

## African Tone in a Tibeto-Burman Language: The Case of Mro Khimi

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At least since the work of Pike, linguists have claimed that there is a basic difference between African and Asian tone systems. More recent typological studies have lent further support to this distinction; Yip devotes 40 pages to common characteristics of African tone systems, followed by 40 pages of various Asian and Pacific tone systems. Tibeto-Burman systems represent a distinct sub-type of Asian tones for Yip.

African tone languages are claimed to be marked by word-level tone melodies tone spreading, polar tone, floating tones and restricted distribution of contour tones. In Asian tone systems, on the other hand, complex tones seem to occur much more freely, different tone patterns incorporate laryngeal and glottal features, and tone changes are more likely to occur between words than within words.

In this paper, we present data from Mro Khimi [cmr] which violate this commonly held distinction. While it is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Myanmar (formerly Burma), its tonal system exhibits African characteristics.

- Complex tones are limited to falls in phrase final position.
- Suffixes are underlyingly toneless, receiving tone from the root.
- Roots have tone of four tone melodies: H, L, HL or LH, but the second tone in HL and LH melodies only surface in forms with suffixes.
- High tones spread to following Low tones that are multiply linked.
- Prefixes take polar tone.

Of particular interest is a non-structure preserving rule that creates mid tones only in verbs.

This is the third Tibeto-Burman language that has been found to exhibit African tone properties, although the actual tone systems in the three are quite different. We claim that this is evidence that African tone systems are less marked than prototypical Asian tone systems: While African tone systems are found in Tibeto-Burman languages, Asian tone systems have not been found in African tone languages.