

Abstract of thesis entitled

Syllable Fusion in Cantonese Connected Speech

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Syllable fusion is a common phenomenon in Cantonese connected speech, where two syllables are merged into a single syllable and sometimes a sesquisyllable (Matisoff 1973), which means 'one and a half syllable'. The result does not cause any communication problems. Traditionally it has been thought that the word to which a high rising changed tone is attached acquires a new meaning. However, this applies to a limited number of words only, mainly verbs and adjectives. This study reinterprets the phenomenon as a merging of two syllables. The changed tone, instead of being a trigger of a new meaning, is analyzed as the result of tonal stability after merging of two syllables. The present analysis of fusion applies to all types of words.

This study attempts to investigate syllable fusion in a comprehensive way based on a large amount of data. Data were collected from recordings



of radio programs and daily conversations. It is observed that fusion is more likely to occur when the first syllable in question has vocalic ending, initial [j] or [h]. On the other hand, fusion is less likely to occur when the first syllable has bilabial endings or when the second syllable has bilabial initials. A stress-based analysis is proposed to explain why fusion occurs. Morphemes which are syntactic non-heads (as defined in Chomsky (1981) and Pollock (1989)) of their compounds or phrases receive stress. This nonhead stress rule motivates the morphemes to be reduced or merged with another syllable when fusion occurs in connected speech. The process of how two syllables become one is accounted for by an autosegmental framework with association starting from both ends.

(271 words)

