

The Diachrony of Tone Sandhi: Evidence from Southern Min Chinese

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Abstract

This dissertation provides a diachronic account of the final-prominent tone sandhi of Southern Min Chinese (SM) based on an in-depth investigation of the disyllabic final-prominent tone sandhi of 16 SM dialects. Most of the previous studies on SM tone sandhi adopted a synchronic perspective and put the main focus on the phonological alternations from citation tone to sandhi tone or vice versa. The explanatory power of these alternation-based analyses is rather limited as they fail to accommodate the diversity of different SM tone sandhi patterns. What's more, the assumption that SM tone sandhi alternation can be treated as generative process has been seriously challenged in the last two decades.

In this dissertation, I propose a position-based diachronic approach towards tone sandhi and argue that SM's sandhi tones (i.e. non-final tones) and citation tones (and final tones) have been changing on divergent paths. Generally speaking, the change of sandhi tones is reductive in nature: it tends to reduce the pitch excursion of contour tones and neutralize categories, and it is more prone to contextual effect than citation tones (and final tones) do. On the other hand, the change of citation tones (and final tones) can be characterized as a series of chain shifts, which is non-reductive in nature. It is this

difference in direction of change that brings about the unnaturalness in the phonology of SM tone sandhi.

An extensive investigation on the areal variations of the final-prominent tone sandhi of SM were conducted to demonstrate the diachronic change of SM tones in final and non-final positions. 16 SM dialects' tone sandhi patterns are discussed here and 10 of them are based on acoustic results drawn from first-hand data. By adopting the position-based diachronic approach, this dissertation provide for the first time an explicit and systematic explanation for these areal variations, and therefore improve our understanding of the formation of SM tone sandhi patterns.