

Experimental Research and Analyses of Yoruba Native Speakers' Chinese Phonetic Errors

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Abstract : Phonetics is the foundation and most important part of language learning. This article, through an acoustic experiment as well as using Praat software, uses Yoruba students' Chinese consonants, vowels, and tones pronunciation to carry out a visual comparison with that of native Chinese speakers. This article is aimed at Yoruba native speakers learning Chinese phonetics; therefore, Yoruba students are selected. The students surveyed are required to be at an elementary level and have learned Chinese for less than six months. The students selected are all undergraduates majoring in Chinese Studies at the University of Lagos. These students have already learned Chinese Pinyin and are all familiar with the pinyin used in the provided questionnaire. The Chinese students selected are those that have passed the level two Mandarin proficiency examination, which serves as an assurance that their pronunciation is standard. It is discovered in this work that in terms of Mandarin's consonants pronunciation, Yoruba students cannot distinguish between the voiced and voiceless as well as the aspirated and non-aspirated phonetics features. For instance, while pronouncing [ph] it is clearly shown in the spectrogram that the Voice Onset Time (VOT) of a Chinese speaker is higher than that of a Yoruba native speaker, which means that the Yoruba speaker is pronouncing the unaspirated counterpart [p]. Another difficulty is to pronounce some affricates like [tʂ] [tʂʰ] [ʂ] [ʐ] [ʐ] [tʂ] [tʂʰ] [ʂ]. This is because these sounds are not in the phonetic system of the Yoruba language. In terms of vowels, some students find it difficult to pronounce some allophonic high vowels such as [ɿ] and [ʅ], therefore pronouncing them as their phoneme [i]; another pronunciation error is pronouncing [y] as [u], also as shown in the spectrogram, a student pronounced [y] as [iu]. In terms of tone, it is most difficult for students to differentiate between the second (rising) and third (falling and rising) tones because these tones' emphasis is on the rising pitch. This work concludes that the major error made by Yoruba students while pronouncing Chinese sounds is caused by the interference of their first language (L1) and sometimes by their lingua franca.

Keywords : Chinese, Yoruba, error analysis, experimental phonetics, consonant, vowel, tone

Conference Title : ICFLLLA 2022 : International Conference on Foreign Language Learning and Language Acquisition

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : April 14-15, 2022