

Is glottalization a by-product of low pitch targets? The view from Muong (Vietnam)

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Glottalization plays different functions in different languages. For Taiwan Mandarin, as captured by the COSPRO corpus, it has been argued that glottalization in Tone 3 is a by-product of laryngeal adjustment for producing low pitch (Kuang, 2017). By contrast, Vietnamese is an uncontroversial textbook case of glottalization playing a phonological function, as one of the defining phonological characteristics of two of its lexical tones. The present study bears on a close relative of Vietnamese: Muong (spoken in the North of Vietnam). Muong is a borderline case, in the sense that it only has one glottalized tone which is also the lowest tone, making it seemingly impossible to test out the two hypotheses: glottalization as a phonological feature, or as a 'low-level' phonetic consequence of a low pitch target. Our talk illustrates the usefulness of experimental phonetic data to shed light on such. Analysis of a corpus from 20 speakers (available in open access through the Pangloss Collection) leads to a clear conclusion: the association of creaky voice to a certain lexical tone in Muong can safely be interpreted as due to a phonological specification.