

## Revisiting East !Xoon verb tones

*Anonymous*

*Erewhon*

The San language !Xoon (!Xóǒ, Taa) is best known for its extensive consonant and vowel inventory, but it also has a remarkably rich gender system in nouns, and a complex concordial structure influenced (it appears) by both semantic and phonological factors. In Traill's long study of the language, one of the most troubling features of concord was the assignment of tones to dependent verbs. Recent work on other dialects by the DoBeS project based in Leipzig makes it appropriate to revisit this question.

Traill (1985) analysed East !Xoon tones with four surface values: high (H), mid-level (M), mid-falling (MF) and low (L), notated  $\acute{a}$ ,  $\bar{a}$ ,  $\hat{a}$ ,  $\grave{a}$ . Some (mostly, but not entirely, bimoraic) forms, in particular nouns, bear lexical tone. Nouns fall into five classes, and two 'tone classes' (which may vary between singular and plural). The classes determine the segmental component of concordially varying dependent forms (transitive verbs, adjectives, relatives etc.); the tone classes determine the tones of dependent forms. For the post-head (!Xoon is an SVO, NAdj language in which the O is the concordial head) dependent forms, the tones are relatively straightforward: mid(-ish) after tone class I, low(-ish) after tone class II. For the pre-head dependent verb, they are not. Dependent verbs appear to bear H, M or L tone ('dep-H' etc.); but though there is a correlation with the lexical tone of the nominal form of the verb, it is far from perfect: H verbs are always dep-H; L are dep-L with one exception; but M and MF are mixed. This puzzle was one of Traill's main reasons for rejecting any analysis of the tones in terms of sequences of simpler tones.

Recently, the DoBeS project has been documenting !Xoon, chiefly Western dialects. Naumann (2008)<sup>1</sup>, refined in (2009), has argued, with extensive phonetic analysis, that West !Xoon can be accounted for with two monomoraic tonemes H and L. Both verbs and nouns have a monomoraic root (H or L), and the second mora is a class marker or concordial agreement morpheme, also with a tone. Thus the bimoraic word can have tones HH, LH, HL, LL, corresponding quite naturally to Traill's surface tones. Kießling (2008) has shown that the noun classes and tone classes are really a single system of six (Western) or seven (Eastern) genders, each determining the class suffix and tone, and the segmental and tonal concord; and Naumann explains verbs similarly in West !Xoon.

Returning to East !Xoon, using the expanded and revised set of data available in Traill's later (1994) dictionary, we find:

The 70 H verbs split 63,3,4 into dep-H,M,L. The 82 L verbs split 6,2,74. The 40 M verbs split 6,25,9. The 40 MF verbs split 25,0,15. On the face of it, this simply makes the situation even worse than it was in (Traill 1985), with more exceptions to explain. However, examination of the detail shows some patterns, of varying strength. There is a correlation between -LV forms<sup>2</sup> and unexpected dep-L verbs (and a negative correlation between -LV and unexpected dep-H). Very curiously, an M verb is dep-L iff it is vowel-initial. The position with MF verbs remains mysterious, with no discernible pattern between the dep-H and dep-L forms.

In the remainder of the presentation, we will speculate on some possible analyses of this data, such as interference from the L nominalizing suffix -sà on the tones of nominals, hiding an inherent tone in the verb 2nd mora.

---

<sup>1</sup>This article is unfortunately not yet available to us, so we are relying on citations.

<sup>2</sup>The four segmental dependent concordial forms are noted -V, -BV, -LV, -JV.

## References

- Kießling, R. (2008). Noun classification in !xoon. In S. Ermisch (Ed.), *Khoisan Languages and Linguistics: Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium January 8–12, 2006, Riezlern/Kleinwalsertal*. Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Naumann, C. (2008). High and low tone in Taa ǀaa. In S. Ermisch (Ed.), *Khoisan Languages and Linguistics: Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium January 8–12, 2006, Riezlern/Kleinwalsertal*. Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Naumann, C. (2009). The phoneme inventory of Taa (West !Xoon dialect). .
- Traill, A. (1985). *Phonetic and Phonological Studies of !Xóǀ Bushman*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Traill, A. (1994). *A !Xóǀ Dictionary*. Köln: Köppe.