Suprasegmentals in Southeast Asia

Paul K. Benedict

'If you can't explain something, you've gotta reconstruct it'
I. $D_1yen/D_2yen/D_3yen/D_4yen$

'Here anything can happen to anything - and often does'
P. K. Benedict

'Mother Soup'
W. L. Ballard

'In this field you have to be a little crazy'
J. A. Matisoff

1. A Short History of SEA Suprasegmentalism

In the early 20th century, scholars agreed that tonal and non-tonal languages don't go together but were puzzled by Chinese, which seems to be a 'broken down' relative of Tibetan - and Classical Tibetan, a high-status language in those days, has all sorts of prefixes and suffixes - and no tones! Chinese scholars had long accepted their tones as a linguistic way of life, even including in that category (sheng) forms with stop finals, and were not inclined to give them up, even though their Western colleagues kept insisting that they simply must be considered secondary in some way in view of the Tibetan evidence. Maspero helped out by showing that a pair of tones in Vietnamese ($\text{hôi}$, $\text{ngã}$) are the reflexes of Mon-Khmer final $\ast$-s $\sim$ $\ast$-h.

In the mid 20th century, Haudricourt expanded on the work of Maspero by trying to show that another pair of Vietnamese tones ($\text{sǝc}$, $\text{nǝng}$) are reflexes of Mon-Khmer final $\ast$-ʔ. The MK data then available were hardly adequate for the proof, as both Benedict and Gage pointed out, but Haudricourt's keen linguistic intuition eventually bore fruit.
when Diffloth was able to connect these tones (partially creaky accents) with a creaky accent reconstructed for PMK/PAA.

Haudricourt has to be credited with a (delayed) hit here but he struck out a little later. No sinologist, he suggested that the three tones of Chinese (excluding final stop forms) originated in a manner parallel to those of Vietnamese: ping sheng (level tone) from plain (unmarked) prototypes, shang sheng (rising tone) from final *-? and qu sheng (departing tone) from final *-h (< PST *-s). His sinological brethren, notably Pulleyblank, seized upon this explanation and expanded it in a linguistic feeding frenzy. Of late Sagart has suggested modifying the *-h to a creaky accent. Gedney and others, caught up in the spirit of the times, suggested a parallel explanation for Tai tones. Benedict had long before connected Tai with Austronesian, explaining the tonal system as a 'whole cloth' loan from the Chinese, and had later expanded this to include Miao-Yao and its tonal system as well, but has been unable to come up with a scheme for tonal assignment (recently Sagart has suggested P-Tai tone *B < final *-s). On the Sino-Tibetan front, Benedict has reconstructed a two-tone *A vs. *B system for PST, based on fairly regular PTK/Chinese correspondences, but many linguists have remained skeptical, continuing to point to (Classical) Tibetan and other non-tonal TB languages in the West.

The field remains divided at the present time. Benedict keeps pointing out (see esp. his Karen studies) that PST *-s yielded final -t in Chinese, not Haudricourt's *-s > -h. Bodman has attempted to support Haudricourt's *-? by setting up the same feature for PTB but few have followed him here. Ballard, given to free expression, has pronounced it all a big mess ('Mother Soup'). Matisoff, given to diplomacy, has introduced the term 'Tonogenesis' and declared a draw all around, with it all going through cycles. Hardly anyone fully agrees with him, it seems, nor with anyone else, really. It's not a field for the faint of heart. Definitely!

2. Suprasegmental = accent

Phonation type (voice quality)
   (clear~breathy~murmured~creaky~glottalized~lax~tense)
Tone
   (pitch/direction of pitch)
Duration (length)
(including short~long vowels; also [Mon-Khmer: Lai and Formosan: Kanakanabu]~extra-long)

Stress
Accent
refers to any of the above parameters

Prosody
refers to any given bundle of the above, e.g. that of Burmese auk-myit is 'creaky/high-falling/short'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST</th>
<th>AA</th>
<th>AT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syllables¹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1~2</td>
<td>2(~3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finals include:</td>
<td>-p/t/k/s</td>
<td>-h</td>
<td>-p/t/k/s -h -b/d/g/z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vowel length² (duration)</td>
<td>short~ long</td>
<td>short~ long</td>
<td>[lacking]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accents :type (other)</td>
<td>tonal: falling ~rising</td>
<td>phonation: clear ~creaky</td>
<td>pitch-accent: low+low ~low+high ~high+low ~high+high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:domain³</td>
<td>restricted (voiced finals)</td>
<td>restricted (voiced finals)</td>
<td>unrestricted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-Accents are depleted/shuffled (to other accents)/segmentalized.
-Segmentals become accentuated thru transphonologization.
-Switching involves either segmentalization or accentuation.
-Checked coda intrusion (CCI): the effect upon accents within the (voiced finals) domain of features developed outside that domain (before surd stop finals); cf. the Cantonese development:
Cantonese tonal reflexes in the 'high' (<*surd initials) series:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C&lt;*&gt;sandhi</th>
<th>D&lt;*&gt;final stops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'standard' (Norman)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55 (short vowels) 33 (long vowels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'early 40's' (Benedict)</td>
<td>55 (pinyam = 'changed tone'; serves to nominalize)</td>
<td>53 (regular tone, including verbal forms)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'present' (Bauer)</td>
<td>53/ largely--completely replaced by 55/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Morphophonemics

Accents do not ordinarily play a morphophonemic role but may do so on occasion, e.g. in Burmese the creaky auk-myiit (see note 9) signals subordination: ña 'I', ñá 'mine'. Duration is rarely involved here but in Rawang (Nungish) vowel length (:) is a phoneme of 'transitive action'. In the Burmese-Yipho group, micro-analyzed by Matisoff, Atsi shows a split in reflexes for PBY tone *2 (<PTK *B), one for verbs and another for nouns, while Mpi has six tones, all from splitting of the three PBY tones, with all three 'verbal tones' having an extra contour feature, apparently thru incorporation of verbal/adjectival enclitics.4

The role of sandhi with tonal/phonation accents displays extreme variation throughout the region, both in degree and in kind, ranging from /none/ to /overwhelming/ and from sandhi-on-the-left (SL) = 'regressive type' (Ballard), with changes on that side, to sandhi-on-the-right (SR) = 'progressive type' (Ballard). The latter, which is atypical for the region, is a hallmark of the Wu dialects of Chinese (lower Yangtze drainage), linked (substratum) by Ballard to that shown by Miao, with the further suggestion that a language with pitch-accent underlay it all (it did: the ancestral JR - see below).

Of considerable historical interest, finally, there is clear evidence at the PTK level, at least, of a distinction between tone *A = 'stative/intransitive' and *B = 'causative/transitive', e.g.: