

Hana T ísková: *Segmental Structure of Mandarin Syllable*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns itself with the segmental syllable of Mandarin, i.e., of standard Chinese as codified in P.R.C. and known as *putonghua*. While it leaves aside the aspect of tone it explores all major topics related to the phonological and phonetic description of the isolated Mandarin segmental syllable and the ways in which they are treated in broad literature, both Chinese and Western. We approach the subject from the perspective of teaching Chinese as a second language (TCSL), where mastering the syllabary (cca 400 segmental syllables, 1300 tonic syllables) represents a crucial basic step. Poor command of the pronunciation of isolated syllables will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the spoken language competence of a student.

Because the pinyin romanization system (developed in P.R.C., officially approved in 1958) assumedly is the only feasible phonological system for the paedagogical purposes, the present dissertation does not aspire to establish any new phonological interpretation of the Mandarin syllable (although some attempts will be made). After making a broad comparison of existing analyses and their pros and cons, we strive to explore the solutions most convenient for the purposes of teaching pronunciation.

Along with accepting pinyin as a phonological background, we advocate for a traditional *Initial-Final* view of the syllable structure (as opposed to the rather recent *Onset-Rime* model accepted by many modern phonologists). We will show the major advantages of the traditional model for teaching purposes. Unlike more or less all treatments of the Mandarin sound system (be it Chinese or Western) we insist on the necessity of making the explanation of the syllable hierarchical structure the point of departure. Furthermore, we strongly recommend placing a major emphasis on the traditional components of the syllable (*initial ó medial ó central ó terminal* defined by their function within the syllable structure) as opposed to approaches that depart from the inventory of vowel and consonant segments and present the Mandarin syllable chiefly as a string of segments arranged according to a set of phonotactic rules. This approach is considered as one of the major contributions of the present text.

Our treatment includes some general explanations of concepts and terms which can be viewed as elementary by phoneticians (e.g., the definition of a syllable, the articulatory properties of consonants, the terms such as šapproximantō or šsemivowelō, the problem of the interpretation of diphthongs in various languages, etc.). However, because Sinologists are expected to be the primary readers, we considered such treatments necessary. We make numerous comparisons with English and Czech.

The text is divided into five parts. The structure is as follows: the **introductory part** briefly portrays the Chinese language in general, explains the process of language standardization and the term šstandard Chinese,ō provides an overview of the pinyin system, and summarizes the phonological research of Mandarin in a nutshell. The second part is devoted to the **structure of the syllable**. After introducing the syllable and diphthongs in general, we explain the specifics of the status of the syllable in Chinese, where it serves as a carrier of a morpheme. Furthermore, we introduce various approaches to an analysis of the Mandarin syllable in the literature, making clear our preference for the traditional model (as accepted by pinyin) for teaching purposes. The third part deals with the **initial consonants**. First, we explore their articulatory properties (presenting the results of instrumental research done by various authors, namely the sagittal cuts and palatograms); then we present Mandarin consonants as a phonological system. The fourth part treats the rest of the syllable ó the **final**. We start from the phonological analysis of finals, followed by the explanation of their pronunciation. The fifth and concluding part summarizes the **inventory of Mandarin segmental syllables**. The dissertation then closes with the Czech-Chinese vocabulary of linguistic and phonetic terms.

The presented dissertation basically has the character of a monograph. Its aim is to serve as a guide to university teachers of Mandarin pronunciation and the compilers of various teaching materials of higher level. University students of Sinology with a profound interest in the sound structure of Mandarin and the subtleties of its pronunciation should also find it useful, as will those who strive to approximate the pronunciation of a native speaker. The phoneticians or linguists can consult it as well.