 'way'
- c. chisa 'wrist bangle'

Low tone is characterized by single strikingly opposite direction of a high tone. This is the lowest tone as far as the pitch level is concerned in Mao. The low tone examples are given below in (5).

- (5) a. shooɛ 'shoot' (can be by gun, catapults, arrow etc.)
- b. jiɛ 'big'
- c. hraɛ 'operate'

3. Contrastive Tone Features in Mao

In Mao, the relative significant pitch levels play an important role in the grammatical system. Pitches are used to contrast or to distinguish each individual lexical item in this language. For instance, ɔvɔ! 'work', ɔvɔ≡ 'crab', ɔvɔ 'niece'/'nephew', ɔvɔɛ 'pig'. These examples clearly show that they do not differ in length or intensity from other syllable(s) but their contrast is only by pitch syllable(s) as in the case of first example the word ends with a high pitched syllable, the second ends with high mid pitched syllable, the third word ends with medial pitched syllable and the fourth one ends with a low pitched syllable.

Examples of contrastive pairs in tonemic features are illustrated in table (1) for the present work analysis.

High (!)		High-Mid (≡)		Mid		Low (ɛ)	
oʒe!	'character'	ozhe≡	'share'	ozhe	'sea'	ozheɛ	'alcohol'
ne!	'see'	ne≡	'you'	ne	'sunshine'	neɛ	'crawl'
odo!	'act of politeness'	odo≡	'acting'	odo	'step'	odoɛ	'field ridge'
zhe!	'drip'	zhe≡	'fly'	zhe	'punch'	zheɛ	'make line'
omo!	'female genital'	omo≡	'brother-in-law'	omo	'pumpkin'	omoɛ	'crop'
de!	'touch'	de≡	'meet'	de	'aspect' (from other)	deɛ	'burn'
dzi!	'coax' (as children)	dzi≡	'short'	dzi	'lay eggs'	dziɛ	'cut'

Table 1: Contrastive pairs of tonemic features

4. Variation of Tones

The tone variation in this language may be brought out in two conditioning environments as phonological and morphological environment. Henceforth, based on these two factors, tone variation may be broadly classified into two categories, viz. (i) Phonological conditioning variant and (ii) Morphological conditioning variant.

4.1. Phonological Conditioning Variant

Words are derived in Mao by either compounding or affixation. In Khezha, *The Ethnology of the Khezhas and The Khezha Grammar*, (Kapfo, 2005:97) it showed that "the pitch of syllable is often affected by its adjacent tones whenever its lexical root is compounded with another morpheme". Similarly, in Mao also such phenomena can be observed. For instance, when the base form of a noun is affixed with another morpheme (noun or adjective) may bring the phonological conditioning variant in compound words.

Type-I

- (6) oleɛi 'bee' + odzi≡ 'water' > leɛidzi 'honey'
- otoɛ 'necklace' + koni≡ 'small beads' > toɛni 'neclace' (Made of tiny beads)
- oci≡ 'house' + todo≡ 'helper' > ciɛdoo 'pillar' (house edge pillar)

Type-II

- omi≡ 'mouth' +kaji 'big', broad' > me≡jiɛ 'Broad mouth'
- ome≡i 'person' +kaji 'big' > me≡idʒiɛ 'huge person'
- ore≡i 'rope' +koso 'long' > re≡isoɛ 'lengthy rope'

4.2. Morphological Conditioning Variant

In Mao, abstract nouns are derived from verbs or adjectives by derivational prefixes as kaɛ, maɛ-, ko-ɛ, moɛ- to denote the way of functioning activity. Morphological conditioning variant do not show indication for generalization like phonological conditioning variant does. Consider the following.

(7)	a.	kaɔ	+ peɛ	'to tell'	>	kaɔpeɛ	'way of speaking'
	b.	kaɔ	+ piɛ	'to give'	>	kaɔpiɛ	'way of giving'
	c.	maɔ	+ peɛ	'to tell'	>	maɔpeɛ	'cause to speak' or 'allow to speak'
	d.	maɔ	+ kheɛ	'pull'	>	maɔkheɛ	'cause to pull'
	e.	koɔ	+ phoɛ	'search'	>	koɔphoɛ	'way of searching'
	f.	koɛ	+ toɛ	'eat'	>	koɔtoɛ	'way of eating'
	g.	moɔ	+ toɛ	'eat'	>	moɔtoɛ	'cause to eat'
	h.	moɔ	+ ziɛ	'sleep'	>	moɔziɛ	'cause to sleep'

From the above examples (7) show that in Mao there is no morphophonemic rule involve, as both the syllables retained their morphological conditioning variant.

Moreover, it is interesting to mention that (see in e.g. 8.), the tone rules in Mao is a basic tone syllable that never gets affected in the cases where there is no phonological rule involved in the compound words.

(8)	a.	de!	'touch'	+ phoɔ	'burst'	>	de!phoɛ	'bust by touching'
	b.	phuɛ	'bind'	+ pfiɛ	'carry'	>	phuɛpfiɛ	'to carry by tying'
	c.	kheɔto	'food'	+ toɛ	'eat'	>	kheɔtoɛtoɛ	'eating food'
	d.	ni!	'catch'	+ koɔhri	'together'	'>	ni!koɔhri	'catch together'

In Mao the data used in this analysis show that the generalization of tone variation is possible where there is phonological rule operates. The result is in the vice versa in the cases where there is no phonological rule is involved.

5. Conclusion

It is understood from the above analysis that the tone system in Mao function in a similar way of other tonal languages. Mao has two tone categories as contrastive tone, and variation tone. In contrastive tone features it is found that pitches are used to contrast or to distinguish each individual lexical item with an example given by a word 'ovo' in four different tones with different meanings. Variation tone has two conditioning environments as (i) Phonological conditioning variant and (ii) Morphological conditioning variant. In Phonological conditioning variant, two rules have been made in according to the base form of a noun which is composed with another noun morpheme or an affixation that may be brought the phonological conditioning variant. In rule 1 show that the affix morpheme sound change when affixed to the base noun and in rule 2 show both the base noun and the affix noun sound got variant when conjoint the two to form a new word. In the case of Morphological conditioning variant, the sound changes do not indicate for generalization like phonological conditioning variant do. In Mao, the generalization of tone variation is possible where there is phonological rule involvement. The result is in the vice versa in the cases where there is no phonological rule involvement.

6. Notes

- (Pike, 1948), (Moira Yip ,2002) stated in a similar way that, language in which pitch is used to contrast individual lexical items or words. When pitch is lexical, it distinguishes the meanings of words.
- Tone languages are generally distinguished into two classes, viz, register or static tone language and contour (gliding or dynamic) tone language.
- Mao may be referred to as a non-restricted level (register) tone language.
- There are four contrastive tone found in Mao.
- Mao variation tones are of two as phonological conditioning variant and morphological conditioning variant.

7. References

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