

Phrasal Tonology in Suzhou Chinese: Some preliminaries

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1. Introduction

This study is a continuation of previous research on tonal behaviors in Suzhou Chinese (Northern Wu; Zhu 2020; 2021). Cited work focused mostly on prosodic words that are disyllabic, and pointed at intriguing alternations among light-initial lexical items. Although a foot inventory following the tenets of Kager (1993) offers a systematic account of all disyllabic sandhi patterns, processes that apply to longer prosodic phrases are yet unexplained, and exactly what roles phrase structure may play (cf. Duanmu 1995, 1999) still remains unknown. In this study, I aim to investigate two phrasal tonal phenomena in Suzhou: pre-boundary L tone insertion, and morphology-sensitive footing.

2. Pre-boundary L tone insertion

Previous descriptive grammars and phonological accounts differ considerably in the treatment of a few sandhi patterns. One pair of examples is given in (1). /T/ stands for any lexical tone.

(1a). /HH/ + /T/ → [H.H] (Shi & Jiang 2013; my fieldwork)

(1b). /HH/ + /T/ → [H.L] (Ye 1979, 1993; Xie 1982; Wang 1996, 2011)

This apparent difference is potentially due to a L tone insertion rule at the end of Prosodic (or Intonational) Phrases: $H \rightarrow L \text{ } / _]_{\text{PhP/IP}}$. This sort of edge-sensitive phonological processes is discussed in Selkirk (1984) for Xiamen Chinese (Southern Min), but is not yet examined in Suzhou. Moreover, the L tone insertion rule fails to apply to certain sandhi forms. Consider the pair in (2). In the current study, I aim to both determine the domain of application and blocking conditions of this L tone insertion rule.

(2a). /HH/ + /T/]_{PhP/IP} → [H.L]

(2b). /LH/ + /T/]_{PhP/IP} → [L.H]/*[L.L]

3. Morphology-sensitive footing

I use the cover term "morphology" to refer to patterns conditioned by phrase structures. Duanmu (1995) compares trisyllabic words in Shanghai (Northern Wu) and Taiwan (Southern Min) with the structure $\sigma\sigma\text{--}\sigma$ and $\sigma\text{--}\sigma\sigma$ (the dash stands for a word/morpheme boundary), attributing the differences across the two types to a prohibition of adjacent foot heads (related to stress clash avoidance effects). An example of Suzhou is shown in (3) (σ : metrical head; \emptyset : toneless).

(3a). ba.həu ti:
grocery store
H L HL/ \emptyset
($\underline{\sigma}$. σ) ($\underline{\sigma}$)
($\underline{\sigma}$. σ) σ

(3b). dəu vɛ:.ti:
big restaurant
L H \emptyset
($\underline{\sigma}$. σ) σ
* ($\underline{\sigma}$) ($\underline{\sigma}$. σ)

In (3a), it is possible for the monosyllabic morpheme *store* to form its own foot and preserve its underlying tones (unfooted syllables lose all phonological tones in Suzhou); in contrast, it is impossible for the monosyllabic morpheme *big* to form its own foot in (3b), since doing so will trigger a stress clash: *($\underline{\sigma}$)($\underline{\sigma}$. σ). Crucially, stress clash can neither be avoided by positing a second iamb, as all feet in Suzhou must be trochaic: *($\underline{\sigma}$)(σ . $\underline{\sigma}$). The current project explores the role phrase structure can play in determining surface tonal patterns in Suzhou.

4. Methodology

All examples above come from my previous fieldwork, but they are preliminary in nature. Since both aspects are rarely, if ever, discussed in the relevant literature, the current project is also documentary work of an understudied language variety. I will analyze conversational speech data in the form of sociolinguistic interviews, and try to locate phrases and utterances that directly address my two research questions:

- (a) What is the domain and condition of the pre-boundary L tone insertion rule in Suzhou?
- (b) What role do different phrase structures play in determining the tonal output in Suzhou?

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