

Tonal Patterns and Tone Evolution of Chaoshan Chinese

by ZHANG, Jingfen

Division of Humanities

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Abstract

This thesis is a comprehensive study on the phonetic characteristics of citation tones in Chaoshan Chinese. It presents the tonal patterns of 65 localities in the Chaoshan area under the “multiple-register and four level” tonal model. Three case studies are conducted to delve into the evolutionary paths of Chaoshan tones.

Fourteen tonal patterns identified in Chaoshan Chinese can be further divided into three groups based on their synchronic variations and diachronic changes, namely Shanjie type, Huipu type and Chaoyang type. This finding can shed light on the linguistic classification of Chaoshan Chinese.

In the Huipu area, two tonal chain shifts are proposed to account for the diversified tonal patterns within this area. The V-shaped shift involving the downward shift of falling tones and the upward shift of rising tones, can explain the tonal development from Jinghai dialect to Liusha dialect. The downward chain shift of level tones is hypothesized to explain the age-related differences of Jinghai dialect.

Based on the variations within and across speakers and dialectal varieties in the Chaoyang area, the evolutionary path of T2a is identified. T2a has changed from a high convex falling tone to a high level tone, and subsequently a rising tone. The tendency of change observed among different age groups is parallel with that revealed by different geographical variations. The younger speakers of Miancheng dialect change T2a to a rising tone, and this development further triggers a pull chain shift that consists of T2a, T3b and T1a.

By referring to the different pitch relationships of checked tones (T4a and T4b) in distinctive Southern Min dialects, four stages are identified for the “flip-flop” change of checked tones from “Yin-high vs. Yang-low” to “Yin-low vs. Yang-high”. Yun’ao and Dahao dialects, being at the transitional stages, are characterized by different pitch contours in T4a and T4b. The Yun’ao case is of great typological significance for it signals that phonetically short tone syllables can have contour distinctions as well. Moreover, it supports the claim that the historical “flip-flop” of checked tones in Chaoshan Chinese is actually accomplished via a process of gradual phonetic change. Different tonal contours and different phonation types are

the reason why this gradual phonetic change does not cause a tonal merger of T4a and T4b.

In sum, this thesis provides a large-scale typological study on Chaoshan Chinese, and offers a good example of how to figure out the evolutionary paths of tones from the perspective of variation. The natural alliance of phonetics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and dialect geography is reinforced. It is also suggested in this thesis that the joint use of these four disciplines is very promising for the study of Chinese.