A Phonetic Analysis of Manange Segmental and Suprasegmental Properties

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0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide a description of a number of phonetic aspects of Manange, a Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal. Specifically I describe acoustic properties of select units in the segmental and suprasegmental domains. In particular, the tone system of Manange is of special interest because the domain of the tone bearing unit is the phonological word, as opposed to the syllable (e.g. Lahu) or the morpheme (e.g. Lhasa and Dolpo Tibetan). Other features of interest include the allophonic variation of the tap consonant and the status of nasalized and long or lengthened vowels. This analysis represents a first focused account of the major phonetic properties of Manange, and as such is of interest to other scholars of Tibeto-Burman languages, especially those with asymmetrical inventories or typologically unique tone systems.

1. This paper has benefitted from feedback from a number of individuals: Matthew Gordon, T. Alan Hall, and Michael Noonan. My research on Manange phonetics and phonology has benefitted from continued input from Carol Genetti.
1 Classification, Location, Methods

Classification and Location of Manange

Manange, also known by its endonym njeshan, or njeshante ‘our language’, is a Bodish language within the Bodic subphylum of Tibeto-Burman. It is grouped with other Tamangic (also called Gurungic or TGT) languages like the Nar and Phu dialects, Gurung, Thakali, Tamang, Seke, and Chantyal (van Driem 2001, Bradley 1997). Figure 1 provides a family tree for Bodish languages.

![Family Tree of Bodish Languages]

Figure 1. Classification of Manange

The Manange language has historically been spoken by members of a single ethnic group: the njeshan or Manange people.\(^2\) The

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2. The word ‘Manange’ is a compound: [maŋəŋəŋ] ‘Manang people/place’ and [ŋəŋəŋ] ‘voice/language’. My orthographic transcription of the language name uses the letter g, which is also the IPA symbol for a voiced velar stop. The phoneme inventory of Manange does not include voiced stops; rather, voicing for obstruents is allophonic, the obstruent is weakly voiced when following another voiced segment. The transcription of Manange is neither phonemically nor phonetically accurate, but rather reflects a Roman alphabet version of the spelling of this language and the ethnic group that speaks it.
Mananges live in the Manang District, which is located in the northern district of the Western Development Region of Nepal.

Geographically, Manang is known as the Inner Himalayan Valley, as it is surrounded to the south, the east and the west by the Annapurna mountain range. The Tibetan border is about 10 kilometers to the north of Manang village. Manang is the second largest district in geographic area in the Gandaki zone, but it is also the least populated district in Nepal. Manang covers 2,246 square kilometers in area (Sharma 1994).

Both Gurungs and Mananges (or Manangis, also called Manangpas, Manangbas and Manangbhots) are the main ethnic groups of the Manang district, although there are Nar-Phu communities on the northern edge of the district and there have also been recent migrations of Tibetans and peoples from western Nepal to Manang. In the 1991 census report the Manang district reported a population of 5,363, underscoring the sparseness of the population (Gurung 1998). The 1991 census also reports that the population of the Manang district had decreased by 23% between 1981 and 1991, while the population of Nepal overall grew by the same amount (23%) during that time.

Published descriptions of the Manange language are few in number. Michiyo Hoshi put out a glossary and a grammatical description of Manange (1984, 1986) with data from speakers who were born in Praka. Another glossary of the variety of Manange spoken in the Ngawal village has been published by Nagano (1984). Hildebrandt (in press) provides an updated grammatical sketch of Manange, with special attention to the phonetics of tone (and the phonemic inventory in general). That work also comprises a complete sketch of the primary morphological and grammatical systems in the language. Hildebrandt (2003) charts the process of tone merger as it is occurring among some speakers of a growing urban Manange community, looking to sociolinguistic and language contact variables as relevant factors in this case of
rapid structural change. Additional contributions towards Manange phonology have been from a diachronic, tonogenetic, perspective (Mazaudon 1978, 1988).

Methodology

The data for this analysis come from four speakers, all born and raised in the Manang District. Speakers 1 through 3 are females, between the ages of 28-35 at the time of data collection. Speaker 4 is a male in his early 30’s at time of data collection. Speaker 3 moved to Kathmandu when she was 18, and has maintained a close relationship with Manange friends and relatives in both Kathmandu and Manang. All speakers are bilingual in both Manange (Tibeto-Burman) and Nepali (Indo-Aryan), and all four speakers have claimed Manange as the primary language of use in day-to-day communication. In this sense, these four speakers represent more conservative users of Manange. See Hildebrandt (2003) for an investigation of phonological differences between conservative and non-conservative speakers of Manange.

The data were recorded during a single field trip in 2001, using a Sony Professional Walkman and an Audio-Technica headset microphone. The recording mode was analog, with a sampling rate of 22,050 Hz. (16 bit sample size and monophonic audio channel) used in the computer digitization process. Unless otherwise noted, the values drawn from spectral analyses are taken from words uttered in isolation (the first repetition of the word in a three-repetition frame). The frame-medial context is used for an analysis of fundamental frequency values corresponding to the tones. This is an ‘I said X’ structure, where the target word is the middle constituent in the verb-final clause.

The data for this study were analyzed using Praat and PcQuirer acoustic analysis software. The data were compiled in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and statistics were performed using SPSS for Macintosh, version 11.