

# Teaching the Sounds of Standard Chinese (*pǔtōnghuà*)

## 普通话语音教学探究

### HAND-OUT

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### PUTONGHUA PRONUNCIATION: DIFFICULT

- Many difficult sounds (difficult consonants, diphthongs, triphthongs...)
- Small inventory of syllables → large homophony of morphemes (*shì* = 是, 事, 市...)
- The words are short, basically have no morphology
- Chinese = tone language; citation tones may change drastically in connected speech
- Co-existence of tone and stress, of tone and intonation
- Problems with *Hanyu Pinyin* spelling (HP is an orthographic system, NOT a phonetic transcription → does not give reliable clues about pronunciation; the letters must be “interpreted”. E.g. one letter – various readings: “*i*” read as [i:] in *mǐ* 米, as [j] in *miè* 灭, as [ɿ] in *mài* 卖, as [ʅ] in *zì* 字, as [ʅ] in *zhǐ* 纸, etc.

### THE INITIALS

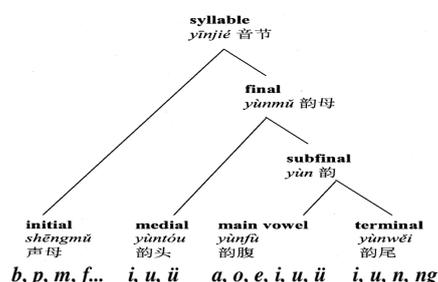
very useful in L2 teaching: The IPA charts, sagittal sections 舌位图 and palatograms 腭位图 (good ones: Ohnesorg & Švarný 1955, Zhou & Wu 1963). E.g.: The “retroflexes” *zh*, *ch*, *sh*, *r* (卷舌音) are actually not retroflexes! They are apical post-alveolars (*zh* is [tʃ̟], not [tʃ̠]). The “palatals” *j*, *q*, *x* are not palatals, they are alveolo-palatals (*x* is [ç], not [ç̟]). Cf. *zh*, *x*:



### THE FINALS

How to find the proper reading (i.e. allophone) of a vowel letter (vowel phoneme)?

- to know the assimilation of the (non-high) main vowel to the ending: e.g. *bān* 班 [pān], *bāng* 帮 [pɑŋ]
- to know the function of a letter (phoneme) within the syllable (an initial, a medial, a main vowel, an ending). The students should know this scheme:

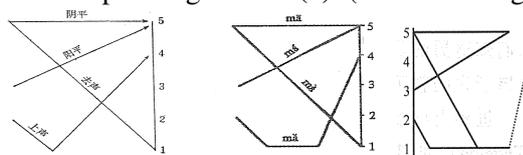


Each of the 4 functional components has its specific phonetic features:

- the medials *i*, *u*, *ü*: pronounced as **glides (approximants)** [j], [w], [ɥ]: *miàn* 面 [mjɛn], *huán* 环 [hwan], *xué* 学 [çɥɛ]
- the main vowels *a*, *o*, *e*, *i*, *u*, *ü*: (mostly) read as **full vowels**: *mǐ* 米 [mi:], *mǎn* 满 [man]
- the endings *i*, *u*, *n*, *ng*: pronounced “**sloppily**”: the vowel *i* = lax, lowered [ɪ], as in *mài* 卖 [mai], *u* = lax, lowered [ʊ], as in *dào* 到 [tau]; the nasals *n*, *ng* often have a weak closure

## THE TONES – T3

Diagrams of T3: EITHER the traditional “spiky” diagram **214** (e.g. Wang et al. 2002, p. 85), OR the “tub-shape” diagram **211(4)** (Lin and Wang 2003, p. 125, Cao 2002, p. 94).



The is better. WHY? The initial fall: probably just physiological; the final rise: optional (allowed just before a pause), majority of T3 occurrences lack it. Phonemically most important: the low portion.

## STRESS

“machine-gun rhythm”: syllable-timed languages (Czech; French)

*Proč jsi mi o tom neřekl.* ●●●●●●●● syllables have roughly equal length

“Morse-code rhythm”: stress-timed languages (English; colloquial *putonghua* = CPTH)

stressed syllables = long full, unstressed syllables = short, reduced

*Some of you wanted to tell him*

—●●—●●—●

*Nǐ xiān zuò gōngke ba, zuòwánle zài qù wánr!*

●—●—●●/●—●●●—

**The phonetic features of stress / non-stress in English and CPTH:** similar principles:

1. manipulation with syllable duration, 2. manipulation with pitch range, 3. segmental reductions in the unstressed syllables. **CPTH – relation between stress and tone:** DISTINCT TONE CONTOUR = physical manifestation of stress (one of them). The more of stress – the more apparent tone contour (expanded pitch range + longer duration of a syllable). And vice versa: the less of stress – the more obscured tone contour.

**clitics** = monosyllabic function words; they are unstressed and closely attached to the neighbouring word (clitic host): *try-it, to-fasten*.

**Chinese Clitics** *fùzhuócí* 附着词: structural particles, aspect particles, and sentence particles (*le* 了, *guo* 过, *de* 的, *ma* 吗, *ba* 吧...). No lexical tone! (they carry 轻声)

**Chinese Cliticoids** *lèi fùzhuócí* 类附着词 (my term) = monosyllabic function words which have lexical tone (prepositions, conjunctions, modal verbs, personal pronouns, formal adverbs, measure words... *wǒ* 我, *nǐ* 你, *tā* 他, *yào* 要, *xiǎng* 想, *jiù* 就, *gè* 个, *běn* 本, *tào* 套, *bǎ* 把, *gěi* 给, *shàng* 上... cca 40-50); normally unstressed, de-stressed (“weak form”), only occasionally bear logical stress (“strong form”). E.g. 我: stressed = [wǒ<sup>3</sup>], unstressed = [wǒ]. They strikingly resemble English “Words with weak forms” (articles, personal pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs... *the, a, an, you, she, your, him, us, and, but, that, at, for, from, of, to, am, can* – cca 40-50).

The Cliticoids have a high frequency in speech. Since they are regularly destressed, they are important for the speech rhythm → important in L2 teaching!

**MINIMODULES** 微型模块 (my term): 2-3 syllabic expressions composed of the most common Chinese words: 1. Clitics, 2. Cliticoids, 3. common 1-2 syllabic words. *hěn hǎo, dào nǎr? wǒ yào qù, nǐ qù nǎr? chī le ma? gào su tā, zuò huǒchē...* Building blocks of speech. Useful for exercising: basic vocabulary, tone combinations, 轻声, stress/ non-stress, sentence intonation (statement vs. 吗 Q).

## LITERATURE

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