

Zhang, H. (2014b). "The Third Tone: Allophones, Sandhi Rules and the Pedagogy." *Journal of Chinese Language Teachers Association*, February 2014, Volume 49:1, pp.117-145.

Abstract:

The third tone (T3) in Mandarin Chinese is one of the most problematic tones for second language studies of Mandarin tones. This study examines non-native tonal productions of three allophones of T3 made by sixty learners of Mandarin with different first language backgrounds: English, Japanese, and Korean. It is found that the learners perform the Pre-T3 Sandhi (214→35/\_\_\_214 or 21) better than the Half-T3 Sandhi (214→21/\_\_\_T when T≠214 or 21), which is the reverse of the case for native Mandarin speakers. Furthermore, seemingly contradictory results suggest that the main source of error may come from how second language learners are introduced to T3. On the one hand, when language learners make an error with T1, T2, and T4, Half-T3 is the most often used substitute tone, suggesting that Half-T3 is an easy tone for second language learners to produce. On the other hand, Half-T3 is often mis-pronounced as Full-T3, indicating that Half-T3 is difficult. Although these results seem to be inconsistent with one another at first glance, it is argued here that these findings are instead caused by an unnecessary computational burden placed on learners. Specifically, this study suggests that the "Half-T3 First" teaching method should be revisited as an alternative to the current mainstream "Full-T3 First" teaching method. This study also proposes that the low falling tone [21] is the basic form of T3, while the dipping tone [214] is the intonation form of T3.)