

THE INFLUENCE OF THE L1 LEXICAL SYSTEM ON THE PROCESSING OF TONES IN L2

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ABSTRACT

Systematic correspondences can be found between Cantonese and Mandarin tones. For example, most of the words pronounced with tone 2 in Cantonese are pronounced with tone 3 in Mandarin (e.g., 找 ‘find’). Therefore, Cantonese speakers may mistakenly think that words where the Mandarin tone pronunciation does not follow the dominant pronunciation relationship (e.g., 摸 ‘touch’, pronounced with Cantonese tone 2, but Mandarin tone 1) are pronounced in Mandarin with the dominant correspondence (i.e., tone 3). A Mandarin character-sound matching task using words which either employed a dominant (i.e., regular) or subdominant (i.e., irregular) tone relationship was carried out to examine whether the processing of Mandarin tones by Cantonese speakers was influenced by such relationships. The auditory stimulus either had a matched or a tone-mismatched pronunciation, where the mismatched pronunciations of irregular and regular words follow the dominant and subdominant tone relationships respectively. Results indicated that more mismatched pronunciations in irregular than regular Mandarin words were treated as the correct pronunciations for Cantonese speakers. The findings indicate that the processing of tones in an L2 is influenced by the L1 lexical system, not just the native phonological system.