Tracing Dynamic Evolution from Cross-dialect Comparisons: A Case Study of Tonal Systems in Songzi Area

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Abstract

Songzi of Hubei, located at a boundary area influenced by Xiang and Gan, now is classified into Subgroup Changhe of Southwestern Mandarin though it is quite distinct from the other members in this subgroup. It is also at the southern tip of a narrow area dividing Hubei into two dialectal parts with or without *Rusheng* (Entering Tone).

This paper attempts to find out the evolutionary process of Rusheng and the phonological systems among Songzi dialects. Based on the *Pan-chronic Phonology*, the methods of Acoustic and Auditory Phonetics and a broad fieldwork, the study reveals that Songzi dialect can be further divided into three phonological systems, i.e. Weishui, Nanhai and Songzihe, which manifest a dynamic tonal evolution. Except for an extra Rusheng category in Weishui, Weishui and Nanhai are identical in their tonal systems; then a tonal flip-flop of Yinping and Qusheng occurs in Nanhai and Songzihe. In addition, according to the four parameters to define Rusheng, the Rusheng category of Weishui is undergoing the following changes: (1) this Rusheng in *falsetto* or *fortis voice* falls in two ways, which implies its downward movement from *Register* High to Register Mid; (2) though the glottal stop ending □ is at the edge of a total disappearance, it still exists and is realized in two ways; (3) its *duration* almost approximates to the other non-Rusheng tones; (4) as to the *pitch* of Weishui's Rusheng, two contours co-occur, which are being lowered or directly changed into other non-Rusheng tones.

In the previous literature, the tonal systems of Songzi dialects were defined under the Five-point Scale. However, with the new findings of this research, there is a challenge in the need for a new theory for the definition of tones.

Key words：Rusheng, Songzi, Falsetto, Southwestern Mandarin, Language Evolution, Tonal flip-flop