

PHONETIC DIFFICULTIES OF CHINESE FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER
LANGUAGES

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Annotation

This scientific article will discuss phonetic challenges in the Chinese language, namely articulation and tones. A comparative analysis is conducted between Chinese, English and Russian. The difficulties that foreign students may face when learning a language, as well as common mistakes, are discussed. Thus, the study of phonetic difficulties in the Chinese language helps to better understand the peculiarities of its development by foreign students and suggests effective strategies for overcoming them.

Key words: Chinese phonetics, tonal system, articulation features, pronunciation challenges, Indo-European language family, listening comprehension, phonetic exercises

Introduction: For speakers of other languages, especially for representatives of the Indo-European language family, learning Chinese is a difficult process. The main problems are related to the tonal structure of the Chinese language, the peculiarities of the phonological system and differences in articulation. The purpose of this article is to study the phonetic problems faced by Chinese language learners, identify the causes of these problems, and propose methods to solve them.

Literature review:

Research conducted in the field of teaching Chinese phonetics to foreigners shows that many factors, including the peculiarities of the tonal system, articulatory features of sounds and the tempo of speech, play a role in creating difficulties in mastering pronunciation. Charchoglyan et al. (2020) explore the main barriers faced by Russian-speaking students when learning Chinese. The authors emphasize that the lack of analog tones in the Russian language makes them particularly difficult to master, and the speed of speech of native Chinese speakers complicates listening.

In 2018, Malyshev, Kiselyevich and Mitchell investigated the main mistakes made by Russian-speaking students when studying Chinese phonetics. According to the study, students often make systematic mistakes in pronunciation, replacing certain Chinese sounds with analogues of their native language. Differences in the articulation of consonant sounds, such as nasal and aspirated consonants, as well as in tone acquisition, are particularly difficult.

The work of Dong Fu Hua (2022) is devoted to the methods of teaching Chinese phonetics. The author suggests a combined approach that includes intensive phonetic training at the initial stage of training and systematic pronunciation throughout the course. Empirical evidence indicates that phonetics and other parts of the language, such as vocabulary and grammar, should be integrated to help the natural assimilation of correct pronunciation.

It is also important to use artificial intelligence technologies to teach Chinese phonetics, according to a study by Li and Wang (2021). In particular, automated speech recognition systems that provide instant feedback help students improve their pronunciation. Thanks to this method, students can correct mistakes in real time, which significantly increases the effectiveness of phonetic training.

The well-known scientist Zhang (2020) conducted an interesting study analyzing the influence of a bilingual environment based on Chinese phonetics. In this study, the author states that students with experience in learning other tonal languages (for example, Vietnamese or Thai) demonstrate higher success in mastering Chinese tones.

This confirms the hypothesis that phonological interference can play both a negative and a positive role in the language learning process.

According to research, studying Chinese phonetics necessitates a responsible approach since it includes exercises for improving your articulation and developing good hearing, specifically phonemic hearing, which allows you to discern between tones. Today, it remains an urgent task to create a methodology that adapts to the phonetic features of native speakers of other languages, especially Chinese. Several studies have been conducted on teaching Chinese to foreigners and students themselves, and the main difficulties encountered by students in the field of listening, as well as the specifics of the sound of the language, because it contains tones that are often difficult for a foreigner to distinguish. The work of scientist Charchoghlian analyzes the main problems faced by Russian-speaking and English-speaking students. The paper emphasizes that the peculiarity of tones and the lack of analogues in Russian and English makes it difficult to study.

Scientists such as Malyshev, Kiselyevich and Mitchell (2018) analyzed the main mistakes made by English-speaking and Russian-speaking students when studying Chinese phonetics. According to the conducted research, it was revealed that Russian-speaking and English-speaking students often try to find analogs of tones that are similar in sound, which led to numerous pronunciation errors. Differences in the articulation of consonants, such as nasal and aspirated consonants, as well as in tone acquisition are very difficult.

The work of Dong Fu Hua (2022) is devoted to the basics of the methodology of teaching Chinese phonetics. The scientist offers a combined approach that includes intensive phonetic training at the initial stage of training and systematic pronunciation throughout the course. It is widely acknowledged that phonetics and other parts of the language, such as vocabulary and grammar, must be combined with each other to help a person learn natural pronunciation.

Methodology

This study uses an integrated approach. It includes the analysis of scientific sources, the analysis of phonetic systems of Chinese and other languages, as well as the study of mistakes made by Chinese language learners. The research focused on issues related to difficulties in learning Chinese phonetics, ways to eliminate them, and how the native language affects the language learning process.

Results

The tonal system of the Chinese language: Chinese is a unique language in itself, with a unique tonal system that is enormously different from other languages we know. There are four tones in this language, plus one neutral, which is the fifth tone by default. The meaning of a word is influenced by each tone based on how clearly it is said. This implies that a word might have entirely distinct meanings when uttered in various tones. The same word might therefore have entirely distinct meanings depending on the tone. Mistakes in tone of voice might therefore result in major communication misunderstandings.

Native speakers of languages such as Russian, English and many European languages have increased difficulty, as mentioned above, mastering the tones. In order to simplify the learning process, students are encouraged to listen to native speakers so that their hearing adapts, as well as try to repeat after them. Moreover, to repeat tones using the example of certain words, allowing students to adapt to the peculiarities of Chinese phonetics.

Phonetic structure of a syllable: Another challenge for language learners is the rigid syllable structure of Chinese phonetics. An initial (an initial consonant sound) and a final (a vowel or combination of vowels) are the two essential components of every Chinese syllable. Medial (intermediate sounds) may also be included. This sets it apart from the Russian language, where words can have different vowel and consonant combinations. The diversity of syllables is restricted by the great homophony caused by such a stiff framework.

There are very few syllables in this language, which makes it even more difficult to distinguish them by ear. This leads to the fact that the same sound can mean dozens

of different ideas, differing only in tone or context. To learn Chinese, this feature requires students to pay special attention to small details and constant practice of distinguishing words by ear.

To facilitate perception, students should practice with small pairs of words that differ in only one component, use audio materials to work with context, and use visual reinforcement techniques to help them memorize the syllabic structure of words.

The difference in articulation: For speakers of other languages, the articulatory base of Chinese is also a great challenge. Chinese has specific sounds that have no analogues in Indo-European languages. Sounds such as [ü] and [ɿ] need a special setting of the organs of speech. Moreover, aspirated consonants such as [p^h], [t^h], [k^h], which are perceived by students as ordinary non-palatalized sounds, are particularly difficult. All this causes difficulties for students in learning the language.

Extra obstacles are associated with the nasal consonants of the Russian language [n] and [ŋ], which are often confused. Thus, the issues between the finals "-n" and "-ng" can be reduced to zero with insufficient articulation, which can lead to confusion in the meanings of words. For example, compare the words "tīng", which means "to listen", and "tīn", which means "non-existent word", which, if pronounced incorrectly, become indistinguishable.

Exercises aimed at developing the articulatory base are necessary to reduce errors. This includes regular listening to native speakers, phonetic analysis of complex sounds, as well as working with phonetic tables, in addition to introducing new phonetic elements into students' speech. Daily practice and articulation exercises will help you adapt to the peculiarities of the Chinese language.

4. The tempo and rhythm of Chinese speech

The rhythmic structure and tempo of Chinese speech are two important factors influencing the difficulty of language perception. Chinese is characterized by a steady tempo, minimal vowel reduction, and lack of pronounced stress, unlike many Indo-European languages. As a result of these features, the perception of oral Chinese speech becomes difficult for learners, especially at the initial stages.

The high speech rate of native Chinese speakers creates additional problems. In Chinese, meaning is determined mainly by context and tonal structure, unlike in Russian, where stress helps to highlight key words in a sentence. Consequently, it may be difficult for students to separate the flow of speech into separate words and phrases.

To improve adaptation to the rhythm of Chinese speech, it is recommended to practice listening with regular changes in the tempo of speech to speed up the process of hearing adaptation. In addition, another effective method is to slow down the audio speed to capture sounds in the speaker's speech in more detail, as well as their intonation patterns. Subtitles in Chinese are an important method for increasing the progress of language learning, as the process improves the recognition of words in the speech stream.

Discussion

A study of the phonetic difficulties of native speakers of other Chinese languages has shown that the main problems associated with the Chinese language are related to its special tonal system, complex syllable structure and articulation features. Thanks to the analysis of the mistakes made by the students, several main trends can be identified that affect the development of Chinese pronunciation.

As aforementioned, Chinese differs from other languages in its tones, which are complicate for foreigners to master. The meaning of tones is that each tone can change the meaning of a word, while in European and other languages it works as a transmission of human emotions and experiences. Thus, in most cases, students, due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of tones and their lack of appreciation, can change and adjust them in their own way, but this can lead to serious speech problems. To avoid such mistakes, the most effective way is to train your speech to get used to the tonalities in Chinese speech.

Moreover, another difficulty for students is the syllable structure in Chinese, because the main reason is that this language has strict rules regarding the combination of sounds. Unlike English or Russian, where there is more freedom. For this reason, it is much more difficult for students to perceive the speech of native speakers, since

those words "ma" in the first tone means "mom" but "ma" in the third tone means horse. Therefore, students should study similar words and replenish their vocabulary.

The peculiarity of the articulation of the language adds another level of complexity, since for the pronunciation of many specific sounds, such as nasal finals, aspirated consonants, it is necessary to rebuild the speech apparatus. To do this, articulation exercises, phonetic tables, and prosodic analysis methods should be added to language learning to help students adapt to a new sound system.

In general, the analysis shows that the successful development of Chinese phonetics requires an integrated approach, which includes the development of auditory perception, active work with audio materials, the development of tones by stages and articulatory training. Successful adaptation to the phonological features of the Chinese language can be achieved only through a systematic and methodically sound learning process.

Conclusion

Thus, summing up, it was revealed that the Chinese language is difficult to learn due to its phonetic difficulties: tonal system, features of syllabic structure, articulatory differences and high speech speed. However, avoiding these barriers requires a serious and responsible approach that includes developing listening skills and exercises. The development of novel ways for teaching Chinese phonetics to international students is an urgent problem for modern linguists.

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Internet resources

1. <https://g.co/kgs/va61HLJ>
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3. <https://www.sci-hub.se/>