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On the retention of an old feature in the Tamang dialect of Taglung (Tibeto-Burman, Nepal)



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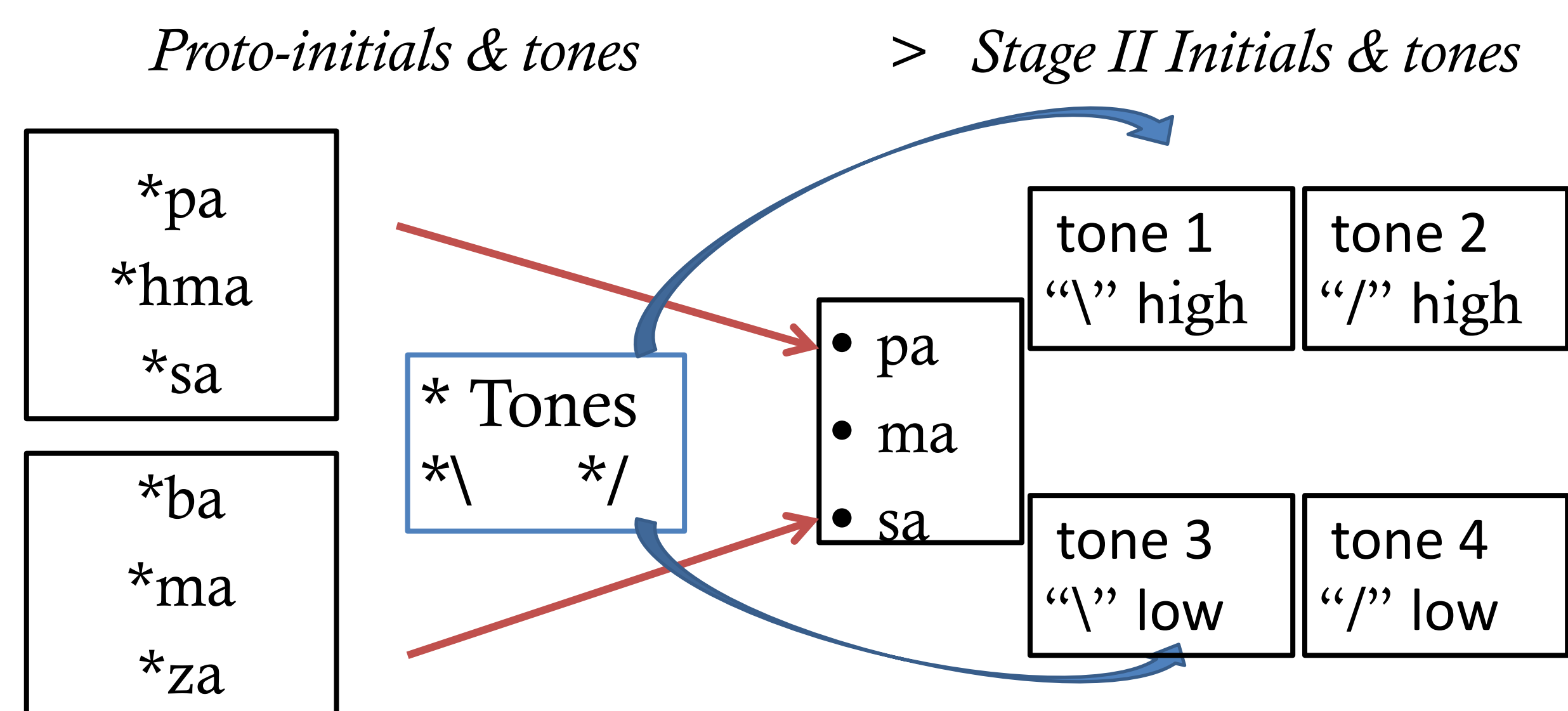


Background

Areal diffusion of the sound change

- Starting around 1000 AD in China, with progressive **devoicing of oral stops**
- Spreading to the South and West, across language families, often with simultaneous **voicing of previously voiceless sonorants**
- Resulting in a **tonal split** as the consonant series merge (Haudricourt, 1961, 1972)

Schematic view of the Asian consonant merger and tonal split



Intermediate stage of the sound change

- New low tones accompanied with **breathiness**
- Some **voicing** of the initial stops retained
- Retention of these old features viewed as a historical transition, e.g., in Wu Chinese, and the languages of the Tamang group...

Various patterns of retention of old features in Tamangish languages

- In all Tamangish languages: Voicing never retained on /s/; voicelessness never retained on sonorants
- Whereas, **for stops (stop onset words)**:
 - **Gurung**: voicing retained only on simple C on tone 4 (low), breathiness retained as enhancement of the two low tones
 - **Risiangku Tamang**: voicing and breathiness retained as enhancement of the two low tones, no distributional regularities (Mazaudon & Michaud, 2008)
 - **Manang**: tone 3>[high], voicing or breathiness NOT retained
 - **Taglung Tamang**: tone 4>[high], what happens to voicing and breathiness?

This study

In Taglung Tamang, when one tone of the low series (tone 4) becomes [high], voicing and breathiness cannot be considered as enhancing features of the tone anymore,
 ➤ **What happens to these old features?** ➤ **Are there any distributional regularities?**

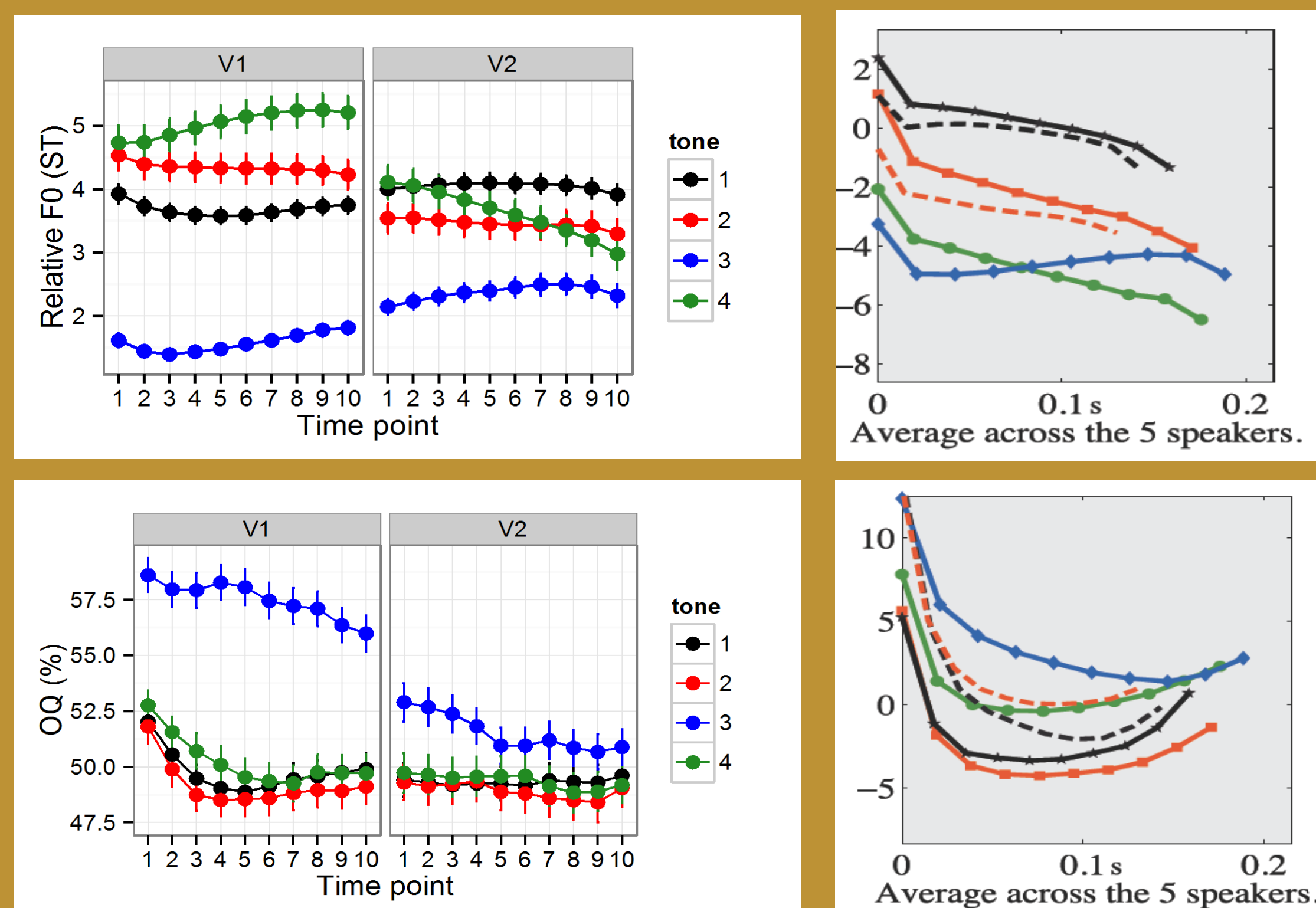
Method

- When: November 2015; March-April 2017; Where: Taglung village, Nepal
- Who: bilingual speakers (Tag & Nepali), M1 (mid-30), M2 (50+), F1 (40+), F2 (70+)
- How: simultaneous **audio** and **electroglottographic** (EGG) data, for detection of the voicing, measurement of F0, and OQ (open quotient, higher values indicating breathier voice)
- What: **C_i(L)V(C_f)** (stem) + nominal/verbal suffix, in isolation and carrier sentences
 Ci (subset) = /p, t, ts, t̥, k/; V = /i, i:, e, e:, u, u:, o, o:, a, a:/; L = /l, r, j, w/; Cf = /p, t, s, k, m, n, ŋ, l, r, j/.

Results: F0 and breathiness

(only stop Ci open syllables, averaged for 3 speakers)

Breathiness retained on T3, lost on T4 in Tag.



Taglung (word) vs. Risiangku (σ1)
 F0 (above) and OQ (below) contours of the 4 tones

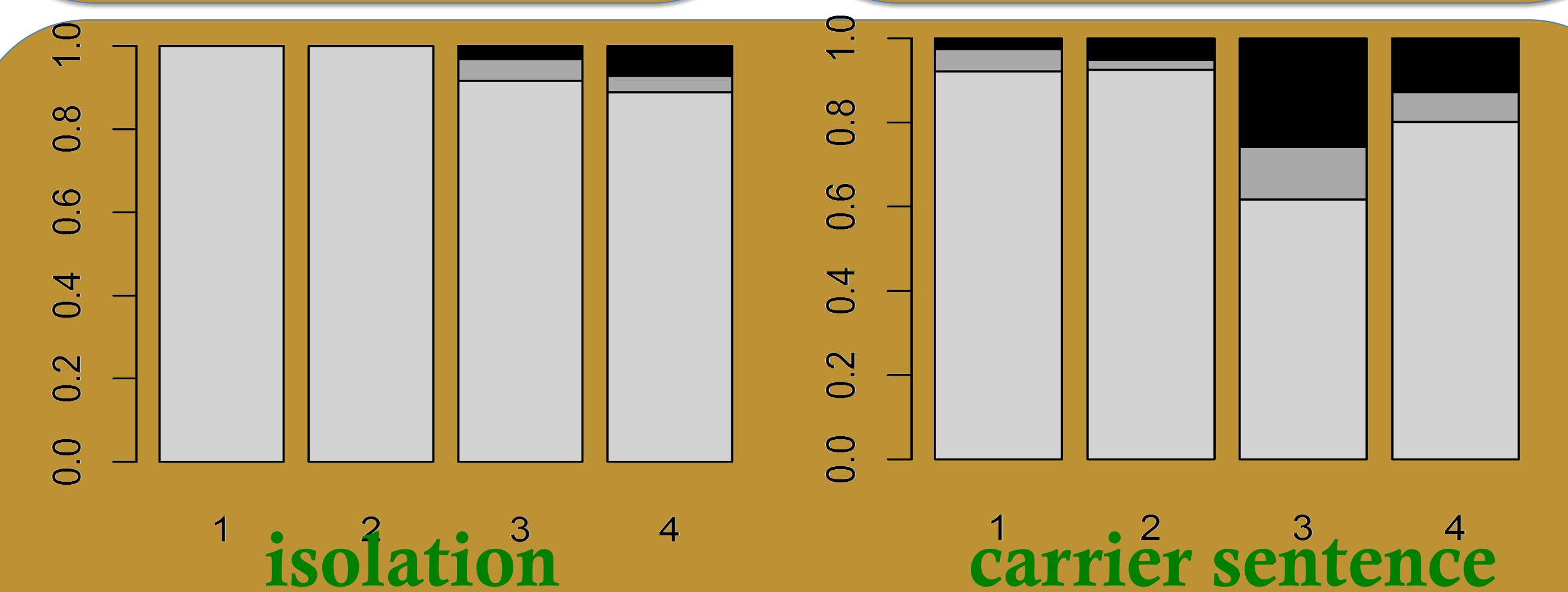
Results: Voicing (4 speakers)

Quasi-systematically voiced T4 items

- ⁴bli ‘four’ (except when preceded by a classifier)
- ⁴bre: ‘eight’
- ⁴bra: ‘cliff’
- ⁴baŋ ‘strength’
- ⁴baŋba ‘be strong’
- ...

For comparison, some voiceless T4 items

- ⁴plu ‘seed’ (never voiced by 3 speakers, voiced by 1)
- ⁴tu: ‘six’ (occasionally vcd)
- ⁴pra: ‘flour’ (never)



% of voiced (black) and partly voiced (dark grey) ~ tone

Concluding remarks

- As expected, breathiness has disappeared on tone 4, presumably because it conflicts with the present high-pitch of this tone. This is in line with the idea that low pitch and breathiness are mutual enhancers (e.g.: Silverman, 1977).
- The retention of voicing on tone 3 can also be considered as an enhancing feature, and is favored by sentence-internal position.
- More intriguing is the retention of voicing on tone 4 items, which is systematic on **some lexical items, that all begin with a labial stop, and especially in a consonant group** (contrary to the Gurung pattern).