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A Case of Rhinoglottophilia in Hayu

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James Matisoff has recently drawn attention to the interesting phenomenon of rhinoglottophilia -- the association between glottal and nasal features in phonology -- with examples from many languages of the world.

In Hayu (Tibeto-Burman; East Nepal) the syllable-final stops are pronounced unexploded, with a simultaneously articulated glottal stop [ʔp, ʔt, ʔk]. The following syllable never begins with a vowel. But when the following syllable begins with /h/, a brief but distinct voiceless nasal, homorganic with the preceding stop, is heard at the syllable boundary. This is best illustrated in reduplicated verb forms with the instrumental postposition /ha/:

Root:	Reduplicated Form:	IPA:
ta 'place'	ta:taha	[ta:taha]
top 'beat'	totop.ha	[totoʔp ^h ha]
tot 'chase'	totot.ha	[totoʔt ^h ha]
tok 'drop'	totok.ha	[totoʔk ^h ha]

The articulatory explanation here is that the glottal closure of the final is released before the oral one; between the release of the glottal and the release of the oral closure, air can only escape through the nose, making a rhinoglottophilic voiceless nasal.

These facts give an articulatory clue to the modern Tibetan reflexes of the sound represented by Written Tibetan a-chung, widely supposed to represent glottal stop. The usual modern reflexes, where they appear, are glottal stop (or [ɣ]) before a vowel, and homorganic nasality before a stop (see Matisoff 1975). Hayu shows how the release of a glottal stop before the release of an oral stop can produce prenasalization.

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