

Corrective focus and tone sandhi in Xiangshan Wu Chinese

Yibing Shi

University of Cambridge

Xiangshan Wu Chinese, a dialect spoken in the southeastern part of China, exhibits two sandhi patterns which prevail in the Northern Wu dialect groups in China: (a) Left-dominant: a left-to-right tone spreading mode that usually only applies to lexical compounds and modifier-head phrases; (b) Right-dominant: a mode that preserves the last tone and reduces some tonal features of preceding tones, and is usually only found in verb-headed phrases. Some previous studies analyse this asymmetry as a one in edge prominence (e.g. Selkirk & Shen 1990). Examples in (1) demonstrate the underlying mechanisms of the two sandhi patterns.

(1) Left-dominant			Right-dominant
[lao	lu]		[ma vε]
'old road'			'buy rice'
LML	LM	underlying tones	LML LM underlying tones
LML		deletion	L LM reduction
L	M	spreading	

The present study examines how corrective focus affects tone sandhi patterns in disyllables in Xiangshan Wu Chinese. Participants include 8 Xiangshan native speakers (mean age: 50, 4 female). A total of 48 disyllables are selected as target tokens, which cover 8 tone combinations and 3 morpho-syntactic structures: (a) Lexical compounds; (b) Modifier+Head (MH) phrases; and (c) Verb-Object (VO) phrases. Presented with the target token in written text and a recording containing a disyllable that differs from the target in one syllable, the participants were prompted to correct the mismatching syllable, thus producing the disyllables with a corrective focus.

Results reveal that the presence of corrective focus, though not always, does affect the sandhi outputs. Three strategies have been observed: (a) Prosodic boundary insertion: each monosyllable forms its own domain and thus preserves the underlying tone; (b) Substitution with a falling contour: the focused tone changes to a falling contour; (c) Prominence head swapping: the head swaps to the other syllable and the whole disyllable thus adopts an opposite sandhi pattern. In (2) I use the disyllable [lao lu] 'old road', which originally adopts left-dominant pattern and has the focus on the 2nd syllable, to illustrate the three strategies.

(2) Strategies for marking focus		
[lao	lu]	
'old road'		
(LML)	(LM)	underlying tones
(L	M)	citation sandhi
(LML)	(LM*)	a. Prosodic boundary insertion
(L	HL*)	b. Substitution with a falling contour
(L	LM*)	b. Prominence head swapping

Interestingly, while strategies (a) and (b) are equally frequently adopted in disyllables originally using left- or right-dominant patterns, strategy (c) is largely detected in left-dominant patterns. It can possibly be explained by the higher complexity of left-dominant

pattern, which is thus not preferred; or by another more theoretical account which assumes that right-dominant pattern happens at the phrasal level whereas left-dominant pattern happens at a lower level and the application is not reversible from a higher to a lower level.

Reference

Selkirk, E., & Shen, T. (1990). Prosodic Domains in Shanghai Chinese. *The Phonology-Syntax Connection*, ed. by Sharon Inkelas and Draga Zec, 313-337. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.