Production and Perception of Kaifeng Mandarin Tones

This dissertation presents a phonetic study of the four syllabic tone melodies, phonologically represented as LH, HL, H and L, in the Zhongyuan Mandarin dialect of Kaifeng, spoken in the east central Henan Province of China. There are three speaker-dependent F0 contours for L, two of which, the dipping L and the falling L, were equally discriminable overall in an identification task that pitted them against each of LH, HL, and H, but with the falling L favouring distinctiveness from LH and the dipping one from HL. The inter-speaker variation of L thus reflects the persistent maintenance of an undecided competition between alternative phonetic enhancements of L. In addition, it presents two cases of incomplete neutralization in the tonal phonology that suggest that this phenomenon may have to be accounted for by the speaker’s inhibition in the pronunciation of derived forms. The findings highlight the importance of detailed phonological and phonetic analyses of Chinese languages for linguistic research.

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