

CHAPTER 6

TONE

6.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the tone in the language.

6.1 Tone

To define tone, Pike (1949:3) defines “a tonal language as a language having lexically significant, contrastive, but relative pitch on each syllable”. Burquest (1993:186) also asserts that “languages which make use of differences in pitch to differentiate lexical items are commonly referred to as tone languages.”

Based on the two proposals above, Syriem is a tonal language in which every syllable carries one of the three underlying tones. In isolation, three tones have been established: rising (low to high rise), falling (high to low fall) and low tone (fairly level but downslide before a pause). The following tonal transcriptions and abbreviations are adopted in this study:

[ǎ] R rising tone

[â] F falling tone

[à] L low tone

6.1.1 Rising tone

The rising tone starts from a little above mid voice range and rises and relatively falls to mid voice range. The pitch pattern is shown below.

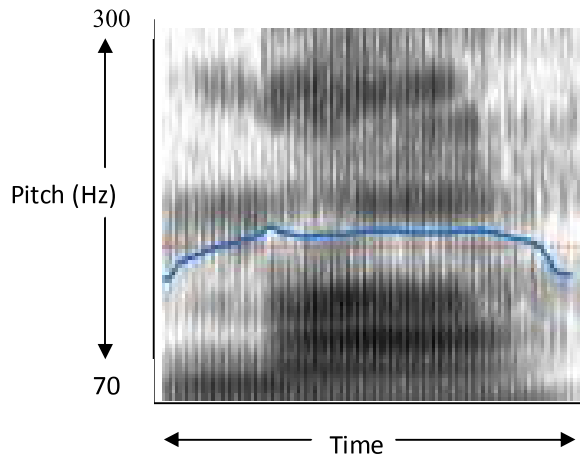


Figure 17: Pitch pattern of an open monosyllabic word with rising tone ‘fish’ /ŋää/

Rising tone occurs in both open and closed syllable. The open syllable has no restriction on the types of vowel. In closed syllables both short and long vowels can be found with nasals and stopped syllables.

<i>Open rhyme</i>	<i>Nasals</i>	<i>Liquid</i>	<i>Stopped syllables</i>
rũu ‘bone’	t ^h ũm ‘three’	ũy ‘dog’	vők ‘pig’
nũu ‘mother’	vũun ‘skin’	mũul ‘feather’	tsöp ‘suck’
ļää ‘wing’	t ^h liŋ ‘wood’	t ^h ir ‘iron’	lũut ‘enter’

In closed syllables with rising tone, the final consonant is restricted to voiceless stop series *p, t, k*, the nasal series *m, n, ŋ*, lateral *l*, trill *r* and approximant *y*.

6.1.2 Falling tone

The falling tone starts from a fairly high voice range and gradually falls to a very lower voice range.

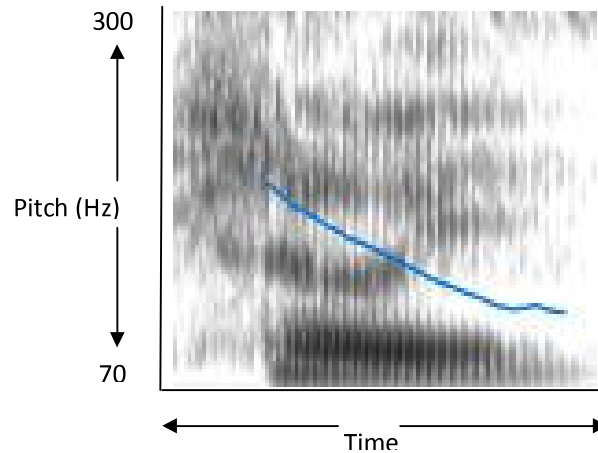


Figure 18: Pitch pattern of a close monosyllabic word with falling tone ‘jhum’ /lôy/

Falling tone can occur with both open and closed syllables. In closed syllables both short and long vowel can occur with nasals and stopped syllables.

<i>Open rhyme</i>	<i>Nasal</i>	<i>Liquid</i>	<i>Stopped syllable</i>
sâa ‘animal’	zôoŋ ‘monkey’	k ^h ôoj ‘bee’	hlôk ‘brain’
t ^h ûu ‘word’	anthêŋ ‘clear’	tsiil ‘saliva’	êk ‘excreta’
t ^h i ‘blood’	indôn ‘to ask’	ŋâar ‘nose’	tûum ‘who’

6.1.3 Low tone

The low tone starts at a low position of the voice range and may fall slightly to extra low at the end point.

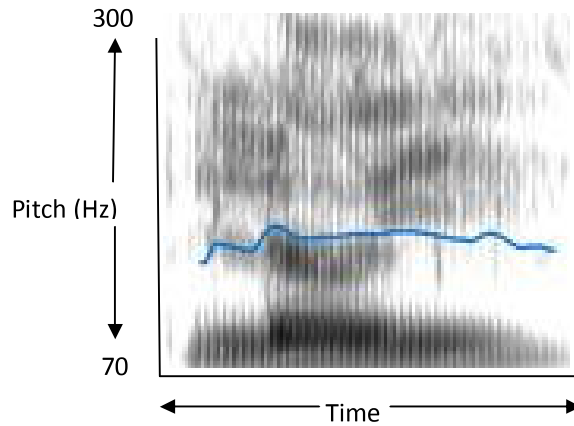


Figure 19: Pitch pattern of a close monosyllabic word with low tone ‘medicine’ /l̥òy/

Low tone occurs in both open and closed syllables.

<i>Open rhyme</i>	<i>Nasals</i>	<i>Liquid</i>	<i>Stopped syllables</i>
bùu ‘cooked rice’	kùm ‘year’	k ^h ùur ‘cave’	nàp ‘mucus’
k ^h ò ‘village’	sòlám ‘east’	p ^h ùuy ‘dry’	mìt ‘eye’
nì ‘two’	ṇàm ‘push’	nùuy ‘smile’	k ^h àt ‘one’

6.1.4 Contrasts

The occurrences of each of the three contrastive tones are provided below with the help of minimal and near minimal pairs:

l̥i ‘wind’	in ‘house’	ṇǎ ‘fish’	l̥y ‘jhum’
l̥i ‘pus’	in ‘drink’	ṇâ ‘five’	l̥y ‘medicine’
l̥i ‘to obstruct’	in ‘instrumental’	ṇàak ‘to wait’	l̥y ‘take’

Figure 20 and 21 show the spectrographic image of three tones in Syriem in contrast.

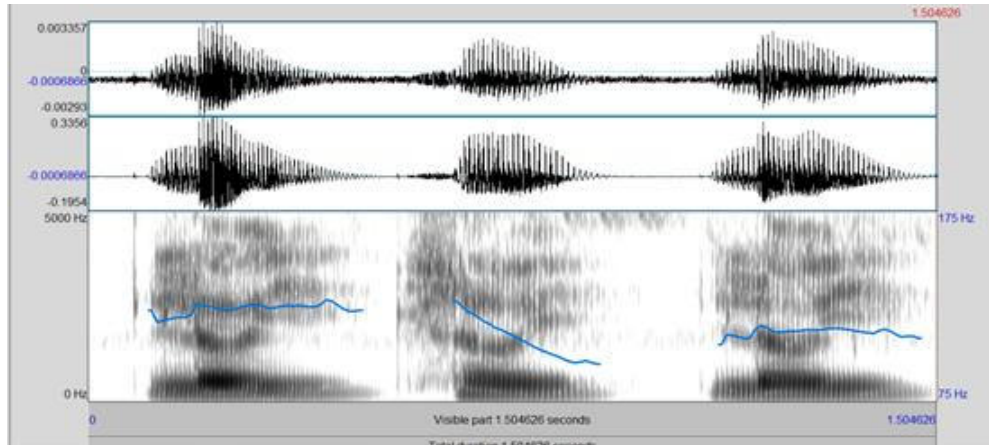


Figure 20: Syriem tone: ʎöy (R) ‘jhum’ löy (F) ‘take’ ʎöy (L) ‘medicine’

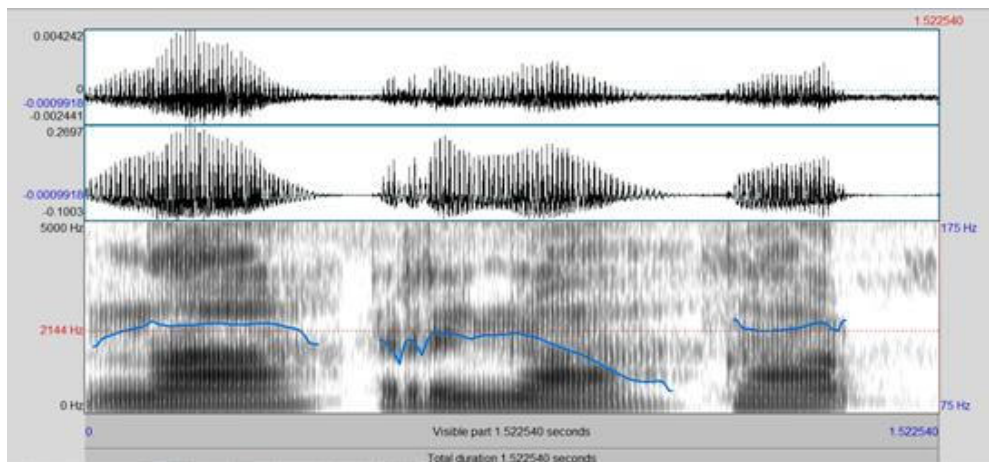
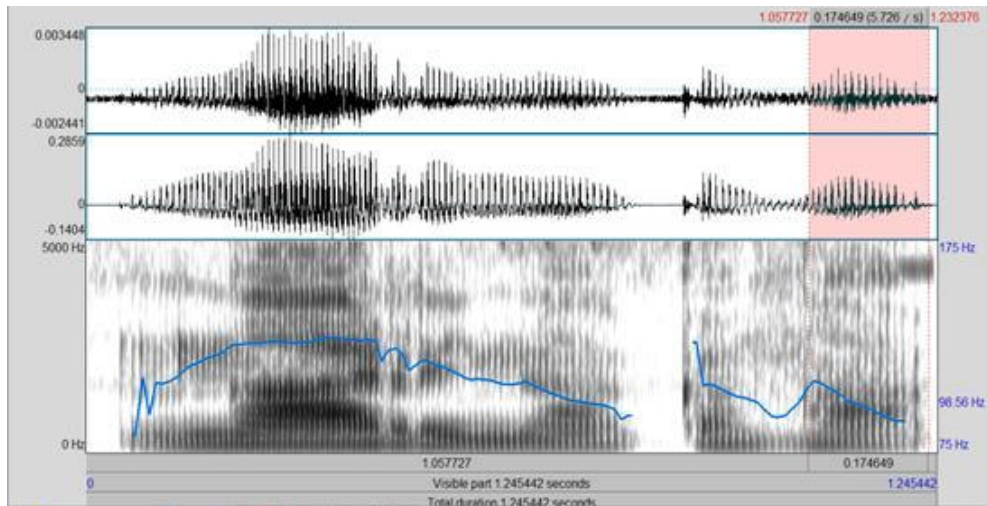


Figure 21: Syriem tone: ɳăa (R) ‘fish’ ɳăa (F) ‘five’ ɳàak (L) ‘wait’

Figure 22 is the spectrographic image of the three tones in a carrier phrase in which all the three tones occur. The carrier phrase is as follows: ‘I waited for five fish’



ḡariḡaakaḡaak ‘I waited for five fish’

Figure 22: Syriem tone in sentence

6.1.5 Tonal dissimilation

Among the three contrastive tones, low tone has two kinds of tone dissimilation patterns. The first tone dissimilation occurs when low tone verbs and nouns with live syllables are preceded by other low tone syllables, especially the pronominal markers (or subject agreement markers before a verb) such as /kà/ ‘my (I)’, /tà/ ‘your (you)’, and /à/ ‘his/her/its (s/he, it)’, the preceding tone is falling. This occurs whether the following syllable is closed or open. Only low tone allows this tone dissimilation pattern.

/k^hò/ ‘village’

kâ khò ‘my village’

tâ khò ‘your village’

â khò ‘his/her village’

/mìt/ ‘eye’

kâ mìt ‘my eye’

tâ mìt ‘your eye’

â mìt ‘his/her eye’

The second tone dissimilation occurs when low tone verbs and nouns in dead syllables are preceded by other low tone syllables, especially the pronominal clitics, the preceding tone stays the same and the second syllable is rising as in:

/kàl/ ‘kidney’

kà kǎl ‘my kidney’

tà kǎl ‘your kidney’

à kǎl ‘his/her kidney’

/tǎp/ ‘to cry’

kà tǎp ee ‘I cry’

tà tǎp ee ‘you cry’

à tǎp ee ‘he/she cry’

In the case of low tone dissimilation, if the first syllable is closed there is no tone dissimilation regardless of whether the second syllable is open or closed.

/vòk/ ‘pig’

vòk ràat ‘strong pig’

zâan vòk ‘night pig’

6.1.6 Tone sandhi

According to Burquest (1993:195), “Tone sandhi is a morphophonemic alternation among the tone phonemes of a language.” Chen (2000:49) also notes that sandhi occurs because “tones associated with syllables in connected speech tend to merge.” Falam also has a tonemic alternation that requires sandhi rules. This section presents tone sandhi that occurs in rising tone and falling tones. The sandhi form of tone will be marked with bold. Low tone undergo no sandhi rule.

There is a tone sandhi rule which affects rising tone syllables ending with vowels (open syllables). Although, there is no high tone in isolation, the rising tone of such syllables is high and the vowel also becomes short in connected speech regardless of the tone of preceding or following syllables. Rising tone syllables retain their underlying tone in isolation or in sentence final position.

Rule: R → H / __ T

/thǐi/ ‘to die’

à **thǔ**

1Sg. die

He died.

ǎn **thǔ**

1Pl. die

They died.

thí à tì

die 1Sg. will

He will die.

thí ǎn tì

die 1Pl. will

They will die.

à **thí** màa

1Sg. die Neg.

He is not dead.

ǎn **thí** màa

1Pl. die Neg.

They are not dead.

Rising tone sandhi rule with closed syllables requires the following environments.

A rising tone becomes low when it occurs before falling tone.

Rule: R → L/___F

rǒol ‘food’

ròol rīŋ kàn bàk

food green we eat

We eat green food.

But rising tone with closed syllable stays the same when it occurs before low tone

as in:

rǒol ‘food’

rǒol dik kà bàk

food correct I eat

I eat the correct food.

When two syllables of rising tone come together in connected speech, a rising tone directly following another rising tone changes into a high tone.

Rule: R → H/ __R

/tsũu tsãaŋ/ → [tsúu tsâaŋ]

sugarcane segment ‘segment of sugarcane’

When three syllables of rising tone come together in a phrase, the first two syllables undergo the L H pattern and the third syllable remains unchanged as in

Rule: R R R → L H R

/mëeŋ ɛŋ löoŋ/ → [mèeŋ éŋ löoŋ]

cat yellow big ‘big yellow cat’

When a preference is to be four syllables long, it creates a (syllableL syllableH) (syllableL syllableH) pattern. It is assumed that the sequence of the L H sandhi pattern of two rising tone syllables is basically derived from the rule that rising tone always becomes low before high tone and falling tone.

There is a tone sandhi rule which affects falling tone syllables with vowel finals (open syllables). The tone of such syllables becomes high (and the vowel shortening) when followed by a low tone syllable as in (34) and becomes low when followed by a high tone as in (35). No tone alternations are found when followed by any other tone syllables. Falling tone syllables retain their underlying rising tone in isolation or in sentence final position.

Rule: F → H / L__T

/khâa/ 'to be bitter'

à khâa èe

3Sg. bitter Decl.

It is bitter.

à **khá** thêy

3Sg bitter may

It may be bitter.

à **khá** màa

3Sg. bitter Neg.

It is not bitter.

Rule: HL → L/H__T

/khâa/ 'to be bitter'

ăn khâa

3Pl. bitter

They are bitter.

ăn **khà** tì

3Pl. bitter will

They will bitter.

ăn **khà** thêy

3Pl. bitter may

They may be bitter.

ǎn **khà** màa

3Pl. bitter Neg.

They are not bitter.

Low tone undergoes no tone sandhi. A rising tone open syllable becomes high when it occurs before any tone syllables. But a rising tone closed syllable becomes low when followed by another rising tone syllable, which itself becomes high. The rising tone converts a rising tone directly following another rising tone into a high tone. Falling tone open syllables become low when preceded by a high tone syllable and becomes high when preceded by a low tone. Falling tone closed syllables undergo no tone sandhi.

6.1.7 Tone distribution

This section provides tone distributions in a syllable. In Syriem a tone occurs on the whole syllable as a unit, of which the vowel is the peak. All three tones can occur with all vowels. The relation between tone and syllable structure is different according to its environment. Syllables retain their underlying tones in isolation. In other places some alternations of tones occur according to their neighboring tone. The following table illustrates tone distributions in a syllable.

Syllable				
Tones	Initial consonants	Open rhyme	Sonorant finals	Stop finals
Low tone	All consonants	Monophthong	m n ŋ r l w j	p t k
		Long nucleus	m n ŋ r l w j	- - -
		Diphthong	m n ŋ r l w j	- - -
Rising tone	All consonants	Monophthong	m n ŋ r l w j	- - - -
		Long nucleus	m n ŋ r l w j	p t k ?
Falling tone	All consonants	Monophthong	m n ŋ r l w j	p t k
		Long nucleus	m n ŋ r l w j	p t k
		Diphthong	m n ŋ r l w j	p t k

Table 11. Tone distributions

As shown in the table above, all consonants are possible with all tones. Monophthongs, long vowels, and diphthongs can occur in the open rhyme of syllables with all tones. Two glides /w/ and /j/ significantly occur word finally in a syllable. Low tone never allows final stops with long nucleus and diphthong. Rising tone does not allow sonorant finals and final stops /p, t, k, ?/ only with a diphthong. Falling tone allows all finals with monophthongs, long nuclei and diphthong.