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“Methodology of teaching prosody in CSL: an uncharted territory”

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keynote speech - abstract

Prosodic features are by no means a standard part of the syllabus when teaching Chinese as a second language. The curriculum commonly includes topics such as the initials, finals, four tones, disyllabic tone combinations, tone sandhi, the neutral tone, and the suffix *-r*. An explanation of prosodic features is usually missing. As prosody is not recognized as an integral part of CSL, it is no wonder that there is no available methodology for teaching it (*what* to teach and *how* to teach it). The Czech Republic is an exception in this respect. There, a focus on teaching prosody is linked to the work of the late Prof. Oldřich Švarný (1920–2011). He carried out his first analysis of connected Chinese in the phonetics laboratory of Prof. William S.-Y. Wang at the University of California in Berkeley back in 1969/70. As well as carrying out research on prosody throughout his life, Švarný also authored teaching materials, which included chapters and exercises dealing with prosody. I was Švarný’s private student for many years, and I am striving to carry his efforts further. Besides research on prosody, I focus my attention on its practical teaching (2014–2015 Masaryk University in Brno, since 2017 Charles University Prague). I teach a course on Chinese prosody to second-semester students, and I have designed a curriculum comprising 12 lessons (1.5 hrs each). The main topics are: stress (articulatory/acoustic correlates of stress and non-stress, unstressed function words, stressed question words, word stress (?), phrasal stress); chunking of speech (prosodic phrases, prosodic words); intonation patterns; information structure; and pragmatics. I use numerous example sentences transcribed in my own system of prosodic transcription – CHIPROT – which helps students to become aware of prosodic features in perception and manage them in production. Another tool I use is short chunks of speech – “minimodules” – which are equivalent to prosodic words and help learners cope with longer utterances. The course seems to substantially contribute to students’ fluency and naturalness. The feedback is also very positive. I have fine-tuned the content and methodology of the course over the years and finally applied it in a textbook (Třísková, 2021; in Czech). After its translation into English is finished, I hope this textbook can help establish prosody as an integral part of the CSL curriculum.

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Švarný, Oldřich et al. *Gramatika hovorové čínštiny v příkladech* [grammar of spoken Chinese in examples]. Vol. I/a, I/b, II/a, II/b. Bratislava: Komenský University, 1991–1993.

Třísková, Hana. 2021. *Mluvte čínsky hezky: prozodie hovorové čínštiny* [Speak Chinese with ease: prosody of colloquial Chinese]. Praha: Academia.