

ABSTRACT

The Semitone Values of the Four Lexical Tones of Ban Pa La-u Sgaw Karen

Sujinat Jitwiriyant

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand
E-mail: sujinat.j@gmail.com

According to previous studies, Sgaw Karen has three to four lexical tones, i.e. /high/, /mid/ and /low/ (Jones 1961a, Ratanakul 1986b) or /mid/, /breathy high/, /breathy low/ and /creaky low/ (Dhananjayananda 1983) or /mid high/, /mid/, /mid-low/ and /low/ (Lar Baa 2001) in non-checked syllables and two in checked syllables, i.e. /high/ and /low/. Even though Pa La-u Sgaw Karen also has four tones, it is interesting to find a falling tone in non-checked syllables.

To confirm our phonological analysis, an acoustic analysis of tones occurring in citation forms was attempted. The fundamental frequencies (F0) in hertz of the four tones were measured and then converted into semitone values to help minimize the variations among the pronunciation of the six female speakers. In addition, time and semitone values were used to generate 2nd degree polynomial or quadratic equations and trendlines to illustrate the details of the pitch contour shape.

The results of the acoustical measurements revealed the phonetic characteristics of the four lexical tones as follows: the *low tone* was mid-falling or low-falling, the *mid tone* was mid level, the *high tone* was mid-high level and the *falling tone* was high-falling. As well as the pitch-height differences between the low tone and the falling tone, the differences between the shapes of these two tones were also obvious, i.e. the endpoint of the falling tone was always higher than that of the low tone. Moreover, the falling tone had a steeper contour than the low tone due to an abrupt fall. In checked syllables, the high and low tones were realized as high-falling and low-falling.

Probably the falling tone in non-checked syllables of Pa La-u Sgaw Karen has resulted from language contact. The inhabitants are the Sgaw (Karang) and the Pwo (Kariang) who are Thai citizens and Burmese refugees. It is widely known that one of the four tones in Pwo Karen is a falling tone.