

Production of Oral Vowels by Chinese Learners of Portuguese: Problems and Didactic Implications

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Abstract : The increasing number of learners of Portuguese as Foreign Language in China justifies the need to define the phonetic profile of these learners and to design didactic materials that are adjusted to their specific problems in pronunciation. Different aspects of this topic have been studied, but the production of oral vowels still needs to be investigated. This study aims: (i) to identify the problems the Chinese learners of Portuguese experience in the pronunciation of oral vowels; (ii) to discuss the didactic implications drawn from those problems. The participants were eight native speakers of Mandarin Chinese that had been learning Portuguese in College for almost a year. They named pictured objects and their oral productions were recorded and phonetically transcribed. The selection of the objects to name took into account some linguistic variables (e.g. stress pattern, syllable structure, presence of the Portuguese oral vowels in different word positions according to stress location). The results are analysed in two ways: the impact of linguistic variables on the success rate in the vowels' production; the replacement strategies used in the non-target productions. Both analyses show that the Chinese learners of Portuguese (i) have significantly more difficulties with the mid vowels as well as the high central vowel and (ii) do not master the vowel height feature. These findings contribute to define the phonetic profile of these learners in terms of oral vowel production. Besides, they have important didactic implications for the pronunciation teaching to these specific learners. Those implications are discussed and exemplified.

Keywords : Chinese learners, learners' phonetic profile, linguistic variables, Portuguese as foreign language, production data, pronunciation teaching, oral vowels

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