

Duration Patterns of English by Native British Speakers and Mandarin ESL Speakers

Authors : Chen Bingru

Abstract : This study is intended to describe and analyze the effects of polysyllabic shortening and word or phrase boundary on the duration patterns of spoken utterances by Mandarin learners of English in comparison with native speakers of English. To investigate the relative contribution of these effects, two production experiments were conducted. The study included 11 native British English speakers and 20 Mandarin learners of English who were asked to produce four sets of tokens consisting of a mono-syllabic base form, disyllabic, and trisyllabic words derived from the base by the addition of suffixes, and a set of short sentences with a particular combination of phrase size, stress pattern, and boundary location. The duration of words and segments was measured, and results from the data analysis suggest that the amount of polysyllabic shortening and the effect of word or phrase position are likely to affect a Chinese accent for Mandarin ESL speakers. This study sheds light on research on the duration patterns of language by demonstrating the effect of duration-related factors on the foreign accent of Mandarin ESL speakers. It can also benefit both L2 learners and language teachers by increasing their sensitivity to the duration differences and difficulties experienced by L2 learners of English. An understanding of the amount of polysyllabic shortening and the effect of position in words and phrase on syllable duration can also facilitate L2 teachers to establish priorities for teaching pronunciation to ESL learners.

Keywords : duration patterns, Chinese accent, Mandarin ESL speakers, polysyllabic shortening

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