



Tonal Variations in Pahari: A Pragmatic Perspective

Ahsan Ali¹, Dr. Inayat Ullah², Sobia Farooq³

¹ MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Mohi-ud-Din Islamic University, AJ&K

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mohi-ud-Din Islamic University, AJ&K

Email: inayatullah418@gmail.com

³ MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Mohi-ud-Din Islamic University, AJ&K

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: July 09, 2026 Revised: July 25, 2026 Accepted: August 26, 2026 Available Online: September 09, 2026 Keywords: <i>The Pahari language, tonal variation, pragmatics, prosody, phonology, Praat software, acoustic analysis, stress patterns, intonation, rising and falling tones</i> Corresponding author: Dr. Inayat Ullah Email: inayatullah418@gmail.com	This paper examines tonal variations in the Pahari language from a pragmatic perspective, with a particular emphasis on how prosodic characteristics affect meaning in spoken conversation. Ten selected Pahari phrases were analyzed for stress patterns, frequency, and rising-falling tonal contours using the acoustic analysis software Praat. The study shows that the understanding of comparable statements in various communication settings is greatly impacted by differences in tone and stress placement. Neutral information transmission was indicated by declarative statements' comparatively level and balanced tone patterns. Requests, on the other hand, were distinguished by softer dropping tones that conveyed indirectness or civility. Orders had rising tones with somewhat higher frequencies, whereas confirmation had rising or flat tonal contours. These results imply that tone in Pahari serves as a crucial pragmatic tool for communicating intents, feelings, and interpersonal relationships in addition to being a phonetic characteristic. The study promotes more research on dialectal diversity and comparative comparison with nearby languages and emphasizes the important role prosody plays in meaning creation.

Introduction

Language is the medium of interaction and the source of communication. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), it is as an organized system of sounds and symbols that enables people to convey meaning within a social group. According to Crystal et al. (2003) it serves as a social tool for people to express their identity, culture, and interpersonal interactions in addition to being a cognitive system. Linguistic theory has been greatly impacted by Noam Chomsky's work since the 1960s. Chomsky argues that language is a biological trait of the human species and a natural feature of human cognition.

Meaning in oral communication is influenced by prosodic elements including tone, emphasis, and intonation in addition to vocabulary and grammatical structure. These characteristics, such as attitude, intention, and emotional posture, are crucial in conveying pragmatic meanings. For example, tone changes can change an utterance's communication function by enabling the same lexical components to express commands, questions, requests, or declarations.

In ordinary speech, the Pahari language, which is extensively spoken in the hilly areas of northern Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, has remarkable prosodic variety. The role of tonal patterns in Pahari communication at the sentence level, however, has received little scholarly attention despite its widespread use. Thus, the current study uses a pragmatic approach to examine tonal changes in Pahari. The study investigates how variations in tone, stress, and frequency affect meaning in various communication settings

by using acoustic analysis to examine spoken sentences. The research intends to further knowledge of Pahari prosody and emphasize the significance of tonal variation as a useful pragmatic tool in spoken conversation.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of research on the Pahari tonal system has focused on lexical-level tonal differences, showing how tone distinguishes words and their meanings (Asghar et al., 2023). However, these studies do not examine tonal variation at the sentence level. In order to fill this gap, this study investigate sentence-level tonal variation from a pragmatic perspective. It explores how tone conveys functions such as statements, questions, prohibition, affirmation, and wonder, highlighting the role of prosody in communication and providing a broader understanding of Pahari intonation.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify features of tones at sentence level of the Pahari language.
2. To highlight the role, tone plays in distinguishing between declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences in Pahari.
3. To recognize how the Pahari language helps the speakers to convey the meanings through tone.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the features of tones at sentence level of the Pahari language?
2. What role does tone play in distinguishing between declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences in Pahari?
3. How tone of the Pahari language helps the speakers to convey the meanings?

Significance of the Study

The primary goal of this study is to examine sentence-level tonal variations in the Pahari language, especially as it is spoken in southern Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K). By analyzing how tonal patterns alter as speakers convey various pragmatic purposes, such as inquiry, confirmation, prohibition, and surprise, this work fills this gap. The study shows that tone in Pahari serves as both a phonological characteristic and a crucial pragmatic instrument that communicates meaning, emphasis, and speaker intention by concentrating on sentence-level variation. The study offers new perspectives on how tone, meaning, and context interact in Pahari. The results provide a basis for upcoming sociolinguistic and comparative research of South Asian languages and further our knowledge of tonal diversity in Pahari.

Literature Review

Language is not only a system of words and grammar but also a means of conveying meaning through speech patterns such as tone, stress, and intonation. Among these suprasegmental features, tone plays a significant role in expressing lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic meanings in many languages. Tone is a suprasegmental feature of language in which variations in pitch distinguish meaning. Tone may be lexical, where it distinguishes word meanings, or grammatical, where it indicates grammatical functions such as tense or aspect.

Research on the Pahari language has mainly focused on its phonological structure, including vowels, consonants, syllable patterns, and stress. Pahari is still relatively understudied in this larger linguistic setting. According to Khaliq et al. (2022), only a few study has noted its linguistic properties. Ahmad (2002) compared English with Pahari, whereas Niazi (2003) examined Pahari's phonological system and found 38 consonants and 22 vowels. The usage of Pahari and Pothwari in certain areas of Pakistan and AJ&K was investigated in a sociolinguistic study conducted by Lothers et al. (2010). The Pahari community's sociolinguistic circumstances are also studied by Shad et al. (2023).

Pahari as a Tonal Language

A tonal Indo-Aryan language, Pahari is spoken by over 4.5 million people in AJ&K (Asghar et al., 2023; Khan, 2015). It has 12 oral and 5 nasal vowels, 30 consonants, and phonemically contrastive nasality and aspiration. Pitch contours like low-rising, mid-level, and high-falling represent the three levels of lexical tone in Pahari: high, mid, and low. Due to historical phonological processes, voiced aspirates in Urdu correlate to low tones in Pahari, just like in Punjabi (Bhatia, 1975; Khan et al., 2020). Similar to consonants and vowels, tone is co-articulated with them and functions as a minimum contrastive unit (toneme) (Pike, 1948; Malik et al., 2018).

Tone refers to pitch patterns that differentiate lexical or grammatical meaning (Pike, 1948; Yip, 2002). Tonal cues including fundamental frequency (F₀), pitch direction, slope, length, intensity, and voice quality have all been studied (Brunelle et al., 2010; Kuo et al., 2008; Gordon & Ladefoged, 2001). Mandarin, and Vietnamese are examples of languages where phonation type and tone interact (Belotel-Grenie & Grenie, 1994; Garallek & Keating, 2011; Silverman, 1997).

Like other Indo-Aryan languages, Pahari tonal system is influenced by contact and sociolinguistic factors. For instance, tone patterns and pronunciation might be impacted by borrowing from Urdu and English (Khan et al., 2023). In order to communicate meaning and pragmatic intent, such as inquiry, confirmation, prohibition, or amazement, tonal distinctions are essential. Although Wells (2009) discusses English intonation, similar patterns can be observed in Pahari, where tonal variation also influences the interpretation and reception of meaning.

Thus, the existing literature indicates that studies on the Pahari language have primarily examined its phonological structure and lexical features, with limited attention to sentence-level tonal variation. Consequently, there is a need for systematic research that explores how tonal variation operates in Pahari speech across different sentence types and pragmatic situations. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a detailed analysis of sentence-level tonal variation in the Pahari language.

Methodology

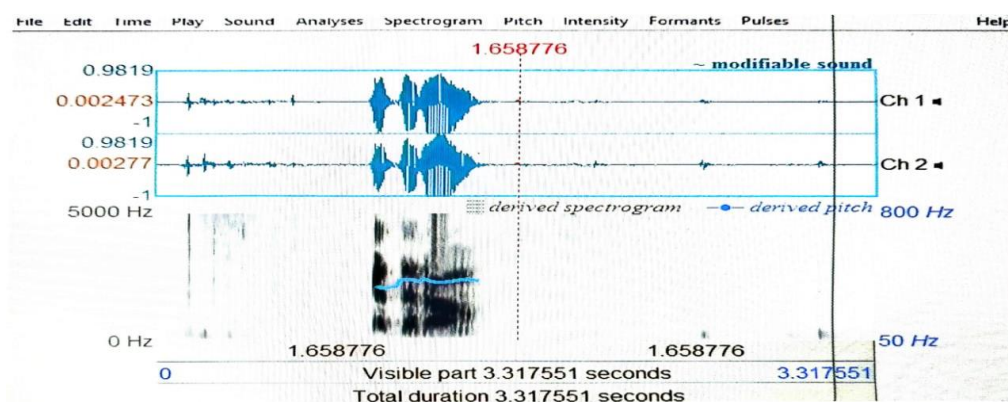
The present study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the prosodic features of Pahari utterances in different communicative contexts. The population of this research consisted of native speakers of the Pahari language, both male and female, including literate and non-literate, resided in the Sudhnoti area of AJ&K. Twenty individuals were selected from each union council: Bessari, Dakh, and Chowkian. To get data, non-probability sampling was employed. To guarantee accuracy and clarity, digital instruments were used to record the voice samples. After being gathered, the recordings were analyzed through the Praat software for acoustic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The data including ten Pahari sentences were acoustically analyzed by Praat software to determine their tonal patterns through pitch contours, duration, and intensity. Each sentence is presented individually, followed by an interpretation of its tonal characteristics and pragmatic function in light of the acoustic findings.

S#1 a. *Adar aa.* (Order)

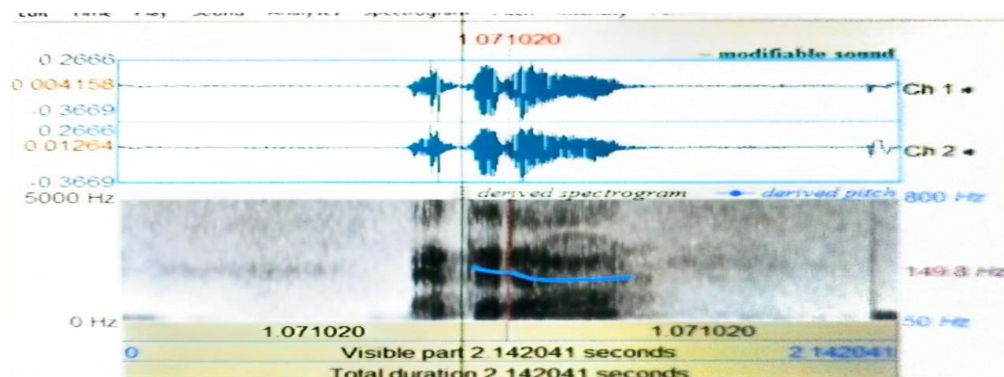
Come here.



When the above sentence was produced in an order-giving context, speakers consistently used a high falling-rising tonal pattern with greater intensity, higher pitch, and noticeable stress on the key lexical item. From a pragmatic perspective, these prosodic features function as markers of authority, urgency, and directive force, demonstrating that tonal variation systematically differentiates commands in Pahari in spite of the phrase remaining segmentally identical.

S#1 b. *Adar aa* (request)

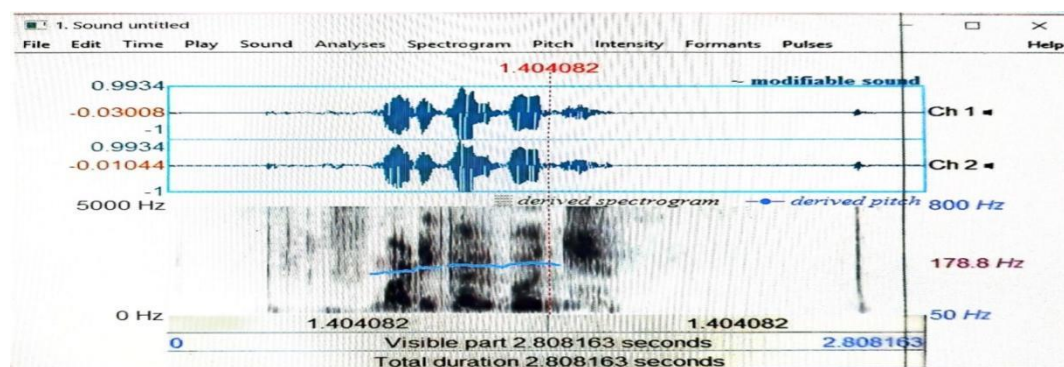
Please come here.



In contrast to the imperative condition, when the same expression was tested in the context of request, speakers produced a rising-falling tonal pattern with lower pitch, reduced intensity, a narrower pitch range, and slight vowel lengthening. From a pragmatic perspective, these prosodic features function as markers of politeness, deference, and indirectness, signifying that tonal disparity encodes speaker intention and social meaning in Pahari regardless of the sentence remaining syntactically the same.

S#2 a. *Mari gul buj.* (order)

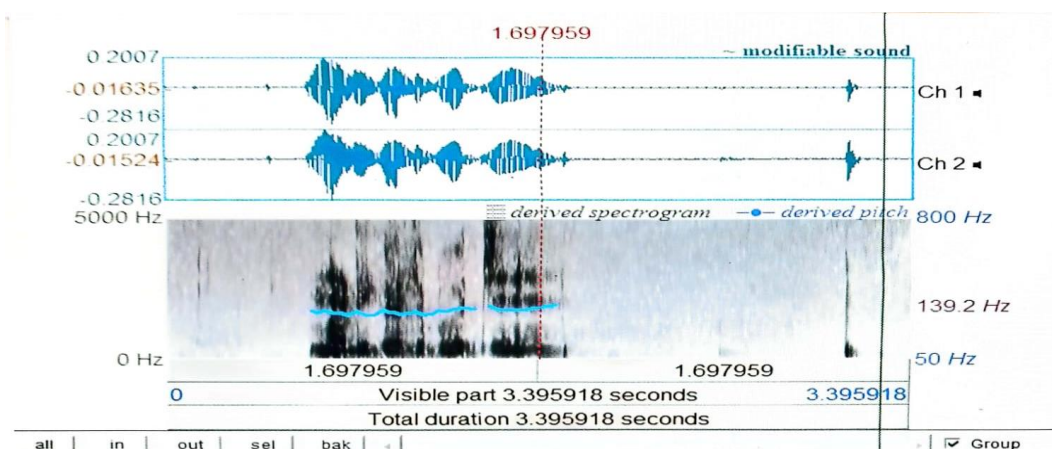
Listen to me.



All sixty participants produced a falling-rising tonal pattern with high pitch, greater intensity, and prominent stress in the order-giving context. From a pragmatic perspective, these prosodic features function as markers of authority and directive force, indicating that tone systematically distinguishes imperative utterances in Pahari even when the lexical and syntactic structure remains unchanged.

S#2 b. *Mari gul buj.* (Request)

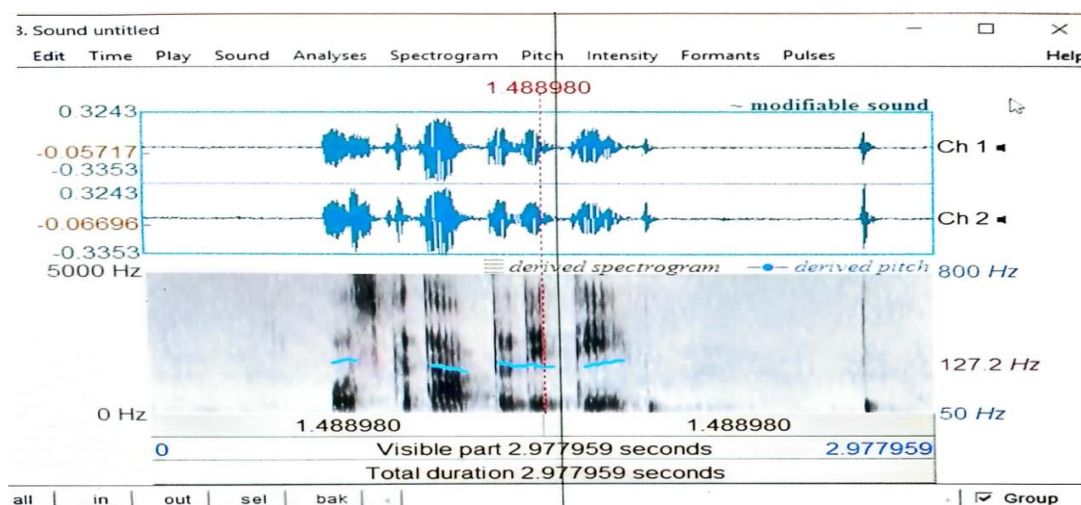
Kindly listen to me.



In a neutral communication context, the identical expression was produced with minimal stress, a flat pitch contour, a narrow fundamental frequency (Fo) range, and lower waveform amplitude, indicating reduced vocal effort. In contrast, the order-giving context exhibited higher intensity, greater pitch variation, and stronger stress, demonstrating that Pahari speakers systematically manipulate pitch, stress, and intensity to convey pragmatic meaning while the lexical and syntactic structure remains unchanged.

S#3 a. *Us katab tu deti.* (Declaration)

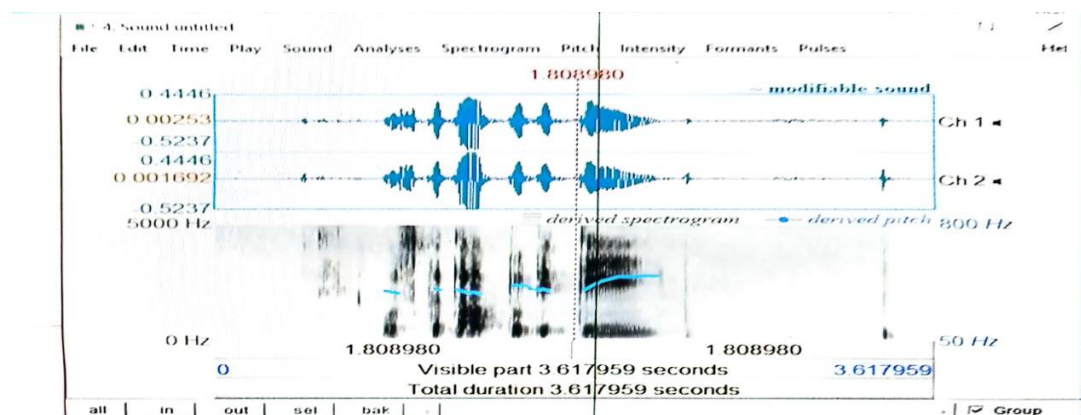
He gave you a book.



The statement exhibited a rising-falling-rising tonal contour in an aggressive communication setting. Praat analysis showed that Fo first rose, then fell, and rose again at the end, while waveform amplitude remained moderate with no noticeable stress, indicating that Fo is the primary acoustic cue for pragmatic meaning in Pahari.

S#3 b. *Us katab tu deti?* (Interrogation)

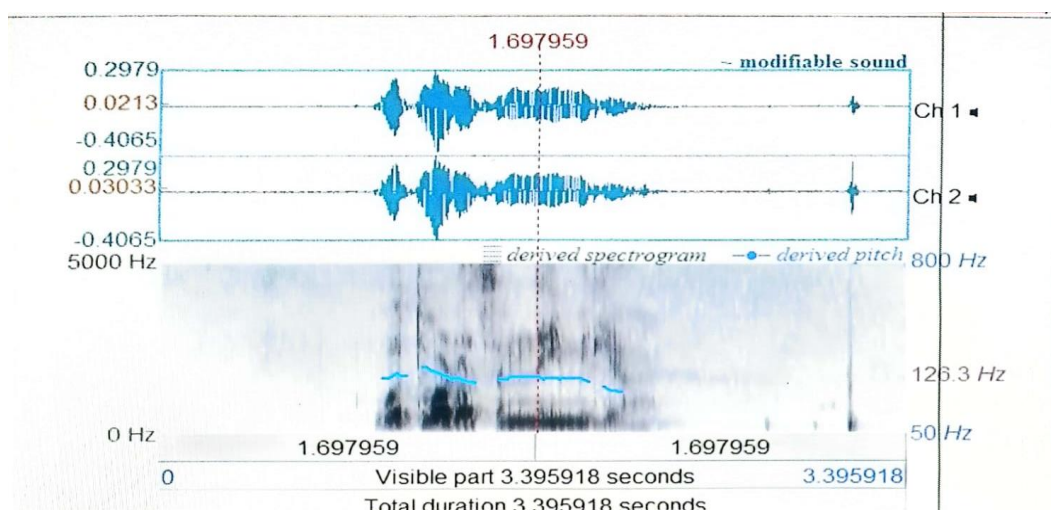
Did he give you a book?



This expression displays a falling-rising intonation pattern, typical of yes-no or confirmatory questions. Praat analysis shows a slight mid-utterance pitch drop followed by a sharp rise in the final syllable, where increased Fo, intensity, and duration create a prominent pitch accent, indicating the interrogative function and demonstrating that tonal variation in Pahari conveys pragmatic meaning even when the lexical content remains unchanged.

S#4 a. *Wo tawra sang ni milya.* (Declaration)

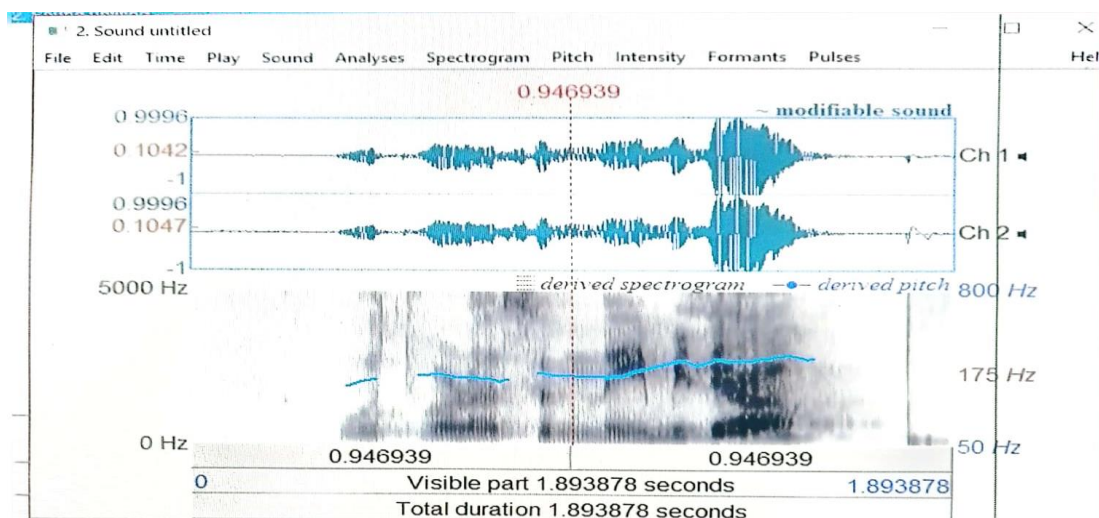
He did not meet you.



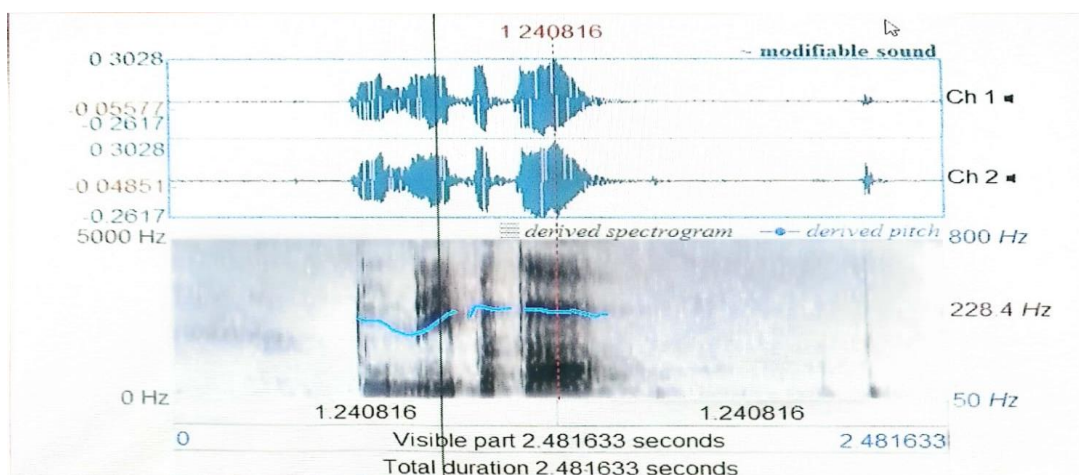
Pahari phrases showed a falling-rising-level contour in an assertive (declarative) context, ending in a final fall. Praat analysis showed that the fundamental frequency (Fo) begins high, levels in the middle, and decreases toward the utterance end. This high-to-low sequence marks the topic, information, and conclusion. Mild stress, low amplitude, and the absence of noticeable peaks indicated a neutral prosodic profile. Assertive phrases showed consistent prosody and less emotional intensity than imperative or interrogative contexts, conveying pragmatic meaning.

S#4 b. *Wo tawra sang ni milya?* (Interrogation)

Did he not meet you?



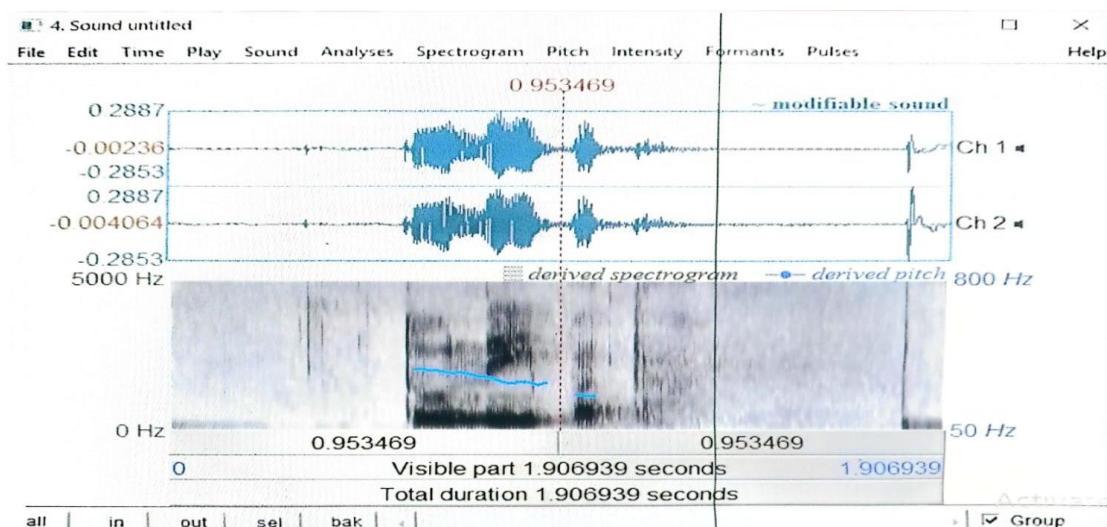
When the same sentence was produced in an interrogative context in Pahari, a change in prosodic behavior was observed. The tonal pattern predominantly followed a falling-rising contour. Acoustic analysis showed that the fundamental frequency (Fo) remained relatively low at the onset and gradually rose, reaching a higher frequency at the sentence-final position. This final pitch rise signals interrogation, uncertainty, expectation of a response, or a request for confirmation. Unlike declarative or imperative contexts, Pahari interrogatives mainly rely on intonation and terminal stress to convey meaning.



When the above sentence was produced in a confirmation context, the tone showed a falling-rising contour, indicating certainty or affirmation in Pahari. The fundamental frequency (Fo) began relatively low and gradually rose to a high final pitch, creating a sustained high terminal tone. The final syllable was slightly longer and higher in pitch, marking sentence-final emphasis. The analysis shows that final stress and pitch movement are key features of confirmation in Pahari.

S#5 b. Tu ni pata. (Declaration)

You don't know.



The same statement in an aggressive setting showed a rising-falling tonal pattern in Pahari, indicating speaker confidence and conviction. The fundamental frequency (Fo) was high at the beginning and gradually decreased to a low final frequency, signaling completion and finality. Praat analysis further showed higher pitch and waveform intensity at the start, followed by a decrease towards the end. This rising-falling pattern serves as an acoustic marker of assertiveness in Pahari sentence-level intonation.

Conclusion

This study examined how sentence-level tonal variation serves as a pragmatic strategy in Pahari communication. The results showed that tone plays an important role in determining meaning and speaker intention in Pahari, functioning as a systematic prosodic process rather than a solely phonetic characteristic.

The study demonstrated how differences in tonal contour, pitch range, and stress location may give similar lexical statements distinct interpretations. Declarative utterances, which indicate informational completion, usually had generally flat or slowly declining contours with a greater starting fundamental frequency (Fo) and a steady reduction toward the conclusion. Conversely, rising or falling-rising contours with a higher ultimate pitch were noted in interrogative settings, signifying inquiry and anticipation of a response. Rising contours with persistent mid-level frequency were noted in expressive and confirmation settings, indicating surprise or confirmation. Conversely, prohibitive situations conveyed restraint and civility by softer falling outlines and less pitch fluctuation.

Summing up, the study demonstrates that Pahari speakers use tonal variation as a crucial pragmatic tool to express goals including assertion, inquiry, confirmation, and prohibition. These results indicate the necessity for more study on dialectal and sociolinguistic variance in tonal use and emphasize the need of including prosodic analysis into linguistic descriptions of Pahari.

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