

Indexical and iconic prosody in Anāl (Trans-Himalayan (TH); Manipur, India)

A widespread phenomenon in many Tibeto-Burman languages of South-East Asia, North-East India and China is a pronunciation of a syllable with an extra-high pitch and/or extreme length, used to impart it a distinct “emphatic” interpretation. It has been briefly described as “paralinguistic emphasis” for a number of languages (e.g. Matisoff 1994:117 for Lahu). This phenomenon has evident cross-linguistic parallels (Ogden 2012; Niebuhr 2010). However, no study addressed it in detail for any TH language and detailed research on parallel phenomena in other languages is also scarce (e.g. Simard 2013). This study examines the phenomenon in Anal, a South-Central (Kuki-Chin) TH language. It is based on 260 examples collected from 1.5 hours of narratives/interviews and 25 minutes of spontaneous speech.

The deviant prosody can be divided into two groups. The first group is characterised by an extreme deviation of the pitch (falsetto voice) and/or considerable lengthening of the syllable. This is found almost exclusively on grammatical morphemes (suffixes) denoting:

- (i) an edge degree or precision on the scale of quantity or time (e.g. distributive, augmentative and durative verbal suffixes). Consider Figure 1, where the affected syllable is the augmentative suffix *dé*: While the average pitch of the rest of the intonation unit is 220Hz, the affected suffix is over 500Hz high and the extreme length is evident.
- (ii) depictive/mimetic communication: ideophones and verbal ideophonic suffixes, as in Figure 2.
- (iii) distal demonstrative *lé*, accompanied by a pointing gesture
- (iv) emotive suffixes (e.g. a pity-expressing suffix) and interjections

The second group of examples is characterised by a deviation and often lengthening of the *last syllable* of the intonation unit. This results in a syllable much higher and longer than the rest of the unit, yet much lower than the falsetto-voice examples above. This usage is a contact-establishing, addressee-engaging prosody found in appeal particles, agreement- or back-channelling (Figure 3) seeking particles, vocatives etc. Remarkably, it also grammaticalized as the question-marking prosody, replacing the question particle =*mo* found throughout the group.

While the first group is closely related to the concept of “expressive communication”, discussed primarily for ideophones (see e.g. Sicoli 2014 and the references therein), the second group appears to represent a case of “indexical performance structures” (Noel Aziz Hanna and Sonnenhauser 2013). I propose to unify the view of the two for Anal: pitch deviation indexes the speakers’ engagement-triggering appeal to the interlocutor. This suffices for the indexing appealing-vocative particles of the second group. In the case of the first group the speaker may additionally express in an iconic way their affective attitude with respect to the content, requesting an interpretive work on the side of the listener as for the reasons for this involvement (cf. Nuckolls 1996:96; Sicoli 2014:451).

Hence, these phenomena demonstrate the conventionalized role of iconic and indexical communication in language. Remarkably, this prosody in Anal occurs on a restricted set of suffixes and even appears to have grammaticalized as question-marking. The study also sheds light on the notion of “emphasis” suggesting that in the current case the actual phenomenon is addressee-engagement by dedicated non-arbitrary means.

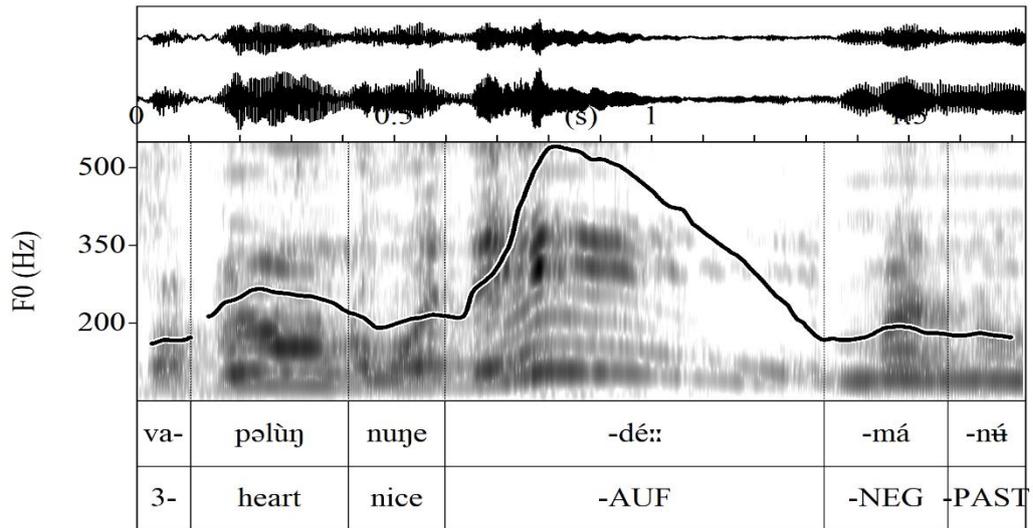


Figure 1

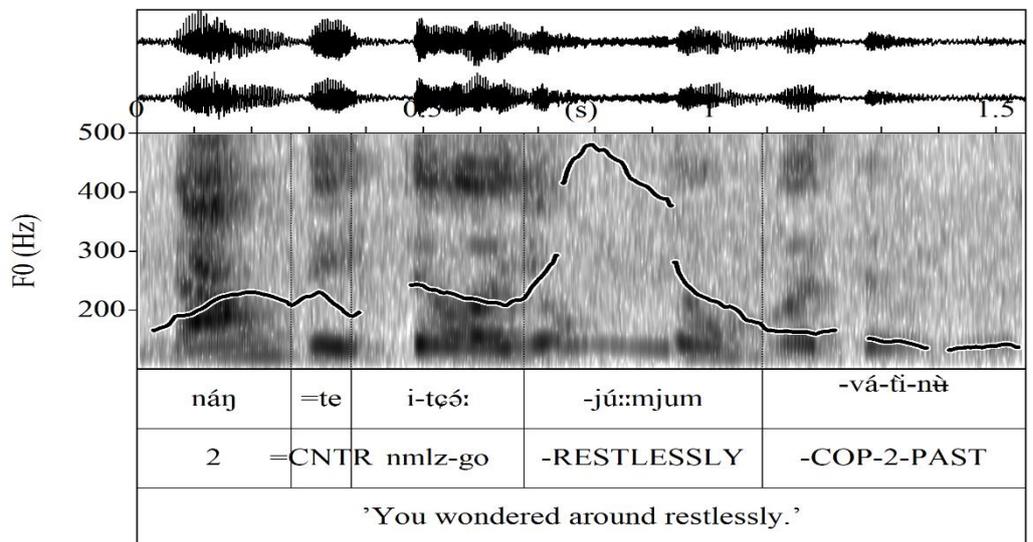


Figure 2

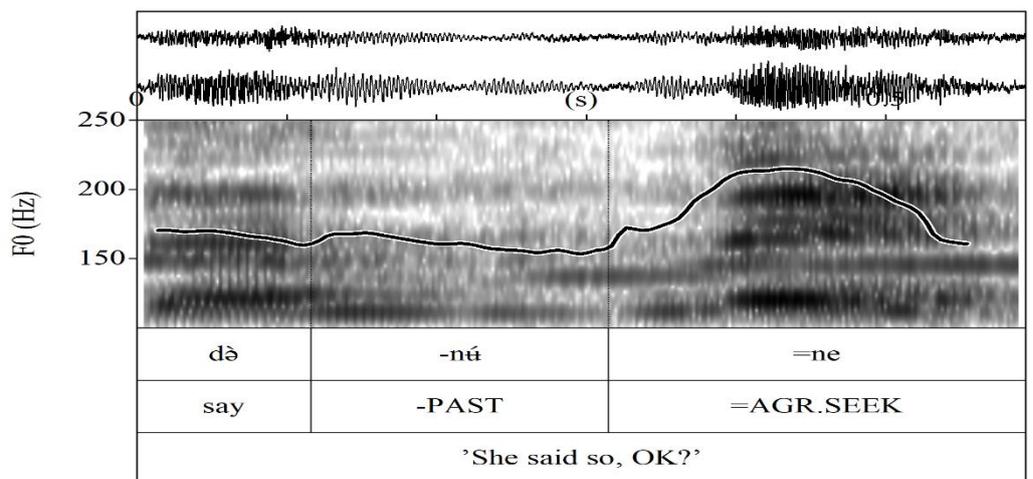


Figure 3

References:

- Matisoff, James A. 1994. "Tone, Intonation, and Sound Symbolism in Lahu: Loading the Syllable Canon." In *Sound Symbolism*, edited by John Ohala, Leanne Hinton, and Johanna Nichols, 115–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Niebuhr, Oliver. 2010. "On the Phonetics of Intensifying Emphasis in German." *Phonetica* 67 (3): 170–98. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000321054>.
- Noel Aziz Hanna, Patrizia, and Barbara Sonnenhauser. 2013. "Vocatives as Functional Performance Structures." In *Vocative!, Addressing between System and Performance*, edited by Barbara Sonnenhauser and Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna, 283–303. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110304176>.
- Nuckolls, Janis B. 1996. *Sounds like Life Sound-Symbolic Grammar, Performance, and Cognition in Pastaza Quechua*. Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics 2. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ogden, Richard. 2012. "Making Sense of Outliers." *Phonetica* 69 (1–2): 48–67. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000343197>.
- Sicoli, Mark A. 2014. "Ideophones, Rhemes, Interpretants." In *Ideophones: Between Grammar and Poetry*, edited by Katherine Lahti, Rusty Barrett, and Anthony K. Webster, 3:445–454. Pragmatics and Society 5. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi.org/10.1075/ps.5.3.08sic.
- Simard, Candide. 2013. "Prosody and Function of 'Iconic Lengthening' in Jaminjung." *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics* 16. <http://www.soas.ac.uk/linguistics/research/workingpapers/volume-16/>.