

The Negative Transfer of Different Regional Dialects on English Pronunciation

Jinrong Zhang^{1,a,*}

¹Changshu Institute of Technology, Suzhou, Jiangsu, 215500, China

a. 18962636075@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: In recent decades, researchers have become increasingly aware of the influence of Mandarin, especially the negative influence, on English pronunciation for Chinese learners. Nonetheless, few of them systematically search for and summarize the impact of regional dialects on it. This paper mainly introduces the impact of regional dialects on English pronunciation. According to several sound recordings from the volunteers, who come from different places in China. Through analyzing regional dialects' pronunciation habits, the author explores the negative transfer of dialect to English pronunciation and the challenges to English pronunciation that people from different places have met as a result of their dialect's pronunciation habits. Through analysis, it is found that due to the specific characteristics of different regional dialects, Chinese learners have difficulties with English pronunciation in terms of both vowels and consonants. Thus, relying on it, it is more straightforward for educators to take targeted measures to tackle this phenomenon. Meanwhile, it is useful for English learners to receive feedback and correct their mistakes in English pronunciation.

Keywords: Chinese dialect, negative transfer, English pronunciation, sound

1. Introduction

A dialect is a variant of a language that has its own local or social characteristics. It differs from other variants in many aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and sequence. It differs from other variants in many ways, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and sequencing. The negative transfer of regional dialects to English pronunciation has become a hot topic to discuss and explore in the past decade. More and more researchers and educators have tramped to figure out how Chinese regional dialects' pronunciation habits have negative effects on English pronunciation. Although, at present, Chinese regional dialects are declining, the negative transfer of Chinese dialects to English learning, especially English pronunciation, cannot be ignored. English phonetics can easily be influenced by the mother tongue, and Chinese dialects have varying degrees of influence on English pronunciation [1].

To pursue a higher comprehension of the negative transfer of Chinese regional dialects, the author recruited several volunteers to record the sound of specific words or sentences. This paper mainly introduces the negative transfer of different regional dialects on English pronunciation. According to comparing the volunteers' sound records to the standard English pronunciation, the author summarized the difference and typical influence on English pronunciation. Based on previous studies

which mainly focused on a specific area of China and a specific category of Chinese dialects, this paper focused on some typical areas and summarized some regular principal. Consequently, this paper aims to summarize the negative transfer of Chinese regional dialect to English pronunciation and conclude the solutions to try to overcome it during English learning. The main contribution of this paper is to offer conclusions on how Chinese dialects have negative effects on English learning and give some suggestions on overcoming this negative transfer.

2. Research Background

A dialect is a variant of a language that has its own local or social characteristics. It differs from other variants in many aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and sequence. Each dialect from different areas has its quality and peculiarity, so it has various negative effects on English learning, especially on English pronunciation. Thus, the impact of dialect on English pronunciation is tough and rough for English teaching and acquisition. However, this kind of impact is easily ignored in daily learning and teaching.

In psychology, “transfer” refers to the influence of one type of learning on another, the influence of skills, knowledge, or attitudes acquired in one context on the acquisition of skills, knowledge, or the formation of attitudes in another context. Ellis said, language transfer is the influence of the first language on the learning of a second language and can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer [2]. Positive transfer refers to the positive contribution of one type of learning to another [3]. Negative transfer in linguist learning is a phenomenon in language learning where the learning of one type of content interferes with or inhibits the learning of another type of learning [3]. Language transfer is not uncommon in second language acquisition (SAL). Chinese, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and English, which belongs to the Indo-European language family, have different pronunciation systems and patterns, so the pronunciation learning process of English learners in China is generally affected by the negative transfer of Chinese pronunciation. This negative transfer is also specific to learners in different regions, due to the influence of local dialects. This paper mainly summarizes the negative transfer of some typical Chinese dialects to English pronunciation and puts forward some suggestions.

3. Research Methodology

In each area (Qingdao, Sichuan, and Suzhou), the author invited 10 volunteers to read the specific words and sentences. To find out the connection between dialect pronunciation and English pronunciation, they read the same words both in English and in a dialect way, which include the same phoneme. According to the international phonetic alphabet (IPA), the author found the difference in each area and summarized the regular principle.

4. Analyses and Example

4.1. Northern Dialect - Shandong

The Shandong dialect is a local variant and branch of the Chinese language in Shandong and is a tool for the people of Shandong to live, work, and study. It is also the basic dialect of various local cultures in Shandong. Local operas such as Lvju, Maoqiang, Wuyin, Sipingtong, Shandong Bangzi, Shandong Liuqin, Shandong Xishu, and Shandong Minhua are all written in Shandong; some of the singing designs and melodies are governed by the Shandong dialect [4].

4.1.1. Negative Transfer of [s], [z] in /s/, /z/

In this dialect, there are no phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, only the phonemes /s/ and /z/. When they pronounce /s/ and /z/, they extend the tip of the tongue and put it between the upper and lower teeth. Thus, when they pronounce the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/ in English, they pronounce just like /s/ and /z/. In the part area of Shandong province, some students read sink /sɪŋk/ more likely as think /θɪŋk/, read rise /aɪz/ more likely as writhe /aɪð/, read sank /sæŋk/ more likely like thank /θæŋk/, and read lows /ləuz/ more likely as loathe /ləuð/.

4.1.2. Negative Transfer of [z], [c], [s] in /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/

In some areas of Shandong province, people are used to reading alveolar /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/ as post-alveolar /z/, /c/, and /s/. This pronunciation habit influences English pronunciation. People from these places can pronounce Jon as Zon, shake as sake, and show as sow.

4.1.3. Negative Transfer of Vowels

Firstly, confusion between long and short vowels. Like other Chinese dialects, the pronunciation of Shandong dialects does not distinguish between long and short vowels. But in English phonetics, there are differences between long and short vowels. Although the students are aware of the distinction between long and short vowels in English pronunciation. However, due to the influence of the dialect, it is still difficult to learn how to pronounce the vowels properly. According to the records, the author got many volunteers pronounced the long vowel /i:/ mistakenly as a short vowel /i/, resulting in the long vowel /i:/ being generally not pronounced with a long enough interval.

Secondly, inadequate pronunciation of diphthongs. The diphthongs in English are more similar to the compound vowels in Chinese Pinyin. In the Shandong dialect, compound vowels are often pronounced as a single rhyme. For example, when reading the characters “yinggai” /tɕiŋ ɡai/, which means should, in the Shandong dialect, it sounds more like /tɕiŋ ɡæ/. As a result, when English learners pronounce English diphthongs similar to the compound vowels in Chinese Pinyin, there is often a problem with the pronunciation of the diphthongs being pronounced as monophthong. For example, they may pronounce /eɪ/ as /e/, or /aʊ/ as /ɔ:/.

4.2. Southwestern Dialect - Sichuan

The Sichuan dialect is a local language that residents use in their daily lives and conversations in Sichuan province. Sichuan students are influenced by their local dialect when learning English phonetics, and the pronunciation habits of the Sichuan dialect are highly impossible to transfer to English phonetics. When the two kinds of pronunciation habits are consistent, the positive transfer occurs; when they are not, negative transfer occurs. Since the Sichuan dialect is more different from English, the influence is mainly negative [5].

4.2.1. The Negative Influence of the Initial Consonant on English Pronunciation

As the Sichuan dialect does not distinguish between nasal consonants [n] and lateral consonants [l], Sichuan students also tend to confuse nasal consonants /n/ with lingual consonants /l/ in English phonetics. Universally, according to my record, the volunteers pronounce night /naɪt/ as light /laɪt/, knife /naɪf/ as life /laɪf/, and name /neɪm/ as /leɪm/.

Cannot distinguish blade-alveolars from retroflexes. The impact of this feature on English pronunciation is mainly reflected in the pronunciation of fricative consonants. People in Sichuan are used to pronouncing blade-alveolars consonant [r] as retroflexes [ʒ]. Thus, practicing English pronunciation, they habitually pronounce blade-alveolars consonant /r/ as retroflexes /ʒ/. When they

read the words “right”, “read”, and “red”, they possibly pronounce the phoneme /r/ as the phoneme /z/.

4.2.2. The Absence of the Phoneme /e/

In the Sichuan dialect, simple finals are not existed [6]. Some characters with the simple final [e] in Mandarin pronounce more like the simple final [o] in the Sichuan dialect, for example, “ge”/ge/, which means dove, pronounces in the Sichuan dialect more like “guo”/go/, which means work, boiler.

4.3. Wu Dialect - Suzhou

The Suzhou dialect belongs to the Wu dialect, which is an elegant and immemorial regional language [7]. The negative transfer of the Suzhou dialect on English pronunciation is still unable to be ignored, even though nowadays Suzhou dialect is facing a potential survival challenge which is that the number of people who can speak this dialect fluently is declining at a rapid pace [8].

4.3.1. Negative Transfer on Consonants

In the Suzhou dialect, there are not phonemes /θ/ and /r/. As the absence of the two phonemes, it is difficult for people in Suzhou to pronounce them. As a result, people use the phonemes /s/ and /l/ instead [9]. For example, residents there are possible to pronounce thanks /θæŋks/ as /sæŋks/ and pronounce night/nait/ as light/lait/.

It is hard available to distinguish front nasals and back nasals. In the Suzhou dialect, people pronounce “Chuang”/tʂ^hwaŋ/, which means bed, as /ʃan/ or/san/. They pronounce the phoneme /ŋ/ as the phoneme /n/ in the Suzhou dialect. Thus, when they are learning English pronunciation, they habitually pronounce the phoneme /ŋ/ as the phoneme /n/.

For example, according to the sound recording, the volunteers in Suzhou pronounce distinguish /di'stiŋgwɪʃ/ as /di'stiŋgwɪʃ/, and think /θɪŋk/ as /θɪnk/.

4.3.2. Negative Transfer on Vowels

The most significant concern regarding the negative transfer of Wu dialects to the acquisition of English vowels is the issue of long and short vowels, which is arguably the same common problem faced by all Wu dialect areas in the acquisition of English phonology. There is a distinction between long and short vowels in English in terms of pronunciation position and method of pronunciation [10]. Specifically, about the pronunciation of individual English vowels, mainly concerns the mispronunciation of monophthong in English by speakers of the Wu dialect. The reason for the mispronunciation of monophthong is that, as some vowels don't exist in the Wu dialect, it is difficult for learners there to learn and acquire the pronunciation place and pronunciation method of these vowels.

5. Measures Were Taken by English Learners

5.1. Correcting Common-sense Mistakes

Oral English is not equal to writing English and is different from Chinese regional dialects. The learner's acquisition of the mother language began with listening and saying. Nevertheless, second-language learners, such as English learners, acquired their second language by writing. During the process of acquisition, they learn the pronunciation of English words with the help of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Hence, they tend to equate the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) with the Chinese Pinyin. Some even directly use Chinese Pinyin for the pronunciation. Based on these two

elements, during the teaching process, teachers should pay attention to these problems and improve this situation.

5.2. Developing a Variety of Teaching Modes

The sense of speaking plays an extremely important role in English learning, especially English speaking and learning. The two aspects of the sense of speaking: phonological awareness and perception [11]. When a person communicates in a state of mental tension, his or her perception of English is shallow and unresponsive. To lessen this negative influence, on the teaching process, teachers need to change students' common Chinese minds. Thus, students must watch English films and learn English songs. Moreover, students should have role play to improve their English pronunciation.

6. Conclusion

Based on the previous studies and the sound recordings by volunteers, according to the analysis of academic materials and sound, this paper summarized the negative transfer of three on English acquisition, especially English pronunciation. In this paper, the author concludes that the pronunciation habits of each regional dialect and the negative impact they make on English pronunciation. Due to the specific characteristics of different regional dialects, Chinese learners have difficulties with English pronunciation in terms of both vowels and consonants.

Nonetheless, there is still something to improve. Due to the limitation of the number of volunteers, the recordings were not collected sufficiently, which made my analysis less than complete. In the future, the author will extend the range and number of subjects and research more regional dialects. To sum up, this paper summarizes the negative transfer of Chinese regional dialects on English pronunciation and gives some suggestions about English acquisition teaching.

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