QP2 Topics

May 1, 2018

1 Topics, Broadly Speaking

For this QP, I'm considering (at least) two broad topics: checked tone in Chinese dialects, and tone sandhi alternations.

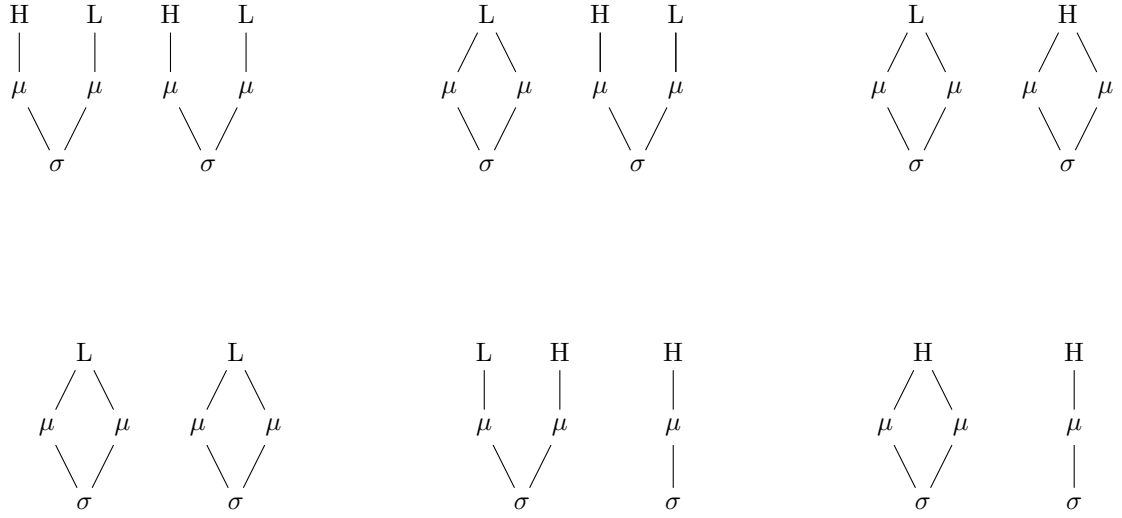
- Checked Tone
  - How to represent it?
  - In terms of local restrictions?
  - In terms of melody restrictions?
  - As an $I \rightarrow O$ process?
  - Can its representation tell us about its learnability?
- Tone Sandhi
  - How to formalize the notion that tone sandhi is an inherently *prosodic* phenomenon?
  - Sandhi happens within a domain; span? foot?
  - Directional asymmetries (right-dominant, left-dominant), are they due to prominence or stress?
  - How are tone sandhi processes learned?
  - Take a step back from a particular formalism (OT, representation)

The interest in checked tone comes from a problem I started working on in my MA thesis, which looked at the representation of checked tone in the Nanjing dialect.

2 Nanjing Checked Tone and a (Possible) Subset Problem

The following tonal structures are illformed in the Nanjing dialect. This assumes that checked tone is monomoraic, with a single mora attaching to a H segment.

(1)



The set of illicit substrings in the language is summarized in (2).

(2) S_{NJ} = {HLHL, LLHL, LLHH, LLLL, LHH, HHH}

There are a number of issues with this characterization. Primarily, there are licit forms in the language which contain members of S_{NJ} as substrings, such as LHHH, and HHHH.

(3)

Enriching the representation to include syllable boundaries (ex. *LH.H or *HH.H) or word boundaries (*LHH# or *HHH#) independently is of no help. Combining the two (*LH.H# or *HH.H#) does mitigate this issue. There is, however, a sense that what is at the heart of the issue is that a monomoraic [H]-toned syllable is different from a bimoraic one (as evidenced by the different sandhi patterns observed for each). Across dialects of Chinese, checked tones are defined not by a particular tonal representation, but by the presence of an obstruent (and sometimes sonorant, non-nasal) coda. The question is how to represent this distinction in a formal theory of tone sandhi. Segmental information cannot be encoded directly on the melodic tier, or in a string representation with tone-to-TBU associations.

In my thesis, I capitalized on the notion of domains and local conjunction to isolate the sandhi environment which included checked-tone, but excluded bimoraic [H] syllables:

(4) *[HH, H?]$_{[H]}$: Assign one violation to an H-element that occupies both HH and H? melodies

Here, the domain of application is a single H-element. An unattractive component of this analysis is that it assumes [?] to be visible on the melodic tier, which is rather unconventional, and probably wrong.