

Tonal Neutralizations in Northern Wu Chinese

This study examines tonal neutralizations in Northern Wu Chinese, especially the Suzhou dialect and the Wuxi dialect. It is well-known that these dialects have the rule which deletes all tones except tones on the initial syllable. This rule is applied to all kind of polysyllabic words, including words that have stem-suffix and numeral-classifier structures, reduplicated words, and compounds. The existence of this rule makes these dialects similar to word tone languages like Kagoshima Japanese, whose length of words does not affect a number of tonal patterns. However, Suzhou and Wuxi also have another type of tone sandhi, named pattern substitution, which alternates underlying tonal pattern of initial syllables with another type of tonal patterns. I conduct experiments that examine whether pattern substitution is caused by the rule or not, a perception experiment for Suzhou and a production experiment for Wuxi. The results show these dialects have several tonal neutralizations in compounds which are caused by the rule. In particular, Suzhou only has three tone patterns in compounds, while it has five tone patterns in other kinds of words.