

A Phonetic Study of Siyi Tonal Systems

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Abstract

Siyi or Sze-yap 四邑 dialects are a distinctive sub-group of Yue dialects which include dialects from Taishan 台山, Kaiping 開平, Xinhui 新會 and Enping 恩平. Despite many distinctive phonological traits, tonal pattern of Siyi dialects also distinguishes Siyi varieties from standard Guangzhou Yue dialect. However, previous studies of Siyi phonological systems treated tones as a side topic with merely impressionistic transcription in Five Points Scale (FPS) and were limited to a handful of Siyi varieties. In this study, a detailed phonetic investigation of tonal systems of 19 Siyi varieties was carried out, in which a new tonal model—Multi-Register and Four Level Model (RLM) was adopted in tonal transcription.

Based on a detailed phonetic description of tonal variation, a pioneering typological study of Siyi tones was also carried. From 17 Siyi varieties (two varieties, Longsheng 龍勝 and Siqian 司前 are quite unique and thus discussed separately), we conclude six typological tonal features and two general tonal patterns of Siyi dialects. Our attempt in setting up a Siyi tonal typology could contribute to our understanding and knowledge of tonal variation in Yue dialects.

Key words: Siyi dialects, Phonetic Study, RLM, Typological tonal feature, Tonal typology