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Phonetic interference in English speech of Chinese pre-schoolers

Abstract

The current paper aims to identify and classify phonetic deviations resulting from language interference in Chinese pre-schoolers learning English. The material of oral speech was obtained from pre-schooler subjects going to the “Mother Goose” Early Childhood Development Center (Yiwu, China). An auditive analysis and acoustic analysis were performed using Praat. The results show that 100% of the subjects displayed various patterns of phonetic interference: underproduction, reinterpretation, resegmentation. The most frequent interference phenomena were: (i) substitutes of unfamiliar sounds by familiar ones, non-distinction of tense and lax monophthongs, problems with producing the necessary degrees of tongue raising as a result of underproduction; (ii) substitution of /r/ by /ə/, /r/ by /l/ as a result of reinterpretation. Epenthesis and epithese involving the addition of extra vowels at the end and in the middle of the words after or between consonants as a result of resegmentation were less frequent. The least frequent phonetic deviation in vowels was the substitute of open /æ/ by the diphthong /ai/ and in consonants – substitutes differing in locus, e.g. /k/→/p/, /n/→/m/, /v/→/b/ and /d/→/g/. No substitutes of voiced-voiceless consonants were found.

Keywords: phonetic interference, underproduction, reinterpretation, resegmentation, epenthesis, epithese, diaeresis, contraction

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