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**Mandarin Chinese: stress or de-stress?**  
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**H A N D – O U T**

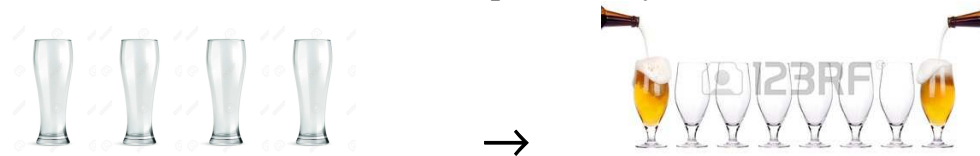
The paper attempts at viewing Chinese stress from a new perspective, offering a “reverse view” of the issue. It argues that non-stress (de-stress) is more important here than stress.

Connected speech is a **sequence of syllables of varying prominence**:

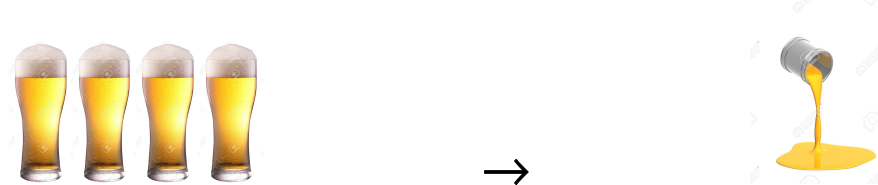


full glass: stressed syllable    empty glass: unstressed syllable

**Western analysis (non-tone languages):** all syllables are **originally (by default) unstressed**, then some of them **become stressed, prosodically enhanced** (word stress, emphasis...)



**Proposed analysis for Mandarin Chinese (tone language):** all syllables (except the morphemes with lexical neutral tone) are **originally (by default) full**, then some of them **become prosodically weakened** (reduced) for particular reasons / in particular contexts



**EVIDENCE FOR THE HYPOTHESIS (IMPORTANCE OF DE-STRESSING):**

- existence of **lexical neutral tone** fulfilling important linguistic functions (了, 吗, 的, 孩子...)
- existence of the group of **cliticoids** (monosyllabic tonal function words such as 我, 把, 是...)
- which are regularly unstressed in speech – high-frequency words!
- native Chinese **hardly perceive stress differences** (except for neutral tone and emphasis)
- **linguists disagreement on stress in Chinese** (many contradicting analyses) as opposed to agreement on non-stress (neutral tone, 轻声)
- **word stress in disyllabic words unsolved** (except for 孩子 type of words)
- **speech synthesis** (may sound artificial and unnatural – too many full syllables)
- Chinese cover term is *qīngzhòngyīn* 轻重音, not *\*zhòngqīngyīn* 重轻音

**Conclusion:** In Chinese, leaving aside emphasis, it is worth searching for a **mechanism and rules for NON-STRESS ASSIGNMENT** (and phonetic reduction), rather than for a mechanism and rules for **STRESS ASSIGNMENT** (and phonetic enhancement).