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Abstract

This study offers a comprehensive examination of the phonetics, phonology, and morphophonology of tone in Chokri, a language of the Angami-Pochuri group within the Tibeto-Burman family. Through detailed analysis, the research highlights the central role of tone in both lexical contrast and grammatical encoding. The study begins by establishing the phonological foundation of Chokri, documenting its inventory of 34 consonants and 7 vowels, supported by minimal pairs and acoustic measurements. Notably, typologically rare segments such as voiceless aspirated nasals and voiceless unaspirated rhotics add to the phonetic complexity of the language. Phonotactic analysis reveals an open syllable structure (C)(C)V, constrained consonant clusters, and several phonological processes, including deletion, lenition, and tone-driven modifications.

The tonal analysis identifies five distinct tones: extra high, high, mid, low, and rising tone. Tone distribution is asymmetric, with the final syllable acting as the primary tone-bearing unit in bisyllabic words. Furthermore, perception experiments confirm that Chokri speakers rely primarily on pitch, with minimal dependence on secondary acoustic cues.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its detailed examination of Grammatical Tone (GT). GT in Chokri emerges through the process of morpheme deletion, wherein the tonal element of the deleted morpheme survives as a floating tone that attaches to the verb root. Crucially, GT operates under stringent morphosyntactic constraints. Adjacent conditioning governs deletion, permitting only directly adjacent functional morphemes to be deleted, while syntactic hierarchy ensures that lower-ranked functional markers are prioritized for deletion. Despite deletion, grammatical integrity is maintained, as Chokri enforces the presence of at least one overt marker such as the declarative particle compensating for a deleted aspect marker thereby preserving grammatical well-formedness.

Notably, GT interacts with the underlying lexical tone without overwriting it. Instead, it concatenates with the root tone, creating complex tonal melodies that enrich the prosodic architecture of the language. In derivational morphology, GT facilitates the nominalization of verbs and adjectives. Thus, GT in Chokri embodies both grammatical significance and tonal autonomy, demonstrating that tone in Chokri is not merely a marker of lexical distinction but an integral component of grammatical encoding and word formation.

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by Sekholu Tetseo

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