

A GUIDE TO THAKALI TONE*

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INTRODUCTION

One striking feature of the tone systems of Tibeto-Burman languages studied thus far by members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Nepal is that pitch contrasts are defined over morphologically defined domains, such as the word or the morpheme, rather than over phonologically defined domains such as the syllable. In Thakali the morpheme is the domain over which pitch contrasts are defined.

This paper gives a summary of the tone system of Thakali. All the theoretical statements are amply illustrated with data. This summary has grown out of extensive field work and also contains a few remarks on the methods of tone analysis. These are hoped to be stimulating for anyone who wants to analyse a similar tone language.

Thakali is spoken in Nepal in the northern part of the Dhaulagiri zone along the upper Kali-Gandaki River. This part of the valley is known as Thak Khola. Many Thakalis have migrated recently to other places, mainly south of the Thak Khola. This guide represents the language as spoken in Tukche, the business centre of the region.

The tone analysis was carried out with the help of Miss Nila Gauchan from Tukche, who proved to be an excellent informant.

A practical text orthography is used to represent the segmental material. This orthography is based on the phonemic analysis. For the suprasegmental features of tone phonetic and phonemic representations have been used. This variation reflects the successive stages of the tone analysis. In the Thakali text all the morpheme breaks are indicated with a dash: so-wa.

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T	retroflexed alveolar stop;
Th	retroflexed alveolar aspirated stop;
t	dental stop;
th	dental aspirated stop;
c	alveolar affricate (ts);
ch	alveolar aspirated affricate (tsh);
ng	velar nasal.

The examples presented in this guide are intended only to illustrate the tone analysis of Thakali. They are not presented for use in the study of the grammar of the language. Though care has been taken to insure the grammaticality of the utterances used, many of them are fragmentary, and many are highly idiomatic. These idiomatic utterances are used especially in jokes, figurative speech and in slang expressions even though from a grammatical or semantic point of view they are far from transparent.

I. THE CONTRAST SYSTEM

1. VOICE QUALITY CONTRAST

Introduction

All the six vowels of Thakali (i, e, aa, u, o, a) occur with tense and with lax articulation. This modification of the articulation is contrastive and also modifies the pitch of the vowels. *Tense articulation* conditions *high pitch* while *lax articulation* conditions *low pitch*. (In the pronunciation of tense vowels the Adam's apple is raised slightly. This results in a smaller resonance chamber at the back of the mouth and the vowel sounds therefore tense, non-vibrant, and high. In the pronunciation of lax vowels the Adam's apple remains lowered. This results in a larger resonance chamber at the back of the mouth and the vowel therefore sounds lax, vibrant, and low.)

The voice quality contrast is very important in Thakali and not too difficult to hear. Without contrasting the voice qualities with each other one may easily fail to hear it, but in a frame where we have the contrast at the same point of the utterance, it is quite striking.

Voice Quality Contrast on Stems

List 1

The following list is a selection of monosyllabic tense and lax nouns in the same frame. In orthographic transcription laxness is symbolised with an h after the vowel, tenseness is not marked. Thus, vowels which

are not followed by h are tense. Observe how tense and lax vowels condition the pitch of the items.

<u>ngā</u> - <u>cē</u> <u>kē</u> <u>mraang</u> - <u>cī</u> .	<i>I saw a field.</i>
<u>kāa</u>	<i>blood</i>
<u>tā</u>	<i>horse</i>
<u>pū</u>	<i>earthen pot</i>
<u>kaah</u>	<i>blister</i>
<u>Tih</u>	<i>skin</i>
<u>cah</u>	<i>son</i>
<u>ngā</u> - <u>cē</u> <u>mē</u> <u>mraang</u> - <u>cī</u> .	<i>I saw a fire.</i>
<u>lī</u>	<i>face</i>
<u>lē</u>	<i>tongue</i>
<u>rū</u>	<i>horn</i>
<u>roh</u>	<i>friend</i>
<u>mih</u>	<i>person</i>
<u>meh</u>	<i>ox</i>
<u>tōm</u>	<i>bear</i>
<u>cām</u>	<i>bridge</i>
<u>sīn</u>	<i>wood</i>
<u>pāy</u>	<i>wool</i>
<u>kehn</u>	<i>bread</i>
<u>kaahng</u>	<i>hill</i>
<u>pahr</u>	<i>garden</i>
<u>tihm</u>	<i>house</i>
<u>kyu</u>	<i>water</i>
<u>plaa</u>	<i>vegetables</i>
<u>pro</u>	<i>snack</i>
<u>cye</u>	<i>meadow</i>
<u>prih</u>	<i>root</i>
<u>praah</u>	<i>flour</i>
<u>ngyeh</u>	<i>milk</i>

List 2: Some minimal pairs

<u>nga</u> - <u>ce</u> <u>ke</u> <u>mraang-ci</u> .	<i>I saw a field.</i>
<u>keh</u>	<i>work</i>
<u>me</u>	<i>fire</i>
<u>meh</u>	<i>ox</i>
<u>kyu</u>	<i>water</i>
<u>kyuh</u>	<i>sheep</i>
<u>pri</u>	<i>yak cow</i>
<u>prih</u>	<i>root</i>
<u>mi</u>	<i>eye</i>
<u>mih</u>	<i>person</i>
<u>yaa</u>	<i>hand</i>
<u>yaah</u>	<i>yak</i>
<u>pen</u>	<i>toad</i>
<u>pehn</u>	<i>young fellow</i>

List 3

The numbers from 1 to 10 sorted for voice quality.

TENSE:

LAX:

<u>curi</u> <u>som</u> 'mu-mu.	<i>Here are three.</i>	<u>curi</u> <u>Tih</u> 'mu-mu.	<i>Here is one.</i>
<u>ngis</u>	<i>seven</i>	<u>ngih</u>	<i>Here are two.</i>
<u>ku</u>	<i>nine</i>	<u>plih</u>	<i>four</i>
<u>cyu</u>	<i>ten</i>	<u>ngaah</u>	<i>five</i>
		<u>Tuh</u>	<i>six</i>
		<u>preh</u>	<i>eight</i>

List 4

Voice quality is contrastive only on the first syllable of a morpheme. Observe this in the following groups of tense and lax bisyllabic nouns.

<u>curi</u> <u>kolaa</u> 'mu-mu.	<i>Here is a child.</i>
<u>karu</u>	<i>wheat</i>
<u>tayaa</u>	<i>potato</i>
<u>polo</u>	<i>nettle</i>
<u>kohca</u>	<i>khukuri</i>