

Towards a Typology of Tone System Changes (ABSTRACT)

Larry M. Hyman, University of California Berkeley

Most general discussions of tonal change are concerned with the issue of tonogenesis, i.e. the question of how non-tonal languages become tonal (see Kingston 2011 for a recent overview). Two general sources have been proposed by which earlier pitch properties come to be transphonologized into lexical tone: (i) the intrinsic pitch effects of laryngeal gestures (glottal stop and glottalization, [h] and breathiness, voicing), which become contrastive when such gestures neutralize, as in SE Asia (Haudricourt 1954; Matisoff 1973; Hombert et al 1979, Svantesson 1989); (ii) the prior stress- or intonation-related pitch alignments, which become contrastive when the tone-bearing units are modified (e.g. by lengthening/shortening, syncope, epenthesis), as in Germanic (Gussenhoven 2000, Riad 1998) and Korean (Ramsey 2001). In this talk I am concerned with what happens AFTER a language has acquired tone, that is, in how one tone system can change into another.

I begin by distinguishing three different kinds of change (parallel to segmental phonology): (i) changes in the phonetic realization of tones; (ii) changes in surface-contrastive tones; (iii) changes in the underlying analysis of the tone system. In (i) I am interested in the different factors that can lead to the development of new “allotones”. These can be conditioned by the same laryngeal factors which give rise to tonogenesis, as when a voiced obstruent conditions a lower allotone of a *L tone or converts a *H into a LH rising tone. Allotones may also be conditioned by surrounding tones, as when the *L of a *L-H sequence raises to M. In (ii) I am interested in how and when such allotones become contrastive, i.e. transphonologized. This can be caused by devoicing, as when *bá > bǎ > pǎ (now contrasting with *pá), or by loss of a tone-bearing unit, as when *L-H > M-H > M (now contrasting with *H and *L). Finally, in (iii) I am interested in how such tonal changes lead to a restructuring of the original underlying system. This includes not only changes in the tonal inventory (both adding and losing tones), but also changes in tonal representations, tonal functions, and tonal domains. While tonogenesis and the kind of tonal bifurcations mentioned above lead to more tones, the reverse is when languages merge tones or level contrasts by position (e.g. limiting contrasts to stressed or root syllables, prohibiting a H tone on a final syllable). What starts out as a system of lexical tonal contrasts can thus develop into a restricted-tone, ultimately accentual system, including cases where a lexical tone system becomes strictly grammatical. While an exclusively syntactic tone system has not been attested (Gussenhoven 2004:46), the development of postlexical construction tonology suggests that some tone systems are heading in this direction, e.g. Kalabari (Harry & Hyman 2013). As will be seen, the goal of establishing a thorough typology of tone systems is inseparable from the study of tonal system changes which I discuss in this talk.

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