

Třísková, Hana. *Segmentální struktura čínské slabiky* [*Segmental Structure of the Mandarin Syllable*]. Prague: Karolinum, 2012. 456 pp. ISBN: 978-80-246-2181-4. Price 387 CZK – Review by *Tomáš Duběda*.

Segmental Structure of the Mandarin Syllable is a comprehensive monograph covering both the phonology and the phonetics of Standard Chinese sounds. Despite the keyword “syllable” in its title, motivated by the fact that the anchoring of Chinese sounds in the syllable is more vigorous than it is the case in European languages, the reader will find in the book a thorough description of what is usually called “segmental phonetics and phonology.” On the other hand, prosodic issues like tone, stress and intonation are not discussed.

The introductory part 1 (*On the Chinese language*) provides general information about Chinese and delimits its standard variety. In the section devoted to Pinyin, which includes its authentic version as it was approved in 1958, the author claims that this alphabet is neither a phonetic nor a phonological transcription system, but rather a writing system of its own, though phonologically motivated. Finally, a short historical overview of phonological and phonetic studies of Chinese, both in China and outside it, is given.

In part 2 (*The syllable*), the “Western” model of syllabic structure (onset/nucleus/coda) is compared with the traditional Chinese approach (CGVX, or initial/medial/main vowel/ending). Although the possibility of a “mixed” model is discussed, implicit preference is given to the CGVX model, which is also viewed as more suitable for language teaching.

Part 3 (*Initials*) is dedicated to syllable-initial consonants, which are analysed both phonetically and phonologically. Particular attention is paid to issues under debate, such as aspiration (including a discussion of its two potential sources – glottal and supraglottal) and its relation to tenseness and voicing, or the phonological status of Pinyin consonants *r* and *j*, *q*, *x*.

An analogous treatment is applied to the remaining portion of the syllable in part 4 (*Finals*). The internal structure of finals,

composed of 1–3 phonemes, obeys a number of combinatory constraints; these are formalised by means of an original phonotactic model inspired by Duanmu¹ and Dragunov & Dragunova.² Several problems that permit more than one solution are discussed in detail: the status of medials (phonologically, the author considers them as forming part of a polyphthong, and phonetically, they are analysed as glides), apical vowels (phonologically, they are analysed by the author as vocalic phonemes, and phonetically, they are syllabic approximants) and the *er* final (analysed as a simple rhoticised vowel), or the transitional nature of nasal endings *-n*, *-ng*. More than once, the author resolves phonological ambiguities in favour of the structures proposed by Pinyin, thus acknowledging its phonological potential.

Part 5 (*Inventory of segmental syllables*) includes an exhaustive list of the segmental forms of Chinese syllables. Systematic and accidental gaps in the system are discussed. The book is completed by a Conclusion, an English summary, an alphabetical list of all Mandarin syllables giving both their phonological structures and their IPA transcriptions, and a Czech-Chinese index of phonetic terms, also including English equivalents for many entries.

Since the significant contribution of Oldřich Švarný,³ investigations into Chinese phonetics have been scarce in the Czech Republic. This applies more generally to all oriental languages (B. Slavická’s *Practical Phonetics of Vietnamese*⁴ is an exception in this respect). In her text, H. Třísková gives Czech readers an account of Chinese segmental phonetics which is *comprehensive, theoretically founded, modern, and useful*. Let me develop these four aspects in more detail:

The 456 pages in A4 format made it possible for the author to give a *comprehensive* description of the articulatory, auditory and phonological aspects of Chinese sounds, which includes a large number of diagrams (mainly adopted from Ohnesorg & Švarný and Zhou & Wu⁵) and tables, and to confront theories originating in different cultural backgrounds: China, Western countries, Czechoslovakia (represented especially by O. Švarný), and

also the Soviet Union. Elements of general phonetics, by no means superfluous, are given each time the topic turns out to require such a reminder. Furthermore, pedagogical concerns are present throughout the book.

The *theoretical qualities* of H. Třísková's text lie especially in the rational and critical way she handles available analyses of Chinese phonetic patterns to achieve her own conclusions, which are explicitly stated in the book. The paradigm of classical phonology is adopted, with occasional references to other models (generative phonology, non-linear phonology, optimality theory).

Although the study of Chinese sounds stems from a long tradition, it needs to be nourished by the findings of *modern* general phonetics, with its universal taxonomy, which enables researchers from different fields to make cross-linguistic comparisons and to communicate more efficiently. This requirement has been largely met in the book.

The claim that the volume is *useful* is not an overstatement: in the context of an increasing interest in Chinese, there is a clear need for a reliable description of its phonetic system. The book will serve not only teachers of Chinese and advanced students, who will find within its pages practical advice for pronunciation training and useful remarks on phonetic interference from Czech, but also sinologists and, last but not least, linguists having no mastery of Chinese, but seeking information about this language (among whom belongs the author of the present review).

In comparison with other authoritative texts on Mandarin phonetics and phonology

(especially Duanmu¹ 2002 and Lin⁶), H. Třísková's book has the advantage of exploring both the phonetic and the phonological aspects of sound structure, going more into detail, and aiming for a pedagogical application. There are good reasons to believe that an English translation of the book would find a readership.

Notes

- ¹ S. Duanmu, *The Phonology of Standard Chinese*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- ² A. A. Dragunov & J. N. Dragunova, "Struktura slova v kitajskom natsionalnom jazyke." *Sovetskoe vostokovedeniye* 1 (1955): 57–74.
- ³ E. g., K. Ohnesorg & O. Švarný, *Études expérimentales des articulations chinoises*. Rozpravy Československé akademie věd 5. Praha: Academia, 1955; O. Švarný, "The Functioning of the Prosodic Features in Chinese (Pekinese)." *Archív orientální* 59 (1991), 2: 208–16; O. Švarný, "Prosodic Features in Chinese (Pekinese): Prosodic Transcription and Statistical Tables." *Archív orientální* 59 (1991), 3: 234–54.
- ⁴ B. Slavická, *Praktická fonetikavietnamštiny*. Praha: Karolinum, 2008.
- ⁵ D. Zhou & Z. Wu, *Putonghua fayin tupu*. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1963.
- ⁶ Y.-H. Lin, *The Sounds of Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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