CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The word *Mandarin* denoting the major dialect family of China is an established linguistic term in the West. In popular as well as linguistic usage, the term also represents the speech of Beijing, which for centuries has been recognized as the standard language of China because of the political and cultural significance of that city. China did not officially establish a common language for the nation until 1955, however, when the government of the People's Republic of China proclaimed a national language embodying the pronunciation of the Beijing dialect, the grammar of northern Mandarin, and the vocabulary of modern vernacular literature. This national language has since been known as *Pǔtōnghuà*, which means the 'common language'. The style and vocabulary of Putonghua aim at being close to the language of workers and farmers. During the early fifties, Taiwan also adopted the policy of promoting a uniform language based on the Beijing dialect; in Taiwan it is called *Guóyǔ*, literally 'national language'. Our term *Mandarin* is meant to include both Putonghua and Guoyu.

Since both Putonghua and Guoyu are based on the Beijing dialect, they are quite similar except in certain areas of vocabulary, which can be attributed in part to the political differences between the mainland and Taiwan. On the other hand, both Putonghua and Guoyu are far from being "uniform," for China has a large population spread over a vast geographical area, and consequently numerous other dialects inevitably influence and affect the versions of Putonghua and Guoyu spoken by people from different regions. Thus, a truly uniform language in a country such as China can exist only in theory, not in reality. This is not to downplay the success of Putonghua and Guoyu in facilitating communication among speakers of mutually unintelligible Chinese dialects and in promoting universal education. Nevertheless, it is important for us to point out that when one speaks of

"the language" of China, one refers merely to an ideal, and that there will always be some variation between "the Mandarin language" of one person and "the Mandarin language" of another person. What we are attempting to describe and explain in this book is a Mandarin language that is as devoid of the idiosyncracies of individual speakers as possible. We intend the generalizations and explanations offered in this book to be applicable to the speech of all speakers of Putonghua and Guoyu, even if some of the illustrative examples may strike some readers as slightly odd. Each example that is not marked with an asterisk (*) is something that could be or has been said by at least some speakers of Mandarin.

Whenever a generalization or an explanation may be affected by dialectal interference, we try to point it out. Since the dialect situation in China is complex, we will briefly describe it here.

1.1 The Chinese Language Family

It is traditional to speak of the different varieties of Chinese as "dialects," even though they may be different from one another to the point of being mutually unintelligible.[1] It is often pointed out, for example, that Cantonese and Mandarin differ from each other roughly as the Romance "languages" Portuguese and Rumanian do. On the one hand, because Portuguese and Rumanian are spoken in different countries, they are referred to as different "languages." On the other hand, because Cantonese and Mandarin are spoken in the same country, they are called different "dialects." We will continue the tradition and refer to them as dialects.

The classification of the varieties of Chinese into dialects is based primarily on a comparison of their sound structure. The classification into seven major dialect groups as shown in table 1.1 is now generally accepted (see Egerod [1967]). The map shows the geographical spread and the locales of the representatives of the different dialect groups, as well as some major cities in China.

The greatest variations in terms of phonology, syntax, and vocabulary occur in the southern region of the country. The dialects of the Mandarin group, divided into four subgroups, not only can claim the largest percentage of China's population, but also have a higher degree of mutual intelligibility.

The Chinese language family is genetically classified as an independent branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The other major branches of the Sino-Tibetan language family are Tibetan, the languages of Tibet; Lolo-Burmese, the languages of Burma and scattered areas in Southern China, Southeast Asia, and the Tibetan borderland; and Karen, the languages of lower Burma and the southern border region between Thailand and Burma. Thus, geographically, the Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken in East Asia and Southeast Asia, with Chinese covering most of the East Asian mainland.

TABLE 1.1
THE SEVEN MAJOR DIALECT GROUPS IN CHINESE

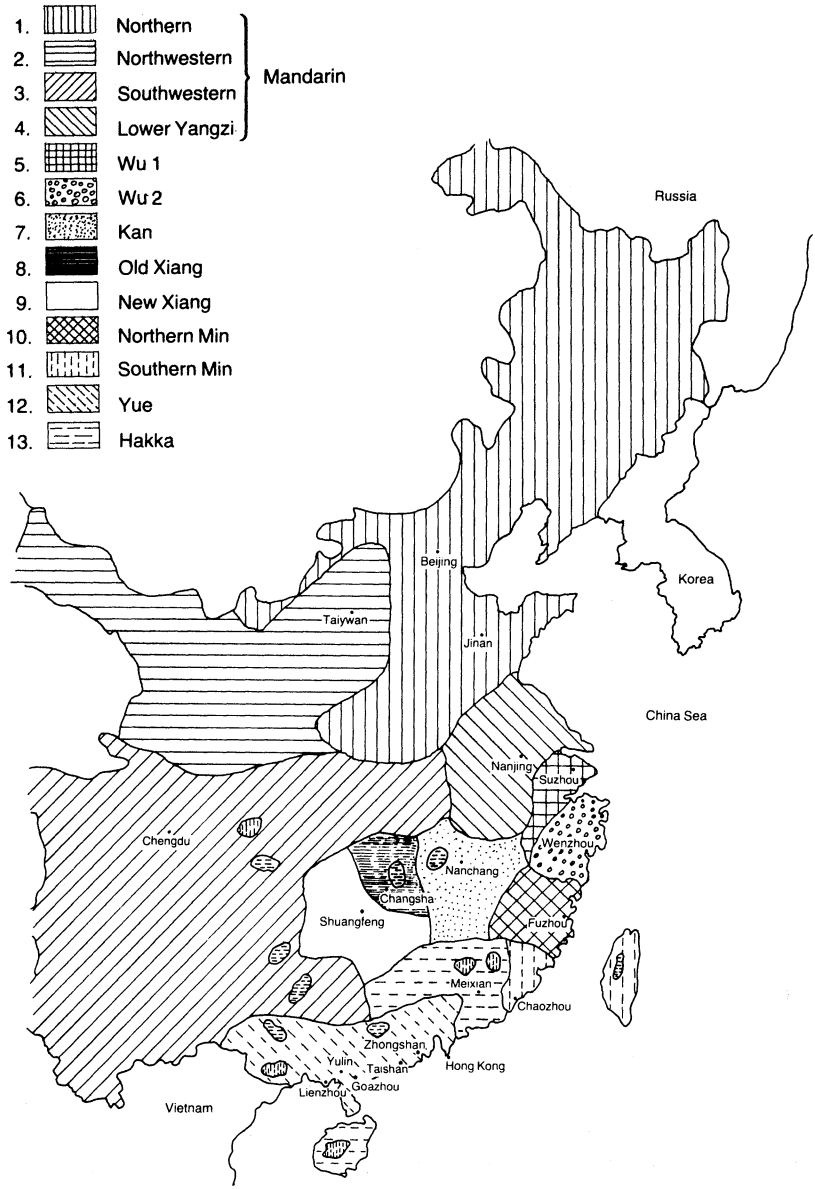
DIALECT FAMILIES		REPRESENTATIVE LOCALE	PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION
Mandarin	Northern	Běijīng	70
	Northwestern	Tàiyuán	
	Southwestern	Chéngdū	
	Lower Yangzi	Nánjīng	
Wú	I	Sūzhōu	8.4
	II	Wēnzhōu	
Xiāng	Old	Shuāngfēng	5
	New	Chángshā	
Gàn		Nánchāng	2.4
Hakka		Méixiàn	4
Mǐn	Northern	Fúzhōu	1.5
	Southern	Cháozhōu	
Yuè	Yuè-hǎi	Zhōngshān	5
	Qīn-lián	Liánzhōu	
	Gāo-léi	Gāozhōu	
	Sì-yì	Táishān	
	Guèi-nán	Yùlín	

1.2 The Phonology of Mandarin

Following the traditional approach to the phonological description of Chinese, we will present the structure of the Mandarin syllable in terms of the initials, the finals, and the tones.[2]

1.2.1 Initials

The *initial* represents the consonantal beginning of a syllable. Since Mandarin does not have consonant clusters (sequences of consonants), the consonantal beginning of a syllable can only be a single consonant. There are, however, Mandarin syllables that do not have any initial consonant. For those syllables the tradition is to describe their initials as "zero." The initials of Mandarin are provided in table 1.2 in terms of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Pinyin, the national phonetic alphabet adopted in China. Including the zero initial, Mandarin has twenty-two initials.



Chinese Dialect Map

TABLE 1.2

INITIALS

Manner of Articulation / Place of Articulation	Unaspirated Stops		Aspirated Stops		Unaspirated Affricates		Aspirated Affricates		Nasals		Fricatives		Voiced Continuants	
	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin
Bilabials	p	b	p^h	p					m	m				
Labio-dentals											f	f		
Dental-alveolars	t	d	t^h	t	ts	z	ts^h	c	n	n	s	s	l	l
Retroflexes					ʈʂ	zh	$ʈʂ^h$	ch			ʂ	sh	ɹ	r
Palatals					tɕ	j	$tɕ^h$	q			ɕ	x		
Velars	k	g	k^h	k							x	h		

1.2.2 Finals

The *final* is the part of the syllable excluding the initial. There are thirty-seven finals in Mandarin, and they are listed in table 1.3 in IPA symbols. The rules showing the correspondences between the IPA vowels and the Pinyin vowels are shown in table 1.4.

TABLE 1.3
FINALS

ɿ, ʅ, ɚ	A	ə	o		ai	ei	au	ou	an	ən	aŋ	əŋ	
i	iA			iɛ			iau	iou	iɛn	in	iaŋ	iŋ	
u	uA		uo		uai	uei			uan	uən	uaŋ	uŋ	uəŋ
y				yɛ					yɛn	yn			

The velar nasal, [ŋ], occurs only as part of a final, never as an initial. In Pinyin, it is represented by *ng*.The finals, as can be seen from table 1.4, are composed mainly of vowels. The only two consonants that occur in a Mandarin syllable final are the velar nasal, [ŋ], and the alveolar nasal, [n], and these may occur only at the end of a final.

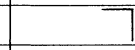
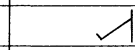
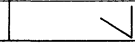
1.2.3 Tones

The tone system of Mandarin is relatively simple in comparison with those of the southern Chinese dialect groups. There are four tones in Mandarin. Each tone may be described as a relative, contrastive pitch pattern associated with a syllable. The four tones are shown in table 1.5. The symbols in the second column from the right are known as *tone letters*, devised by Y.R. Chao. They provide a simplified time-pitch graph of the voice. The vertical line on the right serves as a reference for pitch height. The time-pitch graph is drawn from left to right so that the point farthest to the left on the graph represents the initial point of the tone, and the graph always ends at the vertical line serving as the reference of pitch height. The number represents the pitch register according to a scale of five levels, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Thus the 55 number means the pitch register of the syllable remains at level 5 throughout, whereas the 214 number indicates that the pitch register of the syllable begins at level 2, lowers to level 1, and then rises to level 4. If we take the syllable *yi* in Mandarin and place the four tones on it, we obtain a paradigm of four different morphemes, as shown in the far-right column in table 1.5. The four tones are indicated by four diacritic marks in Pinyin, as illustrated in the examples.

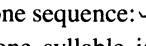
TABLE 1.4
CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN IPA AND PINYIN VOWELS

IPA Vowel Symbols	Pinyin Symbols	Context	Examples
[A]	a	all	lā = [lA] 'pull'
[a]		all	bān = [pan] 'move'
[ɛ]		between {[i], [y]} and [n]	lián = [liɛ́n] 'connect' yuǎn = [yɛ̌n] 'far'
[o]	o	all	mó = [mó] 'grind'
[u]		before [ŋ] or after [a]	lóng = [lúŋ] 'dragon' láo = [láu] 'toil'
[ɣ]	e	all	lè = [lɤ̀] 'happy'
[e]		before [i]	léi = [léi] 'thunder'
[ɛ]		after [i] or [y]	liè = [liɛ̀] 'arrange in order' lüè = [lyɛ̀] 'vile'
[ə]		before [n] or [ŋ]	gēn = [kən] 'root' gēng = [kəŋ] 'till'
[ɚ]	er	all	ér = [ɚ̌] 'son'
[e]	ɸ	after [Cu]	duì = [tuèi] 'correct'
[ə]	ɸ	after [Cu]	dūn = [tuən] 'squat'
[i]	i	with any initial except zero	lí = [lí] 'depart'
[ɿ]		after [tʂ], [tʂʰ], [ʂ], [ɻ]	shī = [ʂɿ̄] 'poetry'
[ɪ]		after [ts], [tsʰ], [s]	sī = [sɪ̄] 'think' [cī] = [tsʰɪ̄] 'female'
[u]	u	with any initial except zero	lú = [lú] 'stove'
[y]		after [tɕ], [tɕʰ], [ɕ]	xū = [ɕȳ] 'false' qù = [tɕʰỳ] 'go'
[y]	ü	after [n] and [l]	lǘ = [lý] 'donkey' nǚ = [nỹ] 'daughter'
[y]	yu	after zero initial	yú = [ǘ] 'fish' yuán = [yɛ́n] 'garden'
[i]	y	after zero initial but not in isolation	yào = [iàu] 'want'
[i]	yi	in isolation	yī = [ī] 'one'
[u]	w	after zero initial but not in isolation	wén = [uə́n] 'smell'
[u]	wu	in isolation	wǔ = [ǔ] 'five'

TABLE 1.5
TONES

TONE	DESCRIPTION	PITCH	GRAPH	EXAMPLE
1	high level	55		yī 'clothes'
2	high rising	35		yí 'to suspect'
3	dipping/falling-rising	214		yǐ 'chair'
4	high falling	51		yì 'meaning'

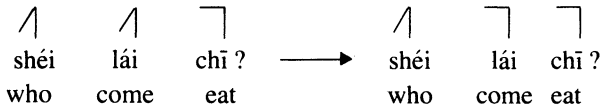
One of the most interesting phenomena involving tones in the Chinese dialects is called *tone sandhi.*[3] Tone sandhi may be described as the change of tones when syllables are juxtaposed. To put it differently, a syllable has one of the tones in the language when it stands alone, but the same syllable may take on a different tone without a change in meaning when it is followed by another syllable. The most important tone sandhi rules in Mandarin involve the third tone.

(i) *Tone sandhi rule 1:* When a third-tone syllable is followed by a syllable with any tone other than another third tone, the third-tone syllable changes to a low-tone syllable with the pitch contour 21. For example, *mǎ* 'horse' has the third tone in isolation, but when it is followed by another syllable such as *chē* 'vehicle', the sequence is pronounced with the following tone sequence: 

(ii) *Tone sandhi rule 2:* When a third-tone syllable is followed by another third-tone syllable, the first one changes into a second tone. For example, *gǎn* 'to chase' and *guǐ* 'demon' both have third tones. When they are in sequence, *gǎn guǐ* 'to exorcise demons', *gǎn* is changed from third tone to second tone.

Another tone sandhi rule in Mandarin involves the second tone, which changes into the first tone when it is preceded by either the first or the second tone and followed by any one of the four tones.

(iii) *Tone sandhi rule 3:* When a second-tone syllable is preceded by either a first tone or second-tone syllable and followed by a syllable with any one of the four tones, it changes into the first tone. For example:

(1) 

Who'll come to eat?

(2)

˥	˧˥		˧˥		˥	˥		˧˥	
sān	nián	–	jí	⟶	sān	nián	–	jí	
three	year	–	grade		three	year	–	grade	

third grade

The spelling in our examples, however, will not reflect the application of any of these tone sandhi rules.

If a syllable has a weak stress or is unstressed, it loses its contrastive, relative pitch and therefore does not have one of the four tones described above. In such a case, the syllable is said to have a *neutral tone*. According to Chao (1968:36), the pitch of the neutral tone is:

- ˨ half-low after first tone: *ta-de* 'he-GEN = his'
- ˧ middle after second tone: *hóng-de* 'red-NOM = red one'
- ˦ half-high after third tone: *wǒ-de* 'I-GEN = my'
- ˩ low after fourth tone: *lǜ-de* 'green-NOM = green one'

Suffixes and grammatical particles typically have a neutral tone. In Pinyin, a syllable with a neutral tone receives no diacritic mark.

1.2.4 Phonetic Effects of the Retroflex Suffix

The addition of the suffix *-er* involves a set of complicated changes in the final of the root morpheme. We will not state these rules here; a detailed listing of all the finals with the retroflex suffix can be found in Chao (1968:47–50). The use of the retroflex suffix is common among natives of Beijing. It is rare, however, among speakers of Putonghua or Guoyu from other locales. In most instances, the retroflex suffix, even when it is used, has become purely an articulatory feature without any semantic significance.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of the Chinese language family and its cultural setting, see Forrest (1948) and Li and Thompson (1979*c*).
2. For detailed treatments, see Chao (1968:18–56), Lyovin (1972), and Cheng (1973).
3. For further discussion, see Cheng (1973), Howie (1976), and Zee (1980).

CHAPTER 2

Typological Description

There are many respects in which languages of the world are alike: for example, they all have ways of expressing denial (negation), existence, and causation, of asking questions, of modifying nouns and verbs, and of combining simple sentences into complex ones; yet at the same time there are many interesting ways in which languages differ from one another. Both the similarities and the differences are important, because an understanding of both tells us what a language is, what it can be like, what properties it must have, and what properties it need not have. The study of these similarities and differences is known as *language typology*.

In this chapter we will examine the position of Mandarin with respect to four typological parameters that are especially revealing of the basic structure of Mandarin as compared with those of other languages. These four parameters are:

1. The structural complexity of words
2. The number of syllables per word
3. The basic orientation of the sentence: "topic" versus "subject"
4. Word order

2.1 The Structural Complexity of Words: Mandarin as an Isolating Language

When any of the Chinese dialects, including Mandarin, is compared to nearly any other language, one of the most obvious features to emerge is the relative simplicity of the words of Chinese. That is, a typical word is not made up of component parts, called *morphemes*, but is, rather, a single morpheme. In Mandarin, there are a great number of compound words that are equivalent to such