Teaching the Sounds of Standard Chinese (普通话语音教学探究)

HAND-OUT

Beijing, Capital Normal University, 首都师范大学, 普通话语音教学探究

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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: “í” read as [iː] in mǐ 米, as [j] in mèi 灭, as [i] in mài 卖, as [ŋ] in zì 字, as [ŋ] in zhǐ 纸, etc.

THE INITIALS

very useful in L2 teaching: The IPA charts, sagittal sections 舌位图 and palatograms 舌位图 (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 [tʃ], not [tʂ]). The “palatals” j, q, x are not palatals, they are alveolo-palata (x is [ɕ], not [ç]). 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. bàn 班 [bʊn], bāng 芭 [bʊŋ]
- 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, û: pronounced as glides (approximants) [j], [w], [ɿ]: miàn 面 [mjɛn], huán 环 [hwan], xuè 血 [ɛɿɛ]
- the main vowels a, o, e, i, u, ü: (mostly) read as full vowels: mǐ 米 [mɨ], màn 滿 [man]
- the endings i, u, n, ng: pronounced “sloppily”: the vowel i = lax, lowered [i], as in mài 卖 [mat], u = lax, lowered [u], as in dào 到 [tou]; 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).

![Diagram of T3]

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)

\[ \text{Proč jsi mů to neřekl.} \]

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

Some of you wanted to tell him

\[ \text{Nǐ xiān zuò gěngkè ba, zuòwǎngle zài qù wǎnr!} \]

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 fūzhuòcí 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 fūzhuòcí 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, yāo 要, xiàng 想, jiù 就, gè 个, běn 本, tào 套, bā 把, gěi 给, shàng 上… cca 40-50); normally unstressed, de-stressed (“weak form”), only occassionally bear logical stress (“strong form”). E.g. 我: stressed = [wɔʔ]₁, unstressed = [wa]. 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!


LITERATURE