

The Tonal Harmony in Chinese Raps  
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There have been two main approaches of reaching the harmony between music and language since Han dynasty. The first is “lyrics-oriented,” which means that melody is modified according to the lyrics for a better sound effect. The second is “music-oriented,” meaning that words in lyrics are deliberately chosen to conform to the melody. The music-oriented approach is frequently used in works like Tang poems, Song prose, and Yuan lyrics (Wang, 1984). Following the tradition of “music-oriented” modification, language tones in Chinese raps are decoratively modified for the purpose of an accordant effect. Such innovation brings intimate interaction of music and language. On the one hand, language tones play the same role as music notes and successfully display musical effects. On the other hand, music motivations are transformed into linguistic constraints generating harmonic linguistic forms. The purpose of this study is to investigate the types of tonal alternations in Chinese raps under the framework of optimality theory and probe into the relevant constraints. Another focus of this study is to examine whether there are core constraints that are partially ordered, and that make raps different from ordinary speech. The theoretical analysis of rap may help construct the grammar of the “music-oriented” language, and shed new light on the insight of natural language.