

Tone realizations in the Burmese tonal system: pitch or voice quality?

Authors:

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Abstract:

Tone contrasts are typically realized through pitch contours, however, voice quality correlates (breathy, creaky) not seldom play a role. We investigated, which of these tone realisations, pitch or voice quality, best distinguishing tones across two varieties of Burmese (a) standard Burmese (STB) and (b) southern Burmese (SBM). Burmese historically most likely had voice-quality contrasts, as suggested by the orthography of Old Burmese (12th century), while Modern Burmese has been described as tonal in terms of pitch contrasts, although their labels are typically derived from voice quality terminology (neutral, creaky and heavy). In the talk we describe our data collection in Myanmar in which we recorded acoustic and electroglottographic (EGG) data from a variety of speakers under different conditions and we present results supporting the view that STB predominantly used contrasts through voice quality correlates while SBM used f_0 . We discuss the obtained variability between tonal correlates in the two varieties in relation to possible external influences like language contact or climatic circumstances on tone systems.