



Lesson1.5

Chinese Phonology - Hanyu Pinyin System

BY CATHY WANG

Translate the following sentence & poem

- ▶ It is a curious fact, of which I can think of no satisfactory explanation, that enthusiasm for country life and love of natural scenery are strongest and most widely diffused precisely in those European countries which have the worst climate and where the search for the picturesque involves the greatest discomfort.
- ▶ 欧洲有些国家，天气坏透，那里的人要辛苦一番，才能找到景色如画的地方。奇怪，他们恰好最喜欢过乡村生活，也最爱欣赏天然风景，而且这个情形也极普遍。这就是实情，我怎么也想不出叫人满意的解释来。

Translate the following sentence & poem

- ▶ 春眠不觉晓，
- ▶ 处处闻啼鸟。
- ▶ 夜来风雨声，
- ▶ 花落知多少。

——（孟浩然：《春晓》）

- ▶ **I awake light-hearted this morning of spring,**
- ▶ **Everywhere round me the singing of birds,**
- ▶ **But now I remember the night, the storm,**
- ▶ **And I wonder how many blossoms were broken.**
- ▶ -----(from The Jade Mountain, tr. By Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu, New York, Knopf, 1929)

- ▶ 春眠不觉晓，
- ▶ 处处闻啼鸟。
- ▶ 夜来风雨声，
- ▶ 花落知多少。

——（孟浩然：《春晓》）

**Spring slumbers unaware of morn,
All around one hears the birds' call.
Last night, the sound of wind and rain,
How many fallen flowers accounted for?**

（任治稷、余正 译）

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Introduction

Pinyin 拼音, literally meaning “spell out the sound,” is currently one of the most commonly used Romanization systems for Mandarin Chinese. It is officially known as Hanyu Pinyin (Hanyu means “the Chinese language”).

This system was developed by a government committee in China and was initially approved by the government in 1958. It is now widely accepted by international organizations and publications and has been adopted in Taiwan and other Chinese-speaking areas as the official Romanization system.

Other systems that were once used in the United States and other overseas areas but now have been replaced by pinyin include Wade-Giles, Gwoyeu Romatzyh (*Guoyu luomazi*), Mandarin Yale, *zhuyin*, and others.

Wade-Giles	Chūngkuó huà
Yale	Jūnggwó hwà
National Romanization	Jong-guo huah
Hànyǔ Pīnyīn	Zhōngguó huà
Zhùyīn Fúhào	ㄓㄨㄥ ㄍㄨㄛˊ ㄏㄨㄚˋ

Syllable

- ▶ When introducing the sounds of standard Chinese, it is useful to begin with the syllable, a unit whose prominence is underscored by the **one-character-per-syllable** writing system.
- ▶ Each pinyin syllable represents a single character. A syllable consists of three parts: initial, final, and tone marker.
- ▶ A syllable such as *shi* can be written dozens of ways, depending on the meaning, as the Chinese linguist demonstrated as follows:
- ▶ 施氏食獅史 *Shī shì shí shī shǐ*
- ▶ ('[Shi] clan eat lion story') = 'The tale of how *Shī* of the *Shi* clan ate the lion.'

II. Initials and Finals

- Initials and finals, like vowels and consonants as in other languages, are the fundamental elements in the pinyin system. In most cases, there is one initial followed by one final in a Chinese syllable. In some cases, a syllable may have only a final, but no initial, for example, “er”.

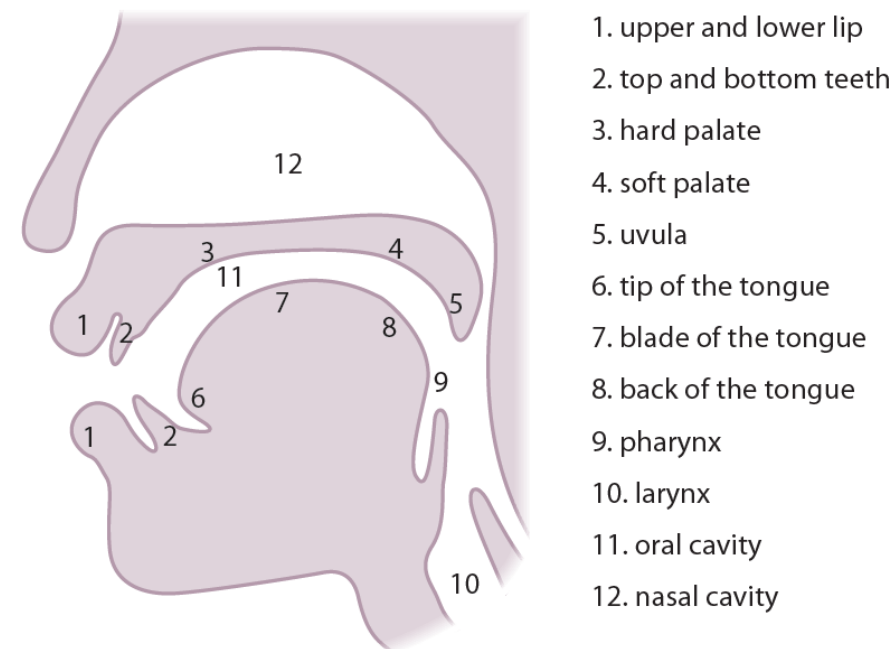


Figure 1 The articulators or organs of speech.

II. Initials and Finals

Table of Initials

	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Nasal	Lateral	Fricative	Voiced continuants
Labial	b	p	m		f	
Alveolar	d	t	n	l		
Dental sibilant	z	c			s	
Retroflex	zh	ch			sh	r
Palatal	j	q			x	
Velar	g	k			h	

II. Initials and Finals

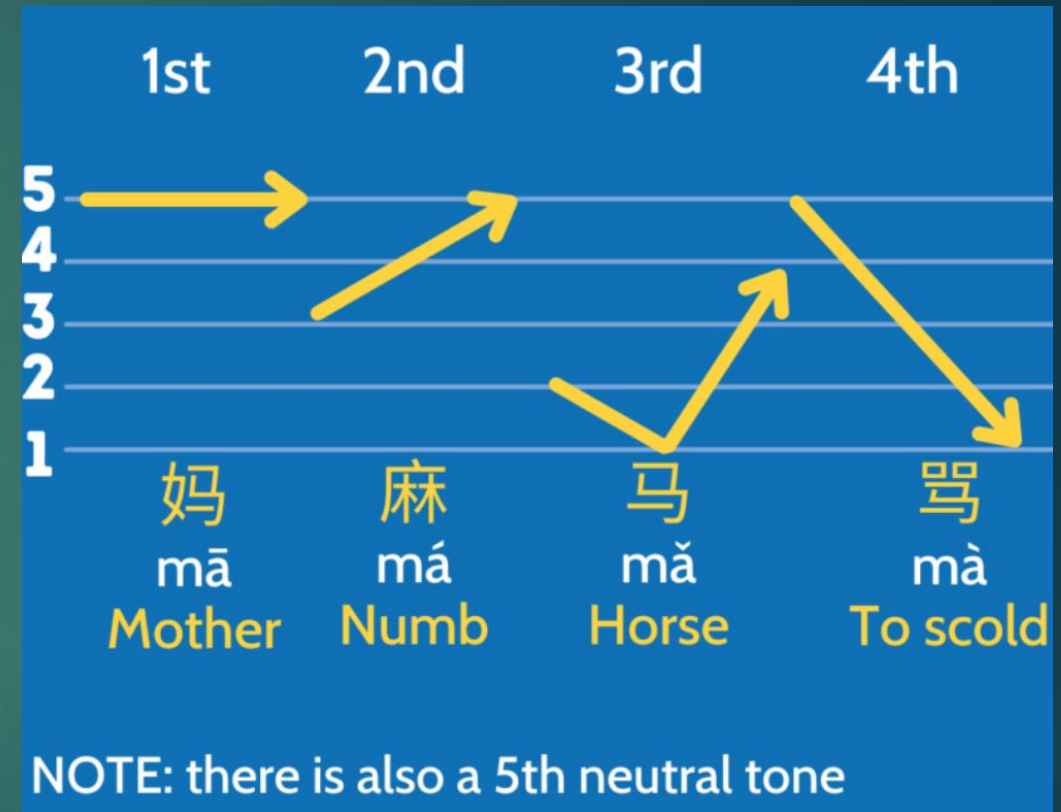
Table of Finals

There are 35 finals in the pinyin system, including 7 simple finals, 13 compound finals, and 15 nasal finals.

Simple finals	a [a]	o [o] / uo [ua]	e [ɤ]	
	i [i]	u [u]	ü [y]	
	-i ([ɿ] / [ʅ])			
Compound finals	ai [ai]	ua [ua]	ia [ia]	üe [yɛ]
	ei [ei]	uai [uai]	ie [iɛ]	
	ao [au]	uei (-ui) [uei]	iao [iau]	
	ou [əu]		iou (-iu) [iəu]	
	er [ɐ]			
Nasal finals	an [an]	uan [uan]	ian [iɛn]	üan [yan]
	en [ən]	uen (-un) [uən]	in [in]	ün [yn]
	ang [aŋ]	uang [uaŋ]	iang [iaŋ]	
	eng [əŋ]	ueng (-ong) [uəŋ]	ing [iŋ]	iong [iuŋ]

Tones

- ▶ The most distinct feature of Chinese is that it is a tonal language. In fact, Western languages also have tones. For example, saying “yes” with a rising tone or with a falling tone will express different connotations or emotions, but the meaning of the word will not change or be influenced by the different tones that the speaker chooses. However, tones in Chinese have the important function of differentiating meanings.
- ▶ Tones are differentiated by the voice pitch. Two features of the voice pitch need to be noted. First, the pitch of the tone is a relative concept and not an absolute one. Second, any change in pitch level should be a smooth and continuous process.



Tones

- ▶ There are four tones in Mandarin Chinese:
 - ▶ 1. the first tone or the high tone
 - ▶ 2. the second tone or the rising tone
 - ▶ 3. the third tone or the low tone
 - ▶ 4. the fourth tone or the falling tone
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- ▶ The chart on the right was developed by the linguist Chao Yuan Ren (Zhao Yuanren). The arrow indicates the direction of change of pitch during the pronunciation process.

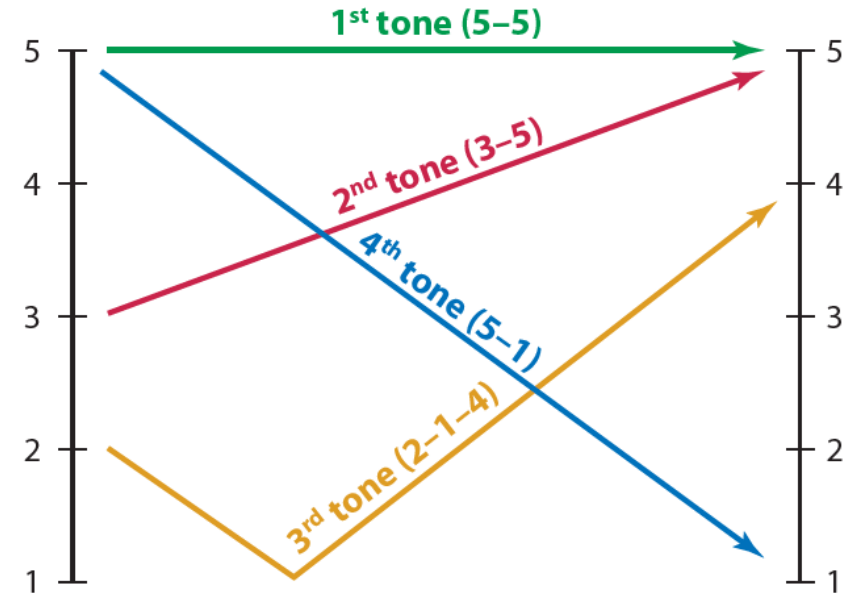


Figure 2 Tone values at five levels.

Toneless syllables

- ▶ Syllables in initial position in Mandarin almost always have one of the four tones, but those following a toned syllable can be toneless. In Chinese, such syllables have *qīngshēng* ‘the light tone’. In this respect, Mandarin contrasts with some regional Chinese languages such as Cantonese, in which almost all syllables are toned, regardless of their position in the word.
- ▶ E.g. *Mang ma?* ‘Are[you] busy?’
xingli ‘luggage’
shūfu ‘to be comfortable’
shūshu ‘uncle’

Spelling Rules

- ▶ *1. The Use of “y” and “w”*
- ▶ When a syllable does not have an initial, it is required that “y” or “w” be used to make the separation between syllables clear. Some specific situations are listed below:
- ▶ When “i” and “u” are used independently as syllables, add “y” and “w” before “i” and “u” respectively.
i → yi u → wu
- ▶ When “i” appears at the beginning of a syllable and is the only vowel in that syllable, add “y” before “i.”
- ▶ in → yin ing → ying

Spelling Rules

- ▶ *2. The Use of “ü”*
- ▶ The initials “j,” “q,” and “x” cannot be combined with “u” to form syllables, but they are compatible with “ü.” In writing, “ü” is changed into “u” (the umlaut is dropped) when it combines with “j,” “q,” and “x” to form syllables.
- ▶ ju qu xu
- ▶ However, the umlaut remains when “ü” combines with other initials, for example “l” and “n.”
- ▶ lü nü

Spelling Rules

▶ 3. *The Use of Apostrophes*

- ▶ Syllables that can form a word are usually grouped together in writing. For syllables beginning with “a,” “o,” and “e,” in order to avoid confusion with the previous syllable, an apostrophe is used for separation. Compare the following syllables:
- ▶ piāo (one syllable): vs. pí'ǎo (two syllables):
to float leather coat
- ▶ xiān (one syllable): vs. Xī'ān (two syllables):
first name of a city

Spelling Rules

▶ 4. *The Use of Capital Letters*

- ▶ In the following two situations, the first letter of the first syllable needs to be capitalized.
- ▶ Proper nouns
 - ▶ Personal names: Máo Zédōng
 - ▶ Place names: Běijīng Měiguó (the United States)
- ▶ The beginning of a sentence
- ▶ Wǒ shì Zhōngguó rén. (I am Chinese.)

Spelling Rules

- ▶ *5. The Use of “iou,” “uei,” and “uen”*
- ▶ When these three finals combine with initials to form syllables, the middle vowels are dropped, and the finals are written as “iu,” “ui,” and “un.”

liou → liu duei → dui chuen → chun

Practice

Read the following tongue twister, and pay attention to the **Toneless syllables**.

Zuò mǎimai

Mǎimai rén zuò mǎimai

Mǎimai bùgōng | méi mǎimai

Méi mǎimai méiqián zuò mǎimai

Mǎimai rén zuò mǎimai děi shízai

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Read the following tongue twister, and pay attention to the **Toneless syllables**.

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Mǎimai rén zuò mǎimai děi shízai

Doing Business

Businessmen do business

If unfair, there will be no business

No business, no money for business

Businessmen must be honest in doing business

Practice

píjiǔ

xiàtiān

báicài

zēngjiā

zúqiú

jùbèi

gǎn xìngqu

yīngxióng hǎohàn

Wǒ shì Měiguó rén.

Yìnián zhī jì zàiyú chūn.

shuōmíng

fēicháng

qīnlüè

dōngnán

fēijī

gǎozhǐ

shāndōng

shānmíng shuǐxiù

fàndiàn

rèliè

xióngmāo

niánqīng

zuòhuór

chūnjuǎnr

kǒuyīn

suān tián kǔ là