

# KORKU LOW TONE AND THE PROTO-KORKU-KHERWARIAN VOWEL SYSTEM

by

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## PRELIMINARY NOTE

This paper was written in 1961 and slightly revised in the light of a check on the data with a Korku informant in 1963. Also in 1963 a brief note on Gutob was added, and the note on Gutob was amended in 1964. If the paper were to be rewritten now, the recent data on Korwa, and perhaps data now being made available on Ho and Birhor would be taken into consideration, and, more importantly, the descriptive and analytical phonological procedures used would be modified. The paper is presented essentially as written since the data presented and the problems they present, and my views on the sources of Korku low tone are largely what they were when the paper was written. It is hoped that a full presentation of North Munda phonology will be offered eventually, and there the conclusions – and the method – offered here will certainly be modified in some degree.

Certain corrections and additions should be made; they will be made here rather than at the appropriate places in the body of the paper.

(1) K. *arâp*. should correctly be *ara*?. (2) K. *siri* is not now considered to be cognate with S. *seleb*, and is considered to be a borrowing from (IA) *cheri* or something like it. (3) K. *surèi* is a loanword, and the forms in Santali are presumed to be loans also, but borrowed independently, probably from cognate but different sources. Fieldwork in Orissa has shown that a number of loanwords from Indo-Aryan that had no Hindi or Marathi cognates have Oriya (or Desia) cognates. Another observation on the affiliations of Korku is that Korku seems to share lexicon with Mundari (and its dialect Ho) that it – and they – do not share with Santali. (4) The low vowel in K. *bulù* was questioned on the grounds of a questionable interpretation on K. *giri*, and on grounds of the South Munda forms (the Sora evidence and Bhattacharya's Remo) not being what they looked as if they ought to be. Further work on Gutob-Remo (Gutob *bili*, Remo (Fernandez) *bili*, SM \**bVlu*?) shows that there was no need to further 'explain' the Korku and PKK forms offered. (5) K. *giri* 'fishhook; to catch fish with hook and line' is probably not a regular cognate of S. *gari*; the latter could be a Dravidian borrowing (see DED 1254, Kannada *gāla*). This particular word – or perhaps more than one converging words – is particularly difficult to account for in Munda. It had better be omitted from consideration in setting up PKK correspondences. Thus, in Gutob there is a verb stem \**gir*- 'fishnet' derived from the nominalized form with infix -Vn- *ginir*. The infixation process is old – it goes back to the pre-Proto-Munda period – and is no longer productive in Gutob and not found with any stems known to be borrowings in Gutob. (There are also two other homonymous verb stems in Gutob: *gir*- 'to rain' (from GR \**gir*), and *gir*- 'to learn'). But the Gutob verb (also found in the Indo-Aryan Desia) is *gira*- which takes the borrowed Desia Oriya causative

-a, otherwise found only in recent Desia borrowings. The Remo form – another irregularity – is *jira*-. Conceivably an old *gir*- is found in Gutob along with a borrowed *gira*-, the latter itself perhaps a borrowing from Munda into Desia or an ancestor of Desia. (6) The aspiration in *bar-khiñ* can be explained in another way: as the result of ‘advancing’ an earlier aspirate lost in *CVVC*- > *CVC*- contraction. Thus, as *koòkoñ* ‘to call (redupl.)’ > *kokhòñ*, *baàrkiñ* > *barkhiñ*. Some suggestive supporting evidence for *\*baàr*- comes from South Munda where in Remo we find *ba²ar* (the -*V²*- seems to be an infix, in *bar* not part of a ‘full form’ for it). That South Munda -*V²*- is cognate with Korku -*ṽ*- is attested in a Proto-Munda verbal infix which has the reflexes -*V²*- in Sora, and -*ṽ*- in Korku. In Korku, an allomorph *baar*- occurs in *baar-ià²* (*bar-ià²*) ‘two (inanimate substantive)’, but one would like some motivation for a development from *baària²* to *baaria²*. There are possible – but questionable – parallels with such Korku forms as *haanè²* ‘there it/they (inan.) is/are!’ from *haàn-e²*. Perhaps a better explanation would derive the *baar*- from *bar*- with automatic lengthening, something that is attested in Korku, in particular before *r*. (7) The Korku form *etha²* ‘to untie’ occurs as a doublet form for *iti*. This supports our suggestion that Korku -*C²hi* cannot occur. (8) One additional possible cognate pair has turned up: Korku *adi* ‘to flow’, Santali *haḍi* ‘driftwood’ (Ho *haḍi* ‘to flow’). This set if accepted as cognate requires revision of our earlier proposed ‘regular correspondences’, the latter being based on the Korku forms *sadi* and *kathiñ*. I would tentatively reject the Santali form as cognate with Korku; apart from the phonological difficulties, the fact that there is no cognate verb in Santali suggests that the Santali (or both the Korku and the Santali) are borrowed. A possible source of borrowing in Kannada is worth mentioning, but the linguistic contacts presupposed for the borrowing – of PKK, presumably from Kannada, directly or indirectly – are in need of support, though not impossible (DED 3317, Kannada *paṛi*, *haṛi-ta*, and, more questionably, DED 3362, Kannada *hāḍi*). The forms must have been borrowed from Kannada (after the eleventh century since only in later Kannada did *p* > *h*); the Santali and Ho forms have initial *h*, and the Korku would probably have to be derived from a Korku dialect (such dialects are known) which lacks (and drops in borrowings) initial *h*, and further (probably) has *hVCV* > *VCV*. This looks like a kind of back formation of a rule noted in this paper *VCV(C)* > *hVCV(C)*. No other example of this sort of back formation is as yet attested.

As to other (non-Korku-Santali) data relevant to PKK reconstruction, Korwa does retain as *e* at least some nonmerged (with *i*) reflexes of Pinnow’s PKK *\*e*, and Ho has final -*r²* and -*l²* which may have something to do with PKK vocalism, as the analogous *²C<sub>contin</sub>* sequences in South Munda do.

Kharia does have aspiration (in some dialects) in morphemes where Korku has ‘inherent low tone’. The examples are S. *seleb*, (there is no Korku cognate; *\*silib* would be expected), Kh. *selhob*, K. *khamāl*, Kh. *kenhel*, and K. *bulù*, Kh. *bhulu*. The correspondences are hardly neat, but considering the size of the sample (and the paucity of old Kharia forms with aspirates) are certainly significant, and ought to be followed up (preferably with larger Kharia and Korku lexicons) and accounted for more adequately.

As to the schema for accounting for the Santali-Korku ‘inherent low tone’ correspondences, I have elsewhere suggested (in ‘Gutob-Remo Vocalism and Glottalised Vowels in Proto Munda’) that Proto Munda had ‘glottalised vowels’, and that these historically account for the PKK forms discussed in this paper. This hypothesis doesn’t help in reconstructing a better PKK vowel system here, although certain suggestive points emerge. For instance, the differential treatment of (what we have tentatively reconstructed as) *\*kaso²* ‘pain’ (K. *kasug*, S. *haso*, SM *\*asu²*) and *\*bVlu²* ‘thigh’ (k. *bulù*, S. *bulu*, SM *\*bVlu²*) suggests that if we were right in the Gutob-Remo paper in hypothesizing – for certain vowels at least – a *²* > *g* development in North Munda, then *u²* became something other than ‘*V²*’ before the North Munda *²* > *g*

shift occurred (assuming that the shift was not selective precisely in distinguishing \**o* from \**u* in this context). The 'something other' was perhaps a 'glottalized vowel' as opposed to a *V**ʔ* sequence. If so, the earlier 'glottalised vowels' in contrast to the later *V**ʔ* (which > *V**g* in North Munda) were those that came down to PKK as described in this paper, and to Korku as 'inherently low'.

*Summary.* This paper introduces the data on Korku low tone and distinguishes three historical sources for it. A new interpretation of the Proto-Korku-Kherwarian (PKK) vowel system in the light of Korku tone is offered, the reconstruction of the PKK vowel system also making use of certain regularities of within-morpheme vowel 'harmony' (co-occurrence) found both in Korku and in Santali and presumed to be present in PKK as well.

Korku is the only Munda language for which tone has been recorded. Tone is not found in the fairly closely related Mundari and Santali languages, at any rate in the dialects of Santali and Mundari described in print.

There are two tones in Korku: high (unmarked) and low.<sup>1</sup> Phonemic tone is low tone, and high tone is considered to be no (low) tone, or the absence of tone. Low tone is positively correlated with aspiration in that every medial aspirate is followed by low tone, but – on the phonemic level – the reverse is not true; not every aspirable consonant followed by low tone is aspirated. We have such pairs as */kɔŋkɪŋba/* 'calls them (dual)' (from *kɔŋ-kɪŋ-bà*) and */kɔŋkɪŋba/* 'calls (intensive) me' (from *kɔŋ-k(h)i-ŋ-bà*). Thus two phonemes are needed to indicate tone-aspiration and at least two ways of phonemicising ton-aspiration are worth considering.<sup>2</sup> On the morphophonemic level only a single tone-aspiration morphophoneme is needed. It is this morphophoneme, low-tone aspiration or, by another analysis, this set of morphophonemic low-toned vowels that will be discussed here.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The two Korku dialects studied differed in their tone-related phonetics: Lahi (Hoshangabad) Korku has the high and low tone before glottal stop and elsewhere indicated by high and low pitch. Dharni (Amraoti) Korku has the high and low pitch except before glottal stop; high tone followed by glottal stop is phonetically a rising pitch with accompanying glottal constriction and a slight fall and more pronounced glottal closure at the end of the vowel. Low tone followed by glottal stop is actualized by falling pitch with glottal constriction of the vowel and a final rise in pitch and more pronounced glottal closure at the end of the vowel.

<sup>2</sup> Tone-aspiration is discussed at some length in my unpublished dissertation "Korku Phonology and Morphophonemics", University of Pennsylvania, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> One set of vowel morphophonemes proposed in "Korku Phonology and Morphophonemics" (*op. cit.*) consists of three 'inherently low' vowels */I, A, U/*, and five inherently high' */i, e, a, o, u/*.

In Korku only a non-initial syllable can be low but (some) syllable-initial aspirates are found in syllables in all positions in the word. Additional complication arises in treating monosyllables with final glottal stop. These are the only low monosyllables in the language and are invariably low; they contrast with no high monosyllables with final glottal, and despite the 'overlapping' are here considered 'phonemically high.' A more interesting complication results from the conditions of the domain of low tone. A low tone in Korku extends to the end of the 'phonological phrase'<sup>4</sup> in which it occurs, masking or neutralising tone contrast (but not aspiration contrast) in all the following phonemes in the phrase. Thus, e.g., the genitive morpheme *-à(ɓ)* is low. Genitives occur initially in noun phrases, and where they do every syllable following the *-à(ɓ)* is low in tone, e.g., in */#ìṇ-à(ɓ)#èì#sìrì-kù&/* 'my seven she-goats' the low tone of *èì* 'seven' and of *sìrì* 'she-goat' is masked by the automatic low tone falling on every syllable after the *à(ɓ)* and before the phrase-final juncture. A word must be elicited either phonological phrase-initially or in phrases in which it is preceded by high-toned words only for its inherent tone to be identifiable. The morphophonemics of tone-aspiration, then, is somewhat complicated and the validity of the forms presented here (and of the procedures responsible for them) is presupposed.

One might expect that if tone contrasts are frequently masked, tone would not carry much of a functional load in Korku, and this is in fact the case. Monosyllabic words are necessarily high, and the very few pairs of polysyllabic words which contrast only in tone are almost always of different morpheme and form class membership, thus, */momon/* and */momòn/* *mo-mon* 'five each' a reduplicated distributive of *mon*, the combining form of *monoi* 'five', and *momo-èn* 'to the *momo* (a species of snake)'; */rukun/* and */rukùn/*, *rukun* 'to nod', and *ruku-èn* 'to the fly *ruku*'; */hūdar/* and */hūdàr/* *hūdar* 'to prepare food' and *hu(n)-(C)àr* '(in) that way,' from *hu-* 'that' and *-(C)àr* 'manner.'

Historical reconstruction in this paper will concern itself with Proto-Korku-Kherwarian (PKK); only one other daughter language of PKK, Santali, will be compared with Korku. Mundari, the only other language adequately represented by lexical and grammatical materials provides

<sup>4</sup> The 'phonological phrase' is not defined here, and will not be further mentioned; it is identified by phonological criteria, and has a correlated syntactic structure, e.g., most Korku noun phrases are also phonological phrases. The phonological phrase terminal juncture is indicated by an ampersand. (See "Korku Phonology and Morphophonemics", *op. cit.*, for further details.)