THE NEGATIVE TRANSFER OF CHINESE DIALECTS ON ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

-- CASE STUDY OF WENZHOUNESE

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-- CASE STUDY OF WENZHOUENESE

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Abstract

THE NEGATIVE TRANSFER OF CHINESE DIALECTS ON ENGLISH PROUNCIATION

-- CASE STUDY OF WENZHOUNESE

Leilei Huang

Under the Supervision of Dr. Dong Isbister

It is not easy for a foreign language learner to pronounce English like a native speaker, especially without realizing the negative transfer of their mother tongue. This paper aims to explore how Wenzhounese influences EFL learners’ English pronunciation. It first reviews a selected body of literature on negative language transfer and English education in China, English writing and pronunciation for EFL learners, and the countermeasures to deal with negative language transfer. The paper then identifies and discusses phonetic features of Wenzhounese and selects representative initials and finals to explain how the sounds influence EFL learners when they pronounce consonants and vowels in English. Pedagogical implications and limitations of the study are also discussed in this paper.
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Chapter I Introduction

3.8 million people in the southeastern part of Zhejiang Province speak Wenzhounese that is described as the most difficult dialect in China. As a representative of Southern Wu dialect, Wenzhounese has inherited different characteristics, such as its grammar and phonology, from ancient Chinese (Ma, 2016). There are at least six distinct sub-dialects in different areas of Wenzhou—such as the Ou, Fujian Manhua, Manjiang, She Hakka, Dajing and Luoyang dialects (Shen & Shen, 2006). These sub-dialects are different and may cause communication difficulties for people living in Wenzhou.

Wenzhounese in this paper refers to the dialect used in Lucheng District of Wenzhou, a port and an industrial city in Zhejiang Province. The dialect in this district is disparate in sound systems of English and Mandarin. Because of the differences in phonology, it is more likely for EFL learners from Wenzhou to speak English with identifiable accents. For instance, the nasal consonants are difficult for native speakers of Wenzhounese because of the confusion between the alveolar and the velar nasals for Wenzhounese speakers.

It is of great importance to teach English language (EFL) learners in China to pronounce every sound like a native speaker. It is unavoidable that EFL learners will be influenced by a variety of Chinese dialects, which may cause difficulties in English pronunciation. Some EFL learners speak Chinese English with phonetic errors that will cause difficulties in communication.

According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, “the language we learn as a child (mother tongue) strongly influences the ways we think and view the world” (Dai & He, 2002, p.130). For language learners, foreign language learning is organized within existing linguistic knowledge bases, such as the basic lexical items and grammatical structures of their mother tongue that have
been already mastered. Consequently, EFL learners unconsciously bring those lexical items, pronunciation, and grammatical structures of their mother tongue into the target language learning. As a result, the mother tongue undoubtedly has an effect on the learning of the target language. This phenomenon is called language transfer.

EFL learners in Wenzhou should have a basic understanding of how Wenzhounese influences their English pronunciation if they want to learn English better. This paper aims to analyze the effects of Wenzhounese on EFL learners’ English pronunciation, and propose pedagogical solutions based on the research and explore effective ways of improving their English pronunciation while they learn English.

**Statement of the Problem**

Currently, EFL learners who speak Wenzhounese have difficulties in pronouncing some English words. For example, they will pronounce /n/ instead of /ŋ/. When they speak English, they tend to confuse their audience because of their poor pronunciation.

The research problem is “How does Wenzhounese affect English pronunciation?”

**Definitions of Terms**

**EFL learners**

EFL learners are learners of English as a foreign language.

**Wenzhounese**

Wenzhounese is a Chinese dialect spoken by 3.8 million people from Wenzhou, a city in Zhejiang Province. It has a nickname of the Devil’s Language because of its unique grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Mair, 2015). It consists of six major subdialects, such as the Ou,
Fujian Manhua, Manjiang, She Hakka, Dajiang and Luoyang dialects (Shen & Shen, 2006). Wenzhounese discussed in the paper is the dialect spoken primarily by native people who live in Lucheng District, the metropolitan district of Wenzhou and it is part of the Ou subdialect.

**Language Transfer**

“Transfer” is a technical term of pedagogic psychology. It refers to the effects caused on the acquisition of new knowledge or new skills and the ability to solve problems by knowledge, skills, and the way to learn or the attitude to learn. Language transfer refers to the influence caused by the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired (Odlin, 1989). It could be either positive or negative.

**Negative Language Transfer**

In the case of similarities between target languages and the mother tongue, language transfer functions positively, which would facilitate the target language acquisition, so it is positive transfer. In the other cases, it functions negatively, which makes it difficult to learn a target language. Language learners may use the models or rules of their mother tongue in the target language learning. This would cause informal expression forms or even errors, which would then be negative transfer.

**Pedagogy**

In the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, pedagogy is defined as “teach the practice of teaching or the study of teaching methods” (Summers, 2004, p.1293).
**Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to explore how Wenzhounese affects EFL learners’ pronunciation in China. The study makes pedagogical suggestions to help with Chinese EFL learners’ pronunciation. Since EFL learners learn British English at school, English pronunciation in this paper refers to British English.

**Significance of the Study**

This paper explains the influences of Wenzhounese on English pronunciation of EFL learners in China and aims to help EFL teachers realize the importance of the effects of dialects on English education for Chinese students. This paper can also discuss pedagogical implications that will help with EFL teachers’ instructional activities and curriculum development.

**Methodology**

This seminar paper is based on library research. Scholarly sources include published journal articles, online sources and books that are relevant to dialects in China and their impacts on EFL learners’ language learning.
Chapter II Review of Literature

Some research focuses on improving EFL learners’ English pronunciation and identifying the effective countermeasures to develop EFL learners’ English-speaking competence. Many studies have been conducted on language transfer and English education in China. Speaking English is a complicated activity for EFL learners because they are more likely to mispronounce English words. They may also have difficulties in stressing the correct syllables. Scholars usually emphasize the impact of language transfer when speaking of EFL learners’ English pronunciation. This chapter reviews the literature on the language transfer and English education in China, negative transfer on English writing in the classroom and English pronunciation for EFL learners. This chapter also reviews the countermeasures to manage negative transfer for EFL learners.

Language Transfer and English Education in China

There are many definitions of “transfer” in languages. Lado (1957) defined transfer as the process by which L2 learners’ active knowledge in developing or using their interlanguage (linguistic system between L1 and L2). In recent years, the role of transfer is acknowledged and has seen to interact with a host of other factors in ways not yet fully understood. “It’s for the researchers to work towards a fuller theoretical understanding of how and when learners draw on their L1” (Ellis, 1985, p.13). An important theory dominating the study of L2 learning now is the cognitive theory. It views the process of learning a language as “skill learning” engaging in perception, memory, problem solving, information processing, etc. In the view of cognitive theory, transfer is not “interference” but a cognitive process. The cognitive theory, which views L1 transfer as one of but not exclusive factors interfere with the L2 acquisition, has replaced
CAH accounting for L2 acquisition. Transfer referred to “the influence which the learning or remembering of one thing has on the learning and remembering of another thing” (Sajavaara, 1986, p.123).

Transfer is also defined as “the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (Odlin, 1989, p. 27). Odlin also stressed that this definition is only a working definition, since there were problematic terms within the definition. Therefore, “transfer” is an umbrella term for a number of different kinds of influence from a language to another.

Gass and Selinker (2008) put “language transfer” at the top of the list of the five cognitive processes responsible for fossilization, interacting with other factors. Language transfer is now viewed as an important element in second language acquisition (SLA).

In China, some researchers have done many studies on language transfer and English education. They believed that Chinese had an impact on EFL learners’ English learning. For example, Wang (2009) did research on Chinese-English translations for the sake of finding out negative transfer in English learning. Jin, Zhou and Tao (2012) studied the evidence of negative Chinese transfer from students’ phonetics, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic errors. Shi (2015) analyzed the types of Chinese negative transfer to English learning, such as English pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, pragmatics and culture. More and more attention has been paid to language transfer and English education, especially negative language transfer.

When the mother tongue is similar to the target language (second language), the transfer could be positive. On the contrary, when there are contrasts between first language and second language, the transfer could be negative. “Negative transfer occurs when the previous
performance disrupts the performance on a second task. It can also be referred to as interference” (Ellis, 2000, p.131). Negative transfer will always make it difficult for learners to acquire information of target language, which will lead to errors in language or troubles in learning. Besides, English and Chinese belong to different sounds of system and they all have their rules of pronunciation. Negative transfer develops when some non-marked features in Chinese system of sound transfer to marked features of target language.

**Negative Transfer on English Writing for EFL Learners**

When it comes to English learning, writing is one of the most important language skills. All the formal English tests in China include a writing test, but English writing has long been a difficulty for the Chinese students due to a big difference between Chinese and English in various aspects. Since it is difficult for students to find the exact words or phrases to express their ideational meaning, it may take students more time to frame up an article. In this process, students may make some errors because of the negative transfer from their mother tongue. The following part will focus on studies of negative transfer on English writing for EFL learners.

According to the research on the students’ writing and the relative questionnaire survey, Liu (2011) presented an analysis of the negative transfer of Chinese on English writing. The study focused on English writing at the level of lexical errors, sentence structural errors and discourse errors. Guo, Liu and Chen (2014) carried out an experiment to discuss the influence of Chinese negative transfer on English writing. In this paper, they found that Chinese middle school students made common errors in English language, such as singular and plural nouns, predicate verbs, cohesion of sentences, omission or misuse of articles and time tense. The studies observed students’ grammar usage in the second language writing, such as spelling, vocabulary,
sentence structural errors and discourse errors in English writing. The conclusion is that the 
exchanging process of thinking modes and culture modes result in some errors and mistakes in 
English writing.

**Negative Transfer on English Pronunciation for EFL Learners**

There are four basic skills in English learning—listening, speaking, reading and writing. As the ultimate aim of learning a new language is to communicate with others, it is crucial for EFL learners to improve the speaking proficiency. Teachers should put more emphasis on improving EFL learners’ English pronunciation because “mispronouncing a single sound causes the listener’s misunderstanding” (Wang, 2014, p.111).

More and more researchers have noticed different dialects in China influence EFL learners’ English pronunciation. “There are many dialects in China, and different local accents will cause trouble in learning English” (Zhang & Yin, 2009, p.141). A typical example is the distinction between /æ/ with /e/ in the words as “bad” and “bed”, which is difficult for students from Yunnan Province (Zhang & Yin, 2009). Luo (2014) explored the phenomenon that different dialects cause some problems for English pronunciation. After analyzing the causes from phonology, he found that some mispronunciations were associated with some Chinese dialects and their pronunciation. He gave an example that “in some local dialect regions in Jiangxi Province, local people always pronounce /f/ for /l/ and some people in the east of Guangdong Province would pronounce /g/ for /j/” (p.1703).

Meanwhile, some Chinese researchers conducted a series of studies on specific dialects and English phonetics. Han, Yu and Zhang (2012) observed high school students’ pronunciation of English in Hebei Province. After statistical analyses, they stated that there is significant
positive transfer between Mandarin and English pronunciation. They also claimed that dialects spoken in Hebei Province led to negative transfer on English pronunciation. As the phonetic systems of Chinese dialects have initials and finals, Han, Yu and Zhang divided the typical errors caused by Chinese dialects into 2 groups: effects of initials and finals.

Based on the theory of contrast analysis and error analysis, Ma and Tan (2003) conducted a study in Sichuan to analyze the common errors in English pronunciation on the supra-segmental phonemes, such as word stress, tones and pitches. Chen (2016) explored how Enshi dialect, a typical dialect in Hubei Province, influenced EFL learners’ pronunciation of English and pointed out the phonetic association. Chen gave a typical example that “when the native show their compliment to others, they pronounce “Very good!” /ˈverɪ/ /ɡʊd/ instead of /ˈwerɪ/ /ɡod/” (p. 152). Shi and Zhang (2016) collected and summarized the influences of Anhui dialects on students through contrasts and analysis. They demonstrated the pronunciation problems caused by different dialects in Anhui Province, such as the confusion of lung vowels and short vowels, stress and liaison.

The Countermeasures to Tackle Negative Transfer for EFL Learners

As mentioned above, EFL learners in China tend to make errors when learning English because of negative transfer of their mother tongue. EFL learners should learn to manage the negative transfer of their mother tongue. How to deal with the effects of negative transfer effectively remains a problem.

Shi (2015) shared some possible strategies to cope with the effects of negative transfer. First, the most effective strategy is to compare the major differences between Chinese and English in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, pragmatics and culture. Next,
teachers can improve EFL learners’ English learning by providing basic knowledge of various language skills, such as listening, speaking and writing. Besides, EFL learners should have a better understanding of the cultural background of English. What’s more, it is of great importance for teachers to make English teaching more interesting and teach EFL learners how to learn. Guo, Liu and Chen (2014) offered similar strategies in their paper for English writing.

Knowing the importance of negative transfer in English learning is far from enough. Understanding how to improve English pronunciation teaching and learning is key for EFL learners. Han, Yu and Zhang (2012) suggested, “Mandarin can be used as a bridge to improve students’ general sense of language, which can be applied to English pronunciation” (p.229). They also pointed out that teachers should contrast the differences between English and Chinese dialects’ phonemic systems. Ma and Tan (2013) claimed that active teaching and practice of English phonetics in young Chinese EFL learners are effective ways to minimize negative phonetic transfer.

Wang (2014) shared a similar idea with Ma and Tan. She discussed a four-step process of activities for effective education of language learning-- pre-speaking, while-speaking, post-speaking and extension practice. Luo (2014) recommended some possible solutions to teach college students English pronunciation. Firstly, it is necessary to differentiate phones from phonemes by providing some knowledge of phonology. Secondly, college English teachers should be aware of that students from different provinces speak different dialects that will affect their English pronunciation. Teachers can take advantage of this knowledge of students’ dialects to predict the students’ mispronunciation when speaking English. Finally, it is an effective strategy to help EFL learners with their pronunciation correction practice.
Researchers studying language transfer argue that the knowledge of English sound systems matter greatly to EFL learners. What about some other factors? Chen (2016) put forward some suggestions in English teaching and learning. It is significant for EFL teachers to teach phonetics systematically. Meanwhile, teachers should call on students to make corrections in pronunciation in groups, or help students individually if necessary. As for EFL learners, they can keep a positive attitude towards learning English, imitate more and make more communication with others.
Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

Wenzhounese is a subdialect of the Southern Wu dialect. It refers to a group of related varieties, such as the Ou, Fujian Manhua and Manjiang, She Hakka, Dajiang and Luoyang dialects. 3.8 million people living in different parts of Wenzhou on the southeast coast of Zhejiang Province speak one of these six Wenzhounese subdialects.

Nicknamed “the Devil’s language”, Wenzhounese is the most difficult dialect in China. It has a close correlation to ancient Chinese because its geographic location isolates from outside influences, meaning that it has inherited grammar and phonology from ancient Chinese. The six subdialects also have their own distinctive linguistic features and can cause difficulties in communication. Wenzhounese in this paper refers to the dialect spoken in Lucheng District of Wenzhou.

Because English and Chinese are two different sound systems and have their own rules of pronunciation, EFL students are not familiar with how native speakers pronounce English vowel and consonant sounds. As such, they are quick to use the sounds of their mother tongue to replace those of English.

Phonetic Features of Wenzhounese

Phonetics is the study of the phonic medium of language (Dai & He, 2002). The phonetic systems of English consist of vowels and consonants. Similarly, Wenzhounese has initials and finals that are similar to consonants and vowels in English. The main phonetic characteristic of Wenzhounese is that it retains the characteristics of the ancient form of spoken Chinese that has contributed to the uniqueness of Wenzhounese. Shen and Shen(2006) pointed out that Wenzhounese has the following representative phonetic characteristics:
1. Unlike Mandarin, Wenzhounese has both voiced and voiceless initial consonants, which exist in the ancient form of spoken Chinese.

2. Wenzhounese has no retroflex, such as the Chinese phonetic alphabet /zh/ /ch/ and /sh/.

3. EFL learners who speak Wenzhounese may easily confuse the alveolar nasal with the velar nasal.

**Influence of Wenzhounese on English pronunciation**

The phonological system of Wenzhounese consists of 34 initials and 39 final sounds (Shen & Shen, 2006). Unlike Wenzhounese, English contains 24 consonants and 20 vowels. Due to the differences between English and Wenzhounese phonetic systems, Wenzhounese may have an influence on native students’ English pronunciation.

**Negative Transfer of Wenzhounese Initials on English Pronunciation**

The 35 initials in Wenzhounese correspond with the 24 consonants in English. Therefore, some English consonants such as /r/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ do not have equivalents in Wenzhounese. They play almost the same part in the phonetic system of Wenzhounese and English.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner / Place of Articulation</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximant / Alveolar</td>
<td>/r/</td>
<td>[z]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/r/ phoneme does not exist in the Wenzhounese phonetic system. As a result, students tend to replace the /r/ sound with the closest equivalent in their dialect. They are likely to
substitute /r/ for [z] in Wenzhou Wenzhounese sound systems without lifting their tongues. In this way, they often cause misunderstandings when pronouncing the words with /r/. For instance, the word *room* is pronounced as /zum/ instead of the correct /ru:m/.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner / Place of Articulation</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fricative / Dental</td>
<td>/θ/</td>
<td>[s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative / Dental</td>
<td>/ð/</td>
<td>[z]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is shown in Table 2, the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ exist in English, but are absent in Wenzhou Wenzhounese. The sounds /s/ and /z/ in Wenzhou Wenzhounese seem similar to /θ/ and /ð/. Therefore, it is not surprising that EFL learners in Wenzhou commonly mispronounce these two sounds. In their dialect, the tongue does not move the same way as it does when speaking English. They do not place the tip of the tongue between the teeth before blowing air. The failure to put the tongue between the teeth results in /θ/ sounding like [s] and /ð/ sounding like [z]. For example, many EFL learners say *thinks* as /siŋks/ instead of /θŋks/ and they substitute *their* /zeə/ for /ðeə/ when they say the word *their*.

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner / Place of Articulation</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fricative / Post-Alveolar</td>
<td>/ʃ/</td>
<td>[s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative / Post-Alveolar</td>
<td>/ʒ/</td>
<td>[j]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since Wenzhounese lacks the retroflex consonants of Mandarin Pinyin like [r] and [sh], it is very difficult for many people in Wenzhou to differentiate blade-alveolar from retroflex. [j] and [s] in Wenzhounese, which are the counterparts of [r] and [sh] in Mandarin Pinyin, vary from English /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ in accordance with the manner of articulation (/ʒ/ and /ʃ/) and the place of articulation (/ʃ/ and /s/). The initial [j] in Wenzhounese is an approximant sound that involves minimal obstruction of the airflow without friction. When pronouncing the [j] sound in Wenzhounese, the air and vibrations flow through the roof of the mouth while the tongue is raised to the soft palate. Conversely, the consonant /ʒ/ in English is a voiced fricative consonant that is pronounced by partial obstructed airstream. The air flows from the side teeth with the top and bottom rows of teeth gently pressing against each other. In terms of /ʃ/ in English and [s] in Wenzhounese, the positions of the tongues are not the same. When pronouncing [s], the tongue is flat. The tone of /ʃ/ in English, however, almost touches the roof of the mouth.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner / Place of Articulation</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affricate / Post-Alveolar</td>
<td>/tʃ/</td>
<td>[teʰ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricate / Post-Alveolar</td>
<td>/dʒ/</td>
<td>[te]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of EFL learners in Wenzhou experience problems associated with English pronunciation of the voiceless sound /tʃ/ and the voiced sound /dʒ/. When pronouncing these two consonants /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ in English, the mouth takes the same shape. Likewise, native speakers’ mouths take on the same shape in the pronunciation of the two initial consonants [teʰ] and [te] in
Wenzhounese. EFL learners tend to pronounce /tʃ/ as [teʰ] and pronounce /dʒ/ as [te].  [teʰ] and [te] in Wenzhounese are formed by putting the tip of the tongue behind the lower front teeth and the blade of the tongue behind the alveolar ridge. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ in English, however, are articulated by raising the blade of the tongue towards the hard palate.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner / Place of Articulation</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nasal / Velar</td>
<td>/ŋ/</td>
<td>/ŋ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal / Alveolar</td>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>/n/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alveolar nasal consonant /n/ and the velar nasal consonant /ŋ/ in English have proven to be difficult for many EFL learners in Wenzhou. These nasal sounds [n] and [ŋ] in Wenzhounese are an alveolo-palatal nasal sound and a velar nasal sound respectively. The mispronunciation of /n/ and /ŋ/ in English is the effects of the confusion between the alveolar nasal and the velar nasal. These four nasals are pronounced with different positions of the tongue (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The positions of the tongue
All these consonants mentioned above in English phonetic systems lack equivalent sounds in Wenzhounese. EFL learners confuse these consonants with some initials in Wenzhounese, which brings negative transfer to native EFL learners’ English learning.

**Negative Transfer of Wenzhounese Finals on English Pronunciation**

Wenzhounese vowels have no long and short sound. EFL learners in Wenzhou can understand the disparity between long vowels and short vowels, but they cannot pronounce them accurately. Since short vowels do not have equivalents in Wenzhounese, it is easy for EFL learners to confuse short vowels with long vowels. For instance, they may replace the word *pull* /pul/ with the word *pool* /puːl/.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tongue Height / Part of Tongue Used</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Wenzhounese (error in English pronunciation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low / Front</td>
<td>/æ/</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vowel /æ/ in English do not exist in Wenzhounese. Since the [ɛ] in Wenzhounese vowels is similar to the /ɛ/ in English, students often make mistakes in the pronunciation of the words with the vowel /æ/. For instance, the word *sad* is easily mispronounced as the word *said*. Meanwhile, many words in English with the two sounds of /æ/ and /ɛ/, but EFL learners speaking Wenzhounese are in the risk of being misunderstood if they fail to master these two sounds. The key to saying the sounds correctly is how wide a speaker’s mouth is open. For [ɛ] in Wenzhounese and /ɛ/ in English, the lips are slightly open and mostly relaxed. When
pronouncing /æ/, however, EFL learners need to open the mouth much more than with [ɛ]. The lips are a little bit tighter for /æ/.

EFL learners are likely to imitate the English pronunciation according to their dialects, so mispronunciations inevitably occur (Chen, 2016). If EFL learners in Wenzhou do not realize the negative transfer of Wenzhounese on English pronunciation, they will easily confuse with the subtle distinctions between vowels in English and finals in Wenzhounese.

**Pedagogical implications**

As is shown in above-mentioned tables and Figure 1, the negative transfer of Wenzhounese initials and finals on English pronunciation in English learning will seriously influence EFL learners’ English communication skills. Although many EFL learners in Wenzhou have become more aware of the importance of English pronunciation, they did not realize the negative transfer of Wenzhounese. In order to help teachers and EFL learners in Wenzhou avoid negative transfer of Wenzhounese, activities and methods of effective teaching and learning are recommended.

Before teaching English phonemes, teachers should compare English and Wenzhounese pronunciation carefully and study the vocal apparatus to make sure they are aware of how the tongue should be positioned in the mouth. Teachers should analyze how students’ mother tongue may cause challenges in English pronunciation. A phonetics class comparing English pronunciation with Wenzhounese help EFL learners in Wenzhou realize the effects of negative transfer. When teachers teach phonemes, they could increase students’ interest in English pronunciation by showing specific errors in English pronunciation. Teachers also could contrast sounds in English and Wenzhounese using figures of tongue positions and mouth shapes.
Appropriate teaching aids and some relevant videos can make phonetics learning more interesting.

To make the phonetics teaching effective, teachers need to provide different kinds of activities by using games, songs and chants. For instance, since the native speakers habitually mispronounce \([n]\) in Wenzhounese as /n/ in English, it is better to compare the tongue positions of the sounds both in English and Wenzhounese by using teaching aids or figures. Then teachers can ask students to find the correct sound in a game. After English classes, teachers can create opportunities for English immersion education by setting up a summer camp with foreign teachers that offers a happy and relaxed learning environment.

In order for EFL learners to pronounce English better, they should make efforts to avoid negative transfer. In fact, the similarities in the structures between their mother tongue and a foreign language can speed up learners’ acquisition of that foreign language’s structures. With the aim of improving and changing Chinese English, EFL learners in Wenzhou should understand the influence of their mother tongue. They can first observe how native English speakers pronounce some sounds in the original audio recordings, then imitate their pronunciation, and do more practice. Students majoring in English education should be aware of negative transfer and identify more and more instances of negative transfer of Wenzhounese on English.

**Limitations**

During the process of writing this paper, I have discovered that there is little research on Wenzhounese and English pronunciation, so what I could conclude here is relatively limited.
This paper is a preliminary study, which means the list of initials and finals in Wenzhounese explained in the paper is not exhaustive. It is possible that more sounds in Wenzhounese have negative transfer on English pronunciation. The sounds identified in this paper also need to be further validated through a series of carefully designed research: 1) more in-depth library-based research; 2) fieldwork with human subjects involved; and 3) comparative analyses to determine if other southeastern dialects have the same or similar initials and finals that may cause similar negative language transfer on English pronunciation.
References


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