Grammar and Phonology for the English Language Teacher

Phonological Analysis

Alina Ioana Morar

Phonological Analyses

1. **Introduction**

Phonology is known as a branch of linguistics which studies the sound system of language (Crystal 2008). This paper will look at the sample of an L2 oral discourse which is a part of an oral presentation. The speaker is a 3ʳᵈ year undergraduate female Chinese speaker who was part of a group project presentation for an English module assessment at a British university. Also, this paper will analyze the discourse based on phonological features. Firstly, it will address to segmental phonology and it will relate to features of the individual speech sounds, it will point out the regular mispronunciation and it will characterize the overall pronunciation. Secondly, it will examine the suprasegmental phonology, which includes stress, juncture and intonation. The purpose of this examination is to show how stress, intonation, fluency and pausing may affect the comprehensibility of a speech. Lastly, this paper will discuss a possible approach of teaching pronunciation to help the Chinese student improve her phonology.

2. **Segmental analyses**

According to David Crystal (2008), segmental phonology analyses the speech into discrete segments such as phonemes. Segmental units are represented by the sounds (i.e. vowels and consonants) that first form the syllables and then the words. The phonological system of Chinese is distinct from the English one; therefore, pronunciation represents a challenge for L2 speakers of every language, and it is a language feature that differentiates a native speaker from a non-native speaker. In order to begin the segmental analyses, it can be argued that the Chinese student has difficulties pronouncing numerous words during her speech presentation (Appendix 1). Also, it must be said that Chinese sound system affects learners' pronunciation in a target language (Lin 2014).

Based on scholars, there are several sounds in Chinese that do not occur in English. Swan and Smith (2001) demonstrate that Chinese learners are usually facing several difficulties when it comes to both English vowels and consonants. Research has found that there are less vowel contrasts in Chinese than in English, which means that distinguishing them requires more attempt for the Chinese student. Swan and Smith (2001) argue that vowels such as /iː/, /ɪ/, /uː/, /ʊ/ have no equivalent in Chinese, which may create confusion for EFL. 2WAN faces

difficulties pronouncing both close-front unrounded vowels and close-back rounded vowels; she pronounces /vɑːrɪ/ instead of /ˈvɛri/ and /fʊrɪʃ/ instead of /ˈfuːlɪʃ/ (Appendix 2). The grapheme /æ/ is inexistent in Chinese and learners are likely to nasalize and confuse it with the close-mid front unrounded vowel /e/: the student pronounces /femrɪ/ instead of /ˈfæmɪli/, /det/ instead of /ðæts/ (Ibid.). Another vowel that cannot be found in Chinese is /ɒ/; for instance, in the word "problem" (Appendix 1, line 13), 2WAN replaces the open back rounded vowel /ɒ/ with the open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔː/, pronouncing /prɔːbrəm/ instead of /ˈprɒbləm/.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the Chinese student faces several difficulties when it comes to consonant clusters. Based on scholars, Chinese learners tend to add an extra vowel to words that end with a consonant. 2WAN is struggling with pronunciation the word "luxury" (Appendix 1), by pronouncing it /lʌkʃərɪː nə/, instead of /ˈlʌkʃəri/ - the student adds an extra syllable after the alveolar consonant phoneme /r/; It is noticeable that she does this several times during her speech, using the mid central unrounded vowel /ə/ to add an extra syllable to words such as "it's", "means", "speed" or "stupid" (Appendix 2). According to Koenraad Kuiper and W. Scott Allan (2017), L2 learners tend to add a syllable to consonant ending words "to create the, for them, native-sound syllables" (Kuiper and Allan 2017 :183).

Another pronunciation issue is made by the alveolar consonants /r/ and /l/. For instance, the student replaces velarized /l/ with alveolar /r/ in "family", "foolish", "problems" and "extremly", and mispronounces them as /femrɪ/, / fʊrɪʃ/, /prɔːbrəm/ and "ɪkstrɪːmrɪ". Same matter occurs for the alveolar fricative consonants /s/ and /z/. The student has difficulties pronouncing "Mercedes Benz", which is correctly pronounced / mɜːˈseɪdɪz bɛnz/; the voiced /z/ becomes voiceless /s/ as she is pronouncing it /ˈmʌsədɪs ˈbænts/. The same problem occurs with the word" characters" because the student pronounces it /kærɪktəsə/ instead of /ˈkærɪktəz /. Research shows that the main factor that influences English pronunciation is Chinese interference itself. For example, dental fricatives /θ/, /ð/ do not occur in Chinese language at all (Zhang and Yin 2006). Therefore, they are replaced by other phonemes; during her speech, the student replaces /ð/ with the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ in words as "this", "these" and "the". She also substitutes /θ/ with /s/ in "death", by pronouncing it /desə/ instead of /dɛθ/ (Appendix 2).

3. **Suprasegmental analyses**

Suprasegmental phonology analyses those which extend more than one segment and it is a "vocal effect which extends over more than one sound segment in an utterance, such as pitch, stress or juncture patter" (Crystal 2008 :446). It is known that stress, intonation and juncture represent areas of difficulty for Chinese speakers. Chinese and English belong to different language families (i.e. Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European), therefore they have a big amount of structural differences. Research states that "giving priority to suprasegmental aspects improves learners' comprehensibility" (Kang 2010 :301).

Intonation

When it comes to intonation Chinese students face many difficulties because Chinese is a tone language and its dialects are generally monosyllabic, therefore, tones are used to differentiate the meaning of words that have the same structure (Roach 2009). In Chinese, intonation represents fixed tones. Scholars compare the intonation of the English language with the spirit of a body and state that "intonation can mean life and death" (Zhang and Yin 2009). According to the speech analyses, it can be argued that the Chinese student faces intonation difficulties (Appendix 3) based on the rising and falling pitch during her presentation (Fig. 1). The pitch of a voice plays the most important part in intonation. 2WAN's pitch range of intonation is disarranging because of the miscues on falling and rising tones during her monologue. Through her presentation, the student raises the tones in words as "extremely" or "flying", where the tones should be lower (Appendix 3, lines 11, 12, 14, 15, 16).

Stress

According to Philip Carr (2013), English stress is not random, and it plays an important part in comprehensibility and intelligibility. Research shows that Chinese learners tend to stress too many English syllables or to misplace it which may affect their speaking flow. Chinese is a "syllable-timed language, while English is a stress-timed language and therefore, they have a great deal of differences in stress" (Zhang and Ying 2006 :141). It is known that Chinese students stress all words in an utterance. A lot of students have difficulties pronouncing the words who are hard to understand, and misplacing syllable stress is the consequence of it (Ibid. :143). During her presentation, the student inclined to stress the second or the last syllable of the words "another", "problem" and "associated", while they all have primary stress (Appendix 1, lines 1, 13 and 15). In /əˈnʌðə/, the student puts the stress on the third syllable, instead of the

first one. For /ˈprɒbləm/, the stress always falls on the first syllable, while the student puts it on the last one. On the other hand, in /əˈsəʊʃɪeɪtɪd/, 2WAN puts the stress on the second syllable, while it always falls on the first one. It can be argued that stress gives "a certain basic prominence to the syllables, and hence to the words, on which it is used, and incidentally assists in avoiding monotony" (Bian 2013 :201).

4. **Fluency and pausing**

Fluency represents the spoken production of a person, and it shows the capacity to speak accurately, swiftly and without delays (Chambers 1997). Also, it refers to the speed at which a person can utter the words without hesitation. Tricia Hedge (2000) states that the term "fluency" is usually associated with language production and that it is an element of the communicative approach. Scholars note that fluency is an important component of speaking because it makes the message clear and concise. Based on the information mentioned in this paper, it can be argued that Chinese students have issues when it comes to pronunciation, which may lead to fluency miscues. 2WAN's speech rate might become slow during her speech (Appendix 4). During lines 7, 8 and 9 (Appendix 4), her speech rate gets slower because she faces difficulties pronouncing "foolish" and "death".

Pausing represents another element of speaking and it can be defined as a silent moment during someone's speech. During her presentation, the Chinese student has various non-silent pauses, which are defined by linguists as fillers (i.e. er, erm, um) or hesitations (Crystal 2008). As it can be noticed, the student uses fillers in almost every line of her presentation (Appendix 1) because she tries to find the correct words. Based on research, it can be argued that second language learners tend to pause frequently during monologues (Kang 2010). Thorough her speech, circumlocution can be noticed in lines 6 to 9 (Appendix 1), in which she explains the meaning of "Benz" in Chinese, by using short sentences and simple words. Also, in lines 12 and 15 (Ibid.) she is groping for words, while she struggles to pronounce "extremely" and "associated". It can be argued that students' speech rate is a normal one for an EFL learner. Moreover, research shows that L2 learners face longer pauses that native speaker during their speeches, not only because they are at the stage of learning, but also because they "may be influenced by the pausing pattern in their mother tongue" (Chambers 1997 :539).

5. Teaching

Pronunciation plays an important role in both teaching and learning a foreign language. Studies show teaching pronunciation may be effective if the teacher focuses on the suprasegmental aspects (Lightbrown and Spada 2010). Every qualified teacher must be aware of students' needs; also, teachers should design their lessons as student centered. Research shows that teaching pronunciation has changed through time, evolving from sound manipulation exercises to communication activities (Moghaddam et all 2012). It must be mentioned that nowadays, there are methods to teach pronunciation which teachers shouldn't use; Audiolingualism is an in ineffective behavioristic way in which pronunciation does not prevail. Another infective way to teach pronunciation may be Lingua Franca Core (LFC), which, based on research, is very complex and hard to teach (Zoghbor 2011). However, there are several effective techniques that teachers might use in order to provide effective pronunciation instructions; first of all, teachers should keep the learners engaged through communicative activities, they should focus on suprasegmental rather than segmental aspects and lastly but most importantly, teachers should provide the students enough time, materials and opportunities to practice their pronunciation skills (Bian 2013). Accordingly, it can be argued that these teaching techniques may help EFL learners to improve their phonology.

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion, based on the information mentioned above, it can be argued that the Chinese student struggles with both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. When it comes to segmental miscues, the student faces misunderstandings for both consonants and vowel, which affect her comprehensibility to one extent. Moreover, this paper has shown that the Chinese student has difficulty with suprasegmental features as well; her pitch range is mixed, and she tends to misplace syllable stress. On the other hand, when it comes to fluency and pausing, the student does not lose track of her accuracy overall even though her speech rate gets slower sometimes. Furthermore, this paper has shown that teaching pronunciation instruction is possible and that there are effective ways to implement it.

Refrecences

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Appendix 1

This appedix is a sample of the transcription and the identified prnunciacion miscues

(highlighted words) :

1. okay let us discuss about er another company

2. erm it's er Mercedes Benz

3. it's a very luxury car brand from German

4. when this luxury car family first come into China erm it seems that Chinese people don't welcome it at all

5. because er the Chinese name is called the burns instead of Benz

6. and in Chinese erm these two character burns

7. er the burn means stupid foolish or silly

8. and (the) another characters

9. the original meaning is er death

10. but in this words er this is means er er it's a (degree) adverb extremely or very

11. so these two characters combined together meaning that er er it's er very stupid er extremely foolish

12. so thinking about er if you are the consumer will you like to buy er expensive car that's telling others oh I'm the foolish I am very ex- er ver- extremely stupid

13. and so er after recognised the recognising this problem er (they) transferred the name into another word called the bun-chu also pronounced er similarly to the er to the Benz

14. the the bun means running and the chu means running fast at er flying speed

15. er what is more er these two words together er is always ass- associated with images that a sturdy steed er gallop on the grasslands

16. so er believe it or not afterwards erm the sales in China er is increasing and er the Benz has (possessed) er large (proportion) in China's luxury car

Appendix 2

This appedix shows the misspronounced words that 2WAN has said during her monologues and also, it shows the correct form of pronunciation.

Mispronounced Words	Correct pronunciation	2WAN pronunciation
1. about	əˈbaʊt	əˈbaʊt ɜː
2. Mercedes Benz	mɜːˈseɪdɪz bɛnz	ˈmʌsədɪs ˈbænts
3. luxury	ˈlʌkʃəri	lʌkʃərɪː nə
4. German	ˈdʒɜːmən	dʒəməm
5. this	ðɪs	dɪsɜːn
6. family	ˈfæmɪli	femrɪ
7. name	neɪm	nəɪːm
8. stupid	ˈstjuːpɪd	stjuːpɪ`də
9. foolish	ˈfuːlɪʃ	fʊrɪʃ
10. another	əˈnʌðə	əˈnʌtən
11. characters	ˈkærɪktəz	kærɪktəsə
12. the	ðiː	də
13. is	ɪz	ɪsə
14. death	dɛθ	desə
15. words	wɜːdz	səwɜːd
16. this	ðɪs	dəsɜː
17. degree	dɪˈgriː	dɪˈgriːn
18. extremely	ɪksˈtriːmli	ɪkstrɪːmrɪ
19. or	ɔː	ɔːn
20. very	ˈvɛri	vɑː`rɪː
21. these	ðiːz	dɪs

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22. two	tuː	tuːn
23. foolish	ˈfuːlɪʃ	ferɪʃə
24. buy	baɪ	baɪnə
25. that's	ðæts	det
26. recognised	ˈrɛkəgnaɪzd	rɛkəgnəɪs
27. recognising	ˈrɛkəgnaɪzɪŋ	rɛkəgnaɪsɪŋ
28. problem	ˈprɒbləm	prɔːˋbrəm
29. they	ðeɪ	dɪn
30. pronounced	prəˈnaʊnst	prəˈnaʊnst
31. similarly	ˈsɪmɪləli	sɪmlet
32. means	miːnz	mɪːnzɜːnə
33. speed	spiːd	spɪːdə
34. two	tuː	tuːn
35. words	wɜːdz	wɜːt
36. associated	əˈsəʊʃieɪtɪd	aæsəʊˋʃeɪtɪd
37. with	wɪð	wɪθs
38. images	ˈɪmɪdʒɪz	ɪmɪdʒə
39. a	eɪ	ən
40. sturdy	ˈstɜːdi	stɜːdɪd
41. gallop	ˈgæləp	gelɒp
42. grasslands	ˈgrɑːslændz	grɑːslændə
43. afterwards	ˈɑːftəwədz	ɑːftəwədʒ
44. sales	seɪlz	seəls
45. and	ænd	dən
46. possessed	pəˈzɛst	pəʊsɪst

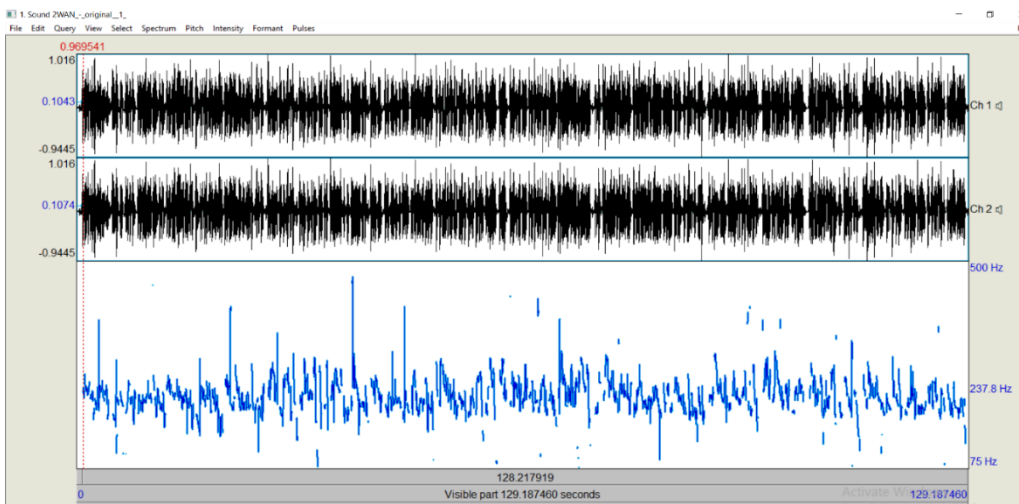|		
47. large	lɑːdʒ	lɑːdʒə
48. proportion	prəˈpɔːʃən	prɒʃɪn

Appendix 3

This appedix shows the intonation miscues and the rising and falling pitch that occures during 2WAN speech.

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3. it's a very luxury car brand from ↗**German** *(higher pitch)*

4. when this luxury car family first come into China erm it seems that Chinese people don't welcome it at **all**↘ *(lower pitch)*

11. so these two characters combined together meaning that er er it's er very **stupid**↘ *(lower pitch)*

12. so thinking about er if you are the consumer will you like to buy er expensive car that's telling others oh ↗**I**'m the foolish I am very ex- er ver- ↗**extremely** stupid *(2x higher pitch)*

14. the the bun means running and the chu means running fast at er ↗**flying** speed *(higher pitch)*

15. er what is more er these two words together er is always ass- associated with images that a ↗**sturdy** steed er gallop on the grasslands *(higher pitch)*

16. so er believe it or not afterwards erm the sales in China er is increasing and er the Benz has (possessed) er ↗**large** (proportion) in China's luxury car *(higher pitch)*

Fig. 1

This figure includes the spectrogram and the pitch range of the speech.

Appendix 4

This appedix shows the speech rate, the number of syllables and the amount of seconds spent on each part.

	Seconds	Syllabels
1. okay let us discuss about er another company	3	14
2. erm it's er Mercedes Benz	2.6	5
3. it's a very luxury car brand from German	3.8	12
4. when this luxury car family first come into China erm it seems that Chinese people don't welcome it at all	3.4	28
5. because er the Chinese name is called the burns instead of Benz	3.6	15
6. and in Chinese erm these two character burns	3	10
7. er the burn means stupid foolish or silly	4.1	15
8. and (the) another characters	3.3	8
9. the original meaning is er death	3.4	9
10. but in this words er this is means er er it's a (degree) adverb extremely or very	3	23
11. so these two characters combined together meaning that er er it's er very stupid er extremely foolish	3.4	29
12. so thinking about er if you are the consumer will you like to buy er expensive car that's telling others oh I'm the foolish I am very ex- er ver- extremely stupid	3.1	46
13. and so er after recognised the recognising this problem er (they) transferred the name into another word called the bun-chu also pronounced er similarly to the er to the Benz	3.2	24
14. the the bun means running and the chu means running fast at er flying speed	3.4	17
15. er what is more er these two words together er is always ass- associated with images that a sturdy steed er gallop on the grasslands	2.5	29
16. so er believe it or not afterwards erm the sales in China er is increasing and er the Benz has (possessed) er large (proportion) in China's luxury car	3	31