

# Neutral Tone in Chinese: A Comprehensive Theory Bridging East and West

Leo Depuydt

Department of Egyptology and Assyriology, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA

Email: leo\_depuydt@brown.edu

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to propose a comprehensive theory of neutral tone in Chinese, possibly for the first time. The theory rests on two pillars. First pillar: neutral tone is interpreted as *a manifestation of enclitic behavior*. Enclitic behavior is all about (word) stress and the absence thereof. Chinese has tone. But does it or does it not also have stress? There is no agreement on the matter. The theory proposed here transcends this yes-or-no question—renders it moot—by proposing, in its second pillar, that *tone implies stress*. The presence of stress-through-tone makes it possible to bridge the gap from neutral tone, which is all about tone, to enclitic behavior, which is all about stress. So, in sum, the theory's two pillars are therefore: 1) stress-through-tone; 2) stress-through-tone as a bridge to enclitic behavior. The development of the theory consists of six steps (§§3 - 8). Additional observations follow the six steps (§§9 - 15). In addition, practical guidance and exercises for teaching neutral tone in the classroom and other settings are provided (§16). The conclusion (§17) sums up what is unique and unprecedented in the approach proposed in the present paper. The paper's argument is presented from first principles, with no prior knowledge being assumed, so as to be accessible to a wider audience. Enclitics are studied in the West. Chinese tone is in the East. The present article establishes a bridge between the two.

## Keywords

Accent, Enclitic Words, Neutral Tone in Chinese, Neutral Tone, Teaching the Correct Pronunciation of, (Word) Stress, Tones in Language

## 1. Statement of Purpose and Main Points

The design of the present paper is to propose a comprehensive theory of so-called neutral tone in Mandarin Chinese. There does not seem to be one, as far as I

know, neither in the West nor in China itself. “Comprehensive” refers to a theoretical framework or blueprint. It does not mean that there is no need for fleshing out all kinds of detail.

Why neutral tone? Why Chinese? It may be useful to briefly highlight the circumstances that led to the present study. It all began when I studied Chinese myself as a Westerner and was faced with pronouncing neutral tone correctly. As a student of Western languages ancient and modern, I was well familiar with the phenomenon of enclitic words. It struck me at some point that applying what I knew about enclitic words to Chinese neutral tone produced the result that I heard when listening to native speakers of Chinese. It is this observation that led to the present study.\*

Much has been written about tones. What has been written can easily be located in the pertinent handbooks, encyclopedias, grammars, journals, and so on. Citing any of it here as background would stray too far from the present paper’s topic, neutral tone.

What is most characteristic about the present paper? What is not only most characteristic but also new, I believe, is that the aim is to place the phenomenon of neutral tone in the context of a very large body of work about acoustically less prominent syllables in which Chinese neutral tone has played no role whatsoever. It is the extensive linguistic literature that came about in the wake of a foundational article by Jacob Wackernagel of 1892. Bibliographical details are found in the companion article to the present article entitled “Past Study of Enclitics in Indo-European and Egyptian: Some Biobibliographical Detail”. Wackernagel’s article is concerned with enclitic words. The present writer was familiar with this line of research from writing about and teaching languages. The present paper may therefore be characterized as an effort to incorporate Chinese neutral tone into this intellectual tradition. It follows its own stepwise logically connected line of argument from beginning to end. Readers will judge whether this intellectual tradition can provide a full theoretical framework for the study of Chinese neutral tone. I believe that it can.

Neutral tone has of course been studied in a Sinological context, but not all that much. It is “a less studied (or insufficiently studied) topic of Chinese linguistics,” Hana Tříšková notes (personal communication). As to what has been done, three recent articles whose bibliographies refer to much else that is relevant are Jiao et al. (2004) in Chinese and Chen (2017) and Tříšková (2019). Tříšková singles out the following items in the extensive bibliography in her article for special attention (personal communication): Cao Jianfen, 2007; Li Weimin, 1981; Lu Jilun, 2012; Wang Yunjia, 2016; and Wang Zhiwu & Peiwen

\*An outline of the present article’s contents was read on March 19, 2022 as a paper entitled “The Nature of the So-called Neutral Tone in Chinese” before an audience at the 232<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, held in Boston, Mass. My colleagues Jiao Liwei of Brown University, Chunsheng Yang of the University of Connecticut, and Hana Tříšková of the Department of East Asia of the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences read an advanced draft of the paper. They provided valuable comments and corrections that have led to significant changes in the article.

Huang, 1981. Details can be found in her bibliography. In addition, she singles out Kratochvil (1987). And then, there are her own two recent studies, Třísková (2016, 2017). Třísková deals with a related topic, stress.

Jiao et al. (2004) survey twentieth century Chinese studies of neutral tone. One thing is clear from this survey. There is no agreement as to what neutral tone actually is, as appears from the following statement (ibid.: p. 295).

普通话里的轻声是一个引起了较多关注的问题。关于轻声的性质，历来争议较大。有人认为是声调(调位)，有人认为是变调，有人认为是轻调。“The neutral tone in Chinese is a problem that has attracted quite some attention. As regards the nature of neutral tone, there has over time been rather much controversy. Some believe that it is a toneme (tone modulation), some think that it is tone sandhi, and some think that it is soft tone (unstressed tone)” (trans. L.D.).

One problem that is often discussed is determining the pitch of neutral tone depending on the preceding syllable. But this issue has little to do with the true essence of neutral tone. Jiao et al. (2004: p. 295) note that the pitch is as follows:

轻声的调值，在阴平后面读半低 2 度，在阳平后面读中调 3 度，在上声后面读半高调 4 度，在去声后面读低调 1 度。

“In terms of pitch, neutral tone is pronounced semi low pitch level 2 after first tone, middle pitch level 3 after second tone, semi high pitch level 4 after third tone, and low pitch level 1 after fourth tone” (trans. L.D.).

I would not be surprised that there are similarities with, but also contradictions of, what is said below in Sinological work on neutral tone. But because of the lack of consensus, it is difficult to choose what to support and what to reject. The aim of this paper is to present an argument that runs in coherent and consecutive fashion from beginning to end, step by step, and operates mainly in the intellectual tradition that starts with Wackernagel. Trying to come to terms right know in full with the Sinological approach to the problem may involve a loss of coherence.

In the end, there is presumably more than one road leading to a better understanding of neutral tone. And presumably, all roads lead to Rome (or better, Beijing).

Since neutral tone is a property of the syllable, it is more accurate to speak of a theory of the neutral tone syllable. Textbooks and grammars all define the neutral tone syllable by what it is not, as follows: neutral tone syllables do not have tone. By contrast, the theory presented in what follows defines neutral tone by what it *is*.

Students of Chinese who take an interest in this paper may be eager to know what the theory means for learning Chinese. The theory does include precise indications for how to pronounce neutral tone (see §16). Native speakers too may be interested in what neutral tone is all about.

But what *are* neutral tone syllables? It will be useful to begin by making a distinction between tone and accent, or between syllables with a tone and accented

syllables.

Tone is a property of Chinese. Accent or stress is a property of English. The accented or stressed syllables of English are pronounced with a more forceful or acoustically more prominent pronunciation than unaccented syllables, such as “air” in “airplane.” There is more than one physiological feature contributing to the acoustic prominence. But there is a lack of consensus regarding the matter.

A key observation is that tone typically implies accent or stress to the extent that tone involves a more forceful pronunciation of a syllable. Tone and accent are different. But presence of tone implies presence of accent in the sense of a certain level of prominence. The syllable may be tonally weakened and exhibit traces of tone (Tříšková, personal communication). One assumes that one may then consider it accentually weakened as well.

The prominence of stress seems obvious. But there are many problems. Still, “stress in Chinese is a controversial issue,” as Hana Tříšková (2019: p. 65) notes and she cites Duanmu (2002: p. 125): “In fact, Chinese linguists disagree on both whether Chinese has stress, and if so, where it is.” And she adds: “The majority of linguists agree that Mandarin (unlike e.g. Cantonese) *has* stress, and that it is a useful concept,” while again citing Duanmu (2001: p. 120): “Stress is the least discussed area in Chinese phonology.”

In any event, I believe that neutral tone syllables are at the same time also unaccented syllables. This fact makes it possible to propose a definition of neutral tone by what it is, as follows.

Neutral tone syllables are *unaccented syllables that form a unit with a single accent together with a preceding syllable that does have a tone and therefore also an accent*. There is a little more to the theory. But that is reserved for the body of this paper.

There are two cases. Either the two syllables in question, accented followed by unaccented, are part of the same word, as in 东西 *dōngxī* “things, stuff”. Or the second syllable is a word by itself, as in 来了 *lái le* “(he) has come.” In the second case, the unaccented syllable is a monosyllabic unaccented word. “Enclitic word” will be the designation introduced for monosyllabic unaccented words in the body of this paper. It is what they are called in the grammar and phonology of many other languages.

In my experience, being enclitic has no necessary connection with meaning. It is a property of syllables that is independent of meaning, independent of lexicon, independent of semantics, independent of syntax. Thus, even when an unaccented monosyllabic word belongs in terms of meaning with what *follows*, it is still pronounced with a syllable that *precedes*. In 你说得对 *nǐ shuō de duì* “You’re right,” 得 *de* is present because 对 *duì* is present and therefore belongs with it in meaning. Only together as a unit do the two belong with what *precedes*. But in pronunciation, 得 *de* belongs with 说 *shuō* and 说得 *shuō de* is pronounced like 来了 *lái le*, and also like 东西 *dōngxī* for that matter.

Importantly, whether the two syllables, an accented one followed by an unac-

cented one, belong to the same word or to two different words makes no difference in pronunciation in terms of accent.

Two practical implications are as follows. First, a word such as 东西 *dōngxi* can be used to teach the pronunciation of 来了 *lái le*. Second, the pronunciation of neutral tone cannot be taught in isolation because it does not exist in isolation. Something needs to precede to achieve the correct pronunciation.

## 2. Introduction: On Tone and on Neutral Tone in General

The design of the present paper is to define the so-called neutral tone of Chinese differently from how it is now—and, as far as I know, has always been—defined in grammars and textbooks. It is at the same time an effort to present a comprehensive explanation of the nature of neutral tone including practical and didactical aspects, reasoning from first principles and with little recourse to linguistic theory because theories can disagree and there is not much theory about the neutral tone anyhow. The theory will be laid out in six discrete steps. These six steps will be followed by remarks on past research about phenomena comparable to neutral tone in other languages. The seeds for treating the neutral tone in its proper context were sown near the end of the nineteenth century.

According to the standard definition, neutral tone means absence of tone. Neutral tone is a property of syllables. A syllable is neutral tone when it has no tone. The term “neutral” is slightly misleading because it suggests a certain positive property. But all there is to it is that there is no tone. The term “neutral” does not affirm the positive presence of a property.

This paper has both a theoretical and a practical component. The theoretical component is concerned with defining the nature of the so-called neutral tone. The practical component is concerned with the impact of this definition on the teaching and learning of Chinese, especially of its pronunciation.

The present focus is on Chinese, and more specifically on Modern Standard Chinese, called 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà* (“general common speech”). There are other languages that exhibit tones. I assume that some of the syllables in these languages do not have tone. And I suspect that these syllables behave like neutral tone syllables in Chinese. Why not? However, I have not gathered data and have not studied any languages that have tone other than Chinese. My suspicion would therefore need to be confirmed (or denied) by empirical observation.

Modern Standard Chinese is also known by the misnomer Mandarin, which corresponds to 官话 *guānhuà*. Mandarin (a word meaning “an official,” directly borrowed from Portuguese but going back all the way back to Sanskrit) is strictly speaking the common and somewhat artificial dialect used by the officials at the imperial court of the 明清代 *Míng Qīng Dài*, “The Ming and Qing Period (that is, Dynasties).” A possible source of the confusion is that both Modern Standard Chinese and Mandarin derive mostly from the language of Beijing and surrounding areas.

In the interest of clarity, it needs to be noted right at the outset that there is

nothing wrong with the prevailing definition of neutral tone in grammars and textbooks. However, while absence of tone may be neutral tone's most conspicuous feature, it is not what is most essential about it.

Neutral tone is indeed absence of tone. But there are other undeniable empirical features beyond absence of tone. These empirical features need to be defined and these definitions need to be combined into a comprehensive theory of neutral tone.

But first something about tones in languages is in general. Some of the world's languages are tonal. They are for the most part found in three regions: 1) East and Southeast Asia; 2) Sub-Saharan Africa; and 3) Mesoamerica.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, they constitute a minority of the world's languages, as is apparent from any world map showing the area that they cover.

Tonal languages exhibit tones. But what is a tone? Available definitions are not always as sharp as is desirable.

Tone is a property of sounds, more specifically syllables, in certain languages. Tone implies presence of pitch. And pitch is about sound waves vibrating at a steady frequency, like musical notes. A high note has high pitch; a low note, low pitch. But there is more to tone than pitch. Two things. First, tones by themselves can distinguish between words. Second, tones are not only about pitch but also about gradual change in pitch (not a jump in pitch, as in from one note to another in a musical melody), or the absence of change in pitch by meaningful contrast with the presence of change.

There are four tones in Mandarin marked as follows: 1) change in pitch from higher to lower (as in *mà*); 2) change from lower to higher (as in *má*); 3) change from higher to lower and back up (as in *mǎ*); 4) absence of change (as in *mā*). They are called fourth, second, third, and first tone respectively.

It is generally accepted that neutral tone can exhibit different levels of pitch depending on the tone of the preceding syllable. However, two properties defining tone are missing. First, there is only pitch, not change in pitch. This fact is not mentioned in accounts of the supposed (weak) tones of neutral tone syllables. Second, difference in pitch does not mark difference in meaning. The same syllable can differ in pitch depending on the tone of the preceding syllable without changing its meaning. Therefore, in spite of presence of some pitch in neutral tone syllables, neutral tone is still absence of tone.

What is the essence of neutral tone? How should it be defined? The following line of argument, subdivided into six cumulative steps, proposes answers to these questions.

### 3. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step One: What Neutral Tone Is Not

#### 3.1. The Notion of Neutral Tone as a Fifth Tone

In a critical first step in this quest to define neutral tone, it will be useful to reject

<sup>1</sup>For an easily accessible general introduction to tonal languages, see McWhorter, 2015.

one possible definition.

It may be tempting to assume that neutral tone is a kind of fifth tone and that absence of tone is a kind of zero tone. Zero often marks meaning in language. For example, presence of the ending *s* marks *chairs* as a plural whereas absence of ending or zero marks *chair* as singular. Nothing is more common.

Accordingly, one might argue that first tone in 妈 *mā* produces the meaning “mother,” third tone in 马 *mǎ* produces the meaning “horse,” and absence of tone as a kind of fifth zero tone produces the particle 吗 *ma* that turns a declarative statement into a question.

It would follow that neutral tone is as capable of differentiating meaning as the actual four tones. But abundant evidence contradicts this.

### 3.2. Rejection of Neutral Tone as a Fifth Tone Marking Distinct Meanings

Compare the two expressions 不多不少 *bù duō bù shǎo* “neither too much nor too little, just right” and 多少钱 *duō shao qián* “how much (money),” literally “how much (or how) little money. In the first expression, 少 *shǎo* exhibits third tone; in the second expression, 少 *shao* exhibits neutral tone. However, the alternation of third tone and neutral tone does not go hand in hand with a difference in meaning. The word is the same in both expressions, namely “little.”

This example involves an association between third tone and neutral tone. The same association can be found between first tone and neutral tone. Compare 生活 *shēnghuó* “life” (as work and activity, not as the opposite of being dead, which is 活着 *huózhe* “be alive”) and 医生 *yīsheng* “doctor,” in which the second syllable is often pronounced with neutral tone. And between second tone and neutral tone, as in 人民 *rénmín* “people” and 爱人 *àiren* “lover.” And also between fourth tone and neutral tone, as in 上午 *shàngwǔ* “morning time” and 晚上 *wǎnshang* “evening.” The meaning does not change between presence of tone and absence of tone. Neutral tone is therefore not a distinct fifth (absence of) tone capable of expressing a different meaning.

Importantly, as far as I can see (or better, hear), this alternation can affect the same syllable in the same word. Thus, 医生 will on occasion be heard as *yīsheng* and on occasion as *yīshēng* (more on this below).

It can be safely concluded that neutral tone is not a zero tone with the same functional capability as the four other tones. It is not a fifth tone in its own right in addition to four other tones. It just looks that way in the case of the question particle 吗 *ma*. But this appearance is deceptive.

Evidently, in contradistinction to the afore-mentioned neutral tone syllables *shao*, *sheng*, *ren*, and *shang*, neutral tone 吗 *ma* cannot exhibit one of the four other tones while retaining the same meaning. It is always neutral tone.

Still, in order to achieve a unified explanation of neutral tone, the perpetual presence of neutral tone in *ma* will need to be reconciled with the alternation between absence and presence of neutral tone with retention of the same meaning in other syllables such as *shao*, *sheng*, *ren*, and *shang*. The search is for what

all five neutral tone syllables have in common. The case of 吗 *ma* does make it seem as if neutral tone can on occasion mark a distinctive meaning. But I would identify that as a secondary effect, as will become clear from what follows.

### 3.3. A Special Case of Neutral Tone Seemingly Functioning as a Fifth Tone

There is another phenomenon regarding which assuming that neutral tone denotes difference in meaning and therefore functions like the four tones is very tempting.<sup>2</sup> One example of the phenomenon is the difference between 老子 *Lǎozǐ* and 老子 *lǎozǐ*. The former evidently refers to the famous sage. The latter has a number of connotations that do not need to be addressed here. A second example is the difference between 精神 *jīngshén* and 精神 *jīngshen*. One might find “spirit” as an equivalent of the former and “vigor” as an equivalent of the latter. There is a definite difference between the two but the precise difference does not matter presently.

The question arises: Are these cases in which neutral tone functions on the same level of the four tones as a kind of fifth tone with the same functionality of distinguishing meaning as the four tones? It is not. So how can the contrast between presence of tone and absence of tone be explained?

To begin, it is important to note that the difference in tone between 老子 *Lǎozǐ* and 老子 *lǎozǐ* does not produce a difference in basic meaning. The character 子 denotes the same word with the same meaning, and not two different words as one would expect with two different tones. Then what is the difference?

It is proposed that the difference is not a difference of tone but a difference between a more forceful or accented pronunciation and a less forceful or unaccented pronunciation (on accent, see Step Two below). In the case of 老子 *Lǎozǐ*, the more forceful pronunciation using tone, and by implication accent, is easy to understand in light of the revered status of the sage. The result is a difference, not with regard to basic meaning, but rather with regard to connotation or level of diction or the like.

### 3.4. A (Fairly) Unique Case of Neutral Tone Seemingly Functioning as a Fifth Tone: 眼睛 *yǎnjīng* “Eye” and 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “Eyeglasses”

A most interesting phenomenon is exemplified by the contrast between 眼睛 *yǎnjīng* “eye” and 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “eyeglasses.” I have not readily been able to find another example like it, though there may be others. It seems therefore quite unique, definitely among the more common vocabulary.

At first sight, the contrast in question looks like the contrasts between 老子 *Lǎozǐ* and 老子 *lǎozǐ* and between 精神 *jīngshén* and 精神 *jīngshen*. These two pairs contrast in two ways. First, as regards sound, there is contrast between presence and absence of tone. Second, as regards meaning, two shades of mean-

<sup>2</sup>I thank 杨宝莉 Baoli Yang, at the time of writing an advanced doctoral student in comparative literature Brown University, for highlighting this special case.



ing of the same basic concept contrast with one another.

However, the similarity is deceptive. There are three critical differences.

First, as regards meaning, the difference between 眼睛 *yǎnjīng* “eye” and 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “eyeglasses” cannot be quite characterized as a difference between two shades of meaning of the same basic concept. Both words do relate to vision. But eyeballs are very different objects from eyeglasses.

Second, whereas the components 子 *zǐ/zi* and 神 *shén/shen* are the same word in 老子 *Lǎozǐ* and 老子 *Lǎozǐ* and in 经神 *jīngshén* and 经神 *jīngshen* respectively, 睛 *jīng* in 眼睛 *yǎnjīng* “eye” and 镜 *jìng* in 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “eyeglasses” are two different words. The characters differ.

Third, most importantly, the meaning of the two components is quite different: 睛 *jīng* means “eyeball” whereas 镜 *jìng* means “glass” or “mirror.” Therefore, in the word 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “eyeglasses,” only the component 眼 *yǎn* creates the association with vision. The component 镜 *jìng* does not, even it may seem so.

In conclusion, the contrast between 眼睛 *yǎnjīng* “eye” and 眼镜 *yǎnjìng* “eyeglasses” is of a very different kind than that of a pair like 经神 *jīngshén* and 经神 *jīngshen* in spite of the surface similarities.

It could be called a remarkable coincidence that the syllable (disregarding tone) that joined *yǎn* to express the concept “glasses” happens to be the same as the second syllable of *yǎnjīng* “eye.” That is why the present case is rather unique.

#### 4. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step Two: Tone and Accent

The search is for a binary alternation that pertains to pronunciation and involves what is called neutral tone in Chinese. One such alternation pertaining to pronunciation is known as accent. Like tone, accent is a property of syllables. It describes a more forceful or louder pronunciation that affects certain syllables as compared to others that do not have an accent. The precise physiological properties of the accent are not directly relevant to the present argument. For example, in the word “airplane,” the first syllable has the accent or is accented and the second does not and is unaccented. Words typically have one main accent. The same word component can both have and not have the accent: “house” has the accent in “housewife” but not in “White House,” the name for the residence of the US president. The alternation is binary: a syllable is accented or not accented.

It is proposed here that presence of tone comes with presence of accent. Tone implies accent. Each syllable pronounced with a tone is also pronounced with a certain force and therefore also has an accent.

The result is that Chinese sounds different from many European languages in the following way. From the perspective of the speaker of European languages, it seems as if many more syllables have an accent. Chinese 儿子 *érzi* “son” has one tone. The second syllable is neutral tone. It therefore has one accent, like English “water.” But 准备 *zhǔnbèi* “prepare” has two tones and therefore two accents. This is not typical of European languages. It does occur when something

is said for emphasis, as in: “I. Want. Wa. Ter. Give. Me. Wa. Ter.”

Neutral tone can now be defined in an additional way. It is not only characterized by absence of tone but also by absence of accent. And furthermore, it is proposed that absence of accent explains certain critical empirical properties of the behavior of neutral tone syllables.

So absence of accent is what it is all about. The Chinese term for “neutral tone” supports this view. It is 轻声 *qīng shēng* “soft sound.” The reference is to a pronunciation that is less forceful. In fact, whispering can be described as 轻轻地说 *qīng qīng de shuō*, literally “talk softly softly.”

So what matters is absence of accent. But this is not the end of the tale. Just calling a neutral tone unaccented does not account for at least two other undeniable empirical properties of neutral tone syllables. Identifying these two properties is Step Three. But before identifying these two properties, it will be useful to introduce another critical distinction. There are two types of unaccented enclitic syllables in Modern Standard Chinese. Either unaccented enclitic syllables are part of a word or they form a word by themselves.

Examples of unaccented enclitic syllables that are part of a word are the second syllables, 西 *xī* and 子 *zǐ*, in the words 东西 *dōngxi* “things, stuff” and 鼻子 *bízi* “nose.” Chinese words are typically not longer than two syllables. If they are, it is mostly easily possible to treat them as compounds of one-syllable or two-syllable words.

Among the best-known examples of unaccented enclitic syllables that constitute a word by themselves, hence monosyllabic words, are the completed action particle 了 *le*, the yes-or-no question particle 吗 *ma*, and the “genitive” particle 的 *de*.

### 5. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step Three: Two Empirical Properties of Unaccented Monosyllabic Words

The first property is that unaccented monosyllabic words cannot appear at the beginning of a sentence or even a word. This property is mirrored by the fact that unaccented syllables in two syllable words are always the second syllable, as far as I can see. In English, it can be either the first or the second. Just compare “Paris,” with accent on the first syllable, and “Berlin,” with accent on the second syllable.

The second property is that unaccented monosyllabic words have a tendency to move forward in the sentence. Consider the completed action particle 了 *le*. It often occurs at the end of a sentence. But it can also move forward, as it were, and occur earlier in the sentence. In the following interesting but unusual example, 了 *le* appears between the preposition 在 *zài* and its object.

他走来坐在了前排的中间

*tā zǒu lái zuò zài le qián pái de zhōng jiān*

“She walked and came to sit down in the middle of the front row”

(Chinese Language Website “Mandarin Corner,” Video for HSK 3/7 No. 146)

This property is less prominent in Chinese than in other languages because

word order is very strict in Chinese. Still, 了 *le* would make for an interesting case study, as to where it can go and where it cannot go.

## 6. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step Four: The Two Properties as Properties of “Enclitic” Words

The need is for explaining the combination of two properties of unaccented monosyllabic words described in Step Three. In fact, it so happens that this very same dual behavior is attested in most if not all languages of the world. And it is called enclitic behavior. The words exhibiting the behavior in question are called enclitic words. The word “enclitic” derives from Greek ἐγκλίνειν “lean against,” also sometimes “lean backwards against.”

As regards Chinese, it seems obvious to classify Chinese words such as 了 *le*, 吗 *ma*, and 的 *de* as enclitic. But enclitic behavior has not, to my knowledge, ever been singled out for a separate treatment as far as Chinese is concerned. In their survey entitled, *Clitics: An Introduction*, Spencer and Luís ever so briefly mention Modern Standard Chinese (Spencer & Luís, 2012: pp. 76-77), but only in relation to the question particle 吗 *ma*, stating that it “has the relevant properties of a clitic.”<sup>3</sup> Trísková has recently studied words with enclitic properties in her study of stress, and the absence thereof (Trísková, 2017, 2019).

As regards other languages, there is a sizeable body of writing on enclitic words. I will return to it below. Remarkably, some studies report only the first of the two afore-mentioned properties and other studies only report the second. Generally, the two properties are rarely mentioned together. It is either one or the other. One reason may be that mentioning them both would necessitate relating the two properties to one another. More about this below, when past research on enclitics is discussed.

So far, six steps were anticipated and four have been completed. A brief review is in order. In a first step of the present argument, it was noted that neutral tone has nothing to do with tone. In a second step, it was noted that tones are also accents, that absence of tone is therefore absence of accent, and that the neutral tone has everything to do not with absence of tone but rather with absence of accent. In a third step, two empirical properties of unaccented monosyllabic words were pointed out. First, they cannot come first and, second, they move forward in the sentence. In a fourth step, it was noted that words exhibiting this type of behavior are called enclitic words in linguistics.

<sup>3</sup>Five examples of 吗 *ma* are cited, a, b, c, d, and e. But four of the five have issues. Example e does not contain *ma*. Instead of “Zhège rén shì shén ma,” one needs to read “Zhège rén shì shén me,” with 么 *me* instead of 吗 *ma*. What is more, the sentence does not mean “Who is this person?” but “What is this person?” “Who is this person?” would be 这个人是谁 *zhè ge rén shì shéi?* Example d, “Nǐ kàn le ma” does not mean “Have you read (it)?” but rather “Have you seen (it)?” 看 *kàn* means “read” only in the expression 看书 *kàn shū* “read, study (literally, read books).” “Have you read (it)?” could be expressed by 你读过(它)吗 *nǐ dú guò (tā) ma?* “Have you been reading?” could be expressed by 你看书了吗 *nǐ kàn shū le ma?* Example c, “nǐ zhīdào tā ma” is not the typical expression for “Do you know him?” It rather is 你认识他吗 *nǐ rènshi tā ma?* The verb *zhīdào* does not normally mean “know” in the sense of “having developed personal relations with.” As for example b, *Tā chī fàn ma*, the translation “Is he eating (rice)?” is somewhat misleading. There is no necessary reference to rice. “Is he eating rice?” would be rendered as 他在吃米饭吗 *tā zài chī mǐ fàn ma*.

But there is need for a fifth step. The two afore-mentioned properties are what happens at the surface. They are symptoms of a deeper truth.

## 7. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step Five: The Essence of “Enclitic” Words

Consider the first of the two afore-mentioned properties, that enclitic words cannot come first. That obviously means that something needs to precede. What precedes is a word with one or more tones and therefore also accents. Since enclitic words do not have an accent, they can be defined *as forming a unit with a single accent together with an accented syllable in a preceding word*.

Incidentally, it is also possible for two enclitic words (or even three) to follow one another. An example is 了吗 *le ma* in 他来了吗 *tā lái le ma* “Did she come?” In this case, not one but two enclitic words form an accentual unit with a word that precedes.

This explicit definition of enclitic words is not widespread, even in linguistic studies of enclitic words. But the definition is not too difficult to find in works on ancient Greek.

In fact, when it comes to enclitic words, many will first think of ancient Greek. That is because ancient Greek occupies a prominent place in the history of the West and is even studied in high school. There is also the strong visual impression deriving from the fact that Greek words are surmounted by accent signs. Those words that lack accent signs therefore stand out. They are either enclitic or proclitic. They form a unit with a single accent either with a word that precedes or with a word that follows.

Lupaş (1972: p. 173) describes the critical property of enclitic words as follows: *Tous les enclitiques sont reliés au mot précédent de manière à former une seule unité accentuelle* (“All enclitics are linked to a preceding word so as to form a single accentual unit”). Allen (1987: p. 126) states that an enclitic word “formed a single phonetic unit with the preceding full word.”

School grammars of Greek have a different focus. The high school student beginning the study of Greek is not interested at this early stage in theories about enclitic words. The focus is on the practical aim of placing the accents (*acutus*, *gravis*, and *circumflexus*) correctly atop Greek words.<sup>4</sup>

Now that it has been proposed in this fifth step that enclitic words not coming first is just a symptom of the deeper truth that they form an accentual unit with a word that precedes.

But what about the other property mentioned above, the fact that enclitic

<sup>4</sup>The best introductory description of the behavior of enclitic (and also proclitic) words in ancient Greek that I know of is found in the school grammar by Van de Vorst, 1969, edited by Adhemar Geerebaert. The “Geerebaert” must be one of the best introductory grammars of Greek ever written in any language. But the language is Dutch (Flemish) and the book is now out of print and no longer used in the classroom. There is also a corresponding Latin grammar. The two books have achieved legendary status among several generations of Flemish high school and university students. It seems impossible to buy them secondhand, though tens of thousands must have been in circulation. Many decades of users of the grammars seem to be holding on to their copies.

words move forward? In English, “to me” in “Give the book to me” is not enclitic. But “me” is enclitic in “Give me the book” is. That is why “to me” appears after “the book” whereas “me” appears before it. No one says “Give the book me.” “Me” forms a unit with one accent together with “give.” In fact, people typically say “gimme,” revealing the strong accent on the first syllable.

The specific phenomenon most readily associated with this specific property in the minds of many is the enclitic particle of ancient Greek. Ancient Greek has many of them. They typically occur in second position in the sentence but never in first.

The true reasons for the forward movement of enclitic words are not fully understood, even if the fact is undeniable. Enclitic words have a tendency to move forward. How can this be reconciled with the other property? It may be suggested provisionally that they move forward to attach themselves to a word with a strong accent.

In any event, the forward movement just confirms the identity of the unaccented monosyllabic words as enclitic words. Because moving forward is what enclitic words often do. In other words, this forward movement does not contradict the first property in any way. It confirms it, even if it is not fully understood at this time.

This much for the fifth step. The results of the first five steps together can be summed up by concluding that monosyllabic words that are always unaccented are enclitic in that, 1) they form a unit with a single accent together with a preceding word that does bear a tone and therefore does have an accent, and 2), have a tendency to move forward.

But there is need for a final sixth step. This step involves critical implications for the teaching of the pronunciation of neutral tone.

## 8. Theory of Neutral Tone, Step Six: Relation between Unaccented Syllables in Two-syllable Words and Unaccented Syllables in Monosyllabic Words and Two Implications for Teaching Neutral Tone

It is proposed that the unaccented syllable and the accented syllable in a two-syllable word, as in 东西 *dōngxi* “things, stuff” and 鼻子 *bízi* “nose”, relate in the same way to one another as an enclitic word and a preceding accented syllable, as in 来 *lái* and 了 *le* in (他) 来了 (*tā lái le*) “(He) has come.”

This equation comes with two implications for teaching the pronunciation of monosyllabic neutral tone words.

The first implication is that the pronunciation of enclitic words such as 了 *le* can be taught by comparison and juxtaposition of an example such as 来了 *lái le* with an example such as 鼻子 *bízi*. There is no difference in pronunciation as far as accentuation goes. I believe it to be the true way of teaching the pronunciation of enclitics because it involves what is really happening.

The second implication involves what is to my mind perhaps the single most pertinent observation that one can make about the neutral tone in a practical context such as the classroom. It is that it is not possible to demonstrate the pronun-

ciation of the neutral tone in isolation because it does not exist in isolation. It needs something to precede to achieve the correct pronunciation. Consider the particle 了 *le*. Its connection with a preceding word is key to achieving the right sound color. So one could illustrate to students its pronunciation with the expression 来了 *lái le*. Contrasting with an expression such 来到 *lái dào* may be helpful. English equivalents may also help. “House” in “white house,” as opposed to “blue house,” “yellow house,” and so on, is not enclitic. But it is enclitic in “Whitehouse,” as in the president’s mansion in Washington. “White” has the accent. To obtain the right sound, it is not possible to pronounce “house” in “Whitehouse” separately just as it is not possible to pronounce 了 *le* in 来了 *lái le* separately.

One does hear anecdotally about certain suggestions used in classrooms to teach students how to pronounce 了 *le* as a separate word and, in general, how to pronounce neutral tone all by itself. I do not think that the efforts in question can be successful.

One might be tempted to note that the two properties seem rather obvious. However, it was not obvious to me for quite a few months when intensively studying beginning Chinese and wondering how I should pronounce neutral tone correctly.

## 9. Considering All Possible Cases

There are a well-defined number of cases. It will be useful to begin with all the possible cases in which one (1) or two (2) syllable words are followed by one (1) or two (2) enclitics words. It appears that exactly six cases can be distinguished, here designated as **A**, **B**, **C**, **D**, **E**, and **F**.

1. The preceding word has one accented syllable.
  - a. One enclitic word follows. 2 syllables in total, accented + unaccented.

### Case A.

- First tone: 他的 *tā de* “his”  
 Second tone: 来了 *lái le* “came, has come”  
 Third tone: 你呢 *nǐ ne* “What about you?”  
 Fourth tone: 去吧 *qù ba* “Let’s go!”

The very same pronunciation of 2 syllables, but this time in 1 word:

- First tone: 妈妈 *māma* “mom”  
 Second tone: 儿子 *érzi* “son”  
 Third tone: 姐姐 *jiějie* “older sister”  
 Fourth tone: 爸爸 *bàba* “dad”

- b. Two enclitics follow. 3 syllables in total, accented + unaccented + unaccented. Case B.

- First tone: 搬出去 *bān chu qu* “move out”  
 Second tone: 拿过来 *ná guo lai* “bring over”  
 Third tone: 走进去 *zǒu jin qu* “walk in” (viewed from outside)  
 Fourth tone: 去过了 *qù guo le* “(I) have gone.”  
 (as part of past experience)

The very same pronunciation of 3 syllables but this time in 2 words, a two syllable non-enclitic word and an enclitic word: this is in fact Case **E** below.

2. The preceding word has two syllables.

a. Both syllables have tone.

i) One enclitic follows. 3 syllables in total, accented + accented + unaccented. Case **C**.

准备 *zhǔnbèi le* “(I) have prepared.”

No obvious equivalent of the same pronunciation in a single word.

ii) Two enclitics follow. 4 syllables in total, accented + accented + unaccented + unaccented. Case **D**.

准备好了吗 *zhǔnbèi le ma?* “Have (you) prepared?”

No obvious equivalent of the same pronunciation in a single word.

b. Only the first syllable has tone.

i) One enclitic follows. 3 syllables in total, accented + unaccented + unaccented. Case **E**.

买了东西吗 *(mǎi le) dōngxi ma?* “(Did [you]) buy stuff?” No obvious equivalent of the same pronunciation in a single word.

ii) Two enclitics follow. 4 syllables in total, accented + unaccented + unaccented + unaccented. Case **F**.

休息了吗 *xiūxi le ma?* “Did you rest?” “Did he rest?”

No obvious equivalent of the same pronunciation in a single word.

Again, Case B and Case E are pronounced identically.

Cases A to F are limited to initial words of no more than two syllables and no more than two enclitic words. These cases account for the vast majority of accentual unity between an initial word and one or more enclitics that follow it.

Words with three syllables are otherwise rare in Chinese. An example in which an initial word has three syllables and is followed by one enclitic word is as follows:

太有意思了 *(tài) yǒuyisi le* “(How) very interesting!”

This is the same sequence of accented and unaccented syllables as Case D above.

The first of the following two examples features a sequence of three enclitic words and the second a sequence of four enclitic words:

上去了吗 *shàng qu le ma* “Has (he) gone upstairs?”

走进去了吗 *zǒu jìn qu le ma* “Has (he) entered?”

## 10. The Three Types of Monosyllabic Words in Terms of Enclitic Status

Some monosyllabic words always exhibit tone, some words sometimes do and sometimes do not, and yet other words never do. That means that some are never enclitic, some sometimes are, and some never are. An example of the first type

is 懂 *dǒng* “understand.” An example of the second type is 去 *qù*: it is not enclitic in 去了吗 *qù le ma* “Did you go?” but enclitic in 搬出去 *bān chu qu* “move out.” Another example of the second type is 不 *bu*. Examples of the third type are 吧 *ba*, 的 *de*, 地 *de*, 得 *de*, 了 *le*, 吗 *ma*, 呢 *ne*, and 着 *zhe*. There are not a whole lot. This may be most of them. There are a number of special cases, which are to be discussed next.

It is a fact that, in fast speech, just about every word can be neutral tone. It would need to be established by means of experimentation whether the very first word in a sentence can lose its tone. It may be the case that the laws of enclitic words are just suspended when most words are without neutral tone.

Does this mean that the distinction between the first type and the second type is invalid? That would be going too far. It remains a fact that, under certain conditions not including fast speech, certain monosyllabic words are always enclitic whereas, under those very same conditions, other monosyllabic words sometimes are and sometimes are not.

## 11. Unaccented Monosyllabic Words or “Enclitic” Words: Five Special Cases

### 11.1. 了 *le*

It was noted above that 了 *le* is always neutral tone. It is a fact, however, that 了 *le* is a weakened form of 了 *liǎo*. One might therefore argue that 了 *le* is *not* always neutral tone and that, when it is not, it is third tone with different vowels, namely *iao*. While there is no denying that 了 *le* and 了 *liǎo* are related, it is better to view 了 *le* as a morphological derivative of 了 *liǎo* that is a word in its own right. The best indication that this interpretation is preferable is the fact that, as far as I can discern, 了 *liǎo* can itself be pronounced neutral tone, especially in fast pronunciation. 了 *liao*, and not 了 *le*, is therefore better regarded as the neutral tone equivalent of 了 *liǎo*.

### 11.2. 得 *de*

The relation between 得 *dé* “obtain” and 得 *de* is not fully clear. Are they the same word? It is well known that 得 *de* follows verbs to introduce adverbial and potential complements. I have the impression that both may well refer to obtaining a result. 得 *dé* “obtain” would then do so as a full-fledged verb whereas the particle 得 *de* would then do so in what linguists call a “grammaticalized” way. They would be one and the same word.

Much has been written about the relation between the particle 地 *de*, which precedes verbs, and the particle 得 *de*, which follows verbs. It may well be that 地 *de* always expresses a circumstance whereas 得 *de* always expresses a result or a resulting state. Additional inquiry remains desirable.

### 11.3. 个 *ge*

Unlike other enclitic words, 个 *ge* is associated with a tone, namely the fourth



tone. This is clear from the fact that 一个 is pronounced *yíge*, with 一 *yí* “one” bearing second tone, which it does in front of fourth tone syllables. It is also clear from the expression 个人 *gègèrén* “individual.”

Unlike other enclitic words, 个 *ge* exhibits a restriction in usage of the following kind. Because 个 *ge* is a measure word, it evidently precedes as a rule only words that are preceded by measure words.

An exception is when 个 *ge* is an abbreviation for 一个 *yíge*, as in 见面 *jiàn ge miàn* “meet up” and 洗澡 *xǐ ge zǎo* “wash up.” The words with which 个 *ge* forms a unit with one accent are 见 *jiàn* and 洗 *xǐ*. Accordingly, 见面 *jiàn ge* and 洗澡 *xǐ ge* have the same tonal pattern as 看了 *kàn le* “saw, has seen” and 我的 *wǒde* “mine.”

#### 11.4. 么 *me*

Unlike 个 *ge*, 么 *me* has no obvious association with any tone. Moreover, its use is limited to a small set of expressions such as 多么 *duōme*, 那么 *nàme*, 什么 *shénme*, 要么 *yàome*, 怎么 *zěnmē*, 这么 *zhème*, and a couple of other expressions. Because its use is limited to a handful of expressions, it is not interpreted as a word in its own right but as forming a single word with the syllable that precedes. It is therefore written together with the preceding word. One might say that it has been “lexicalized” in conjunction with the word that precedes. The fact remains that its behavior is for the most part that of an enclitic word.

了 *le* has a similar function in *wèile* “because,” which cannot mean what it does without 了 *le*. Whereas absence and presence of 了 *le* produce two modalities of a single 看 *kàn* “look,” namely “looks” and “looked” or “has looked,” it does not produce two modalities of a single meaning as expressed by 为 *wèi*. 为 *wèi* does not have the same meaning in 为 *wèi* and 为了 *wèile*, whereas 看 *kàn* does in 看 *kàn* and 看 *kàn le*.

#### 11.5. 们 *men*

Plural 们 *men* also behaves like an enclitic word. The reason that it is typically written as one word with one or more preceding syllables may be influence from the grammar of European languages, in which plural markers are suffixes. The problem with interpreting 们 *men* as a suffix is that Chinese does not have suffixes. One suggestion is to treat 们 *men* in conjunction with one or more preceding syllables as some kind of compound noun. I have not researched its etymology.

## 12. Enclitic and Non-Enclitic Pronunciation

It is possible that tones can return when the pronunciation slows down. But the exact conditions of such an event would need to be examined. Much more research is needed. At a slower rate of pronunciation, enclitic words may come to be felt as words in their own right without accentual unity with a preceding word. Such accentual unity is vital to their status as enclitic words. Much more empirical research is necessary. For example, is the following pronunciation

possible?

休息了吗 *xiūxi le ma?* “Did you rest?” (instead of... *xiūxi*...)

Because *le ma* needs a word or an accented syllable to “lean against,” the syllable 息 *xi* may perhaps perform this function.

### 13. Enclitics and Pinyin

It is possible for enclitics to be viewed as one word together with a word that precedes. Pronunciation is no obstacle because it was already noted above that an initial word plus an enclitic word are pronounced as if they together are a single word.

Examples are as follows:

好极了 (*hǎo*) *jíle* “Superb!” (one enclitic word)

看起来 *kànqilai* “It appears that” (two enclitic words)

These expressions are also written as one word in Pinyin. The common expression

太好了 (*tài*) *hǎo le* “Very good!”

is written with a space though the pronunciation in terms of accents is the same as that of 极了 *jíle*. The reason must be that 极 *jí* is much less often used by itself as a word in its own right.

### 14. Enclitics and Word Order

Compare the following two sentences.

Sentence A

请你买回一些水果来 *qǐng nǐ mǎi HUI yì xiē shuǐguǒ LAI* “Please buy and bring some fruit.” (*Integrated Chinese*, Third Edition, Level 1, Part 2, p. 185)

Sentence B

他买回来了一些水果 *tā mǎi HUI LAI LE yìxiē shuǐguǒ* “He bought and brought back some fruit.” (*ibid.*, p. 187)

The difference between the two can be, and is as a rule, described as a rule of word order. But there is more than meets the eye. Importantly, there is the “why”-question: Why is the order different? The answer would appear to be that 了 *le* is strongly enclitic and therefore exhibits a strong tendency to move forward in the sentence, perhaps more than any other enclitic word. On its journey forward, it takes 来 *lai* along, as it were.

This enclitic tendency of 了 *le* is seen in the following variant of sentences A and B.

SENTENCE C

他买来了一些水果 *tā mǎi LAI LE yìxiē shuǐguǒ* “He bought and brought some fruit.” (*ibid.*, p. 186)

Furthermore, what may not be possible or be unusual is the following:

SENTENCE D

请你买回来一些水果 *qǐng nǐ mǎi HUI LAI yì xiē shuǐguǒ* “Please buy and bring back some fruit.”

More empirical data need to be gathered.

## 15. Directional Verbs as Verbs and as (Enclitic) Directional Complements

When a directional verb follows another verb, it becomes a so-called directional complement. And it is then also unaccented. Then again, when the pronunciation is slower and more articulated, the accent may return. The exact circumstances need to be detailed by further research.

Eleven directional components are as follows: 上 *shang*, 下 *xia*, 进 *jin*, 出 *chu*, 回 *hui*, 过 *guo*, 开 *kai*, 到 *dao*, 起 *qi*, 来 *lai*, 去 *qu*.

The first nine describe a displacement from a point A to a point B. The last two describe the *direction* of the displacement as being either towards the speaker (and the hearer) in the case of 来 *lai* or away from the speaker in the case of 去 *qu*.

The first eight can therefore be combined with the two last two, 来 *lai* and 去 *qu*, because the two groups denote something different, displacement versus direction of displacement, and combinations of members of the two groups will therefore not involve contradiction.

The ninth member, 起 *qi*, is only combined with 来 *lai*. The difference between 起 *qi* and the other eight directional components denoting displacement is as follows. The other eight describe displacement of a body from one point to another. But 起 *qi* describes displacement inside a body.

The main contrast is between 起 *qi* and 上 *shang*. In relation to the human body, 起 *qi* denotes a shift in the body from a sitting position to a standing position and can be rendered as “rise” or “rise up.” The body changes its position but not its location. By contrast, 走上楼来 *zǒu shang lóu lai* and 走上楼去 *zǒu shang lóu qu* refer to coming up or going up a staircase. The body changes location. 起 *qi* is only combined with 来 *lai* and not with 去 *qu*, apparently because 起来 *qi* is viewed from standing position and therefore as a movement toward the speaker.<sup>5</sup>

来 *lai* and 去 *qu* are opposites and cannot be combined with another in relation to the same movement. An exception is possible when there are two movements, as in “fetch,” which involves going out and bringing back, as in “The dog fetches a stick.” An example that I found somewhere is as follows.

我去提壶水来 *wǒ qù tí hú shuǐ lai* “I will fetch a kettle of water,” “I will go get a kettle of water.”

## 16. Pronunciation Exercises for the Classroom and Teaching in General

In the classroom, pronunciation of enclitic words can be practiced by constant

<sup>5</sup>For a different explanation, see *Integrated Chinese*, Third Edition, Level 1, Part 2, p. 188.

comparison with unaccented syllables that are not enclitic words but rather part of a word. In the following list, sequences of accented and unaccented syllables containing enclitic words are juxtaposed to sequences pronounced the same in terms of accentuation but containing either a different number of enclitic words or no enclitic words.

2 syllables

1 accented + 1 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations); example with second tone

0 enclitic words: 儿子 *érzi* “son”

1 enclitic word: 来了 *lái le* “came”

3 syllables

1 accented + 2 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations); second tone

1 enclitic word: 儿子的 *érzi de* “the son’s”

2 enclitic words: 来了吗 *lái le ma* “Did (he) come?”

2 accented + 1 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations); third tone + fourth tone

0 enclitic words: 有意思 *yǒuyìsi* “interesting”

1 enclitic word: 准备了 *zhǔnbèi le* “He prepared”

4 syllables

1 accented + 3 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations); first tone

2 enclitics: 休息了吗 *xiūxi le ma?* “Did (you) rest?”

3 enclitics: 搬出去了 *bān chu qu le* “He moved out”

2 accented + 2 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations); third tone + fourth tone

1 enclitic: (太)有意思了 *(tài) yǒuyìsi le* “How very interesting!”

2 enclitics: 准备好了吗 *zhǔnbèi le ma* “Did (you) prepare?”

3 accented + 1 unaccented (2 equivalent pronunciations);

0 enclitics: 我想妈妈 *wǒ xiǎng māma* “I miss mom.”

1 enclitic: 你想她吗 *nǐ xiǎng tā ma* “Do you miss her?”

## 17. Conclusion: About Tone and Stress

It is more than obvious that Chinese exhibits tone. It is also more than obvious that western languages exhibit (word or lexical) stress. But what about stress in Chinese?

Linguists do not agree at this time whether there is or there is not stress in Chinese. This is more than obvious from papers by native Chinese authors gathered in volume 8 of the *Studies in Prosodic Grammar*, just published (the editorial introduction is dated to May 2021), a reference that I owe to Hana Třísková.

What is most characteristic, and I believe unique and unprecedented, about the present paper’s approach, is that it sidesteps the question about stress or no

stress in Chinese and the relation to tone entirely by proposing that *tone implies stress*. The question stress or no stress therefore becomes moot. Stress is part of tone. There is therefore no need to look for stress outside of tone.

In order to apply all that has been said in the western tradition about enclitics to Chinese, the need is for the presence of stress. Enclitics are all about stress. The proposal that (absence of) tone implies (absence) of stress makes it possible to link the study of tone with the study of stress and enclitic behavior.

In sum, the proposed theory consists of two interlocking theses.

- 1) Tone implies stress.
- 2) Tone implying stress makes the link between tone behavior and enclitic behavior possible.

Answers to two questions become possible:

- 1) Does or does not Chinese exhibit stress?
- 2) What is neutral tone?

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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