

Call of the Unmarked, And Rise of Tone: A Case Study of Tripura Bangla Alphabet

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ABSTRACT: Tripura Bangla consonant inventory is undergoing a major restructuring compared to its underlying counterpart noted in Sadhu Bangla or comparable forms in Standard Colloquial Bangla. The changes obviate an undercurrent of weakening through reducing/replacing the marked features under motivation to move towards the Unmarked. Underlying (UR) labials and velars tend to move towards the coronal zone of articulation; palatals migrate to the alveolar i.e. coronal. For UR coronals this place relocation is redundant. The next route of weakening is through manner features changes: voiceless labial and velar stops convert to fricatives. UR palatals, migrated to coronal area, get fricativized en masse. The final brunt of weakening is felt in the deletion of place identity of the voiceless labial and velar fricatives: they become placeless fricatives putatively known as the glottal fricative intervocalically. This is treated here as weakening under the head ‘phonation’. In extreme cases this η between vowels deletes. Aspiration retains underlying η ; but all UR aspirated plosives in TB (barring optional exceptions in the word initial positions) undergo deaspiration and acquire a High tone in compensation. This results in the emergence of lexical tone in this variety of Bangla. The entire picture of re-specification of consonantal features in TB is summed up in the two tables winding up the article.

Keywords: (de)aspiration, fricativization, High tone, lenition, Tripura Bangla, Unmarked

I. INTRODUCTION

Tripura Bangla dialect of Bangla (henceforth TB) exhibits certain interesting tendencies in respect of its underlying consonant inventory which can be summarized under the umbrella term -- weakening. The latter affects the consonantal sounds by altering and simplifying the letters’ place, manner and phonation features. Underlying (i.e. UR) peripheral places of articulation namely labial, velar and also palatal, tend to get converted to coronal – the universal unmarked place of articulation. While palatals succeed, velars and labials fail.

Weakening then takes another route – attacking the plosive identity of the velars and labials: the latter are debilitated to fricatives though allowed to retain their UR place of origin. But the demands for the movement towards the ‘unmarked’ is so strong that these ‘derived’ fricatives are dethroned from their original places of articulation and become ‘homeless’ (read placeless) vagabonds and survive singly as the glottal fricative h. This is the story of the UR voiceless velars and labials, both aspirates and non-aspirates. The rest of their journey leads to deletion in intervocalic positions though in a restrictive way. But the itinerary is now predictable.

Voiced velars and labials stop at being fricativized without losing the place of articulation but there are occasional exceptions prophesying their fate!

The migrated palatals χ , β , χH , βH also undergo fricativization at their new home ‘alveolar’ and fall together with σ , ζ , $\sigma\eta$, $\zeta\eta$ (the loss of aspiration in the latter ones is compensated by High tone). Up till now the streamline of the story is: labial and velar plosives → fricatives (with place) → voiceless fricatives → glottal (i.e. placeless) fricative η → deletion intervocalically (i.e. extreme form of weakening). UR palatal plosives → alveolar (plosives) → alveolar fricatives.

But the ‘decadence’ is not yet over (the Unmarked is calling!).

The glottal fricative h is foredoomed to die in TB whether it descends from the UR form compatible to Sadhu Bangla or the derived incarnation of the voiceless velars and labials discussed above.

But it has its step sister present as aspiration carried along underlyingly by other plosives. Voiced aspirated plosives are strictly prohibited in TB: βH , $\delta\eta H$, βH , βH , γH are all disallowed. Voiceless ones survive restrictively in the word initial places. In the non-initial positions the ghost of aspiration haunts the voiceless plosives and fricatives (derived from UR aspirated palatals) and springs up as High tone. This is true also of underlying voiced aspirates. Thus the gene of High tone is tracked and traced back to the ghost of aspiration in the UR for TB!

The paper is organized along the following line. Section 2 presents the relevant data and analyses. 3 elaborates on the issue of movement to the Unmarked. 4 illustrates the story of the emergence of High tone to redeem aspiration. 5 Briefly touches on the issue of lenition via voicing. 6 concludes the study followed by acknowledgements in 7.

II. DATA AND ANALYSIS

2.1 No place relocation (only fricativization)

In response to the demand for moving to the unmarked place of articulation velars are expected to move to the coronal place. But for the sake of greater need of intelligibility and contradistinction the former demand is overridden and velars retain their underlying place of origin. However, the stronger pressure, namely weakening, again crops up, and continues to assert itself. The latter now adopts an alternative route to debilitate the velars by divesting them of their non-continuant i.e. plosive identity. This results in the emergence of velar fricatives, especially, in respect of the voiceless ones (cf. 1).

(1) $k \rightarrow x$

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---|----------------|
| a. $\kappa\alpha.\kappa\alpha \rightarrow \xi\alpha.\xi\alpha$ | ‘uncle’ | b. $\kappa\alpha.\kappa\iota \rightarrow \xi\alpha.\xi\iota$ | ‘uncle’s wife’ |
| c. $ \text{H}\alpha\kappa\alpha \rightarrow \square\alpha.\xi\alpha$ | ‘Dhaka’ | d. $\square\alpha.\kappa\alpha \rightarrow \square\text{E}.\xi\alpha$ | ‘money’ |
| e. $\kappa\alpha \kappa\alpha \rightarrow \kappa\text{E}\xi.\rho\alpha$ | ‘crab’ | f. $\square\text{H}\alpha\kappa\upsilon\rho \rightarrow \square\text{H}/\square\square\alpha.\xi\upsilon\rho$ | ‘priest’ |
| g. $\pi\square.\tau\delta\alpha.\kappa\alpha \rightarrow \pi\square.\tau\delta\alpha.\xi\alpha$ | ‘flag’ | h. $\chi\alpha.\lambda\alpha.\kappa\iota \rightarrow \sigma\alpha.\lambda\alpha.\xi\iota$ | ‘cunningness’ |

Because of left alignment principle voiceless velars only optionally fricativize in the word initial position; in the intervocalic place within the word the weakening occurs without exceptions. That the same holds true for the underlying aspirated velars also is borne out by the examples in (2). The fact that aspiration continues to survive in disguise of a High tone is also testified here and will be discussed later on.

(2) $\kappa\text{H} \rightarrow \xi\text{H}, \xi\square$

- | | | | |
|--|----------|--|---------------|
| a. $\kappa\text{H}\upsilon.\delta\delta\alpha \rightarrow \xi\text{H}\iota.\delta\delta\alpha$ | ‘hunger’ | b. $\rho\text{E}.\kappa\text{H}\alpha \rightarrow \rho\text{E}.\xi\square\alpha$ | ‘line/a name’ |
| c. $\kappa\text{H}\alpha.\kappa\iota \rightarrow \xi\text{H}\alpha.\eta\iota$ | ‘grey’ | d. $\mu\upsilon.\kappa\text{H}\alpha \rightarrow \mu\upsilon.\xi\square\alpha$ | ‘lid’ |
| e. $\beta\upsilon\iota.\Sigma\alpha.\kappa\text{H}\iota \rightarrow \beta\upsilon\iota.\Sigma\alpha.\xi\square\iota$ | ‘a name’ | f. $\beta\iota.\Sigma\square.\kappa\text{H}\alpha \rightarrow \beta\iota.\Sigma\square.\xi\square\alpha$ | ‘a name’ |

Voiced velars resist fricativization (3-4). But High tone replaces aspiration in respect of the underlying voiced velar aspirates (4).

(3) $\gamma \rightarrow \gamma$

- | | | | |
|--|------------|--|-------------|
| a. $\gamma\upsilon.\rho\upsilon \rightarrow \gamma\upsilon.\rho\upsilon$ | ‘cow/bull’ | b. $\gamma\alpha).\phi\alpha \rightarrow \gamma\alpha.\zeta\alpha$ | ‘marijuana’ |
| c. $\rho\upsilon.\gamma\iota \rightarrow \rho\upsilon.\gamma\iota$ | ‘patient’ | d. $\rho\text{E}.\gamma\alpha \rightarrow \rho\text{E}.\gamma\alpha$ | ‘MGN-REGA’ |

(4) $\gamma\text{H} \rightarrow \gamma\square$

- | | | | |
|---|-----------|---|----------------|
| a. $\gamma\text{H}\upsilon.\rho\alpha \rightarrow \gamma\square\upsilon.\rho\alpha$ | ‘horse’ | b. $\beta\iota.\gamma\text{H}\alpha \rightarrow \beta\iota.\gamma\square\alpha$ | ‘unit of land’ |
| c. $\gamma\text{H}\square.\Sigma\alpha \rightarrow \gamma\square\square.\Sigma\alpha$ | ‘scratch’ | | |

Another set of peripheral stops namely labials undergo weakening along the same route: do not change the place of articulation but lose their stop feature. Voiceless ones are most affected (5-6). Voiced ones turn out to be strong resistant to weakening by spirantization (7-8). The latter is only optionally resorted to. Once again underlying aspirates survive accompanied by High tone (6, 8). Systematic optional exceptions are noticed on the left margin of words (6e-f, 8d).

(5) $\pi \rightarrow \div$

- | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|----------------|
| a. $\pi\alpha\pi \rightarrow \div\alpha\div$ | ‘sin’ | b. $\pi\alpha\nu \rightarrow \div\alpha\nu$ | ‘beetle leaf’ |
| c. $\pi\square\text{H}\alpha \rightarrow \div\iota.\square\alpha$ | ‘cake’ | d. $\pi\upsilon)\square\iota \rightarrow \div\upsilon.\iota$ | ‘kind of fish’ |
| e. $\pi\upsilon.\lambda\iota \rightarrow \div\upsilon.\lambda\iota$ | ‘cake type’ | f. $\pi\epsilon\tau\delta\iota \rightarrow \div\epsilon.\iota$ | ‘carton’ |
| g. $\beta\text{E}.\pi\alpha.\rho\iota \rightarrow \beta\text{E}.\div\alpha.\rho\iota$ | ‘trader’ | h. $\Sigma\upsilon.\pi\alpha.\rho\iota \rightarrow \Sigma\upsilon.\div\alpha.\rho\iota$ | ‘beetle nut’ |

(6) $\pi\text{H} \rightarrow \div\text{H}/\div\square$

- | | | | |
|---|----------------|---|-------------|
| a. $\pi\text{H}\upsilon\lambda \rightarrow \div\text{H}/\div\square\upsilon\lambda$ | ‘flower’ | b. $\pi\text{H}\alpha)\pi\alpha \rightarrow \div\text{H}/\div\square\alpha.\div\alpha$ | ‘hollow’ |
| c. $\pi\text{H}\square\nu\alpha \rightarrow \div\text{H}/\div\square\square.\nu\alpha$ | ‘snake’s hood’ | d. $\pi\text{H}\alpha \iota\lambda \rightarrow \div\text{H}/\div\square\alpha.\zeta\iota\lambda$ | ‘wicked’ |
| e. $\tau\delta\upsilon\pi\text{H}\alpha\nu \rightarrow \tau\delta\upsilon.\div\square\alpha\nu$ | ‘storm’ | f. $\tau\delta\alpha\pi\text{H}\alpha\iota\lambda \rightarrow \tau\delta\alpha.\div\square\alpha\iota\lambda$ | ‘arrogance’ |

Simple voiced labials do not succumb to weakening through becoming fricatives, optionally though it is attested (7). Voiced labial aspirates continue to retain their plosive identity. Aspiration however is strictly disallowed with voice and hence High tone emerges as a compensation for the loss of aspiration (8).

(7) $\beta \rightarrow \beta$

Optionally B

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|--------|
| a. $\beta\alpha\beta\alpha \rightarrow \text{B}\alpha.\text{B}\alpha$ | ‘daddy’ | b. $\beta\circ\beta\alpha \rightarrow \text{B}\circ.\text{B}\alpha$ | ‘dumb’ |
| c. $\beta\iota\nu\alpha \rightarrow \text{B}\iota.\nu\alpha$ | ‘musical instrument’ | | |

(8) $\beta\text{H} \rightarrow \beta\square$

- | | | | |
|--|------------|--|-------------|
| a. $\beta\text{H}\text{Y}\lambda \rightarrow \beta\square\text{Y}\lambda$ | ‘mistake’ | b. $\beta\text{H}\alpha\tau\delta \rightarrow \beta\square\alpha\tau\delta$ | ‘rice’ |
| c. $\beta\text{H}\alpha\Sigma\alpha \rightarrow \beta\square\alpha.\Sigma\alpha$ | ‘language’ | d. $\square\beta\text{H}\alpha\beta \rightarrow \square.\beta\square\alpha\beta$ | ‘want/lack’ |

2.2 Place relocation: palatal → coronal (+ fricativization)

The call of the unmarked is responded to positively by the plosive consonants of the palatal zone clubbed under ‘c barga’ in Bangla alphabet. These palatal plosives lose their place of origin and migrate to a zone spanning between the alveolar and palatal which is more comprehensively termed as coronal, the universally acknowledged unmarked or most favored place of articulation. These migrated coronals also undergo the second phase of weakening by being fricativized and emerging as coronal/alveolar fricatives (9-12). The UR feature of voicing remains intact. Aspiration as such is lost across the board irrespective of the place of occurrence of the host segment within the word (10, 12). Once again the emergence of High tone compensates the loss of aspiration.

(9) χ → σ

- | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|
| a. χαλ → σαιλ | ‘rice’ | b. χιτι → σι.τι | ‘sugar’ |
| c. χαχι → σα.σι | ‘uncle’s wife’ | d. καχι → κα.σι | ‘sickle’ |

(10) χH → σ□

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------|----------------------|---------|
| a. χΗανι → σ□α.νι | ‘cataract’ | b. χΗυ□ι → σ□υ.ι | ‘leave’ |
| c. μαχΗι → μα.σ□ι | ‘fly’ | d. βιχΗανα → βισ□.να | ‘bed’ |

(11) | → ζ

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
| a. αμα → ζα.μα | ‘shirt’ | b. αδ5υ → ζα.δ5υ | ‘magic’ |
| c. μ□ α → μ□.ζα | ‘fun/joy’ | d. □ν αλ → ζ□ν.ζαλ | ‘garbage’ |

(12) |H → ζ□

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| a. μα Ηι → μα.ζ□ι | ‘boatman’ | b. βο Ηα → βοζ□α | ‘luggage’ |
|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| c. μα Ηαρι → μα.ζ□α.ρι | ‘middle size’ |
|------------------------|---------------|

2.3 Loss of place: velar and labial fricatives → glottal fricatives

Previously it has been noted and discussed (2.1) that voiceless velars and labials (aspirated or not) undergo weakening through spirantization. An equally attested fact of TB is that these consonants, more often than not, get reduced to the voiceless glottal fricative h. This change is noted only in intervocalic position (13-16) though. Aspiration survives in its new incarnation i.e. High tone (14, 16).

(13) κ → η between two vowels

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------|---------------|
| a. κακ → καξ | ‘crow’ | b. χα.λακ → σα.λακ/ξ | ‘clever’ |
| c. κα.κα → κα.ηα | ‘uncle’ | d. □α.κα → □Ε.ηα | ‘money’ |
| e. χα.κ□ρ → σα.η□ρ | ‘servant’ | f. Σ□καλ → Σ□.ηαλ | ‘morning’ |
| g. π□.τ5α.κα → π□.τ5α.ηα | ‘flag’ | h. χα.λα.κι → σα.λα.ηι | ‘cunningness’ |

(14) κH → η (+High tone) between two vowels

- | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| a. ρΕ.κΗα → ρΕ.η□α | ‘line/a name’ | b. μυ.κΗι → μυ.η□ι | ‘of/like face’ |
| c. ρακΗαλ → ρα.η□αλ | ‘shepherd/a name’ | d. νικΗιλ → νι.η□ιλ | ‘a name’ |
| e. μακΗ□ν → μα.η□□ν | ‘butter/a name’ | f. βοι.Σα.κΗι → βοι.Σα.η□ι | ‘a name’ |

(15) π → h between two vowels

- | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. βΕ.πα.ρι → βΕ.ηα.ρι | ‘trader’ | b. Συ.πα.ρι → Συ.ηα.ρι | ‘beetle nut’ |
| c. γο.λα.πι → γυ.λα.ηι | ‘pink’ | d. παγ□λ → ÷α.γ□λ | ‘insane’ |
| e. κ□παλ → κ□.ηαλ | ‘fate/forehead’ | f. γοπαλ → γο.ηαλ | ‘a name/Lord Krishna’ |

(16) πH → η (+High tone)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| a. τ5υπΗαν → τ5υ.η□αν | ‘storm’ | b. τ5απΗαιλ → τ5α.η□αιλ | ‘arrogance’ |
| c. τ5□πΗατ5 → τ5α.η□ατ5 | ‘distance’ | d. δ5απ□□ → δ5α.η□□□ | ‘sway/prowess’ |

2.4 Loss of place: voiceless post-alveolar fricative → glottal fricative

The sweep of weakening also brings within its fold the voiceless post-alveolar fricative Σ by relocating it to the glottalic zone and the putative ‘placeless’ fricative h is the consequence. Σ emerges at the word initial place obeying the constraint of left alignment (17a-d). But intervocalically even this reduced version i.e. the glottal fricative undergoes the extreme form of weakening by getting deleted (17e-f).

(17) Σ → η, O

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| a. Σακ → ηαγ | ‘leafy vegetable’ | b. Σαλ → ηαλ | ‘thorn’ |
| c. Σαλα → ηα.λα | ‘wife’s younger brother’ | d. Συ□κι → ηυ□.κι | ‘dry fish’ |
| e. μυΣα → μυ.α | ‘mother’s sister’s husband’ | f. δ5ιΣα → δ5ι.α | ‘sense of direction’ |

2.4.1 Exceptions to (17)

$\Sigma \rightarrow \eta$ is however a very restricted phenomenon and lexically specified perhaps as a consequence of historical factors or borrowing. Majority of words hosting Σ zealously retain it in its UR form (18).

(18) $\Sigma \rightarrow \Sigma$; * η

- | | | | |
|--|----------------|--|-------------------|
| a. $\beta\alpha)\Sigma \rightarrow \beta\alpha\Sigma$ | ‘bamboo’ | b. $\Sigma E\Sigma \rightarrow \Sigma E\Sigma$ | ‘end’ |
| c. $\Sigma o \alpha \rightarrow \Sigma v.\zeta\alpha$ | ‘straight’ | d. $\Sigma i\delta 5\alpha \rightarrow \Sigma i.\delta 5\alpha$ | ‘straight’ |
| e. $vE\Sigma\alpha \rightarrow v i.\Sigma\alpha$ | ‘intoxication’ | f. $\mu\alpha\Sigma i \rightarrow \mu\alpha.\Sigma i$ | ‘mother’s sister’ |
| g. $\alpha\mu\alpha\Sigma\alpha \rightarrow \alpha.\mu\alpha.\Sigma\alpha$ | ‘dysentery’ | h. $\eta\alpha\mu E\Sigma\alpha \rightarrow \eta\alpha.\mu\alpha.\Sigma\alpha$ | ‘often’ |

2.5 Only deaspiration

Two more sets of coronal consonants namely the dentals (‘ $\tau 5$ barga’ as popularly known to native speakers/grammarians) and retroflexes (clubbed under ‘ \square barga’) decline to relocate themselves as they are already coronal. In respect of the intervocalic dentals aspirated ones get deaspirated, and acquires High tone in return (19-20). The word initial position licenses the UR features of the aspirated dentals, though optionally at times in respect of voiceless ones (19).

(19) $\tau 5H \rightarrow \tau 5\square$ (optionally attested in foot heads; in non-head deaspiration is a must)

- | | | | |
|--|------------------|--|--------|
| a. $\tau 5H\alpha\lambda\alpha \rightarrow \tau 5H/\tau 5\square\alpha\lambda$ | ‘dish’ | b. $\tau 5H\alpha v\alpha \rightarrow \tau 5H/\tau 5\square\alpha.v\alpha$ | |
| | ‘police station’ | | |
| c. $\tau 5HEk v\alpha \rightarrow \tau 5H/\tau 5\square E.k v\alpha$ | ‘thrashing’ | | |
| d. $\mu\alpha\tau 5H\alpha \rightarrow \mu\alpha.\tau 5\square\alpha$ | ‘head’ | e. $\beta E\tau 5H\alpha \rightarrow \beta E.\tau 5\square\alpha$ | ‘ache’ |
| f. $\mu\epsilon\tau 5H i \rightarrow \mu\epsilon.\tau 5\square i$ | ‘fenugreek’ | | |

(20) $\delta 5H \rightarrow \delta 5\square$ everywhere

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---|-------|
| a. $\delta 5H\alpha v \rightarrow \delta 5\square\alpha v$ | ‘paddy’ | b. $\gamma\alpha\delta 5H\alpha \rightarrow \gamma\alpha.\delta 5\square\alpha$ | ‘ass’ |
| c. $\alpha\delta 5H\alpha \rightarrow \alpha.\delta 5\square\alpha$ | ‘half’ | | |

Aspirated retroflexes attest a strong preference for deaspiration followed by acquisition of High tone (21-22). In case of voiceless ones the consonant gets voiced by assimilation in between vowels. Voiced aspirated retroflexes are rarely used in TB: they occur only word initially (22).

(21) $\square H \rightarrow \square H/\square\square$, intervocalically | \square

- | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---------------------|
| a. $\square H E\lambda\alpha \rightarrow \square H/\square\square E\lambda\alpha$ | ‘push’ | b. $\square H i k\alpha \rightarrow \square H/\square\square i\eta\alpha$ | ‘buttress/contract’ |
| c. $\square H\alpha k v\alpha \rightarrow \square H/\square\square\alpha\eta v\alpha$ | ‘priest’ | | |
| d. $\mu i\square H\alpha \rightarrow \mu i.\square\alpha$ | ‘sweet’ | e. $\lambda\alpha\square H i \rightarrow \lambda\alpha \square i$ | ‘stick’ |
| f. $\alpha\square H\alpha \rightarrow \alpha.\square\alpha$ | ‘glue’ | | |

(22) | $H \rightarrow |\square$ (everywhere)

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------|--|---------------|
| a. $H\alpha k \rightarrow \square\alpha k$ | ‘drum’ | b. $H i\lambda \rightarrow \square i\lambda$ | ‘stone throw’ |
| c. $H\alpha k\alpha \rightarrow \square\alpha.\eta\alpha$ | ‘Dhaka machine’ | d. $H\epsilon k i \rightarrow \square\epsilon.\eta i$ | ‘husking’ |

III. A MAJOR RESTRUCTURING OF THE UNDERLYING ALPHABET DRIVEN BY THE MOVE TOWARDS THE UNMARKED

The major phonological processes discussed so far point towards weakening/loss of some underlying features in respect of obstruents in TB relating to three broad areas: a) place of articulation, b) manner of articulation and c) phonation.

3.1 Place of articulation I: Plosives

For plosives or [-continuant] sounds Bangla in general uses five places of articulation: labial, dental, retroflex, palatal and velar. In concordance with the universal preference for the less marked place of articulation the peripheral places labial, velar and *partially* palatal tend to migrate towards the coronal area consisting of dental, alveolar, post-alveolar and *also retroflex*. Hence the [-coronal] plosives gravitate towards [+coronal] zone as far as possible. So

(23) i) $\pi, \pi H, \beta \rightarrow [+cor]$ ¹ Not allowed; UR place must be retained. (*later fricativized*)

ii) $\chi, \chi H, \varphi \rightarrow [+cor]$ ² Allowed; new place is alveolar. (*later fricativized*)

¹ “(cor) In the *SPE* feature system, [is] a distinctive feature defined as ‘produced with the blade of the tongue raised from its neutral position’. Dental, alveolar, palate-alveolar and retroflex segments are [+cor]; other segments are [-cor]. In post-*SPE* work, palatals have often been taken as [+cor]” [1].

² If already treated as coronal the movement is redundant. But let us accept them as *moved* palatals.

- iii) κ, κH, γ → [+cor] Not allowed; UR place must be retained. (*later fricativized*)
 iv) τ5, τ5H, δ → [+cor] Already coronal, no movement needed. (*No fricativization*)
 v) □, □H, | → [+cor] Already coronal, no movement needed. (*No fricativization*)

3.1.1 Place of articulation: Fricatives

The present study investigates only one fricative the voiceless post alveolar Σ. Post alveolar already belongs to the [+cor] zone in the unmarked place of articulation. So no relocation of this sound is needed.

3.2 Manner of articulation

Plosives

Having moved towards the core part of unmarked zone of articulation the UR place features of palatals are lost and replaced by alveolar. But these palatals have to undergo another feature loss: [-continuant] → [+continuant] i.e. plosives reduce to fricatives: χ → σ, χH → σ□, φ → ζ. Here one notices weakening in terms of manner change.

Labials and velars resist place relocation but accept the alternative mode of reduction: change in manner of articulation. Both types undergo fricativization remaining in situ: π → ÷, πH → ÷/÷□, (β → B); κ → ξ, κH → ξH/ξ□.

Fricative

Σ is already a fricative and hence no reduction in terms of manner change is needed.

3.3 Place of articulation II: Plosives and fricative

Voiceless velars κ, κH and voiceless labials π, πH undergo another round of weakening: losing their UR place feature and neutralizing to glottal fricative η which is treated as a canonical placeless consonant by many linguists³ (cf. [3] among others): |ακE → |αηE ‘call, 3pr’, δ55EκHα → δ55Eηα ‘seen/act of seeing’, υπαΣ → υ.ηαΣ ‘fast’, πHαλτ5υ → ηαλ.τ5υ ‘irrelevant’.

Post alveolar fricative Σ also undergoes this fate of losing place specification, though in selective positions.

In consequence η emerges as an unmarked segment, a substitute for voiceless velars, voiceless labials and voiceless post-alveolar fricative.

3.4 Phonation

Under this third category of feature reduction we notice three phonological phenomena: a) loss of aspiration, b) emergence of high tone, and c) intervocalic voicing.

3.4.1 Deaspiration of plosives

In TB there is a strong restriction against the use of the feature [+spread glottis] with plosives and fricatives. The two features [+voice] and [+spr.gl] never coexist. Hence one does not come across marked stops like βH, δ5H, |H, |H and γH in TB unlike in Sadhu or Standard Colloquial Bangla. With voiceless plosives also aspiration is never attested. This results in deaspiration of κH, πH, τ5H, □H and χH though in a restrictive way: some of them occur optionally only in word initial stressed syllables in a trochee: □Hακυρ → □H/ □□αηυρ ‘priest’, τ5Hανα → τ5H/τ5□ανα ‘police station’, κHα|αΣ → κH/ξ□α|αΣ ‘dirty fellow’. πH, χH stand exception to this: πHα)πα → ÷H/÷□α÷α ‘hollow’, χHαγ□λ → σ/σ□αγ□λ *χHαγ□λ ‘goat’.

IV. RISE OF HIGH TONE

To fill in the gap created by deaspiration TB speakers resort to using a High tone (□) as a distinctive feature of the underlying aspirates. This is a mandatory requirement (cf. 24). This emergence of High tone in consequence of simplifying an underlying marked feature (aspiration) points towards a special characteristic TB has acquired. A thorough redefining of the restructured/emergent phonemic alphabet of TB is therefore urgently needed. The following set of minimal pairs based on the use of High tone as a distinctive ingredient familiarizes the readers with the issue.

(24) UR aspirates	TB (SR with High tone)	UR Non aspirates
χHανα	σ□ανα ‘butter’	σανα ‘pulses’
αχHαρ	ασ□αρ ‘stumbling’	ασαρ ‘pickles’
Hαλ	ζ□αλ ‘hot’	ζαλ ‘forged/net’

³ ‘It may have a glottal place of articulation. However, it may have no fricative articulation, in which case the term ‘glottal’ only refers to the nature of its phonation, and does not describe the location of the stricture nor the turbulence. All consonants except for the glottals, and all vowels, have an individual place of articulation in addition to the state of the glottis. As with all other consonants, surrounding vowels influence the pronunciation of [h], and [η] has sometimes been presented as a voiceless vowel, having the place of articulation of these surrounding vowels’. [2]

Hαλα	ζ□αλα ‘welding’	ζαλα ‘rice sapling/ restlessness’
κHαλι	ξ□αλι empty’	καλι ‘goddess Kali/ink’
πακHi	÷αη□ι ‘bird’	÷αηι ‘cook’
γH□ρ	γ□□ρ ‘home’	γ□ρ ‘average’
γHαι	γ□αι ‘piercing’	γαι ‘cow’
πHα)κι	÷□αηι ‘deceit’	÷αηι ‘cook’
βHα□ι	β□α ι ‘low tide’	βα ι ‘bowl’
α□Hα	α □α ‘glue’	α α ‘flour’
Hακι	□αηι ‘drummer’	αηι ‘call, 1’
τ5Hακ	τ5□ακ ‘let it remain’	τ5ακ ‘rack’
αδ5Hα	αδ5□α ‘half’	αδ5α ‘ginger’

UR fricatives do not accommodate the High tone. Voicing plays no role.

V. VOICING

Voicing of plosives in intervocalic onsets is another expression of weakening in the form of lenition noted in TB. This takes place only for voiceless retroflex irrespective of whether the host was underlyingly an aspirate or not (24).

(25) UR aspirates		UR Non aspirates	
(=SCB) TB		(=SCB) TB	
κα)□Hαλ	ξα □□λ ‘jackfruit’	λα□ι	λα ι ‘kind of fish’
πα)α□Hα	÷α □α ‘he goat’	μα□ι	μα ι ‘earth’
μυ□Hi	μυ □ι ‘bunch of hair’	ρυ□ι	ρυ ι ‘bread’

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to find an answer to the question of why prosodic prominence fails to license certain underlying marked features/segments in the segmental phonology of TB. These elements undergo weakening/deletion, though not across the board as yet, irrespective of their position of occurrence. Arguably, the grammar of prosody or metrical phonology of the system also plays no decisive role in this respect, though it may appear lucrative. A major restructuring of the segmental inventory of the dialect currently underway therefore holds the key to the mystery of weakening in TB compared to Sadhu Bangla held compatible with the UR of TB. A remarkable feature of this redefined featural/segmental inventory is the emergence of High tone as a compensation for the loss of aspiration. It is claimed and argued with evidence that there is a strong undercurrent of the movement towards the Unmarked in TB and all the segmental restructurings discussed are the consequence of that clandestine but universal sweep. The following tables contain the summa of the findings of the study. More studies are needed to demarcate the areas and routes of weakening in response to the call from the Unmarked.

Table 1 Weakening in TB: Place and Manner of Articulation

Place of Articulation (P/A)		Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation
Step 1: P/A1		Step 2	Step 3: P/A2
Plosives:		Plosives:	
pal → [+cor] (alv)	Allowed	(pal>) alv → [+cont]	
lab,velar → [+cor] (alv)	Not allowed	lab, vel → [+cont] (÷, ξ)	lab[-V] → h (*#), vel[-V] → h(*#)
retro, dental = [+cor] (alv)	Redundant		
Fricatives:		Fricatives:	
post alv = [+cor] (alv)	Redundant	post alv → η	

Table 2 Weakening: Phonation

1. Deaspiration	2. Rise of H tone <[+spr.gl]	3. Voicing (Lenition)
Plosives	Plosives	Plosives
*[+V, +spr.gl]	[+V, +spr.gl] → [+V, H]	
vel [-V, +spr.gl] → ξ□/(κH #-)	vel [-V, +spr.gl] → H (ξ□/(κH #-))	
lab [-V, +spr.gl] → ÷□/(÷H #-)	lab [-V, +spr.gl] → H (÷□/(÷H #-))	
(pal>) alv [-V, +spr.gl] → σ□	(pal>) alv [-V, +spr.gl] → H (σ□)	
dent[-V, +spr.gl] → τ□5/(τ5H #-)	dent[-V, +spr.gl] → H (τ□5/(τ5H #-))	

retro[-V,+spr.gl]→□□(□H #-)	retro[-V,+spr.gl]→H (□□□H (#-))	retro[-V+/-spr.gl]→H[+V]/v_v
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the audience including Aditi Lahiri, Carlos Gussenhoven, K.G. Vijaykrishnan and others, in the WT13 at IITG, 2016 for their observations and suggestions in respect of tonogenetic tendencies noted in TB, an otherwise ‘non-tonal’ variety of Bangla.

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