

Bertha Tone

Bertha is a tonal language and has both high and low tones. Only the high tones are marked. It is important to mark tone because often the absence of a tone marking can change the meaning of a text.

Write the following examples on the board and show the difference of tone to the students.

Examples of tone causing a difference of meaning:

Lexical difference:

dáára daara iis'ú íis'u
'burn' 'remain' 'bowl' 'star'

Grammatical difference:

Valence of verb:

dáára -alú dáára -álu

'burn s.th.' 'burn' (e.g. 'grass burns')

húrmiña hurmiña

'turn s.th. over' 'turn over' (e.g. 'car turns over')

Subject marker:

A-shup'úth-óó bele.
'I hit a stone.'

A-shup'úth-óó béle.
'A stone hit me.'

Tense difference:

Dáá-lí-ñgó-í.
'I gave it (once) to you.'

Daa-lí-ñgó-í.
'I will give it to you.'

Tone is marked on the vowels and so to look at tone we look at the syllables.

Put the following words on one side of the blackboard (WITHOUT TONE MARKED!!)

ber – spear	giñ – thing
bele – stone	are – eye
sheegé – sugar cane	marú – cat
bába – sister	míhi – women
indushafa – lips	añs’ak’ala – rainy season
holoñoniñ – two	afióñk’o – ladle
almúmdura – mirror	gín-da-lía – riddle
mis’éshoorú – bird	lúúbá – barn/stall
k’uria – snake	dabarú – alligator
amazíñ – mouse	haláli – python
ashishí – army ant	p’íp’íyó – little chicks
alíliañ – hyena	andugúné – great – grandfather
maabá-páálí – farmer	

On the other side of the blackboard write out the following syllable patterns:

L	H	LL	LH	HL
HH	LLL	LLH	LHL	LHH
HHH	LLLL	LLLH	LLHL	LHLL
HLHL	LHLH	LHHL	LLHH	LHHH

Explain to the students that you want them to arrange the different words into the correct syllable patterns. Do a couple of examples with the whole class. Have the students work together in groups of three or four to complete this exercise. Mix the students so that a non-Bertha speaker is with Bertha speaking students. Encourage the non-Bertha speakers to listen to the other student when they are speaking to see if they can hear the different tone patterns.

After the students have done this put the answers on the board [Answer key is below]. Tell the students that this is for their own reference when they are writing. Later they can check the list below and compare the

word they are writing to the words in the different syllable patterns to help them know where to write the tone.

ANSWER KEY

L ber – spear are – eye	H gíñ – thing	LL bele – stone	LH marú – cat sheegé – sugar cane
HL bába – sister míhi – women	HH lúúbá – barn/stall	LLL k’uria – snake	LLH amazíñ – mouse dabarú – alligator
LHL haláli - python	LHH ashishí – army ant	HHH p’íp’iyó – little chicks	
LLL indushafa – lips añs’ak’ala – rainy season	LLLH holoñoníñ – two	LLHL afióñk’o – ladle	
LHLL almúmdura – mirrior	HLHL gín-da-lia – riddle	LHLH mis’éshoorú – bird	
LHHL alííañ – hyena	LLHH andugúné – great – grandfather	LHHH maabá-páálí – farmer	