Abstract: Disyllabic sequences in Shanghai Wu undergo different types of tone sandhi depending on their syntactic structure: modifier-noun compounds spread the initial tone across the disyllable, while verb-noun phrases often maintain the final tone and neutralize the nonfinal tone, especially if the phrase has a low frequency of occurrence. We investigated the productivity of the two tone sandhi types through 48 speakers’ productions of real and nonce words. Our results showed that Shanghai speakers were sensitive to the structure-dependency of the sandhi pattern and performed different sandhis according to the disyllable's syntactic structure in both real and nonce words. But in nonce words, the productivity of each specific sandhi varies, and the difference between left- and right-dominant sandhis is attenuated. Additionally, neither the left- or right-dominant sandhi involves complete tonal neutralization. These results indicate that in order to arrive at a full picture of the sandhi patterning, traditional impressionistic descriptions need to be complemented by instrumental data.

[Full Paper]