By No Means Marginal: Privative Tone in Zhuokeji rGyalrong

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Abstract

Zhuokeji rGyalrong has long been identified as ‘atonal’ or marginally tonal’. This paper argues against this view based on evidence discovered in lexicon and a wide range of morphological constructions. I assert that Zhuokeji is by no means atonal, nor are its tonal modifications merely restricted to a limited range of uses. Instead, tones are not only employed to contrast lexical meanings, they also serve as a crucial device for the formation of all sorts of grammatical categories. This paper demonstrate that Zhuokeji is a tone language that exhibits a privative system in which /HL/ contrasts with /∅/. The basic domain of the tonal contrast is the word, and the surface pitch of every word is contextually sensitive. With respect to typology of tone systems, Zhuokeji tone is situated right between the prototypes of “contour-tone” and “register-tone”. This updated analysis should help us consider Zhuokeji tone for what it really is.