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Teaching Mandarin Pronunciation: Basic Types of Phonetic Chunks HAND-OUT

High frequency words are typically:

1. monosyllabic
2. function words

Cf. the frequency dictionary Xiao et al. 2009:20 – top 8 words from the frequency index:

Frequency index

Frequency rank Headword in Simplified Chinese [Headword in Traditional Chinese] /Pinyin/ (Optional HSK Level) Part of speech English gloss
Illustrative example in Simplified Chinese and English translation of the example
Normalised frequency | Dispersion index | Usage rate | Optional register code

0001 的 [的] /de/ (1) *aux* [structural particle used after an attribute]
非洲是一块非常的大陆。Africa is a very large continent.
236106 | 0.95 | 223484

0002 是 [是] /shì/ (1) *v be*
你是哪里人呢? Where are you from?
81965 | 0.83 | 67954

0003 一 [一] /yī/ (1) *num one, a, an*
市政大厅前有一群人。There is a crowd of people in front of the town hall.
69925 | 0.89 | 62263

0004 在 [在] /zài/ (1) *prep* [indicating location or time, etc.] at, in
她坐在窗旁。She sat at the window.
52774 | 0.94 | 49460

0005 了 [了] /le/ (1) *aux* [aspect marker indicating realisation of a situation]
她从马上摔了下来。She fell off her horse.
51296 | 0.9 | 46283

0006 不 [不] /bù/ (1) *adv no, not*
这条街不准停车。You can't park in this street.
50589 | 0.8 | 40245

0007 我 [我] /wǒ/ (1) *pron I, me*
咖啡和茶使我感到兴奋。Coffee and tea stimulate me.
51365 | 0.71 | 36653

0008 个 [个] /gè/ (1) *clas* [generalised measure word used for nouns without a specific measure term]
山那边有一个村庄。There is a village beyond the hill.
36612 | 0.83 | 30504

Important group of Chinese high frequency words: the Cliticoids *lèi fùzhuó cí* 类附着词
(newly coined term derived from the common term **clitic** 附着词)

monosyllabic personal pronouns: *wǒ* 我, *nǐ* 你, *tā* 他...
conjunctions: *hé* 和, *tóng* 同...
prepositions: *zài* 在, *bǎ* 把, *gěi* 给, *bǐ* 比...
monosyllabic postpositions: *shàng* 上, *xià* 下, *lǐ* 里
measure words: *gè* 个, *zhǒng* 种, *wèi* 位...
modal verbs: *yào* 要, *huì* 会, *xiǎng* 想...
three “low-content” stative verbs: *shì* 是, *zài* 在, exist. *yǒu* 有
three formal adverbs: *jiù* 就, *dōu* 都, *hěn* 很

Shared features of the Cliticoids:

- they are monosyllabic
- they are function words, or semantically bleached content words
- they have a lexical tone
- they have two pronunciations:
 - a) stressed = full, “strong” e.g. 他 [t^ha:]¹
 - b) unstressed = reduced, “weak” e.g. 他 [t^hə]

The Cliticoids exhibit similar features as English **Words with weak forms** (i.e. monosyllabic function words with two forms of pronunciation: 1. strong = stressed, 2. weak = unstressed clitic; 2. is more common; cca 50-60 words). Example: the conjunction **and**: *you and me – you ´n me*. Most common English WWF are:

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

The Cliticoids typically assume **an unstressed form** in connected speech. Short 2-3 syllabic **chunks of speech** (*yǔkuài* 语块), containing such unstressed forms, may be established. I call them **Phonetic Chunks** (*yīnkuài* 音块) (previously called Minimodules); newly coined term.

they may have various stress patterns:

• trochee	●● (<i>season, na stůl</i>)	<i>mà tā</i> 骂他
• iamb	●● (<i>delay, Tak co?</i>)	<i>nǐ hǎo</i> 你好
• dactyl	●●● (<i>flattery, na stromě</i>)	<i>xǐhuan tā</i> 喜欢他
• cretic	●●● (<i>Petr Pan, Co to jíš?</i>)	<i>zhè běn shū</i> 这本书
• amphibrach	●●● (<i>remember, jak dávno</i>)	<i>gěi bàba</i> 给爸爸
• bacchius	●●● (<i>when day breaks, Co sháníš?</i>)	<i>zài Běijīng</i> 在北京
• palimbacchius	●●● (<i>neat organ, dál zíval</i>)	<i>xuéxiào lǐ</i> 学校里

they may have various grammatical structures:

e.g.: personal pronoun functioning as a subject + verb: PP is a typical proclitic:

●● *nǐ qù!* 你去! ●●● *wǒ zhīdao* 我知道

verb + personal pronoun functioning as an object: PP is a typical enclitic:

●● *mà tā* 骂他 ●●● *máfan nǐ* 麻烦你

Phonetic Chunks may be **efficiently used in L2 teaching**, particularly in teaching **tricky pronunciation of the Cliticoids**. The unstressed forms of the Cliticoids are quite difficult to master, displaying more or less drastic reductions (segmental reductions, reduction of syllable duration, and reduction of tone).

LITERATURE

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