



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI  
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of the Student : PRITI RAYCHOUDHURY  
Roll Number : 146141012  
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Name of Thesis Supervisor(s) : PROF. SHAKUNTALA MAHANTA  
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**SHORT ABSTRACT**

This dissertation discusses the nature of prosodic features of Sylheti, an Indo-Aryan language (ISO 15924), also debatably a dialect of Bengali. It aims to present the correlation between components of the prosodic hierarchy in the language and the components of its grammar. It is an attempt to present a typological study of Sylheti that evolved into a tone language, independently from the group of the language family to which it genetically belongs. It presents an overall view of tone and intonation in the language and shows how these connect to sound systems and grammar. The language exhibits a three-way tonal contrast, distinguishing the High, Mid, and Low lexical tones. The tonogenetic factors contributed by the instability of the diachronic four-way laryngeal contrast conditioned a three-way tonal contrast in Sylheti depending on the voicing and syllabic position of the sound. Tonogenesis is one of the central aspects of the phonology of the language, as a detailed study on the phonetics and phonology of the three-way tonal system of the language reveals the factors behind the difference in the tonal behaviour at the post-lexical level such as the difference between the complex morphemes and compounds in the language.

Since the phonetic correlate of tone and prosodic hierarchy is variation in  $f_0$  (Beckman & Pierrehumbert, 1986; Nespor & Vogel, 1986), we study the tonal domain of phonological words

to analyse the typological aspect of the language. This component of the grammar has been attested as one of the significant domains to understand the typology of tone languages (Ratliff, 2015). This dissertation thus makes one of the first attempts to study both the domains of complex stems and compound words in Sylheti. The study of these domains exhibits a predominant structure of tonal polarity represented by a polar LH or HL tone contours and a uniform LHL melody in compound stems. The inherent nature of the tonal polarity in complex stems is neutralised by the lexical Mid tone, which gives an interesting insight into the correlation between prosodic hierarchy and tonogenetic aspect in the language. The domain of compound words exhibits a canonical LHL tonal melody, and this structure is marked by a uniform rise (LH) on the leftmost word in majority of the compound stems regardless of their underlying tonal specifications. This aspect of these words provides a very interesting aspect of grammar and its correlation with prosody in the language.

This dissertation also presents a preliminary attempt to understand the intonational system of a language from a typological and descriptive perspective by studying the interaction between tone and intonation. This study thus primarily presents a detailed investigation into the phonetics and phonology of tone and its interaction with the components of grammar in Sylheti to provide a wide picture of the prosodic hierarchy of a tonal language that genetically belongs to a non-tonal language family and is geographically surrounded by numerous tonal languages.