

Extended Abstract

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Production of Initials by Mandarin Learners: L1 and L2 Clogging

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1. Abstract

Accurate production of initials is a common issue faced by learners and teachers of Chinese as a foreign yet an essential prerequisite for effective communication in Mandarin Chinese. This study intends to explore the nature of L1 and L2 influence on pronunciation of the Mandarin Chinese initials in Sri Lanka. It was observed that owing to improper, interrupted or erroneous instruction, less practice and controversies on pronunciation code learners often tend to substitute sounds of their first language and second language sounds of Mandarin Chinese. It is emphasised that core knowledge of phonemics and phonetics is a crucial core understanding of the speech organs, places of articulation and manner of articulation to be provided to students at the initial stage of acquiring the pronunciation code. The study proposes a study plan for effectiveness in the acquisition of Mandarin initials including six steps to resolve key issues governing inaccurate production.

Keywords: L1 and L2 influence, Mandarin Chinese initials, Pronunciation Issues, Pedagogy, Sri Lanka

Introduction and research problem/issue

Accurate production of initials is a common issue faced by learners and teachers of Chinese as a foreign yet is an essential prerequisite for effective communication of Mandarin Chinese. Key areas of common production include aspiration, nonaspiration and articulation errors which result in substitution of sound to improper, interrupted or erroneous instruction and less practice, learners often tend to replace sound of first language to similar sounds of Mandarin Chinese. In the Sri Lankan context where Chinese interaction is very low, the issue of the production of Mandarin Chinese

sounds is observed to be at a critical juncture. It is assumed that negative transfer of Sinhalese and English dominant cause resulting in erroneous production of Mandarin initials. The three retroflex sounds and dental sibilant sounds of Mandarin Chinese are assumed to be the most frequent in erroneous production. This study expects to investigate into the nature and the causes of erroneous production of Mandarin Chinese in Sri Lankan learners. Proposing remedial measures to circumvent frequent errors and proposing methodologies and strategies are the other key objectives of this study.

2. Research Methodology

15 students were selected as key informants of the study from year 4 students who read Mandarin Chinese special degree programme in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. The students were selected randomly and their registration numbers. The 21 initials of Mandarin Chinese were combined with randomly selected words that they express frequently used words which are familiar to the students. A worksheet was containing these sounds and

wadistributed among the students. Each student was requested to produce individually. Production of sounds was recorded, observed and data were gathered together. The assi native Chinese professor of Mandarin Chinese was obtained for the observation of accurate production a of data. The lecturers who teach Mandarin Chinese at Sabargamuwa University of Sri Lanka were inte obtain their views on the nature of the mistakes and suggestions for improved pedagogical approaches

Students' level of competence of initials, speed of acquisition, nature of mistakes, most frequent mis frequent substitutions, attitude on accurate production of initials were the key areas of discussion in the

Previous studies conducted on Chinese phonetics, production of Mandarin sounds and acquisition o Chinese by foreign language learners were referred for comparative analysis.

4. Results and findings

According to the data analysis, palatal sounds, dental sibilant sounds and retroflex sounds have shown percentages of accurate production when categorised by place of articulation. 'zh', 'ch', 'sh' and 'r' wh retroflex sounds of Mandarin Chinese show the lowest rate of accuracy. Alveolar sounds have shown rate of accuracy followed by labial and velar sounds which show 80% of accuracy in production. Bo and negative transfer from Sinhalese and English are seen dominant in the situation.

Sounds p/p/,k/k/,m/m/,n/n/,s/s/,l/l/ are among the most accurately pronounced initials. All these available in Sinhalese or English or at least a similarly articulated sound is available in either of the two

On the contrary, 'zh/tʂ/', 'ch/tʂʰ/', 'sh/ʂ/', 'r/z/',

'z/ts/', 'c/tsʰ/', which are rarely used or not available in English or Sinhalese have shown very low accuracy. The students have resorted to a slightly similar sound available in their mother tongue or L the students have substituted s/s/ or z/z/ for the sounds

'z/ts/', 'c/tsʰ/' and s/s/. The substitution of non-aspirated sounds to aspirated sounds is another issue d the study. Many informants have resorted to the labial unaspirated sound for the labial aspirated sound aspirated alveolar and velar sounds are also substituted by a majority of students by the unaspirated a velar sounds. In the interview with the teachers, it was found out that the students tend to believe tha and non-aspiration is not a dominant factor on the meaning of a sound which is a wrong supposition. Th nasal sounds of Mandarin Chinese are similar to Sinhalese and English and both of them have been produced by 100% of the students. According to literature and considering the data collected, the kn the students on general phonemics is found to be at a very low level. Less knowledge of phonemics is als as one of the key causes of erroneous production of sounds.

5. Conclusions, implications and significance

The results of the study reveal that the students' production of sounds that are alien to them is at a low on the contrary they have shown very high accuracy in the production of familiar sounds. Basic phonemics and phonetics is stressed as a crucial factor for correct articulation of sounds with the vocal organs. Basic understanding of the speech organs, places of articulation and manner of articulation provided to the students at the initial stage of practicing the sound table. The study proposes a student efficient results in the acquisition of Mandarin initials including six steps to resolve all the key issues. Confusion is found among teachers regarding the true pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese initials. It is suggested teachers follow the standard IPA table for Chinese sound table.

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