Teaching Mandarin Pronunciation: the Cliticoids and Basic Types of Phonetic Chunks

Hana Třísková
Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Annotation: This paper is concerned with an important group of Chinese words, belonging to the high frequency items of the lexicon: monosyllabic function words such as prepositions, conjunctions, personal pronouns, modal verbs, etc. They carry lexical tone, thus have a potential to be stressed. Yet, due to their deficiency in lexical meaning and frequent usage, they regularly behave as unstressed (and noticeably reduced phonetically) in connected speech, namely in colloquial putonghua. They receive stress (i.e. full pronunciation) only occasionally, particularly if emphasised. A new term is coined for these words: “the cliticoids”. The author provides their list and reviews the pitfalls of their pronunciation in connected speech, observing that the Chinese cliticoids display similar features as so called “words with weak forms” found in English. Finally, short (2–3 syllabic) chunks of speech which contain the cliticoids are introduced. They are particularly designed for exercising the unstressed, reduced pronunciation of the cliticoids in L2 teaching. They are termed “phonetic chunks”. Note that the paper is focused on the function words with a lexical tone. On the other hand, function words without a lexical tone such as the particles 的, 了, 着, 过, 吗, 吧, etc. are not discussed. They invariably behave as atonic enclitics, thus do not pose a problem.

Keywords: Standard Chinese, putonghua, phonetics and phonology, prosody, stress, function words, second language teaching

1 High Frequency Words

Corpus linguistics and frequency dictionaries based on large language corpora offer a specific view of the language lexicon, different from the view provided
by standard dictionaries. Frequency dictionaries list the words by their frequency in language, or more exactly by their rank (the most frequent word has rank 1, the following word has rank 2, etc.). High frequency words are worth the attention of language pedagogues and second language learners, as they are very “useful” to know. At the same time, their number is relatively small. Consequently the effort expended on learning them is highly efficient.

A small number of high frequency words “are doing most of the work” in language (Tao 2015, also cf. Zipf’s law, 1935). In other words, high frequency words have a huge coverage of any text, be it spoken or written. For instance, according to Nation 1990 (quoted in Xiao et al. 2009, vii), the 1,000 most frequent words of English account for 85 percent of speech. The data for Chinese from the Frequency dictionary Xiao et al. 2009 show that the top 1,000 words have a coverage of about 66 percent (note that the top 2,000 words have a coverage of “only” 75 percent – the increase in coverage between the top 1,000 and 2,000 words is relatively small, as reflected by Zipf’s law). The figures based on Tao’s (2015) spoken Chinese corpus are even more striking: as much as 78 percent of word occurrences in his corpus (namely 269,000 word tokens) is covered by a mere 100 words (word types). The figures may of course differ depending on the particular language, type of the analysed corpus and its size. Yet in any case they clearly prove that effort invested into learning high frequency words is a fairly good investment.

**What words belong to high frequency words?** Two major groups can be distinguished:

- **content words** coming from the oldest core of the lexicon (e.g. the Chinese verb 有 “to have”, the numeral 一 “one” or the noun 人 “man”)
- **function words** with a purely or mainly grammatical meaning (e.g. the Chinese structural particle 的, sentence modal particle 吗, classifier 个, or preposition 在)

The number of function words in any language is restricted. Unlike content words, they form a closed set. Their ratio in speech is generally very high. For instance 60 per cent of speech in English is composed of a mere

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1 Chinese function words are largely, but not entirely identical with the traditional category called 虚词, “empty words”.
50 function words (Xiao et al. 2009, vii). Function words are typically (though not always) monosyllabic. This is not surprising, given the general tendency to economy in language. Further, they typically behave as unstressed in connected speech.

A recently published example of a frequency dictionary for the Chinese language is Xiao et al. 2009. Its Frequency index (pp. 20–238) contains 5,004 word types extracted from a valid lexicon containing roughly 85,000 word types (coming from 39 million word tokens). The top 8 words from the Frequency index (i.e. rank 1–8) are: de 的, shi 是, yi 一, zai 在, le 了, bu 不, wo 我, ge 个. We observe that all of these eight words are monosyllabic. Furthermore, five of them are function words: structural particle de 的, preposition zai 在, aspect particle le 了, personal pronoun wo 我, and classifier ge 个. If we were to browse the following few pages of the Frequency index containing other high frequency words, our observation would be similar:

- most of these words are monosyllabic
- many of these words are function words

2 Chinese Monosyllabic Function Words

Chinese monosyllabic function words may be divided into two major groups:

1. toneless function words (structural particles de 的, de 得, de 地; aspect particles le 了, zhe 着, guo 过; and sentence-final particles such as ma 吗, ba 吧, etc.)²

2. function words which carry lexical (dictionary) tone, such as the prepositions (e.g. bu 把) or measure words (e.g. ge 个)

The latter group will be the main concern of this paper. Among the top words of the Frequency index (Xiao et al. 2009) the following items belonging to group 2) can be found³:

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² The Chinese tradition lists all of them among zhuci 助词 “auxiliary words” (which is a subcategory of xuci). Yet some linguists treat some of these particles (e.g. le 了, zhe 着, guo 过) as affixes, not as independent (though function) words. In any case, the borderline between an affix and a function word may be vague.

³
personal pronouns (人称代词): wǒ 我, nǐ 你, tā 他
conjunctions (连词): hé 和, dàn 但, kě 可...
prepositions (介词): zài 在, bā 把, gěi 给...
postpositions (后置词): shàng 上, xià 下, lǐ 里
classifiers (量词): gè 个, zhòng 种, wèi 位...
modal verbs (能愿动词): yào 要, huì 会, xiǎng 想...

Two groups of content words with a rather general meaning or grammaticalized meaning (semantically “bleached” «虚化» content words) may be added:

- three basic stative verbs (状态动词): shì 是, zài 在, exist. yǒu 有
- three formalized adverbs (副词): jiù 就, dōu 都, hěn 很

The pronunciation of these words displays specific features. Before we continue with a more detailed description of their sound forms, an important point must be made: the claims made below refer to colloquial (!) Standard (!) Chinese known as putonghua (!), delivered in a natural tempo (!). They may not hold true for other speech styles of putonghua than colloquial speech (such as formal speeches), for other standard varieties of Chinese (such as Taiwanese guóyǔ), for other dialects than the Beijing dialect (such as Cantonese), for speech delivered in slow tempo, etc.

The Chinese function words listed above, such as monosyllabic personal pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, etc., carry lexical tone. Thus, unlike the toneless particles, they have a potential to be stressed. They have two rather distinct pronunciations in colloquial Standard Chinese (putonghua, Standard Mandarin), i.e. two sound forms:

- full form (wánzhěngshì 完整式), e.g. 他 [tʰaː]¹

This pronunciation is used if the word in question appears as stressed; that is mainly if it carries emphasis or contrastive stress, when it is uttered in isolation or quoted:

³ Disyllabic items falling in the particular part-of-speech category (disyllabic personal pronouns such as wǒmen 我们, tāmen 他们, or postpositions such as hòubìan 后边) do not concern us.
⁴ Chinese linguists list the postpositions (后置词) among “locality words” (方位词) belonging to a wider class of nouns.
⁵ These adverbs often lose their original lexical meaning, becoming a purely a formal element.
**Tā qù Bālì, wǒ dào bù qù!** 他去巴黎，我倒不去!  
\[tʰə:]\[n]

- **reduced form** (jiànruò shì 减弱式), e.g. 他 [tʰə]

This pronunciation is used if the word in question appears as unstressed in connected speech (which is regularly the case):

**Wǒ hěn xīhuan tā.** 我很喜欢他。  
\[tʰə\]

Here are a couple of examples of words belonging to the group under discussion\(^6\). The table shows both their full forms and their reduced forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>part of speech</th>
<th>full form</th>
<th>reduced form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hé</td>
<td>conjunction</td>
<td>[xy^[4]</td>
<td>[xə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shì</td>
<td>verb (copula)</td>
<td>[xən^[4]</td>
<td>[xə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hěn</td>
<td>adverb</td>
<td>[xən^[3]</td>
<td>[xə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tā</td>
<td>personal pronoun</td>
<td>[tʰə:]^[1]</td>
<td>[tə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zài</td>
<td>preposition</td>
<td>[təzai^[4]</td>
<td>[təzə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɡè</td>
<td>classifier</td>
<td>[kə^[4]</td>
<td>[kə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bǐ</td>
<td>preposition</td>
<td>[pi:[^[3]</td>
<td>[pi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiǎnɡ</td>
<td>verb (modal)</td>
<td>[ɕən^[3]</td>
<td>[ɕə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 1: Pronunciation of the Chinese monosyllabic function words which carry a lexical tone**

As is obvious from the last column of the table, **reductions may be quite drastic.** They may affect all phonetic or phonological features of the word: its segments (the vowels and/or consonants may have their articulation weakened in various ways, or may be deleted completely), its tone (it be-

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\(6\) Note that not all Chinese monosyllabic function words belong to this group. For instance, measure words other than noun classifiers (e.g. qún 群, wōn 碗) do not display a strong tendency to reduced pronunciation if unstressed (e.g. qún 群, sui 岁). Demonstrative pronouns zhè 这 “this”, nà 那 “that” are usually slightly stressed (being commonly followed by an unstressed classifier). Other examples are the postpositions qián 前 “before, in front of”; hòu 后 “after, behind”; or zhōnɡ 中 “inside”. They tend to keep their tone and a certain degree of stress.
comes either reduced or entirely neutralized, deleted), and its duration (it becomes considerably shortened).⁷

If a word assumes the reduced form, it inevitably behaves as a clitic. This means it tightly attaches to an adjacent word, forming a single prosodic unit together. The term clitic (fúzhuó ci 附着词) comes from the Greek verb *klinein* “to incline, lean on”. The clitics are elements which display some of the properties of independent words and some of the properties of affixes (Anderson 2005, Spencer and Luís 2012, etc.). For our purposes, a clitic may be generally defined as an unstressed monosyllabic³ function word which is tightly attached to an adjacent word in speech; it may be either a proclitic *(to school)*, or an enclitic *(see you)*.

In most contexts the reduced (unstressed) forms of the words in question are used; they are much more common in connected speech than the full (stressed) forms. The reduced forms may be viewed as regular, standard, i.e. unmarked. On the other hand, the full forms are exceptional, i.e. marked. The reduced forms may appear only in connected speech; it follows that their exercising in L2 teaching requires some minimal context.

The choice between the full form and reduced form in speech is not random – each form serves a specific function. The choice is decided mainly by the pragmatics and the context. In most contexts the use of the unstressed (thus more or less reduced) form is compulsory. The stressed (full) form is mainly reserved for situations when the speaker needs to point out the particular importance of the word (emphasis / contrastive stress). As the choice matters, it follows that the speaker must make a correct choice. If the student neglects the functional distinction between both forms and invariably uses the “all-full-form” pronunciation, he/she ends up with a clear foreign accent and may be even misunderstood (the pragmatics of the message may become quite unclear).

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⁷ The table gives only one reduced form for each word: the most “drastically” reduced one. In fact, there may be more alternatives: reduction is a scale, a continuum. The degree of reduction may vary according to speech style, communication situation, individual speaker, speech rate, etc.

⁸ A clitic may even be a subsyllabic element, e.g. the English possessive marker ‘s. It cannot be viewed as an affix, as it attaches to the whole noun phrase, not to a single word: This is my father’s friend’s hat. A Chinese example of a clitic which may lack syllabic identity is the structural particle de 的: it can be turned into a mere coda of the preceding syllable in fast casual speech: báide gōu 白的狗 → báid gōu.
We may sum up now. The words listed above share certain important features:

- they belong to high frequency words
- they are monosyllabic
- they are either function words, or semantically “bleached” content words
- they carry lexical tone (= they have a potential to be stressed)
- they have two different forms of pronunciation in colloquial *putonghua*: a) stressed, full (exceptional), b) unstressed, reduced (regular)
- the choice between a stressed form and unstressed form is to a large extent obligatory

A new cover term for the above described group of Chinese words was coined by the author of this article: **the cliticoids.**9 The corresponding Chinese term is *lèi fūzhúo cì* 类附着词. The term cliticoid (first mentioned in Trisková 2008, 529) is derived from the common term clitic explained above. The cliticoids are Chinese monosyllabic function words which:

- mostly **behave as clitics** (they are weak, unstressed, leaning on the neighbouring word)
- yet in some situations show a **different sort of behaviour** (they are fully stressed)

The issue of the cliticoids is closely related to yet another interesting topic: statistical survey of the unstressed syllables in connected speech. We may wonder how large is the proportion attributable to the cliticoids. According to Švarný’s 1991 statistics, the ratio of unstressed syllables (so called “theses”) in speech is roughly 56 per cent (while the ratio of stressed syllables, so called “arses” is roughly 44 per cent). As far as the fullness of tone is concerned, the ratio of atonic syllables may be up to roughly 34 per cent,

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9 The morpheme “oid” comes from the Greek word *eidos* “appearance”, “look”. If attached to a noun, it refers to “something that looks like a certain thing, but is not quite like it”. For instance, *android* is something resembling a man, *asteroid* is something resembling a star, etc. Thus cliticoid is something resembling a clitic to a large extent, but displaying partly different properties.
and the ratio of weak tone syllables may be up to roughly 15 per cent (the ratio of full tone syllables being merely slightly over 50 per cent); Švarný and Rusková 1991, 241. No doubt the cliticoids (together with the clitics) substantially contribute to the ratio of the unstressed (and consequently atonic or weak tone) syllables in connected speech. To find out how large exactly is this ratio, remains a task for future research.

The Chinese cliticoids make a strong parallel to a group of English words called “words with weak forms”. Showing their similarities will be the concern of the next paragraph.

3 A Parallel with English

We may observe that the cliticoids form a category very similar to a group of words found in English: words with weak forms, also called weak form words (below abbreviated as WFW); the Chinese term is ruòduōshí ci 弱读式词. They are treated e.g. in Roach 1996, 102; Cruttenden 2001, 252, 278; Ortiz-Lira 2008.

English WFW may be described as monosyllabic function words which have two forms of pronunciation: strong (= full), and weak (= reduced and clitic-like).10 The full form is used if the word is uttered in isolation, if it is stressed in connected speech, or if it occurs at the end of a sentence. The weak form is used in most other contexts. For instance consider the English conjunction and: you and me → you’n me. Typical examples of English WFW are:

- articles: a, an, the
- personal pronouns: you, he, she, we, he, him...
- conjunctions: and, as, but, than, that...
- prepositions: at, for, from, of, to...
- modal verbs: can, could, may, might, must...
- auxiliary verbs: am, is, are, have, has, had, do, was, shall, will...

10 Note that some English monosyllabic function words do not belong to the WFW category, e.g. by, or, on, when, as they do not have an alternative weak form. Nevertheless, they may show reductions in rapid speech if unstressed.
Several examples of WFW are shown in the table presented in Fig. 2. The table shows both their strong forms and their weak forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>part of speech</th>
<th>strong (= full) form</th>
<th>weak (= reduced) form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>conjunction</td>
<td>[ænd]</td>
<td>[ən], [ŋ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shall</td>
<td>auxiliary verb</td>
<td>[ʃæl]</td>
<td>[ʃɔl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>personal pronoun</td>
<td>[wiː]</td>
<td>[wi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>preposition</td>
<td>[fɔːr]</td>
<td>[fɔ] / [fə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>article</td>
<td>[ðiː]</td>
<td>[ðə], [ðɪ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>preposition</td>
<td>[ʌv]</td>
<td>[əv]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>modal verb</td>
<td>[kæn]</td>
<td>[kən]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>preposition</td>
<td>[tə]</td>
<td>[tə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>auxiliary verb</td>
<td>[æː] / [ɑː]</td>
<td>[ə], [ɜ] / [ə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 2: Pronunciation of the English words with weak forms**

The analogy between English WFW and the category of the cliticoids found in colloquial Mandarin is an important point made in this paper.

After this somewhat lengthy introduction dealing with the very concept of the cliticoids we can move to the second major topic, that being the practical exercising of these little words in L2 teaching.

## 4 Lexical Chunks

Some words are commonly used together, some are not: e.g. we say *to commit suicide*, not *to undertake suicide*. An increased attention to units larger than a word came with the emergence of language corpora. The linguists speak of multiword strings, collocations, formulaic expressions, formulaic sequences, chunks of speech, lexical chunks, etc. One of the commonly used umbrella terms is “lexical chunk”, also cf. “formulaic language” (yǔyán yǔkuài 语言语块), e.g. Wray 2000, Wang Lifei 2012.

A lexical chunk may be described as a group of words that are often found together in language. It functions as a unit: it is stored in memory,
retrieved, produced and perceived as an unanalysed whole. This considerably reduces language processing time, benefiting both a speaker and a listener. It follows that the importance of lexical chunks in L2 teaching/learning is very high, though not always sufficiently recognized.

5 Phonetic Chunks in Chinese

The Chinese cliticoids enter various sort of lexical chunks too. Short word strings containing these high frequency words may be established for the purpose of language teaching. Such strings can be particularly utilized to exercise the unstressed pronunciation of the cliticoids. At the same time they may be beneficial for exercising various other aspects of Mandarin pronunciation such as tone combinations, sentence intonation patterns, pronunciation of the most common Chinese content words, etc. For the purpose of teaching beginners it seems useful to deal only with very short (disyllabic or trisyllabic) strings, e.g. mà tā 骂他, zhè běn shū 这本书. The reason for limiting their size to three syllables is at hand: in spite of being short, they are not easy to pronounce correctly. Leaving aside the traps of the segmental level (pronunciation of the initials and finals) there is both tone and stress involved – and stress/non-stress in Chinese is no simple thing for the beginning learners of the language.

I establish a new term for such chunks of speech: the “phonetic chunks”, yīnkuài 音块 (abbreviated as P-Ch). They may be analyzed from two aspects. First, these chunks are not random clusters of words — they display various syntactic structures. Second, when the cliticoids enter such chunks, they assume an unstressed, reduced form (found in neutral speech). This gives rise to various stress patterns. The description of major syntactic structures of the phonetic chunks and their major stress patterns will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

Stress Patterns of the Phonetic Chunks:
Phonetic chunks may display various stress patterns, such as trochee, iamb, etc. (borrowing the terms for metrical feet from the Greek metrics, e.g. Durych 1992). In particular:

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11 The term “phonetic chunk” replaced the original term “minimodule”. The concept of minimodules was first presented in 2012 at the University of Melbourne and subsequently in 2013 at the 7th Czech-Slovak Sinological Conference in Bratislava.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metrical foot</th>
<th>pattern</th>
<th>English example</th>
<th>Chinese example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trochee</td>
<td>●●</td>
<td>season</td>
<td>mà tā 骂他</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iamb</td>
<td>●●</td>
<td>delay</td>
<td>ní hǎo 你好</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dactyl</td>
<td>●●●</td>
<td>flattery</td>
<td>xīhuan tā 喜欢他</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cretic</td>
<td>●●●</td>
<td>Peter Pan</td>
<td>zhè běn shū 这本书</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amphibrach</td>
<td>●●●</td>
<td>remember</td>
<td>gěi bāba 给爸爸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bacchius</td>
<td>●●●</td>
<td>when day breaks</td>
<td>zài Běijīng 在北京</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antibacchius</td>
<td>●●●</td>
<td>neat organ</td>
<td>xuéxiào lǐ 学校里</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that in connected speech two cliticoids may occur next to each other. For instance nǐ jiù..., tā zài..., jìu shì..., nǐ bā..., etc. In such cases the two words usually tightly join together forming a disyllabic rhythmic unit, while the first word receives weak stress. For instance: Tā–zài zhèr. 他在这儿. Tā–zài wàimían. 他在外面. These cases need a more detailed treatment which is beyond the scope of this paper.

**Syntactic Structures of the Phonetic Chunks:**

Let us review the major types of syntactic structures in which the cliticoids may occur in, forming disyllabic or trisyllabic phonetic chunks. The list is arranged according to the parts of speech the cliticoids belong to (eight altogether). Particular syntactic structures are presented in the form of a flat table. The alternants within a box are divided by a slash. The optional items are in brackets. The examples of phonetic chunks are arranged by the stress patterns. It is not claimed that the list of the structures is exhaustive. Also note that in completed longer sentences other elements may be inserted into the structure.

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12 The stress pattern consisting of two stressed syllables (●●, spondee, e.g. Mayday, xuéxiào 学校) does not occur in the list because it does not contain any cliticoid / unstressed syllable. The stress pattern consisting of two unstressed and one stressed syllables (●●●, anapest, e.g. seventeen) does not occur there either, as it would probably be turned into cretic in Chinese; anapest may be also viewed as an alternative of cretic.
1. **personal pronouns**
   as a subject
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>personal pronoun</th>
<th>verb / adjective</th>
<th>(sentence particle) / (noun)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nǐ qù 你去, nǐ hǎo 你好</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wǒ zhídào 我知道, tā lái le 他来了</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tā fànduì 他反对, nǐ kāi ménr 你开门儿</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   as an object
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>transitive verb</th>
<th>personal pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mà tā 骂他, dǎ wǒ 打我</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mǎfàn nǐ 麻烦你, xīhuàn tā 喜欢他</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   as an attribute
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>personal pronoun</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǒ gē 我哥, wǒ mā 我妈</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wǒ gēge 我哥哥, wǒ māma 我妈妈</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **classifiers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>numeral / demonstrative pronoun</th>
<th>classifier</th>
<th>(noun)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǔ gē 五个, zhè běn 这本</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wǔ gē rén 五个人, zhè běn shū 这本书</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **conjunctions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noun / personal pronoun</th>
<th>conjunction</th>
<th>noun / personal pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǒ hé tā 我和他, wǒ gēn tā 我跟他, māo hé gǒu 猫和狗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **prepositions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>preposition</th>
<th>personal pronoun / noun / place word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gěi tā 给他, zài nàr 在那儿, dào nàr? 到哪儿?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zài xuéxiào 在学校, zài Běijīng 在北京</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zài lǐmian 在里面, gěi bàba 给爸爸</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **postpositions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noun</th>
<th>postposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- shù shàng 树上, lǐng xià 零下, hǎi lǐ 海里
- zhuō zì shàng 桌子上, wū zì lǐ 屋子里

6. **modal verbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>modal verb</th>
<th>content verb</th>
<th>(noun)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- yào zǒu 要走, xiǎng chī 想吃
- yào chūqu 要出去, xiǎng huílái 想回来
- xiǎng chīfàn 想吃饭, huí yóuyǒng 会游泳, xiǎng chī ròu 想吃肉
- tā yào zǒu 他要走, wǒ xiǎng qù 我想去

7. **stative verbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun / pronoun / place word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- yǒu rén 有人, shì wǒ 是我
- shì lǎoshī 是老师, yǒu wùmái 有雾霾, zài Běijīng 在北京
- zài lǐmian 在里面, shì méimei 是妹妹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>personal pronoun / demonstrative pronoun / place word</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun / place word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- tā zài zhèr 他在这儿, zhèr yǒu shū 这儿有书, zhè shì gǒu 这是狗

8. **grammaticalized adverbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adverb</th>
<th>verb / adjective</th>
<th>(sentence particle)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- hěn hǎo 很好, dōu yǒu 都有
- hěn piàoliàng 很漂亮, dōu zǒu le 都走了

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>personal pronoun</th>
<th>adverb</th>
<th>verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- tā hěn xiǎo 他很小, nǐ jiù qù 你就去

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13. Two neighboring cliticoids such as tā hěn, nǐ jiù: see above.
6 Concluding Remarks

- The **frequency of a word** in language is an important factor which should be taken into consideration both in linguistic research and in L2 teaching.
- A large part of high frequency words is represented by **function words**. Due to the lack of morphology in Chinese, function words carry a particularly heavy functional load. Proper identification of the function words in (rapid colloquial) **speech perception** as well as their proper pronunciation in **speech production** is an essential part of language competence in Chinese.
- A large part of function words in Mandarin Chinese is represented by the **cliticoids**: language users encounter them in literally every sentence.
- **Pronunciation of the cliticoids** is quite tricky: first, they have at least two different forms of pronunciation in connected speech; second, the reduced forms are rather difficult both to produce and to perceive; third, a correct choice between the full and reduced forms must be made in speech, as “all-full-form” pronunciation is wrong, foreign-sounding, and may even lead to misunderstanding.
- Consequently, the **cliticoids deserve attention in L2 teaching**.
- As the reduced forms of the cliticoids occur only in connected speech, their exercising requires a minimal context. This context may be provided by the **phonetic chunks**. The efficiency of this instrument has yet to be tested in classroom teaching.
- Profound research based on speech corpora, e.g. on the example sentences (both sound-recorded and prosodically transcribed) of Švarný’s large dictionary **Učební slovník**, 1998–2000, may shed more light on the properties of the cliticoids and reveal their major role in Chinese speech rhythm.
References


