

An Initial Description of Tone in 'Cho

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1. Introduction

In this paper I will give a description of phonological tone in 'Cho (/ʔkxòu/ or /ʔkxò/), also known as Müün, or Ng'Mèen, a Southern Kuki-Chin language of Southern Chin State, Myanmar. Previous treatments dealing with this dialect have not marked tone for various reasons (e.g. Jordan (1967), So-Hartmann (1988)), and the traditional orthography lacks a recognized system of tonal diacritics. The primary goal here is to describe the system and note its characteristics.

The present description is based on the language of Sít Hmòì village, Mìndàt'. For this study, tone was notated from recorded word lists and short sections of monologue. It was also marked on all of the Jordan dictionary entries, the main reference source on 'Cho, and further compared with narrated sections of the gospel of Matthew.

'Cho has four tones that are discernable to the native speaker, but only three of these are widespread and in a mutually contrastive relationship. These three are; high, low, and rising. A falling tone is found restricted to some question words and elsewhere, essentially as the result of morphological assimilation and intonation. Furthermore, a high tone on long vowels is in a contrastive relationship with a high tone on short vowels, and so this distribution will also be considered. Finally, there is a pattern of tonal *sandhi* exhibited on items from several grammatical categories. In such cases the original tone ends up as a high tone. Examples of each of these phenomena will now follow.

2.1 Orthography:

The 1935 traditional orthography will be employed here.² However, we have modified it in the following ways for increased precision:

1. By abandoning the use of 'o' and 'aw' to represent [o], and solely employing 'o'. The use of each is interchangeable in the writing system, and they are not distinguished by our informant.
2. By including tonal markers as follows³:

/a/	High level short (HS)
/à/	Low (level) (L)
/á/	Rising (low to high) (R)

Similarly, high long vowels will be marked with a double vowel.

/aa/	High level long
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The following table is made up of examples of all four categories.

le 2 Four Phonemic Distinctions

PH LONG	HIGH SHORT	LOW	RISING
i' 'to wash'	m' 'si' 'soak'	m' 'si' 'metal', 'saliva'	m' 'si' 'seed'
ong' 'opened up (path)'	khong' 'attach carry straps'	khong' 'to beat'	khong' 'trap made of a log'
n' 'collection of veges'	ghu' 'wipe'	ghu' 'a corner'	ghu' 'to miscarry'
n' 'to call'	chu' 'get lost'	chu' 'speak'	chu' 'join cloth, pants'

re examples of the three tones are in Table 3 below.

le 3 Three Phonemic Tones

SH SHORT	LOW	RISING
'to transplant'	<i>phui</i> 'carry on head'	<i>phui</i> 'Place name'
'claw, scratch'	<i>khet</i> 'difficult'	<i>khet</i> 'not exactly'
'pluck'	<i>bit</i> 'to plug up'	<i>bit</i> 'a kind of sparrow'
'road, path'	<i>lam</i> 'an arm span'	<i>lam</i> 'bland'
'grab, hold'	<i>pang</i> 'wall'	<i>pang</i> 'the back'

Vowel Length:

mentioned above, vowel length is only distinguished on the high tone, (in all but glottal-final ables). The following are representatives of closed syllable items.

Table 4 Vowel Length

GH LONG	HIGH SHORT
up 'a crow'	kap 'to collapse'
lak 'to be on the look out'	chak 'knock on'
ap 'to give way underneath'	dep 'to smash, shatter'
uk 'to swallow'	duk 'to pinch, pimper'
at 'a disease, a carbuncle'	get 'to roll up'
an 'opening the mouth'	an 'edible leaves of plants'
um 'to prepare great quantity'	sam 'to be too short / low'
an 'to jump over'	sin 'this'
un 'to do something together'	vun 'skin'
un 'flying'	zon 'to point at with a finger'
ang A man's personal name	ang A woman's personal name

length is also distinguished on high tones in open syllables. The following are examples of some of these

1. *Lo tee ci* '(He) came;
2. *Loo tee ci* '(He) killed (it).'

3. 'Chim òm tu cì	/ʔkxìm òm tuk kì /	'(He) slashed (him) with a knife'
4. Tuu cì	/tuu kì/	'(He) gave (him) something to drink'
5. Lo cì	/lok kì/	'He came'
6. Loo cì	/loo kì/	'He killed (it).'

In this way the long vowel high tone is systematically contrasted with the short vowel high tone, and thus in a distributed paradigmatically with the others tones. These toens will be labelled henceforth as high long (HL), and high short (HS).

2.3 The Falling Tone:

A tone falling from H to L is also perceptible in 'Cho. It is found 1) as the result of assimilations, 2) on some question words, and 3) as the product of intonation⁴. The following table contains some examples of assimilations that result in the falling tone. They are notated here with a double vowel for the sake of convenience.

Table 5 Assimilations:

ITEM	ORIGINAL FORM	GRAMMATICAL STATUS
<i>Kaa</i>	<i>kä kà</i>	NEGATIVE + 1 st P
<i>Cee</i>	<i>ci + nè</i>	NON-FUT. + PT ⁵ = QUOTATIVE
<i>Caa</i>	<i>ci + à</i>	NON-FUT. + PT = ADJ. ATTRIBUTIVE
<i>Vaang</i>	<i>vaai + ?</i>	PT + ? = 'let me V'

In the first three examples of the above table, the assimilation of HS and L result in a falling tone. The final item *vang*, is synchronically non-transparent, but probably the result of assimilation, as the following examples suggest.

7. *Ip vaang.*

'Let me sleep' (PC)⁶

8. *Ni ip vaai*

'Let's (DUAL) sleep.' (PC)

Since at this stage it is not clear from what it *vang* is derived, it will not be considered further here.⁷

Similar to the above sound change, a falling tone derived from an HS and a falling tone also becomes a falling tone. One such example is *cuung* 'therefore, in that case' which is the abbreviation of the demonstrative 'that' and the conditional postposition *ung*⁸. The falling tone can also be found as the result of other sound changes, such as the items in the following table.

Table 6 Other Sound Changes

ITEM	NUMERAL
<i>Nii</i>	Dual Person Numeral
<i>Mii</i>	Plural Person Numeral

The above two examples are the pronominal numerals *ní* 'dual' *mí* 'plural', that occur here with a falling tone only when preceded by the assimilation of *nàmi nà* > *nàa* (2nd PPl. & 1st P.Sg.) as the following

amples of *mi*, and *maa* show, The case is identical for *ni*, and *naa*.

9. *Nangmi nòh kei àn nàa mii pe ci.* 'You (pl) gave it to me.' (PC).
10. *Nangmi nòh kei àn nàa maa pe ci.* 'You (pl) gave it to me.' (PC).

n of the above examples have the same gloss, but there is an optional change of the vowel from *mi* to in the second example (both falling). In these cases the falling tone is a resultant change assumed to triggered by the preceding assimilation.

illy we turn to question words. Of all question words looked at, only the following were found to have ng tone.

le 7 Non-Abbreviations

M	GLOSS
ai	'why, for what reason / don't'
naam	'where'
ni	'where'

Following are examples sentences of each.

11. (A) *ivvai à Mindai à nà hieit ci ang ?*
'For what purpose did you go to Mindai.' (PC)

12. *'Chim à hngaam*
'Where is the knife.' (PC)

13. *Nang ci à-hooi-(à) ka, nàh lo ci ang ?*
'Where do you come from?' (PC)

ummary then, only the above examples of the falling tone have been discovered from the data so far investigated. The falling tone is seen to be limited in distribution, the product of assimilation or alteration adjacent sound changes, and most importantly, not found in systematic contrast with other tones. rification of the individual processes involved will be relegated to later research.

one Sandhi:

Cho there are four grammatical items that exhibit tonal variation. The tone becomes HS from either in three of these cases, or from an R in one. We will now look at these in the following order.

he Position *cih*

he Verb-Final Particle *ci*

he Inchoative Verb-Final Particle *lo*

he Personal Numerals *ni*, and *mi*