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Phantom stress in tone sandhi: evidence from Shaoxing Wu Chinese

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Citation

Wen, X. (2026, September 17). *Phantom stress in tone sandhi: evidence from Shaoxing Wu Chinese*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4309711>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Phantom stress in tone sandhi

Evidence from Shaoxing Wu Chinese

This dissertation investigates the potential tone-stress interaction in Shaoxing Wu Chinese, a Northern Wu variety exhibiting complex sandhi patterns, through a series of controlled acoustic experiments. The findings reveal that stress cannot provide a consistent account of tonal realizations across different domains in Shaoxing Wu Chinese. At the word level, left- and right-dominant sandhi patterns are found to coexist, yet no independent acoustic correlates of stress are observed. At the compound level, all 2+1 and the vast majority of 1+2 compounds form a single sandhi domain, with tonal contours conditioned primarily by the initial syllable alone, which is incompatible with stress-based predictions. At the phrase level, disyllabic verb-object and subject-predicate structures display different tonal patterns, but the distinction disappears in longer sequences, suggesting an interaction between syntactic structure and constituent size that stress cannot adequately capture. These results call for a more empirically grounded approach to tone-stress interaction in Sinitic varieties and highlight the importance of investigating complex sandhi patterns. Moreover, the tone sandhi patterns in Shaoxing Wu Chinese reveal more general tendencies across Northern Wu varieties, and offer new empirical evidence on how morphosyntactic structure and constituent size interact in prosodic constituent formation.

ISBN 978-94-6093-509-1
DOI <https://dx.medra.org/10.48273/LOT0724>



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