A foot-based typology of tonal reassociation

Perspectives from synchrony and learnability

This dissertation is about the synchronic analysis, typology, and formal learnability of tonal reassociation. Tonal reassociation refers to a group of phonological phenomena where a lexical tone surfaces in positions that the tone did not occupy underlyingly, without an apparent phonological trigger for doing so. Linguistic theory must answer why tone reassociates, and how the surface targets for reassociation are determined. In addition, it must account for the attested crosslinguistic variation of such patterns.

To address this, the dissertation develops an analytical framework based on the interaction between tone and foot structure. Feet function as licensors for tone, driving and restraining tonal reassociation. Since many reassociation patterns involve ternary domains, the framework extends traditional binary feet theory by allowing layered, ternary feet. Grammar computation is modeled in Harmonic Serialism, which solves an opacity problem found for Optimality Theory.

The first half of the book motivates the framework through case studies of ternary spread-and-shift in Saghala, and quantity-sensitive ternary tone spread in Copperbelt Bemba. The framework accounts for both cases, and it is argued that layered feet are crucial to this success.

The third study investigates the typology predicted by the foot-based approach. By exploring factorial typologies, it is found that the approach accounts for much or all of the considered variation, but also shows several kinds of overgeneration. The fourth study accounts for the overgeneration by considering the learnability of foot-based analyses for various reassociation patterns in Optimality Theory. Attested patterns are learnable, and more easily so than unattested ones, under the condition that learners consider production and comprehension errors in tandem.