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### Chinese prosodic transcription – a proposal

In phonetic scripts, written texts record the segments (vowels and consonants) in one way or another. **Suprasegmental (prosodic) features** such as stress, grouping, or sentence intonation are reflected to a very limited degree (e.g. by sentence punctuation). In **L2 teaching**, labelling such features could greatly improve the students' fluency and naturalness of their speech (note that prosodic labelling is more commonly used in research related to speech technologies). Attempts to design a system of **prosodic transcription for Mandarin for pedagogical purposes** are scarce. To my knowledge, the most elaborate one (based on Hanyu Pinyin) was created by the Czech sinologist and phonetician, Prof. Oldřich Švarný (1920-2011). He labels two features: grouping of the lexical words into prosodic words and intonational units, and degree of stress in syllables. His scale of stress has 6 degrees. It is an outcome of two successively applied parameters: 1. tone fulness: neutral tone – weak tone – full tone – emphasized tone; 2. [± stressed]. Present paper challenges both the number of stress degrees (proposing only four) and Švarný's underlying phonological analysis. Principal points: 1) All tonal morphemes are inherently full, “stressed” by default. Their full, unreduced pronunciation is unmarked. 2) Some tonal morphemes are structurally prone to prosodic weakening, e.g. monosyllabic tonal function words (“the cliticoids”), such as prepositions, classifiers, personal pronouns, the verb 是 etc. 3) Prosodic weakening is related to semantic weakening, it is marked and has specific functions. It can occur at any of the structural levels (morpheme / word / phrase / discourse).

- mā* stressed syllable carrying logical stress  
*mā* “normal” tonal syllable (cf. Chao's “normal stress”)  
*mā* inherently weak tonal syllable (the cliticoids, 不 in Yes-No questions etc.)  
*ma* toneless syllables (the clitics such as 的, 吗, lexical suffix 子 etc.)

Example of transcription:

这是我的屋子。

*Zhè-shì wǒde wūzi.*

“This is my room.” (neutral statement)

这是我的屋子，不是他的屋子！

*Zhè-shì wǒ de wūzi, bú-shì tāde wūzi!*

“This is **my** room, it is not **his** room!” (contrastive stress)

key words:

phonetics – Mandarin prosody – prosodic transcription – L2 teaching