Negative Transfer of Anhui Dialects to English Pronunciation—Case Study in Anhui Agricultural University

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Abstract. In this paper, Anhui Agricultural University is taken as an example to study how Anhui dialects influence the English pronunciation of students. The different pronunciation characteristics of Anhui dialects are collected and summarized in this paper. A phonetic test based on the international phonetics is comprehensively designed for the collection of students’ pronunciation. Through contrasts and analysis, the specific influences that Anhui dialects exert on students are discovered, which will help a lot in the improvement of student’s pronunciation.

Relevant Studies about the Influence of Chinese on English Pronunciation

Language variety is the basic unit studying language in sociolinguistics. The British linguist R.A. Hudson defines language variety as a set of linguistic items with similar to social distribution [1]. This set of linguistic items can be the whole phonetics, grammar and lexical system, and also the component or rule of certain word or grammar [2]. Dialect is the branch and variety of a language and can be divided into regional dialect and social dialect [3].

From 1930s to 1940s, scholars in China, such as Zhao Yuanren, had already started the comparison of Chinese and English phonetics, from then on, Chinese and English phonetics difference became an important field in contrastive study of Chinese and English. The contrastive study of Chinese and English phonetics involves pronunciation phonetics, phonetics system structure and phonetics change, syllable, pitch, stress and rhythm. However, the related studies mainly focus on the contrastive study of Chinese mandarin and English phonetics. In the middle and late 1950s, The Contrastive Analysis of English and Canton Dialect Phonetics written by Fang Shuzhen was published, in which similarities and differences between English phonetics and Canton dialect phonetics are detailed from consonant, vowel and syllable to explore the positive and negative transfer from Canton dialect to English pronunciation so as to provide English pronunciation improvement instructions for people in Canton dialect area [4]. In Chuandong Ma & Lunhua Tan’s study, characteristics of Sichuan dialect and English phonetic systems were compared and analyzed from aspects of phoneme, phonetic pairs, tone language, intonation language and rhythm to explore the similarity and difference of these two languages, which contributed to the identification of key and difficult points in English phonetics teaching [5]. In 1995, In Yu Jin’s study, empirical investigation is adopted to collect linguistic data so as to make detailed analysis of English pronunciation errors and mistakes of students in Chinese dialect areas of Liaoning province. This study contributed to the contrastive analysis of Chinese and English language [6]. Changzhong Du studies the differences between Fujian dialect and English phonetics were discussed [7]. Xizhe Liu (2010), Youhui Shi (2010), Qing Wang (2010) and Xuemei Wang (2011) made relatively systematic study of influence of
Shenyang dialect, Dalian dialect, Benxi dialect and Zhuanghe dialect on English phonetics learning respectively [8].

To sum up, the existing papers study the positive and negative transfer of Chinese dialects to English by the method of contrastive analysis so as to provide effective instructions for English learners in English pronunciation improvement. However, the comprehensive study of Anhui dialects is seldom found in these studies about the relationship between dialects and English pronunciation. It is well known that the Yangtze river and Huai river divide China into North China and South China. The Huai River is located in Anhui Province, which divides Anhui Province into north part and south part. This geographical factor has significant influence on the division of Anhui dialect.

Anhui dialects can be divided into Zhongyuan Mandarin in North Anhui Province, Jianghuai dialect in middle of Anhui province, Gan dialect in west Anhui Province, Xuanzhou Wu dialect in south Anhui Province and Hui dialect in south Anhui Province. Therefore, the thorough study of Anhui dialects is difficult to a great extent. In this paper, Anhui Agricultural University is taken as an example for the analysis of the negative transfer of Anhui dialects to English pronunciation. In the process of study, the contrastive analysis method is adopted for the detailed analysis.

Classification of Anhui Dialects and Their Phonetic Features

Instead of a single language, Anhui Dialects are the synthesis of different dialect systems, which are extremely complex and different to each other. Based on different features, Anhui Dialects can be classified into Zhongyuan Mandarin, Jianghuai dialect, Gan dialect, Xuanzhou Wu dialect and Hui dialect from the north to south in Anhui Province [9].

Zhongyuan Mandarin in North Anhui Province

Represented by Fuyang dialect, Zhongyuan Mandarin is mainly distributed in cities and towns in Huaibei city and south bank of Huai River. The main phonetic features are as follows: First, Initial consonant: The pronunciation of “f” and “xu” are difficult to be distinguished in Shou County, Yingshang County and Huoqiu County, etc. The pronunciation of “zh”, “ch” and “sh” are easily mixed with “z”, “c” and “s”; second, vowel: the pronunciation of “en” and “eng” and “in” and “ing” are difficult to distinguish; third, there are no vowels ending with “i” or “u” in Zhongyuan Mandarin compared with standard Chinese Mandarin, which results in the loss of tail vowel pronunciation in English pronunciation, that is, the diphthongs are usually monophthongized.

Jianghuai Dialect in Middle of Anhui Province

The Jianghuai dialect is usually distributed in the middle of Anhui province, featured by following parts: first, the pronunciation of “n” and “l” are difficult to distinguish in most areas; second, retroflex misses in some areas; third, the pronunciation of “en”, “eng”, “in” and “ing” are difficult to distinguish.

Gan Dialect in West Anhui Province

Represented by Yuexi dialect, Gan dialect is widely used in Yuexi, Taihu, Qianshan, Susong, Wangjiang, Huaining, Dongzhi and Guichi, etc. The main features are as follows: first, initial consonant, the full voiced consonants are now pronounced as voiceless consonants, the plosive
and affricate are all aspirated. For example, “pa” and “ba” are both pronounced as “pa”. Second, in Yuexi, Susong and Qianshan, “zh, ch, sh” are easily pronounced as “z, c, s”.

**Xuanzhou Wu Dialect**

Xuanzhou Wu dialect is mainly distributed in ancient xuanzhou or xuancheng county and the jurisdiction located in the south of the Yangtze River and north of Huangshan Mountain. The pronunciation of “en” and “eng” and “in” and “ing” are difficult to distinguish.

**Hui Dialect**

Represented by Tunxi dialect, the phonetic features of Hui dialect are as follows: first, oxyphomia, the nasal initial consonant “g” is in the same category with “k” and “g”, belonging to the standard radical consonant; in Xiuning, Qimen and Qian County, "mao” (cat) is usually pronounced as "min", "mian" and "ming" respectively. The words ending with “n” pronunciation in Hui dialect are similar to the words ending with “r” pronunciation in English. The pronunciation of the third-class rhyme of “zh, ch, sh” are usually as “j, q, x”, and the second-class rhymes are usually as “ts, ts', s” (“z, c, s” in mandarin).

**Research and Analysis of Pronunciation Problems**

The international phonetic system of English is adopted as the reference in the audio test, covering the complete international phonetics, so as to ensure the comprehensiveness of samples collection. The data of this paper are from the audio test on November, 20, 2012 of English majors in Anhui Agricultural University. Twenty-eight English majors coming from different dialect areas of Anhui province participated in this test, all of whom are freshmen without any systematic English phonetic learning and training. The test result of audio samples is shown in table1 below.

| Dialect/Dialect Area       | Quantity | [i] | [æ] | [e] | [eɪ] | [oʊ] | [aʊ] | [o] | [a] | [ʌ] | [ɒ] | [u] | [uː] | [i] | [iː] | [θ] | [n] | [l] | [s] | [ʃ] | [z] | [ð] | [f] | [v] | [w] | [h] | [æ] | [e] | [ɛ] | [ɹ] | [t] | [d] | [tr] | [dr] | [ts] | [dz] |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Zhongyuan Mandarin /10    | 8        | 5   | 8   | 5   | 6    | 4    | 1    | 5   | 4   | 2   | 5   | 3   | 6    | 5    | 5   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 3   | 9   | 3   | 7   |
| Jianghuai Dialect/12      | 11       | 8   | 8   | 4   | 4    | 5    | 0    | 1   | 3   | 5   | 8    | 3    | 5   | 5    | 1   | 4   | 1   | 1   | 3   | 1   | 8   | 8   | 5   | 8   |
| Gan Dialect/3             | 3        | 2   | 1   | 0   | 1    | 2    | 0    | 1   | 0   | 2   | 3    | 1    | 1   | 2    | 2   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 3   | 3   | 0   | 3   |
| Hui Dialect/1             | 1        | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0   | 1   | 0   | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 1   |
| Wu Dialect/2              | 2        | 2   | 1   | 1   | 2    | 0    | 0   | 1   | 2   | 2   | 2    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 1   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 2   |

Pronunciation problems are found in different dialects of Anhui province after the analysis of the collected audio samples. The confusion of long vowels and short vowels, stress, unaspirated
sound, liaison, elision and assimilation problems are common to different dialects in Anhui province.

For the pronunciation problems resulting from different dialects are shown respectively as follows:

For Mandarin dialect in North of Anhui Province, four main problems are founded. First, the confusion of long vowel and short vowel, in this test, 80% of the subjects pronounced the word “seek” as [sik] instead of [si:k]. Second, the confusion of /ei/ and /e/, about 80% of the subjects pronounced the word “eight” as [et] instead of [eɪt]. Third, the confusion between /ɔː/ and /ao/, about 60% of the subjects pronounced the word “horse” as [haos] instead of [hɔːs]. Fourth, the mispronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ into /s/ and /z/, about 60% of subjects pronounces the word “with” and “leather” as [wiz] and [‘leza] in this audio test.

For Jianghuai Dialect, four main problems are listed below. First, subjects from Jianghuai dialects speaking area have the same pronunciation problem in the distinction of /æ/, /e/ and /ei/. The incidence of errors are respectively 92%, 67% and 67%. Second, the confusion of /n/ and /l/. Subjects from Jianghuai dialect speaking area usually pronounce /n/ as /l/, which is very distinctive. About 42% of the subjects pronounced the word “near” as [liə]. Third, the confusion of /aː/ and /ʌ/, about 67% of subjects pronounced the word “march” as the same as “much”. Fourth, extra vowel in consonants, in this test, for example, “post”, “dog” and “wait” are pronounced as [pəʊst], [dɒɡ] and [wɛɪt]; “shrug” and “green” are pronounced as [ʃræɡ] and [ɡriːn].

For Gan Dialect, following results are obtained. First, the confusion of /v/ and /w/is resulted from the lack of /v/ in Chinese. However, Gan dialect speaker takes up the relatively higher percentage. About 67% of subjects pronounced the word “valid” as [ˈwælɪd]. Second, the confusion of long vowel and short vowel. For example, the word “love” is pronounced as [lʌv]. All subjects from Gan dialect speaking area have the same problem. Third, extra vowel in consonants.

Subjects from Hui dialect speaking area are not good at identifying the distinction of long vowels and short vowels, in addition, affected by n-colored pronunciation, the difference between /n/ and /l/ is not obvious.

Seeing from the test result of the subjects from Wu dialect speaking area, apart from the common pronunciation problems, such as the confusion of long vowels and short vowels and the lack of tail vowel, shared with Mandarin dialect in the north of Anhui province, Wu dialect speaker has also the common pronunciation problem of lacking inter-dental /θ/ and /ð/.

Summary

Literature review and corpus collection are adopted in this paper, which provides both reliable the theoretical support and real data support. Taken Anhui Agricultural University as an example, the negative transfer of dialects to English pronunciation is further analyzed after collection of audio materials. In the process of study, the phonetic difference between dialects and standard mandarin are compared first to rule out the influence of mandarin to English Pronunciation, then the contrast and analysis of dialect phonetics and international phonetics are made to study the negative transfer of Anhui dialects to English pronunciation. In this study, the common shared problems resulting from the negative influence of dialects on students are found. Also, some problems influenced by distinctive dialect features are analyzed. The
analysis and findings in this paper provide a constructive implication in English phonetic teaching for the better correction of students’ English pronunciation.

References