Grammar and tone in Asian languages[1]

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0.   Introduction. When I was working on my dissertation on morphological tone in White Hmong some years ago now, two articles provided me with inspiration, and I found myself referring to them again and again. Both were by British scholars affiliated with SOAS in London, and both were written a distant 25 years ago, in 1967. The first, by Gordon Downer, "Tone change and tone shift in White Miao" is a brilliant piece of detective linguistics based on scant data in which Professor Downer reconstructs the tone sandhi system of West Hmongic (or Miao). His reconstruction is still the best one today -- the analysis of much new data has led to no major revisions in his early view of the situation. The second is an overview of the types of morphological tone found in Southeast Asia by the late Eugénie Henderson. The importance of her article "Grammar and tone in South East Asian languages" was that it was the first to lay out the shape of the Southeast Asian *sprachbund* with regard to this aspect of language. I consider it relevant to the theme of this symposium to review what Professor Henderson wrote there, expand and recast it, and then tie these facts about grammar and tone to my concept of tone language type in which tone function is only one feature in an interdependent network of other tone language features.

Henderson describes and exemplifies the following tonal morphology categories for the languages of Southeast Asia:

-tonal inflection marking verb classes
    ("indicative", "subjunctive") and noun
    classes ("direct", "oblique") in Tiddim
    Chin (and other Chin dialects)
-tonal derivation (Chin, Classical Chinese,
    Cantonese examples)

-tonal variation and compounding (Vietnamese,
    Chin, Thai, Songkhla, Bwe Karen examples)
-tonal alternation in reduplicative
    expressions (Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese,
    Bwe Karen examples)
-"a special use" of tonal alternation in
    Southern Vietnamese (to mark the
    anaphoric reference form of certain
    pronouns and appelatives)

I would like to suggest that the first two types of
tonal morphology are of a fundamentally different sort
than than the last three types. The scarcity of
examples of inflectional and derivational tonal
morphology in Southeast Asia is related, I will argue,
to the dominance of a different type of tone language in
the Asian area, which is necessarily limited to the type
of tonal morphology exemplified by the last three
categories Henderson presents.

**1. Further evidence of reduplicative expressions
and form classes.** The last two categories Henderson
describes, meaningful tonal alternations in
reduplicative expressions and the correlation of a
particular tone with certain "form classes" (small,
closed word classes) are typical of (South)East Asian
languages.

In addition to the examples from Vietnamese, Thai,
Chinese and Bwe Karen which Henderson gives, one can add
evidence from Biao Min (a Mienic language) and Putian (a
Northern Min dialect of Chinese). According to Solnit
(1985:186), in Biao Min , ". . . classifers may
reduplicate with the meaning 'every, all'; change to
tone 7 [54?] adds emphasis, as if 'every single one of
X'":

[tau^{21} tau^{21} thuŋ^{44} pun$^{54?}$]   "everyone went"
clf (people) all   go
[tau$^{54?}$ tau$^{54?}$ thuŋ^{44} pun$^{54?}$]   "*every*one went"

In Putian, "A merely reduplicated adjective means
'very adjective' and there is no tone sandhi; in a
triplicated form meaning 'very, very adjective', the
first syllable becomes [453] (II); in a triplicated
form meaning either 'very positive adjective' or 'very

negative adjective', the first syllable becomes [55]" (Ballard 1988: 166-67 < Chang 1982 and Huang 1962).

Examples of tonally defined form classes, which Henderson exemplifies by the class of Southern Vietnamese anaphoric reference pronouns, are also not uncommon. These word classes are small, closed sets, such as pronouns, demonstratives, locative nouns and numerals. They are formed either by absorption of an affix or function word into a member of the form class (as in Henderson's Vietnamese example, where the absorption of all but the tone of a following demonstrative accounts for the "anaphoric tone" on the pronouns), by analogy, or probably most commonly by a combination of the two. In Hakka (M. Hashimoto 1973:436-37), the singular personal pronouns have reflexes of tone 2 in all Hakka dialects; this form class can thus be reconstructed for Proto-Hakka. In Shimen Hmong (Wang 1982), the "prepositional localizers" all have acquired the reflex of tone 8 [31]:

[vɦai^{31}]   "there"
[bɦi^{31}]   "on the slope up there"
[ŋɖɦu^{31}]   "on the slope down there"
[dɦi^{31}]   "opposite there"
[dɦu^{31}]   "opposite there (far)"
[ŋɖɦai^{31}]   "inside there"

And finally, in White Hmong (Ratliff 1992) the first five numerals all have the reflex of tone 1 [55]:

[i^{55}] "1" [ɔ^{55}] "2" [pe^{55}] "3" [plau^{55}] "4" [ʈsi^{55}] "5"

2. Two new categories: attitude tone and tonal morphology in expressive phrases. In addition to meaningful tone patterns in reduplicative phrases and tonally defined form classes, there are at least two other categories of tonal morphology that are characteristic of (South)East Asian languages. The first is the non-idiosyncratic use of a particular tone to indicate the speaker's attitude toward the referent. I use "non-idiosyncratic" to underscore the fact that the tonal morpheme that is used this way in a particular language is not one controlled by certain individual speakers and not by others as a matter of style or

intonation, but is rather a part of the grammar that all speakers control.

For example, according to Thurgood (1981), in Burmese the "induced creaky tone" serves to emphasize, and indicates a brusque, imperative attitude:

[kwa] appended appelative (level tone: gentle)
[kwa'] appended appelative (creaky tone: brusque)

In White Hmong (Ratliff 1992) the breathy-falling tone can be used to indicate negative judgment:

[nia?^{21}] "mother"   >   [nia^F] "old woman; hag"

And finally, the well-known Cantonese "changed tones" perform the same type of function. According to O.Y. Hashimoto (1972) the high rising tone, for example, indicates familiarity:

[ïɐn^{21}] "person"   >   [ïɐn^{35}] "fellow, guy"

Part of the description of these "attitude tones" must include a description of the words or classes of words that are subject to the tonal alternations. These tonal morphemes are only secondarily tones of attitude; primarily they are lexical tones. An interesting psychological experiment would involve forcing these alternations on words not normally altered in this way to see if speakers could identify the working of an independent meaningful tone on the base.

Tonal morphology is also found in expressive (ideophonic) phrases involving non-prosaic morphemes. This type of tonal morphology should be contrasted with tonal alternations in reduplicative phrases mentioned in section 1 above since both the words involved and the morphological rules governing the formation of the phrases are specialized to the expression of aesthetic word-painting (see Diffloth 1972 and Ratliff 1992 for further discussion). For example, in Vietnamese (Vu 1992) the addition of an expressive morpheme consisting of (1) a copy of the initial consonant; (2) rime replacement: -e; (3) bound tones: "hỏi" or "ngã"; (4) tone harmony: "hỏi" with series 1; "ngã" with series 2 -- produces an expressive with positive intensification: