

20) yī 咦

Yí, nǐ shénme shíhòu lái de? 咦，你什么时候来的？(Why, when did you get here?) — surprise.

21) yō 哟

Yō, nǐ wàng le? 哟，你忘了？(Did you forget?) — mild surprise;

Yō, nǐ cǎi wǒ de jiǎo le. 哟，你踩我的脚了。(Ow! You stepped on my foot!) — pain, displeasure.

22) yōu 呦

Yōu, huār zěnmē sǐ le. 呦，花儿怎么死了。(How come the flower's died?) — surprise.

## 9.5 Onomatopoeic Words

Onomatopoeic words imitate the sounds of the natural world, or use meaningless syllables to evoke a certain spirit or mood. They most often function as adverbial phrases, modifying verbs or adjectives, but they can also fulfill other functions within the sentence. A few examples of usage follow. (The quotation marks enclosing the onomatopoeic element are optional, being used purely for visual effect.)

Yǔ huǒhuà de xià. 雨哗哗地下。(The rain pattered down.) — adverbial;

Tā de liǎn “shuā” de hóng le. 她的脸“唰”地红了。(Her face went red in an instant.) — adverbial;

Shān shàng chuán lái “pēngpēng” de qiāngshēng. 山上传来“砰砰”的枪声。(The “ping” of gunfire floated down from the hilltop.) — attributive;

Xiǎo Wáng hūlūle liǎng shēng, yòu hūnmí guòqu le. 小王“呼

噜”了两声，又昏迷过去了。(Xiao Wang made an indistinct noise and then fell unconscious once more.) — predicate;

Mén bèi tā qiāo de dongdongdong de. 门被他敲得咚咚咚的。(His knocking rattled on the door.) — complement.

Onomatopoeic words may be divided into two subgroups. The first type consists of words that originate in classical Chinese, and which have been passed down through written records. These forms are generally limited in use to literary language. As they possess fixed Chinese character forms, it is allowable to mark them with tones when writing in HP. A few examples of this type:

liúshuǐ chúnchún 流水潺潺 (the babble of flowing water);

shūshēng lángláng 书声琅琅 (the sound of reading aloud);

mó dāo huòhuò 磨刀霍霍 (the rasping sound of a knife being sharpened).

The second type of onomatopoeic words originate in modern spoken Chinese and lack fixed Chinese character forms. It is often difficult or impossible to fix their tones, and for this reason they are never marked with tones in HP. In the examples throughout this section, it is easy to distinguish the two types of onomatopoeic words by observing which are marked with tones and which are not.

The forms onomatopoeic words in Putonghua take on is a topic worthy of discussion here. They are very similar in form to adjectives (see Chapter 6); this similarity has led many grammatologists to classify them as concrete rather than function words. The different forms of onomatopoeic words are introduced below, along with an explanation of their written forms.

### 1) Simple

All monosyllabic onomatopoeic words are simple in form. Among the many examples of this form are: pa 啪 (bang), peng 砰 (bang, thump), hong 轰 (boom), shua 唰 (swish), ca 嚓 (screech), and dong 咚 (rat-tat-tat). Some of these words can be stretched out for auditory effect; to express this lengthening in writing, a dash is added after the syllable:

Du — , qìdí xiǎng le. 嘟—, 汽笛响了。(Toot went the steam whistle.);

Dà gōngjī, o — o — ti. 大公鸡, 喔—喔—啼。(The rooster crowed cock—a-doodle-do.).

Simple onomatopoeic words, like simple adjectives, include a number of disyllabic forms. These include alliterative and vowel-rhymed forms (compare Chapter 6, Section 6).

#### Alliterative (both syllables use the same initial):

- dingdōng 叮咚 (tinkling sound of jade or of flowing water);
- dingdāng 叮当 (sound of metal or porcelain objects striking each other);
- dīdā 滴答 (“tick-tock”; sound of a clock ticking);
- pīngpāng 乒乒 (sound of objects striking each other);
- pīngpēng 乒砰 (sound of gunfire);
- pīpā 噼啪 (sound of cracking, slapping, or patting).

#### Vowel-rhymed (both syllables use the same final):

- kāchā 喀嚓 (sound of cracking or snapping);
- huāluā 哗啦 (sound of crashing, or of flowing water);
- hūlū 呼噜 (sound of snoring);
- hōnglóng 轰隆 (sound of rumbling);
- kuānglāng 匡啷 (sound of crashing or banging);

danglang 当啷 (sound of clanging).

**Other:**

putong 扑通 (sound of heavy objects landing);

puchi 噗嗤 (sound of tittering, or of escaping gas);

ciliu 刺溜 (sound of something sliding or whistling by);

gòzhi 嘎吱 (sound of something creaking under a heavy weight).

**2) Reduplicated**

**AA form**

huhua 哗哗 (sound of water or rain);

huhu 呼呼 (sound of wind);

wawa 哇哇 (sound of calling or crying);

dongdong 咚咚 (sound of beating drums);

wangwang 汪汪 (sound of a dog barking);

miaomiao 喵喵 (sound of a cat meowing);

jiji 唧唧 (sound of insects buzzing or chirping);

zizi 吱吱 (sound of a mouse squeaking);

gugu 咕咕 (sound of a pigeon cooing);

wengweng 嗡嗡 (sound of bees or flies buzzing);

gaga 嘎嘎 (sound of a duck quacking);

haha 哈哈 (sound of laughter);

heihei 嘿嘿 (sound of bitter or sardonic laughter);

xixi 嘻嘻 (sound of giggling);

gege 格格 (sound of guffawing).

Onomatopoeic words of the form AA may be used as components in forming words belonging to other parts of speech, as:

bengbeng 蹦蹦 + chē 车 (car) → bengbengchē 蹦蹦车 (a small three-wheeled automobile);

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haha 哈哈 + jing 镜 (mirror) → hahajing 哈哈镜 (distorting mirror, funhouse mirror);

guagua 呱呱 + jiao 叫 (to call, shout) → guaguajiao 呱呱叫 (A-one, excellent).

There are, however, not many examples of this type of construction.

### AAA form.

Any onomatopoeic word that can take the form AA can also take this form (adjectives, on the other hand, never take this form):

huhuchua 哗哗哗 (sound of rain falling);

wangwangwang 汪汪汪 (sound of a dog barking);

hahaha 哈哈哈 (sound of laughter).

### ABB form.

This form is composed of a disyllabic word whose second syllable is reduplicated.

hualala 哗啦啦 (sound of wind or flowing water);

honglonglong 轰隆隆 (sound of rumbling);

gululu 咕噜噜 (sound of drinking water, or of objects rolling);

dilingling 的铃铃 (sound of a telephone ringing).

### AAB form.

This form is composed of a disyllabic word whose first syllable is reduplicated:

dingdingdang 叮叮当 (sound of metal or porcelain objects striking each other);

pingpingpang 乒乒乓 (sound of objects striking each other).

### AABB form.

For clarity, a hyphen is used to separate AA from BB:

pipi-papa 噼噼啪啪 (sound of patting or slapping);  
didi-dada 滴滴答答 (sound of a clock ticking);  
pingping-pangpang 乒乒乓乓 (sound of objects striking each other);  
jiji-gugu 唧唧咕咕 (sound of whispering);  
jiji-zhazha 叽叽喳喳 (sound of birds chirping).

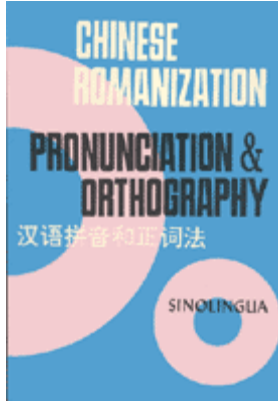
**ABAB form.**

In this form, the two AB's are separated by a space:  
huala huala 哗啦哗啦 (sound of rain or wind);  
dida dida 嘀嗒嘀嗒 (sound of a clock ticking);  
putong putong 扑通扑通 (sound of thumping or splashing).

**3) Onomatopoeic words formed with affixes**

Onomatopoeic words of four syllables are formed by using a disyllabic word for the first and third syllables, using the infix *li* 里 as the second syllable, and adding a fourth syllable which begins with "l" and has the same final as the third syllable. Thus the overall form is Ali-BC, with a hyphen separating the two halves for the sake of clarity:

pili-pala 噼里啪啦 (sound of cracking or slapping) — from pipa 噼啪;  
pingli-panglang 乒里乓啷 (sound of objects striking each other) — from pingpang 乒乓;  
jili-gulu 叽里咕噜 (sound of whispering) — from jigu 叽咕;  
jili-guala 叽里呱啦 (sound of chattering) — from jigua 叽呱。



This is an excerpt from *Chinese Romanization: Pronunciation and Orthography*, by Yin Binyong, translated and edited by Mary Felley.

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