

Southern Udihe: Contact Induced tonegenesis

1. Tonogenesis, the emergence of tonal oppositions in a language, constitutes a component of the broader inquiry into the causes of language changes and the elucidation of the trajectory of these changes. Language transformation is instigated by various factors, with primary emphasis on two: 1) the impact of other languages, and 2) internal restructuring of the linguistic system. Both factors are relevant for tonogenesis.

The areal factor assumes a significant role in the development of tonal oppositions within a language. Languages exposed to regions where tonal languages hold prominence are more likely to acquire phonological tonal distinctions.

2. The Udihe language (Tungusic < Tungus-Manchu < Altaic) holds a unique position in the Tungus-Manchu language family. One of its peculiarities is the vowel system which contains complex vowels: aspirated (pharyngealized) and glottalized (laryngealized). The specific phonetic realizations of these complex vowels vary among different dialects:

consonant > laryngealized vowel / creaky voice phonation > tone

Cf. the word for 'dog': Oroche [inaqı]; Koppi variety [inæ̃?i] / [inə̃?i]; Khor variety [inæ̃?ai] / [inə̃?ei]; Bikin variey [inə̃?ei] / [inə̃?ei]

3. Janhunen proposed an explanation for the emergence of tonal distinctions in Udihe [Janhunen 1998], suggesting that it may be attributed to the following factors: a) the influence of the tonal Chinese language, and b) the development of tones as a form of "suprasegmental compensation" for the loss of segment sequences. I argue that the primary factor contributing to the appearance of tones in Southern Udihe was the influence of the Chinese language.

The southern dialects of the Udihe language have undergone significant influence from the Chinese language, especially pronounced in the southernmost regions. This influence manifested itself at all levels of language, including phonetics, morphology and vocabulary. In essence, there was a linguistic shift towards the Chinese language, which reached its culmination among the southernmost groups of Udihe, who became a component of the Chinese-speaking ethnic minority of mixed origin (the Tazy).

4. Conclusions. The appearance of tonal differences in the southern Udihe (the only case in the Tungusic language group) has to be explained by the fact that these varieties became part of the Sinosphere [Matisoff 1990]; the widespread introduction of Chinese vocabulary was to play a decisive role in this process.

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