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Title of proposed paper: Typological features of prosody in three Tibeto-Burman languages of Nagaland

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Abstract of proposed paper:

This paper describes the typology of prosodic features — subsumed by tone, intonation and a prosodic phoneme — in Khamniungan, Chang and Ao, three Tibeto-Burman languages of Nagaland, a mountainous state of north-east India. Khamniungan is a little-known language of the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw branch, spoken in Tuensang district and in villages located on the eastern shoulder of the Saramati Range in adjacent areas of Burma. Chang, also belonging to the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw branch, is spoken on ranges found immediately west of the Khamniungan-speaking area. Ao is spoken in the Mokokchung district of Nagaland on ranges situated between the Chang-speaking area and the Plain of Assam. The higher level genetic affiliation of Ao is yet to be convincingly established. While it is clearly not a member of the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, the existence of substantial Ao/Chang bilingualism in villages adjacent to the shared border has resulted in the borrowing of some linguistic features, presumably as a direct result of this intensive contact situation.

In addition to having the ubiquitous three-height system of level tones found in Ao dialects and many other languages of Nagaland, Chang and Khamniungan are somewhat unusual for also demonstrating falling tones, and Khamniungan is even more so for the presence of a rising tone in its six-toneme system. This perhaps makes it the most tonally complex representative to be found amongst the Tibeto-Burman languages of north-east India. Acoustic and auditory analyses of the three tonal systems will be presented and compared. The analysis of tone in these languages is made all the more challenging by the presence of intonation patterns that override and distort the lexical tones of individual syllables in naturally spoken language. Intonation potentially carries the lexical tones of individual syllables either lower or higher than their usual realisations, according to their position of occurrence on the intonational wave. Intonation patterns serve a pragmatic function: some operate as boundary signals that delineate phrasal and clausal boundaries, while others are used to indicate topic continuity or change.

The third feature to be discussed is a prosodic glottal stop that is common to all three languages. This is uniformly deleted in the environment of a syllable boundary, suggesting that it too serves as a type of boundary signal at the level of the word.