The languages are believed to display either so called “machine-gun rhythm”, i.e. syllable-timed languages, or “Morse-code rhythm”, i.e. stress-timed languages (Pike 1945, Abercombie 1967). English is viewed as a typical stress-timed language (stressed syllables: long, full articulation of segments, unstressed syllables: short, tendency to segmental reductions). The linguists generally agree that similar features can be found in putonghua (e.g. Chao 1968:35, Lin Tao 1962:302; Shih 1988:93, Shen 1989:59-60, Lin Yen-hwei 2007:222, 99). However, Mandarin Chinese is mostly labelled as a stress-timed language by few linguists concerned with this topic and offering instrumental data (e.g. Lin and Wang 2007, Mok 2009). Obviously there is a contradiction. In my paper I will argue that colloquial putonghua (that is spontaneous, ordinary conversational speech) – at least in speech perception – displays strong tendency to stress-timed rhythm, showing very similar properties of stressed / unstressed syllables as English has. (I will not make any claims about other varieties of Chinese, such as other putonghua speech registers, e.g. formal speeches or speech of media, dialects other than Beijing dialect, e.g. Cantonese, other standard varieties of Chinese such as Taiwan Guoyu, etc.) The main topic of the paper are weak form words (abbreviated as WFW). English has a group of words (about 40) called words with weak forms, or weak form words (弱形式词, 弱读式词). The members of this group are high-frequency monosyllabic functional words such as prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, pronouns or articles. In most contexts they are pronounced as “weak” unstressed clitics (附着词) with a severely reduced sound form, while “strong”, stressed, full pronunciation occurs only under logical stress, sentence finally or in isolation. E.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>strong form</th>
<th>weak form</th>
<th>example of WF usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>[æ]</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
<td>read a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>[ænd]</td>
<td>[ɪnd], [ən], [n]</td>
<td>you and me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from</td>
<td>[frəm]</td>
<td>[frəm], [frn]</td>
<td>I’m home from work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>[kæn]</td>
<td>[kən], [kn]</td>
<td>She can do it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will claim that a very similar group of words can be found in colloquial putonghua. I will call them Cliticoids 类附着词 (my term), as they mostly behave like clitics, but not always. These are monosyllabic function words with lexical tone, namely:

- **personal pronouns** 人称代词
  - wǒ 我, nǐ 你, nín 您 tā 他
- **measure words** 量词
  - gè 个, běn 本, zhǒng 种, xiē 些
- **conjunctions** 连词
  - hé 和, tóng 同...
- **prepositions** 介词
  - zài 在, gěi 给, dào 到, bā 把, bǐ 比...
- **some postpositions** 后置词
  - shàng 上, xià 下, lǐ 里 ...
- **modal verbs** 能源动词
  - yào 要, huì 会, xiǎng 想...
- **3 “special” verbs** 特殊动词
  - exist, yǒu 有, zài 在, shì 是
- **formal adverbs** 形式副词
  - jiù 就, hěn 很, dōu 都

Similarly as English WFW, the Cliticoids display two distinct sound forms in natural rapid speech: unstressed (“weak”), which is regular, and stressed (“strong”), which is less common. E.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word PY</th>
<th>word 中文</th>
<th>strong form</th>
<th>weak form</th>
<th>example of WF usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǒ</td>
<td>我</td>
<td>[wɔ̌]</td>
<td>[wɔ], [wɔ̌]</td>
<td>Gěi wǒ!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dào (prep.)</td>
<td>到</td>
<td>[dɔ̌]</td>
<td>[dɔ], [dɔ̌]</td>
<td>kāi dào wǎinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiǎng (modal v.)</td>
<td>想</td>
<td>[cjɑŋ̃]</td>
<td>[cjɑ], [cjɑ̌]</td>
<td>Wǒ xiǎng chūqu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will point out that 1) the choice between two forms is not arbitrary in most contexts, 2) wrong choice (“all-strong-form” pronunciation) makes speech unnatural and foreign sounding, and may even result in misunderstanding.

Weak forms of the Cliticoids (together with the Clitics = toneless function words which are always unstressed, such as structural particles 结构助词, aspect particles 动态助词, and sentence particles 语气助词), make up a large portion of the unstressed syllables of connected speech. Consequently they deserve our attention both in research of speech rhythm and in L2 teaching.

I will suggest that proper pronunciation of the Cliticoids (as well as other things such as tone combinations, basic vocabulary or sentence intonation) can be trained with help of “Minimodules”微型模块 (my term): 2-3 syllabic combinations containing all Clitics and Cliticoids, and common 1-2 syllabic words (examples: hên hào 好, qù ma? 去吗? wǒ yào qù 我要去, găosu tā 告诉他, zuò huǒchē 坐火车).

LITERATURE

Rachel’s English: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrAe07KluZY