

Project: Cantonese English Accent Reduction and Native-like Accent Enhancement Characterization and Training for Primary School Students and English Teachers

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Abstract:

Scientific characterization (perceptual and acoustic) of 25 local primary school English teachers' accent (mispronunciation and deviations in pronunciation and prosody) of Hong Kong Cantonese English (henceforth HKCE) based on real-time recording of their lessons was conducted to analyse their errors and deviations in terms of rigorous phonetics and speech physics, which was found to be predominantly cantonized. New frameworks and mechanism of production of speech sound distortion were introduced, and extensive contrastive studies of English and Cantonese phonology and phonetics were carried out, to account for potential word merging and unintelligibility to native ears. Their needs of training were identified and prioritized. An innovative scheme of clinical training categories were developed with a new focus on quantitative parameters of speech physics instead of the qualitative segmental parameters of traditional descriptive phonetics.

Based on the new emphasis and order of the speech categories, pilot tailor-made one-to-one accent reduction therapy sessions were conducted for the participants by a native-like trainer with reference to the categorized errors of their lesson speech. Post-training lesson was recorded and analysed to evaluate their progress. In general, it is feasible to train teachers to reduce their mispronunciations and accent distortions. Feedback was very positive. Teachers unanimously expressed their great need of being trained systematically in the greater number of hours. Thus, we are striving to develop a full-fledged foreign accent reduction therapy programme tailor-made for teachers and students' HKCE, and to be the first laboratory in the world to extend first language therapy to second-language accent therapy.

Keywords:

Mispronunciation; accent deviations; speech distortion; Hong Kong Cantonese English(HKCE) accent; cantonization; tonalization; accent characterization; accent reduction; native-like accent; accent enhancement; physics; phonetics; phonics; English pronunciation; quantitative and qualitative parameters; partial distortion; two-way distortion; twofold distortion