

Is Dongolese Still a Tone Language?

Al-Amin Abu-Manga

More than 80 years ago Almkvist (1911) was able to detect only one tonally distinguished minimal pair; that is 'an 'for me' and `an 'for us'. Both Schäfer (1912) and Heinitz (1913) confirmed the above finding for Kenzi (a dialectal variant of Dongolese). About two decades later, Westermann and Ward (1933) concluded: "Nuba has only one word left; my and our are distinguished by tone. Armbruster (1960), on the other hand, found Dongolese to be a 'stress' rather than 'tone' language. A few months ago Nasir Satti, a Dongolese MT speaker, tried in his PhD thesis to prove that tone has a dynamic lexical and morphological function in Dongolese. In other words, Dongolese for him is an adequately tone language.

The data I have been collecting on tone in Dongolese (as the focal subject of my presentation) and Nobiin, Ghulfan and Meidob (for the purpose of comparison) has revealed a bit different picture. On the basis of tonal BEHAVIOUR in Dongolese, compared with the tonal behaviour in the other three above sister languages, I will argue in this paper that:

- a- Tone is indeed one of the phonological characteristics of Dongolese.*
- b- Tone has a limited function in Dongolese.*
- c- Dongolese is undergoing a process of tonal loss.*

I will then indicate the linguistic signs of this tonal loss and the extra-linguistic reasons behind it.