

# The Characteristics and Problems of Chinese Students' English Acquisition Pronunciation Patterns

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**Abstract.** In the context of globalization, English phonetic competence has increasingly been recognized as a crucial indicator of language proficiency. However, despite sustained instructional focus on phonetics, Chinese learners of English continue to exhibit persistent pronunciation inaccuracies, which impede their oral communicative effectiveness. This paper systematically examines the typical patterns and underlying causes of English phonetic acquisition challenges among Chinese students, drawing on linguistic, phonological, and pedagogical perspectives. The findings indicate that learners' difficulties occur primarily at two levels: segmental inaccuracies, such as phoneme substitution, and suprasegmental deviations, particularly in rhythmic patterning. These issues are largely attributable to typological discrepancies between the Chinese and English phonological systems. In response, this study proposes a diversified pedagogical framework that integrates intelligent instructional technologies with cross-linguistic awareness. The model encompasses three key dimensions: a reconfigured learning environment enabled by adaptive tools for personalized training, a flipped classroom structure to facilitate interactive practice, and a developmental assessment mechanism emphasizing suprasegmental mastery and learning progression. This approach aims to enhance the efficiency and precision of English phonetics instruction in China.

**Keywords:** English Acquisition Pronunciation Patterns; Chinese Students; Oral Communicative.

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of globalization, English has become the global lingua franca. As language learning is being emphasized, the number of English remedial classes, such as preschool English and foreign teacher-led English, is increasing. In China, students who learn English often possess a certain amount of vocabulary. However, the pronunciation exhibits various characteristics. While their fluency in expression has effectively improved, their pronunciation accuracy differs significantly from classic American English or British English pronunciation [1]. Therefore, there is an urgent need to deeply explore the causes and corrective paths.

The academic community has explored the issues of Chinese students' English pronunciation from multiple perspectives. Huang Yuehui pointed out that native Chinese speakers are prone to negative transfer of phonemic features from their mother tongue during English acquisition [2]. Wang Ying proposed that the current college English pronunciation curriculum needs to reconstruct teaching objectives and evaluation systems [3]. In addition, Yang Yiling found that both positive and negative transfer effects of Pinyin coexist [4].

Despite significant progress in existing research, there are still several shortcomings [5]. Firstly, most studies lack a systematic, integrated analysis of phonetic and suprasegmental features. Secondly, there is insufficient exploration of the interactive mechanism between dialects and mother tongue transfer. Lastly, the practical application and effectiveness verification of intelligent technology-assisted speech training are still relatively weak.

Therefore, this study intends to sort out the typical characteristics of Chinese students' English phonetic acquisition, analyze their causes, and attempt to construct a phonetic teaching optimization framework that integrates modern educational technology, to provide theoretical references and practical paths for improving the efficiency and relevance of English phonetic teaching in China.

## 2. Characteristics of Chinese Students' English Pronunciation Patterns

Most Chinese students start learning English in primary school, adopting it as a second language. Consequently, Chinese students tend to apply Chinese pronunciation patterns to their English phonetic learning [6]. For instance, in the English acquisition pronunciation patterns of Chinese students, /v/ is often replaced by the /w/ sound. When Chinese people pronounce "vet", most pronounce it as /wet/ instead of /vet/. Furthermore, Chinese pronunciation patterns do not include the consonants /θ/ and /ð/. Therefore, in English pronunciation, Chinese students substitute the consonants /θ/ and /ð/ with two other similar sounds, /s/ and /z/, respectively. Additionally, some Chinese students cannot distinguish between the two sounds /l/ and /n/. For example, when they pronounce "light", their pronunciation becomes /nait/, confusing it with the pronunciation of "night". In addition, there are other notable pronunciation patterns. Chinese is a monosyllabic language. Therefore, native Chinese speakers articulate each word clearly. However, English is a polysyllabic language. Clearly articulating English pronunciation patterns makes English "Chinese-like". For example, native English speakers will pronounce "ask them" as /æsdəm/. Usually, the /k/ sound is omitted. However, in Chinese students' English pronunciation, every sound is pronounced clearly, including the /k/ sound, so Chinese people will pronounce "ask them" as /æskdəm/.

## 3. The Reasons Behind the Characteristics of Chinese Students' English Acquisition Pronunciation Patterns

The fundamental differences between English pronunciation and Chinese pronunciation, the influence of dialects on individuals, and the methods of English phonetic education all contribute to this issue.

### 3.1. The Fundamental Difference Between English and Chinese Pronunciation

The fundamental differences between the Chinese and English phonological systems are manifested in three aspects: phonetic structure, phonemic system, and prosodic features.

Firstly, English is a phonemic language. Changes in phonemes lead to changes in word meaning, such as the difference between "ship" /ʃɪp/ and "sheep" /ʃi:p/. On the other hand, Chinese is a syllabic language, where syllables with tones are the basic units. Tones serve the function of distinguishing meanings, for example, "mā, má, mǎ, mà" all pronounced as "ma", but their meanings are differentiated by tones.

Secondly, the English phonological system exhibits considerable complexity, particularly in its consonant and vowel inventories. It includes consonants such as /θ/ and /ð/, which have no direct equivalents in Chinese, and allows complex consonant clusters (e.g., /spr/ in "spring"). The vowel system comprises more than twenty phonemes, maintaining critical distinctions between pairs such as /i:/ and /ɪ/, and /ɑ:/ and /ʌ/, while its diphthongs demonstrate more perceptible and dynamic articulation trajectories. In contrast, the Chinese vowel system is relatively simpler, with less prominent glide realizations in diphthongs [7].

A further fundamental distinction lies in the functional role of tone. English uses intonation predominantly at the phrasal or sentential level to convey pragmatic meaning, whereas Chinese employs lexical tones at the syllable level to distinguish word meaning. This typological difference constitutes a major source of difficulty for Chinese learners in acquiring English prosody.

### 3.2. Dialectal Interference

Beyond the systemic differences between Mandarin and English, China's rich dialectal landscape also exerts substantial transfer effects on English pronunciation acquisition. The distinct phonemic inventories and articulatory habits characteristic of various dialect regions frequently induce persistent interference, resulting in systematic pronunciation inaccuracies.

At the suprasegmental level, the prosodic characteristics of Chinese dialects significantly interfere with the acquisition of English rhythm and intonation. As most Chinese dialects are tonal languages characterized by relatively isochronous syllable timing, learners frequently transfer this prosodic structure to English speech. This transfer manifests as ambiguous lexical stress patterns, insufficient vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, and flattened intonation contours. For instance, speakers of Northern dialects often neutralize the contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables in English, while Min dialect speakers tend to impose their native tonal patterns on English intonation.

Beyond articulatory habits, dialectal influence on English pronunciation is profoundly shaped by regional cultural psychology and linguistic identity. Learners immersed in specific dialect environments often unconsciously apply their native phonetic perception and production mechanisms to English, resulting in a distinguishable accent. This accent embodies not merely phonological transfer but also reflects how deeply ingrained cultural identity shapes second language acquisition. Consequently, English pronunciation instruction should systematically account for learners' dialect backgrounds and develop region-specific training protocols that address particular phonological challenges, thereby effectively mitigating negative transfer and enhancing phonological accuracy.

### **3.3. English Phonetic Education Methods and Learners' Psychological Factors**

The core dilemma facing English phonetic teaching in China at present lies in the significant gap between teaching investment and actual results. Despite considerable resources invested by both teachers and students, there is still a considerable distance between the phonetic abilities students ultimately acquire and the ideal level of communication [8]. The causes of this problem are related to both the teaching system itself and the psychological factors of learners.

The current framework for English pronunciation instruction in China presents several systemic constraints. Inadequate instructional time compresses curriculum coverage, often limiting teaching to core phonological rules at the expense of developing stable pronunciation habits. This approach results in fragmented fluency training with predominant emphasis on segmental features rather than suprasegmental elements. The persistent teacher-centered paradigm—characterized by mechanical repetition and imitation—proves particularly inadequate, as it neglects critical auditory discrimination skills while isolating practice from communicative contexts. Consequently, learners demonstrate competence in reading standardized sentences yet struggle with phonological processes in connected speech.

Practical implementation faces further challenges in large-class settings where individualized feedback remains scarce, allowing pronunciation errors to fossilize. The scarcity of teaching resources additionally constrains students' capacity for self-monitoring and correction. Compounding these issues, assessment protocols prioritize phonemic accuracy over prosodic features like rhythm and intonation, thereby misaligning learning objectives with communicative competence. This evaluation system inadvertently encourages the pursuit of examination scores rather than functional pronunciation skills.

Beyond pedagogical limitations, learners' psychological dimensions significantly influence acquisition outcomes. Cultural predispositions regarding "face preservation" often heighten sensitivity to pronunciation errors, generating classroom anxiety and verbal avoidance. This tendency manifests particularly among dialect speakers who frequently avoid practice sessions to conceal regional accents. The substantial typological divergence between Chinese and English phonological systems further intensifies learners' psychological burden, establishing a self-perpetuating cycle where anxiety undermines practice opportunities, which in turn perpetuates proficiency gaps.

## **4. Solution**

To systematically address the challenges in Chinese students' English phonological acquisition, this study proposes a diversified instructional framework integrating technological innovation with cross-cultural awareness. This comprehensive model operates through three interconnected

dimensions: reconstructing the digital teaching environment, transforming classroom pedagogical structures, and implementing a multidimensional evaluation system.

The proposed pedagogical framework operates through three integrated dimensions. First, the teaching environment is reconfigured through intelligent speech technologies and cloud-based platforms that transcend temporal and spatial limitations of traditional classrooms [9]. These platforms employ diagnostic assessments to generate individualized learning paths, while visualization technologies convert abstract phonological features into intuitive acoustic imagery, enabling students to conduct self-comparison and correction. Crucially, the system provides targeted intervention for dialect speakers, such as emphasizing /θ/ and /ð/ for Wu dialect learners or /n/-/l/ distinction drills for Southern dialect speakers.

Second, classroom structure is transformed through a flipped model that relocates knowledge transmission to pre-class phases, thereby freeing classroom time for addressing common difficulties and facilitating interactive practice. Teachers utilize visual analytical tools to demonstrate intonation patterns and diagnose pronunciation errors within authentic communicative contexts. To mitigate culturally-induced anxiety, progressive training sequences transition from individual recording tasks to collaborative dialogues. Concurrently, intelligent platforms document learning trajectories, particularly tracking the evolution of dialect-specific challenges, thus generating valuable data for instructional refinement.

Third, the evaluation system is redesigned to transcend narrow phonemic accuracy by incorporating suprasegmental dimensions, including rhythm and intonation. For dialect-background learners, assessment emphasizes developmental progress over absolute standards, thereby enhancing learning motivation [10]. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to develop metalinguistic awareness of dialectal variations and employ comparative linguistics methods to illuminate cross-linguistic phonological relationships. This approach transforms negative transfer from subconscious interference into conscious learning opportunities through explicit contrastive analysis.

## 5. Conclusion

This study systematically investigates the characteristic patterns, underlying causes, and pedagogical interventions pertaining to Chinese learners' acquisition of English phonology. The analysis reveals that pronunciation difficulties demonstrate systematic features, primarily manifesting as segmental phoneme substitution and suprasegmental prosodic imbalance. Through rigorous examination, three determining factors emerge: fundamental typological differences between Chinese and English phonological systems, significant negative transfer effects from regional dialects, and inherent limitations in current teaching methodologies—including insufficient instructional hours, monotonous pedagogical approaches, underdeveloped practical components, and inadequate assessment mechanisms. Additionally, learning anxiety stemming from cultural-psychological factors substantially impedes pronunciation development.

To address these multifaceted challenges, this research proposes an innovative educational framework integrating technological applications with cross-cultural phonological pedagogy. The model emphasizes utilizing intelligent speech recognition and visualization technologies to deliver targeted training addressing dialect-specific learning difficulties, while simultaneously establishing inclusive classroom environments to mitigate psychological barriers. This study's theoretical contribution lies in its comprehensive integration of segmental and suprasegmental features, linguistic system comparisons, and psychosocial factors within a unified analytical framework. Future research directions should include longitudinal investigations of pronunciation acquisition patterns across dialect regions and empirical validation of technology-enhanced instructional efficacy.

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