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HOW TO CREATE A LANGUAGE
FOR THE WHOLE PEOPLE? ON THE CODIFICATION
OF *PUTONGHUA* PRONUNCIATION

A b s t r a c t. The process of creating a modern national standard language for the whole of China has been long. It started in the beginning of the 20th century, when it became clear that a common spoken tongue was needed to unite the Chinese people. Thus the concept of *Guóyǔ* — 'national language' — was created.

After the founding of People's Republic of China, the work was taken up anew, the standard was renamed *Pǔtōnghuà* — 'common speech.' Its pronunciation is based on the dialect of Beijing, the Mandarin dialects have been the source of lexicon, and grammar has been founded on "model works in *báihuà*."

But how exactly did the work on creating the new standard look like? This paper intends to show the process of codification of the pronunciation of what we now know as *Pǔtōnghuà*. How it was decided to choose the speech of Beijing as the starting point, how the work was carried out, and also how the standard is changing.

Key words: *Putonghua*; Mandarin; codification; language reform; phonetics; phonology.

The aim of this paper is to show the process of codification of the pronunciation of what we now know as *Putonghua* (*Pǔtōnghuà* 普通話). To create a standard language for a country as vast as China was a challenging task, undertaken by a few generations of linguists and politicians. Not all the decisions made by them were as obvious as may seem. The intention of the article is, among others, to show how it was decided to choose the speech of Beijing as the starting point, how the work was carried out, and also how the standard is changing.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Creating a national standard for the whole of China was a long process, with roots in historical times. In the remote past, the language of super-dialectal communication was known as *yǎyán* 雅言 ('elegant speech' or 'correct speech'). It is a term used in reference to the language of communication between various states during the times of the Spring and Autumn Period (ca. 770–480 BC) and the Warring States Period (ca. 480–221 BC). It was based on the language of the capitals of Zhou dynasty, i.e. Xi'an and Luoyang, and it is essentially equivalent to Old Chinese. It is also known as *tōngyǔ* 通语 ('common tongue'), or *zhèngyīn* 正音 ('correct sounds') (cf. Dong 2014, 6 and 43; Chen 2015, 534; Yuan 2003, 17; Lü 2002, 41–2). Some authors (cf. Wang and Tsai 2015, 559) even suggest, that *yayan* originated in the times of the legendary Xia Dynasty (ca. 2070–1600 BC).

Guānhuà 官话 ('language of officials (mandarins)') is a term which describes the language of communication used by the workers of the administration (cf. Shi 2016, 723; Chen 2004, 7–13). *Guānhuà* was always connected with the dialect of the capital city. Therefore, it would change if the capital was moved to a different city (Shi 2016, 723). The last two imperial dynasties had their capital in Beijing, thus the *Guānhuà* (known in English as 'Mandarin') which was the base for the later standard, was built upon the dialects of Northern China, with the Beijing dialect as the core (cf. Shi 2016, 724; Norman 1988, 133; Lü 2002, 42).

It must also be noted, that in China there existed for centuries two parallel written languages: the classical literary language — *wényánwén* 文言文, and the vernacular literary language — *báihuàwén* 白话文. *Wényánwén* was based on Old Chinese, the language used in the times of the Zhou dynasty, and it had not changed much since ancient times (cf. Chen 2015, 532). It was the standard written language since the times of Han dynasty until the beginning of the twentieth century (Dong 2014, 80). *Báihuàwén* started to be used at the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907). It was based on the vernacular used in Northern China. *Báihuà* 白话 ('colloquial speech') entered the popular, informal literature, and it was much closer to the language spoken by ordinary people than *wényánwén* (cf. Chen 2015, 532).

THE CONCEPT OF *GUOYU* 国语

The creation of Modern Standard Chinese started in fact in the mid-19th Century, after the Opium Wars, when China realized that it had to modernize the country as well as the language (cf. CHEN 2004, 13). A country as large as China, with a network of mutually unintelligible dialects and minority languages, required a language reform. It was believed that uniformity of language was necessary for the unity of the country and for future modernization (cf. CHEN 2004, 14; NORMAN 1988, 133; RAMSEY 1987, 3–4).

The idea of creating a Standard Spoken Chinese other than the dialect of the capital city, emerged at the beginning of the 20th Century. The term *Guóyǔ* 国语 ('national language') was proposed, borrowed from Japanese. Many students at that time went to Japan and were inspired by the idea of a common standard language. They believed that China could similarly adapt a universal language for the whole nation and they incited the *Guóyǔ Yùndòng* 国语运动 ('National Language Movement') (CHEN 2004, 14; cf. LÜ 2002, 47–67).

How to create the national language was still a matter of discussion. There were ideas to abolish the Chinese language completely and replace it, for example, by Esperanto. Qian Xuantong (Qián Xuántóng 钱玄同) put this concept forward, arguing that only this way could China be free from the backward past (cf. RAMSEY 1987, 3). This idea was obviously utopian and was not taken up, but the works on a national standard had started.

CONFERENCE ON THE UNIFICATION
OF PRONUNCIATION IN 1913 (*Dúyīn tǒngyī huì* 读音统一会)

On 15 February 1913 the Conference on the Unification of Pronunciation started in Beijing (RAMSEY 1987, 5; LÜ 2002, 54). The work of the language reformers had begun in 1911, when it was decided to form a 'General Committee for the Survey of the National Language' (*Guóyǔ Diàochá Zǒnghuì* 国语调查总会). Its task was to conduct large-scale research on the linguistic situation of the country (CHEN 2004, 15–6).

Due to the immense linguistic diversity in China, the task to create a new national language was not easy. The language reform involved also the restructuring of the Chinese writing system, which had developed many variations during the centuries of usage (CHEN 2004, 15).[1]

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[1] Many of the partakers in the National Language Movement insisted on replacing Chinese characters with a phonetic script (CHEN 2004, 15).

It was not at all obvious which dialect should be the phonological base of the new national standard. Though the language of Beijing, the capital, might have seemed to be the most natural choice, the dialects of Nanjing, Wuhan and Shanghai also had strong advocates. Other scholars suggested that the standard language should not be built on a single dialect, but ought to include universal features (CHEN 2004, 14).

After a long debate on which sounds should be adopted as standard, the North versus the South, the representatives of each province had only one vote. And thus, the Mandarin variety won, as it is spoken in the majority of the country (RAMSEY 1987, 5–8).

After the decision was made to use the Mandarin dialect as the basis of the pronunciation for the new national language, the Committee determined the articulation of 6500 characters, voting on each character separately. This way, the members defined the sound system of *Guóyǔ* (CHEN 2004, 17; RAMSEY 1987, 8). The results were published six years later in the *Dictionary of national pronunciation* (*Guóyīn Zìdiǎn* 国音字典) (CHEN 2004, 17).

Despite the fact that the phonology of the newly created standard was based mainly on the pronunciation used in Beijing, there was an ideological belief that it should simultaneously combine characteristics of all dialects. The most salient features were the entering tone (*rùshēng* 入声), which had disappeared in the Mandarin dialects but still exists in the southern dialects, also the voiced fricative [v] from the Wu dialects was included, and other features which did not prevail in the northern dialects (CHEN 2004, 18; RAMSEY 1987, 9). Consequently, the proclaimed standard became an artificial language which hardly anybody could speak (CHEN 2004, 18; RAMSEY 1987, 9–10; SHI 2016, 724–5). This tongue was to be later called *lǎo guóyīn* 老国音 — i.e. the 'old national pronunciation' in contrast to the *xīn guóyīn* 新国音 — the 'new national pronunciation,' which was defined in the 1920s.

XIN GUOYIN 新国音 – THE 'NEW NATIONAL PRONUNCIATION'

In the meantime, the movement to reform written Chinese was very strong. The *Báihuàwén Yùndòng* 白话文运动 ('The Vernacular Movement') succeeded to promote the vernacular literary language, based on the northern Mandarin languages, as the language of literature, replacing *wényánwén*, which was incomprehensible to the majority (RAMSEY 1987, 10; DUANMU 2000, 7; NORMAN 1988, 134).

The phonological system presented in the *Dictionary of national pronunciation* in 1919 was never fully accepted by the language committee and was criticised for its artificiality. Thus, it was decided that instead of creating a language out of many dialects, one single dialect should serve as the basis for pronunciation. Under the influence of the Vernacular Movement, the dialect chosen for this purpose was *Běijīnghuà* 北京话 — the speech of the capital city (SHI 2016, 725; CHEN 2004, 19–20; NORMAN 1988, 134–5).

In 1932 an official decision was proclaimed by the Ministry of Education that the Beijing Mandarin dialect was to become the model for the *xīn guóyīn*. The same year, a revised version of the *Dictionary* was published – *Guóyīn chángyòng zìhuì* 国音常用字汇 ('A Glossary of frequently used characters in National Pronunciation') (NORMAN 1988, 135; CHEN 2004, 20).

This dictionary contained 12,219 characters, each of them annotated in a special phonetic alphabet created for the purpose of writing down the pronunciation of Chinese characters — *zhùyīn fúhào* 注音符号,[2] and with *Guóyǔ luómǎzì* (*Gwoyeu romatzyh*) 国语罗马字 ('National Language Romanization'[3]) (CHEN 2004, 20).

The new pronunciation did not include the fifth tone, i.e. the *rùshēng*, nor any sounds not present in the vernacular of Beijing (CHEN 2004, 20–1). What is known today as the *Guoyu*, i.e. the Mandarin Standard Chinese in Taiwan, is in principle this new version of the 'National Pronunciation' (SHI 2016, 725).

It is important to note that *Guóyǔ* was based on a spoken language, not on the literary *wényán* form. Before this, the literary language was considered to be prestige. It was not an easy decision to choose a vernacular, a language of lower social status, as the standard for the whole country (cf. CHEN 2004, 21–2).

THE FORMING OF *PUTONGHUA*

Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government continued the works on one common language for the Chinese nation. In 1955, two conferences were held: the National Conference on Script Reform (*Quánguó Wénzì Gǎigé Huìyì* 全国文字改革会议) and the Symposium on the Standardization of Modern Chinese (*Xiàndài Hànyǔ*

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[2] For a detailed information of the *zhùyīn fúhào* (earlier known as *zhùyīn zìmǔ* 注音字母) see SHI 2016, 725–6; CHEN 2004, 180–2.

[3] For more information on *Guóyǔ luómǎzì* see CHEN 2004, 182–4.

Guīfànhuà Xuéshù Huìyì 现代汉语规范化学术会议) (CHEN 2004, 23; TAN (ed.) 2000, 198). The focus of these meetings was put on the script reform, but the National Standard was also an important issue (CHEN 2004, 23).

The script reform conducted by the committee for language planning involved regulating the writing system and designing and promoting a new system of transliteration of the Chinese language, i.e. *Hànyǔ pīnyīn fāng'àn* 汉语拼音方案 ('Phonetic System of the Chinese Language') (cf. SHI 2016, 727).[4]

The *xīn guóyīn* played a very significant role in the creation of the present standard Chinese language (cf. CHEN 2004, 21). The pronunciation of the new tongue is in fact a continuation of the 'new national pronunciation', although in the process of establishing the standard there were still some ideas of introducing southern features, such as the distinction between the so-called sharp (*jiān* 尖) and rounded (*tuán* 团) consonants (CHEN 2004, 24; SHI 2016, 726).

The name of the standard language proclaimed in 1956 was changed into *Pǔtōnghuà* 普通話 ('common tongue'), to stress its intended closeness to all the nationalities living in China. The definition of the national common language was given in the "State Council Instruction Concerning Spreading Putonghua" (ZHOU 1956, translation by CHEN 2004, 24): „*Putonghua* is the standard form of Modern Chinese with the Beijing phonological system as its norm of pronunciation, and Northern dialects as its base dialect, and looking to exemplary modern works in baihua 'vernacular literary language' for its grammatical norms."

From this moment, *Pǔtōnghuà* officially became the standard national language of all China (cf. LÜ 2002, 70). The organ which regulates the language is the State Language Commission (*Guójiā Yǔyán Wénzì Gōngzuò Wěiyuánhuì* 国家语言文字工作委员会) ("State Bureaus…" 2014).

THE SOUND SYSTEM OF *PUTONGHUA*

The 1956 definition leaves no doubt about the norm of pronunciation for *Pǔtōnghuà* — it is the Beijing dialect. In fact, as Norman (1988, 138) states, phonology "[…] is the only aspect of the modern language that is strictly codified." Both vocabulary and grammar are still lacking firm norms. This may be the outcome of the common belief that Chinese dialects differ

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[4] For more information on the *Hànyǔ pīnyīn* system see SHI 2016, 727–9.

mostly in pronunciation, "less in vocabulary, least in syntax (DEFRANCIS 1967, 142).

The results of codification are published in the normative *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* 现代汉语词典 — *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, which was published for the first time in 1978 and hitherto has had seven editions, the last one in 2016 (cf. ZHONGGUO SHEHUI KEXUEYUAN… 2002; 2016).

Traditionally, the phonetic system is presented in tables according to the division into initials (*shēngmǔ* 声母), finals (*yùnmǔ* 韵母) and tones (*shēngdiào* 声调). They are usually noted down in *Hànyǔ pīnyīn* and *zhùyīn fúhào* annotations, see Tables 1, 2, 3.[5]

Table 1. The initials of *Pǔtōnghuà* (cf. ZHONGGUO SHEHUI KEXUEYUAN… 2002, 2696; QUANGUO RENDA… 2001, 118–9; IPA transcription according to SHI 2016, 728).

b ㄅ	[mo]	d ㄉ	[kɤ]	j ㄐ	zh ㄓ	z ㄗ
[po]	f ㄈ	[tɤ]	k ㄎ	[tɕi]	[tʂ ɹ]	[tsɹ]
p ㄆ	[fo]	t ㄊ	[kʰɤ]	q ㄑ	ch ㄔ	c ㄘ
[pʰo]		[tʰɤ]	h ㄏ	[tɕʰi]	[tʂʰɹ]	[tsʰɹ]
m		n ㄋ	[xɤ]	x ㄒ	sh ㄕ	s ㄙ
		[nɤ]		[ɕi]	zh ㄓ	[sɹ]
		l ㄌ			[ʂɹ]	
		[lɤ]			r ㄖ	
		g			[ʐɹ]	

Table 2. The initials of *Pǔtōnghuà* (cf. ZHONGGUO SHEHUI KEXUEYUAN… 2002, 2697; QUANGUO RENDA… 2001, 119–20; IPA transcription according to SHI 2016, 728).

	i ㄧ [i]	u ㄨ [u]	ü ㄩ [y]
a ㄚ [ɑ]	ia ㄧㄚ [jɑ]	ua ㄨㄚ [wɑ]	
o ㄛ [o]		uo ㄨㄛ [wo]	
e ㄜ [ɤ]	ie ㄧㄝ [jɛ]		üe ㄩㄝ [ɥɛ]
ai ㄞ [aj]		uai ㄨㄞ [waj]	
ei ㄟ [ej]		uei (ui) ㄨㄟ [wej]	
ao ㄠ [ɑw]	iao ㄧㄠ [jɑw]		
ou ㄡ [ow]	iou (iu) ㄧㄡ [jow]		
an ㄢ [an]	ian ㄧㄢ [jæn]	uan ㄨㄢ [wan]	üan ㄩㄢ [ɥæn]
en ㄣ [ən]	in ㄧㄣ [in]	uen (un) ㄨㄣ [wən]	üen (ün) ㄩㄣ [ɥən]
ang ㄤ [ɑŋ]	iang ㄧㄤ [jɑŋ]	uang ㄨㄤ [wɑŋ]	
eng ㄥ [əŋ]	ing ㄧㄥ [iŋ]	ueng ㄨㄥ [wəŋ]	
ong (ㄨㄥ) [uŋ]	iong ㄩㄥ [ɥəŋ]		

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[5] For a detailed description of the phonology of *Pǔtōnghuà* see NORMAN 1988, 138–48; CHEN 2004, 34–7.

Table 3. The tones of *Pǔtōnghuà* (cf. Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan…
2002, 2698; Chen 2004, 36).

First tone (high and level)	*yīnpíng* 阴平	55
Second tone (rising)	*yángpíng* 阳平	35
Third tone (falling-rising)	*shàngshēng* 上声	214
Fourth tone (falling)	*qùshēng* 去声	51

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *PUTONGHUA* AND THE BEIJING DIALECT

Although the sound system of the Beijing dialect served as the basis of the national standard, these two phonetic systems are not identical. Not all the features of the speech of the capital city have been included in *Pǔtōnghuà*. In the language of Beijing there are many local characteristics, which do not appear in the systematized sound inventory of *Pǔtōnghuà* (cf. Tan (ed.) 2000, 200; Chen 2004, 37).

San Duanmu (2002, 6) lists a few traits which have not been included in the Modern Standard Mandarin from the speech of genuine Pekingeses. There exist some syllables which do not occur in *Pǔtōnghuà* at all, such as [t^{h}en^{51}] ('not to hurry when one should'), or syllables which are not pronounced in the same tones, e.g. [t^{w}ei] in the third tone.

More cases of features typical to the Beijing dialect are enumerated by Ping Chen (2004, 37–41). There are, for example, some alterations in the initials. The phenomenon of so-called rhotacization (*érhuàyùn* 儿化韵) is exceptionally frequent in *Běijīnghuà* and has been very limited in *Pǔtōnghuà* (Chen 2004, 39–40). The use of syllables in the neutral tone is also much more common in the speech of Beijing (Chen 2004, 40–1).

It is said (cf. Wang et al. 2016), that during the process of standardization of the national language, researchers went to a place called Luanping (Luánpíng 滦平) near Chengde (Chéngdé 承德) in Hebei Province (Héběi Shěng 河北省) in order to collect phonetic material. Luanping was chosen as a place where the speech was pure, very close to that of Beijing, but simultaneously lacking those features which made Beijing dialect less understandable, such as the very strong rhotacization (Wang et al. 2016: 90).

EVOLUTION OF THE PRONUNCIATION OF *PUTONGHUA*

The codified standard is not changing visibly, despite the absorption of words and expression from other dialects, because these words are usually adapted to the Beijing pronunciation (DUANMU 2002, 5–6). However, due to the promotion of *Pǔtōnghuà*, it is spreading and there are different varieties of *Pǔtōnghuà* (LIN 2007; 265–6; SHI 2016, 733). The approved version is found in national radio and TV broadcasts and is used by speakers of *Pǔtōnghuà* from Beijing who "do not exhibit local features peculiar to the Beijing dialect" (LIN 2007, 265).

One must remember that there are more than one standard Mandarin Chinese. Besides *Pǔtōnghuà*, Mandarin is spoken in Taiwan, where it is known as *Guóyǔ*, and in Singapore, as *Huáyǔ* 华语. However, there are only some minor differences in the sound system and these standards differ mainly in vocabulary (SHI 2016, 733).[6]

On the other hand, due to the enormous diversity of Chinese languages in the Mainland, there are various accents which are accepted as standard. *Pǔtōnghuà* is undergoing the process of "vernacularization" (SAILLARD 2004, 168) and is developing into "local Putonghua" (*dìfāng Pǔtōnghuà* 地方普通话), or "non-standard Putonghua" (*bù biāozhǔn dì Pǔtōnghuà* 不标准的普通话) (cf. CHEN 2004, 41–6).

Local *Pǔtōnghuà* in Pumen (*Pùmén* 铺门), a small town in Guangxi Zhuang AR, can serve as one of many examples (ZHANG 2008). The dialect of Pumen (*Pùménhuà* 铺门话) belongs to the *Pínghuà* 平话 dialect group, which is one of the smaller dialect groups recognised by Chinese linguists (ZHANG 2008, 74).

There are two kinds of phonological phenomena which can occur. One is that the tones are mostly similar to those of Putonghua, but there are slight differences in initials and finals. The second situation is that the differences in tones, vocabulary, initials and finals are comparatively significant (ZHANG 2008: 74).

To illustrate how *Pǔtōnghuà* is diversifying, only a few examples will be given below, according to Zhang (2008):

Among initials, [h] is often read as [f], e.g. 花 is pronounced [fɑ]; or [tʂ, tʂʰ, ʂ] are read as [ts, tsʰ, s], e.g. 中 is pronounced [tsuŋ]. Sometimes the zero initial (*líng shēngmǔ* 零声母) is read as [ŋ], e.g. 我 is pronounced [ŋo] (ZHANG 2008: 74-75).

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[6] For more information on differences between *Pǔtōnghuà*, *Guóyǔ* and *Huáyǔ* see SHI 2016, 733–735; LIN 2007, 265–74).

Regarding finals, it is quite common that [ɑu] is read as [ou], e.g. 保 is pronounced [bou]. There are also differences in pronouncing the [əŋ] final, in Pumen it is read as [ɑŋ], e.g. 能 is pronounced [nɑŋ] (Zʜᴀɴɢ 2008, 75).

CONCLUSIONS

To create a language for the whole people is beyond any doubt a very demanding task. Designing *Pǔtōnghuà* has been an undertaking that has spanned over a long period of time, starting before the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It has engaged many specialists, linguists and officials in meticulous work. The final choice of the spoken Beijing dialect as the base for its pronunciation was decisive in many aspects, but it should be borne in mind, that *Pǔtōnghuà* is not merely an adaptation of the language of the capital.

In the long process of standardization of the national language in China, pronunciation is thus far the only fully codified aspect. Vocabulary and grammar are still in the course of systematisation. In spite of the intensive promotion of the national standard throughout the country, the approved phonetic system is not influenced by dialects. At the same time, even though its pronunciation is based on one vernacular, *Pǔtōnghuà* is diversifying in the areas of non-Mandarin dialects, and some alterations are acceptable. And thus, there are many "non-standard" varieties of the standard. However, "pure" *Pǔtōnghuà*, which was standardized in the 1950s, is regarded as a language of prestige and it remains officially untouched.

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JAK STWORZYĆ JĘZYK DLA WSZYSTKICH LUDZI?
O KODYFIKACJI WYMOWY *PUTONGHUA*

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Proces tworzenia nowoczesnego języka narodowego dla całych Chin był długi. Zaczął się na początku XX wieku, kiedy stało się jasne, że potrzebny jest wspólny język, by zjednoczyć Chińczyków. W ten sposób powstała koncepcja *Guóyǔ* — „języka narodowego”.

Po założeniu Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej prace zostały wznowione, standard został przemianowany na *Pǔtōnghuà* — „wspólną mowę”. Jego wymowa opiera się na dialekcie Pekinu, dialekty mandaryńskie były źródłem leksyki, a gramatykę oparto na „modelowych pracach w *báihuà*”.

Jak jednak dokładnie wyglądały prace nad stworzeniem nowego standardu? Ten artykuł ma na celu pokazanie procesu kodyfikacji wymowy tego, co obecnie znamy jako *Pǔtōnghuà*. Dlaczego postanowiono wybrać mowę Pekinu jako punkt wyjścia, jak przebiegały prace, a także jak zmieniał się sam standard?

Słowa kluczowe: *Putonghua*; mandaryński; kodyfikacja; reforma językowa; fonetyka; fonologia.