

Variables in L2 learners' VOT production in English-learning Mandarin speakers

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Previous studies indicated that the differences of the voice onset time (VOT) for voiceless word-initial stops in Mandarin Chinese and in English are slight but significant. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether Mandarin speakers are aware of the differences and are able to distinguish them when producing English voiceless aspirated stops (i.e. /p, t, k/). Meanwhile, three variables which may have an influence on the degree of foreign accent in a second language (L2) were carried out to assess whether each factor played an independent and significant role in L2 learners' VOT production. Several instrumental articles have been devoted to the study of the influence on L2 acquisition and more and more factors have been proposed and assessed. Among all the effects, age of L2 learning (AOL) and length of residence in an L2 speaking country (LOR) are the two predictors which have been widely discussed in a number of studies (Oyama, 1976; Tahta, Wood, & Loewenthal, 1981; Flege, 1988, 1991; Flege & Fletcher, 1992; Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001). Basing on these previous studies, the variables implemented in this experiment include (1) LOR, (2) AOL and (3) language use. Eleven Mandarin speakers participated in this experiment. The results indicated that the English VOT values produced by Mandarin speakers were intermediate between those observed for Mandarin and English /p, t, k/. With regard to the three variables, each predictor discussed in this study was found to have a simple correlation with the L2 VOT production; however, none of them affected L2 acquisition significantly and independently. Moreover, individual variation was considered as important as the other three factors and should be taken into consideration when analyzing and interpreting the results.