

Alternations of Voiced and Voiceless Initials in Old Chinese: A Cognitive Approach to the Study of Chinese Historical Phonology

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This paper discusses different phonetic representations for the morphological process of the alternation of voiced and voiceless initials in Old Chinese. Two important proposals by Baxter & Sagart (1995) and Gong Hwangcheng (2002) are highlighted. The crucial difference between these two proposals lies in the assignment of the base and derived forms that participate in this valence-changing process. In the former, a transitive verb is taken to be the basic, while in the latter, the transitive verb is instead analyzed as the derived form. By making reference to Joan Bybee's (1985) work on morphology, the two proposals are studied from a cognitive-typological perspective. As a final point, this paper also highlights the fact that in the reconstruction of Old Chinese phonology, word frequency and meaning are two important factors that deserve further exploration in Chinese historical phonology.