Chinese prosodic transcription (CHIPROT) – a proposal

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ABSTRACT

Except for a very initial stage of studies, teaching materials usually introduce Chinese sentences **only in Chinese characters** (without Hanyu Pinyin). Consequently, students spend most of their energy on deciphering the characters, having hardly any capacity left to pay attention to proper pronunciation. Further, **prosodic features** such as stress, grouping or intonation are usually not explained in the textbooks at all. Mastering the prosody of continuous speech could be supported by labeling major prosodic features on Hanyu Pinyin notation of the sentences (utterances; STT).

I will introduce my own system named CHIPROT. It labels **three levels of prosodic boundaries** (prosodic units): prosodic word, non-final prosodic phrase, finished utterance. Further, regarding **syllable prominence**, seven graphic forms are used: *ma, mā,* ***mā, MĀ,*** mā, **mā**, **MĀ**. Graphic representation of a syllable offers two kinds of information: both phonetic info (**four degrees of prominence**), and underlying phonological / grammatical info.

The fundamental difference from other systems is following: CHIPROT works with the concept of **normal syllable**, 正常音节 (regular, ordinary tonal syllable with fully pronounced tone, though not enhanced; cf. Yuen Ren Chao 1968:35, *normal stress*, 正常重音). Normal syllable may become either phonetically **enhanced** (emphasis or contrastive stress; capitalized), or phonetically **weakened** (italics, bold, tone mark). Further, some tonal morphemes have an **inherent tendency to be pronounced as weakened** in fluent speech, particularly monosyllabic tonal auxiliary words (such as monosyllabic personal pronouns), etc. These are not viewed as normal syllables and are labeled differently (italics, tone mark). Further, sometimes a morpheme behaves **contrary to its inherent grammatical / lexical features** (i.e. autosemantic word may be pronounced as weakened, or a monosyllabic synsemantic word may be fully pronounced, or even emphasized). Such cases are marked by absence of italics. A large part of cases can be predicted, as there are clear tendencies or even rules. Thus the process of transcribing could be possibly automated to a large extent (TTS?).

The resulting transcript is rather iconic and may help the students to make their pronunciation more natural and fluent. Example:

茶碗 在这儿，饭碗在那儿。

Plain Hanyu Pinyin:
Cháwǎn zài zhèr, fànwǎn zài nàr.

CHIPROT:
Cháwǎn *zài-**ZHÈR** //, **fàn***wǎn *zài-**NÀR***.