

Chengxu Lin

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*“Command of English, spoken or written, ranks at the top in business. Our main product is words, so knowledge of their meaning and spelling and pronunciation is imperative. If a man knows the language well, he can find out about all else”- William Feather.*

### Pronunciation problems as a hindrance to effective communication among Chinese Students

With the English language acquiring a more significant role as a recognized international language, it is of great importance that foreign students invest time, and effort in upgrading their eloquence and comprehensibility in intercultural communications. According to varied research, it is not debatable that students with fluent pronunciation and efficient English communication skills tend to have a higher competitive advantage in the globalized worlds. According to (Kelly, 2013), “pronunciation is a vital element in effective communication.” However, the education curriculum today, pays more attention to all other aspects of communication at the expense of pronunciation learning. A number of research studies and expert sources have established that pronunciation has a direct effect on propagating or degrading communication. Naturally, all people cannot speak the same way; however, the past decades have seen a growing in preference for English learning as it is regarded as an international lingua-franca. Today, more Chinese students are under the pressure to learn the English language and to polish on its pronunciation, such is to illustrate that pronunciation is a problem that potentially bars the effectiveness of the communication process. Incorrect pronunciation of American English by Chinese college

students from Columbia University and St. Johns University has been largely blamed for interfering with optimal communication and success due to the wrong articulation of words that make the communication process ineffective.

*“It may be a silly way, but if you remember that an owl looks like  $\Lambda(OO)\Lambda$ , it will perhaps help you remember that it is pronounced with something close to 'loo'.” – Jakub Marian, *Improve your English pronunciation and learn over 500 commonly mispronounced words**

### The importance of proper pronunciation patterns

In today's society English language plays a vital role in many areas of the economy, political, commercial, diplomatic and cultural arenas. Due to this wide spread of English in virtually all countries in the world, scholars argue that the language no longer represents that societies of native speakers only, and neither can they claim to own the language exclusively. According to Jenkins (2007); McKay (2002), and Kirkpatrick (2007), English is considered as an international lingua franca and is utilized by both native speakers and non- native in intercultural communications (Burri, 2015). This, therefore, means that there are different accents of the language from different speakers around the globe. Consequently, there arises situations where Chinese students from Columbia and St. John universities feel inclined to sound or speak like the native American English speakers but they cannot due to their the effect of their first language accents. Jenkins (2007), however, points out those Chinese students in New York universities should be comfortable relating to their native language accent when speaking English, since pronunciation takes quite some time to clear. However, most of the Chinese students complain that the high length of time it takes to get the right American English

pronunciation completely impairs their communication with other white students especially in college.

In the present world, English is considered a global communicative language. Similarly, in most parts of the world, where English is not the first language such as in China, Bangladesh, India among others, there is a growing emphasis for learning the English language. More countries want its citizens to be efficient in English speaking so as to develop the people's communicative competence on the global front (Baker, 2014). Hence, some of the basic skills being impacted on the people include; reading, writing, speaking and listening of the English language. However, pronunciation is hardly given enough attention yet it is the most difficult part in the English language (Monroe, 2015). Although, more countries are introducing the teaching and learning of English at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, pronunciation seems to be a growing problem among foreign students (Jenkins, 2007). This has been attributed to the fact that most of these students lack neutral grounds to practice their English skills and to sharpen their pronunciation skills; as a result it becomes difficult to speak English efficiently in future. Such is evidenced by the fact that more Chinese students struggle with proficiency in pronunciation at the college level, especially those in Columbia and St. John universities, despite having being exposed to English at earlier levels. As a result, this indicates that there is a problem, in the mechanism used in the teaching and learning of the English language, since more Chinese students have not yet mastered the right pronunciation patterns despite their long exposure to the English language (Rubin, 2012).

Numerous evidence points out that pronunciation is a major problem in the communication process. According to statistics poor pronunciation makes most Chinese students shy away from participating in class, limits one's opportunities in the U.S., hinders efficient

interpersonal relationships and makes most Chinese students feel intimidated by the white students. Such is to illustrate that pronunciation is a major problem especially among the Chinese students taking their studies in the U.S. and thus it needs to be redressed to ensure that the communication process is not broken down (Burri, 2015). According to Derwing and Monro (2015), Chinese students in most New York Universities, have a harder time fitting into the American education system especially since their pronunciation varies greatly from that of American students. However, the problem can be averted by offering of pronunciation lessons early in life; this may start from simple lessons such as learning minimal pairs, to more impactful lessons such as offering public speaking lessons to correct the students where they go wrong (Cruttenden, 2015). However, there has been a significant reluctantness among most facilitators who feel that pronunciation cannot be reversed since it is an innate issue and that trying to twist pronunciation in favor of a particular language means rubbing off one's culture.

*"If you don't know how to pronounce a word, say it loud!" (William Strunk). Why compound ignorance with inaudibility?" — E.B. White, The Elements of Style*

#### Pronunciation Patterns among Chinese Students

Chinese students have long realized that they have problems with learning of spoken English. Research shows that language distance is often a factor for most students striving to learn a second language. As such the common pronunciation problems among Chinese students are often brought about by the dissimilar in structure between the two languages. When it comes to pronunciation, the biggest difference is that Chinese is a tonal language whereas English is not (Kirkpatrick, 2007). This means that the different dialects of Chinese command use of tones to differentiate diverse words with first tones whereas the English language does not use tones to differentiate words from one another. As opposed to Chinese, English uses intonations (pitch

patterns in sentences) for different types of grammar and for the expression of diverse types of feelings hence bringing out the difference in pronunciation in the two languages. Due to the fact that almost every syllable in Chinese has a distinct tone while English does not, Chinese speakers' intonation in most cases goes up and down inappropriately when speaking in English (Cruttenden, 2015). As a result, Chinese students are hardly understood by the English students. Worse still since most Chinese students are often unaware of what feelings come out when conveying in English, they may unintentionally sound excited, bored, or abrupt to English speaking students (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Furthermore, Chinese students often have trouble understanding what feelings are being passed across by the English speaking students because of the manner in which they speak. Beyond this problem, Chinese students also have problems pronouncing certain sounds for example sound /l/ at the end of a syllable position, as such words like 'will' 'feel' or 'pill' often end up being pronounced as 'wiw' 'feew' and 'piw'" (Cruttenden, 2015).

When learning a new language, most people often tend to focus on grammar and vocabulary yet the real icing on the cake is usually on the pronunciation. As a matter of fact, most Chinese learners tend to excel in reading of the English language, however, when it comes to speaking wrong pronunciation is almost inevitable (Kanellou, 2011). In most cases, no matter how fluent, the Chinese students may be in reading, hearing of mispronounced words, incorrect stressing and use of heavy accents is a common feature when speaking in English. Although, there is nothing wrong in speaking with a certain accent, it often affects the audience, who may strain trying to understand what is being passed across (Kanellou, 2011). Such is to illustrate that poor pronunciation patterns often raise red flags in most cases as miscommunication takes place. In most cases, when learning a second language, our pronunciation tends to be affected by our

mother tongue. This is to mean that the closer the target language is to the mother tongue, in regards to grammar, lexical composition and culture, the better one is able to speak the second learnt language (Hasan, 2010). Unfortunately, Chinese native speakers, tend to have more struggles learning the English language, because of the great distant between the two languages and the fact that the two languages share little in common, especially when it comes to pronunciation patterns. As such a number of authors reinforce the fact that incorrect pronunciation of American English by Chinese students often hampers the efficiency of the communication process.

According to Milos Milosevic, a Chinese teacher, with a background in the English language, pronunciation problems among most Chinese students are often because of the different grammatical wiring of the two languages (Wang & Koda, 2005). The same was evidenced at Columbia and St. John University where the Chinese students struggled with seven common pronunciation errors that hindered their efficient learning of the English language (Shag, Chin, & Chan, 2015).

#### Common Pronunciation Errors for Chinese Students

##### a) Pronunciation Error #1: d, t, s, and k

This is a common pronunciation problem among most Chinese students. Chinese students naturally, stress the last sounds of the words and in addition produce an extra syllable. For example the word “and” for them becomes “an-deu” in such a case; the solution would be to teach the Chinese students to drop the end syllables that alter with the pronunciation pattern.

Other words in this category include; don't/yes/McDonald's/ bread and Scotland (Shag, Chin, & Chan, 2015)

b) Pronunciation Error #2: th

The second pronunciation problem for most Chinese students is proper pronunciation of the sound /th/. Naturally, the pronunciation of /th/ involves biting the tongue, however, this technique does not exist in the Chinese language. Therefore, most Chinese students end up replacing the /th/ sound with the sound /s/. Letter/ th/ is a fundamental sound in the English language, as most English words are often preceded by the sound, thus wrongly pronouncing it often makes it easier for one to be misunderstood by the audience. Hence the solution to this problem, would be to train Chinese speakers to place their tongue between their upper and lower teeth and in turn blow out air between the created gap in the upper teeth and tongue. Some of the words in this category include; the/those/throne/mouth/south/ broth among others (Wang & Koda, 2005).

Pronunciation Error #3: on/un

In most cases, Chinese students add an extra /g/ to the end of words with letter /d/, as such it really becomes a problem, getting what they may be trying to pass across. For instance in words like, Monday, where they end up pronouncing them as 'Mongday' , London as 'Longdon' and wonder as 'wongder.' This pronunciation pattern is especially dominant among those from Northern China as opposed to the other parts. However, the error can be solved by emphasizing that the /on/ sound is not a nasal sound and hence the sound does not come from the throat but rather from the tongue's tip once it touches the back part of the teeth. Affected

words in this category include; Monday, London, wonder, under and thunder (Shag, Chin, & Chan, 2015).

#### Pronunciation Error #4: i

Another common pronunciation error among Chinese students is the changing of sound /i/ to /ee/. For instance, instead of pronouncing the word 'fish' they pronounce it as 'feesh' and bin as 'been.' Although this may seem like a minor pronunciation error, it often impairs the communication process. As such, the solution would be for facilitators to emphasize that the sound/i/ is such a short sound that should be allowed to last for about a second or less. Some of the affected words in this category include; in, bin, sin, delicious, cripple, chip, lisp and crispy (Ho, 2013).

#### Pronunciation Error #5 : /r/

Pronunciation of the sound/r/ is another difficult combination for most Chinese learners. Most Chinese students find it hard pronouncing both sounds simultaneously, and hence they tend to do away with one of the sounds. For instance, the word, 'world' often becomes 'weuld' and whirl becomes 'weul.' This wrong pronunciation often impairs the communication process in most cases. Hence, the solution to this error would be to teach Chinese students to separate the sounds /r/ and /l/. For example a word like world should be split into 'were' and 'ld' thereby combining both words into one by touching the tongue on the soft palette and back to the upper teeth. Common words in this category include; earl, curl, whirl, world and pearl (Shag, Chin, & Chan, 2015).

#### Pronunciation Error #6 : /o/



The sound /o/ is another major problematic letter for most Chinese students, where they tend to change the short /o/ into a long /0/. As such instead words like offer tend to be pronounced as ‘o-fer’ and honor as ‘o-ner.’ This twist in the pronunciation patterns largely interferes with the correct communication process. However, the solution would be to pronounce the sound /o/ as /au/ when speaking in English, like the word, Australia. Some of the words in this category include; offer, block, sock, bottle and Honda (Ho, 2013).

#### Pronunciation Error #7 : /ed/

Pronunciation of the sound /ed/ is another problem among most Chinese students. In English, /ed/ can be pronounced in two ways; hence it can be confusing on which way to use when pronouncing it. As such sounds like these become twice as hard for Chinese students to pronounce. To determine which way to pronounce words best, Chinese students need to differentiate between words that do not end in /ed/, and those that end in /ed/ in their natural state. For the words that naturally end in ed, their pronunciation of the sound is rather silent, like webbed, swished, graphed, fanned and bagged. On the other hand, sounds with an added /ed/ tend to be stressed more like, graded, sedated, meditated, credited and padded (Shag, Chin, & Chan, 2015).

#### Counterclaims on correct pronunciation patterns

Evidently from the above illustration it is not debatable that the difference in pronunciation patterns results in diverse communication problems. Hence, this is to show that pronunciation patterns take a central position in the communication process. However, there have been diverse reactions surrounding the topic on pronunciation, with some experts arguing that what matters most when it comes to communication is message delivery and not

pronunciation. According to Baker (2014), the Chinese have been in the U.S. for centuries now, and their pronunciation has never changed yet they still manage to co-exist well with the Americans. Hence, the communication process should not be inclined towards pronunciation patterns but rather on message delivery, which is the main basis of any communication process. Barman, further points out that Communication is all about passing of different messages in a manner that is understandable by both parties, for this reason, pronunciation does not play a significant role in the communication process as it does not distort messages. As a matter of fact, pronunciations take a longer time to correct since they are embedded into one's genetic disposition. Therefore, communication is the bigger picture and not pronunciation (Barman, 2009). However, although message delivery matters most, wrong articulation, intonation and stress on different words may result in distortion of information as opposed to efficient communication (Cruttenden, 2015). This has been evidenced in different scenarios and especially in colleges where different cultures converge, especially in New York universities where Chinese students have put forth concerns that pronunciation problems really interferes with their communication process. Thus, I am strongly convinced that the right pronunciation patterns enhance efficient communication.

Moreover, a number of experts point out that correction of the pronunciation means rubbing off one's culture and therefore, pronunciation should be left as it is despite learning of subsequent languages. Culture is something very important, and language as well as pronunciation patterns are important in identifying one to a particular language (Hassan, 2013). Therefore, pronunciation does not need to be corrected as it is an indication of one's roots and their communication patterns (Hassan, 2013). In my opinion, the whole essence of language learning is to learn how to efficiently read, write and speak a different language. Therefore,

having pronunciation problems only shows that one has not fully met the learning requirements since certain aspects are lacking. Right pronunciation therefore, does not necessarily indicate a loss of culture but rather that one has a good command of the learnt language (Gooch, Kazuya, & Roy, 2015). For the Chinese students in New York Universities, they take so much pride in their Chinese culture, while at the same time feel that a great command of the English is not demeaning to their culture but rather it places them at a better competition level internationally with other similar students from different parts of the world who are all bound by the English language.

Besides, certain scholars argue that pronunciation is innate and that pronunciation lessons are simply a waste of time. For years now, facilitators have not fully embraced the idea on teaching pronunciation as a valid lesson. Such is because most scholars argue that altering pronunciation takes a significantly longer time and it is generally more tasking when compared to the other teaching methods (Kanellou, 2011). In addition, most foreign students tend to take longer periods of time, before their pronunciation is polished hence reinforcing the point that pronunciation is innate and that pronunciation lessons are a waste of time (Derwing & Monro, 2015). Well, although such may be valid, there have been instances, of successful learning of pronunciation among most Chinese students in the United States. In my opinion, learning of English needs to be introduced at a younger age, as it becomes easier for younger students to learn new pronunciation patterns as opposed to teaching pronunciation lessons to mature and older students who find it harder altering their original pronunciation patterns (Gooch, Kazuya, & Roy, 2015). According to the responses from the Chinese students, proper pronunciation of American English only becomes a problem, when the pronunciation lessons are introduced late

in life. If the lessons would be incorporated early in elementary then by the time they reach the college level, the problems with pronunciation would be long cleared.

*In Malay, there are pronunciations that are similar to Chinese – Andy Lau*

#### The value of correct pronunciation

As a matter of fact the value of correct pronunciation is simply unmatched; a good command of pronunciation patterns shows a good command of knowledge and intelligence, as well as aids the education process as it makes communication easier. Despite the varying ideologies surrounding the topic on pronunciation as a problem, it is not debatable that students with pronunciation problems feel less disadvantaged. In many instances, Chinese students struggling to get the right pronunciations tend to shy away from participating in active school activities in fear of being looked down upon as well as fear of being misunderstood (Pennington, 2014). Although facilitators tend to shy away from the topic on pronunciation, Chinese students have shown an interest in learning the right pronunciation patterns to have an easier time communicating with other students as well as to look for opportunities in the United States (Kanellou, 2011). What's more most employment agencies tend to turn down graduate Chinese students with pronunciation problems in fear that they will distort messages, such is to illustrate that pronunciation is a big communication barrier and it limits most foreign students struggling with it. With English talking stage as the world's lingua-franca, more people are interested in getting the right pronunciations; therefore more emphasis needs to be given to the pronunciation patterns even more (Hasan, 2010).

According to the responses from some of the Chinese students in Columbia and St. Johns University, pronunciation goes a long way to harbor they everyday interactions as well as their future endeavors. 95% of the Chinese students pointed out issues with pronunciation have

hindered their interactions with American students making them feel secure interacting with their fellow foreign students (Derwing, 2015). Much worse, some of the other American students tend to ridicule them for their wrong articulation of particular words. This has in most cases hindered their interactions and made them shy away from participating in some of the school's activities such as debating (Cruttenden, 2014). The other 5% of the Chinese student's correspondent pointed out that the problem of pronunciation is felt more when it comes to the job market as employers prioritize offering employment to American students. Such shows that pronunciation requires more attention and foreign students need to be accepted and nurtured until they can pronounce some of the English terms, words and even sentences well.

*We manipulated it a little bit for pronunciation purposes-* Nolan Lawing

Why do Chinese students pronounce these sounds wrongly?

Naturally, it is difficult for Chinese speakers, to correctly pronounce English words, especially because of how teaching of languages is done in schools. What's more, most Chinese speakers often treat most English words as a corrupted form of the Chinese pinyin, because of the habitual passage of wrong pronunciation patterns from the teachers to the students (Wang & Koda, 2005). As such these makes them treat English sounds as Chinese pinyin sounds yet the two are completely different. As such Chinese students need to imitate native English speakers so that they can get a better sense of how to correctly pronounce diverse words. There is a growing need for more Chinese people to speak English, and even the Chinese government is emphasizing that its people need to master English speaking (Wang & Koda, 2005). Such is to illustrate the extent to which English has grown over the years and the international status it enjoys today. However, the American accent has been

known to be one of the hardest foreign language accents, as such Chinese students could try out British accents which is way easier to learn, understand and has an easier accent.

*“We manipulated it a little bit for pronunciation purposes”- Nolan Lawling*

## Field work and Interviews

### Pronunciation Problems among Chinese Students

To test the thesis, interviews were conducted on 47 Chinese students from Columbia and St. Johns University. All the interviewees had a problem in the pronunciation of some vowel sounds and diphthongs which are not found in their native language. For instance, 20 of the students found it difficult pronouncing the sounds, /l/ and /th/ whereas the remaining 27 still struggled with pronouncing of the sounds /d/, /t/ and/v/ depending on which sounds were not present in their mother tongue. Another problem that was challenging among the Chinese interviewees is the fact that English emphasizes on word stress while Chinese does not. Native English speakers, emphasis on the use of word stress all the time, therefore, even is one does not understand the spoken words clearly; the position of word stress makes it easier to pass across the message efficiently (Cruttenden, 2014). However, Chinese as a language does not have similar word stress, as such most of the students tend to speak English the same way they speak their native language, pronouncing all the syllables with equal emphasis thus making it harder for the English speakers to clearly understand what is being passed across (Kang, 2010). The Chinese students interviewed from Columbia University had devised a way of dealing with their pronunciations through speaking slowly and clearly, they are especially cautious with the

pronunciation of the words with sounds /v/ and /th/ as this is where the problem is most dominant.

Furthermore, 35 of students among the 47 interviewees spoke with some accent acquired from their native tongue. The accent among the students was as a result of the long exposure to their mother tongue and English only coming in as a second language. From the interviews as well interactions with the Chinese students at St. Johns University and at Columbia University, it was evident that mastering the sound system of a second language presents difficulties for most Chinese students. Such is because; the first language has a greater influence on the learners mastering the sound system of a second language. As such, evidently, those learning a second language, their accents tend to give hints of their location of origin as it cannot be separated from their accents. This is to illustrate that the first language interference is so powerful, that the effects spill over to the second language. According to 20 of the interviewees, they claimed that the accent problems solely lie in the phonological system, since that of English and Chinese is so distant a part. In addition, the places and manners of articulation of the two languages is completely different, some of the English phonemes do not have Chinese equivalents and are equally hard to learn while others resemble L1 phonemes but are not identical to them in pronunciation, hence bringing about the pronunciation problems among Chinese students.

*“Pronunciation has made many an innocent word sound like a doctor’s orders for stomach pump”- Zelda Fitzgerald*

#### Chinese attitudes towards learning pronunciation

It is often believed that better learning of pronunciation often takes when students develop positive attitudes towards both the task as well as the method used to enhance good

pronunciation patterns (Cruttenden, 2014). According to the results from the questionnaire, carried out on the students, 90% of all the Chinese students from both universities registered a strong desire to improve their pronunciation patterns. However, despite the fact that virtually all the students are interested in improving their pronunciation patterns only about 32% of all the participants spent quality time practicing the right pronunciation patterns, with only another 10% setting at least 10 minutes per week for pronunciation practice. Another 65% of the participants were confident on learning the right pronunciation patterns, while more than half of all the respondents expressed the belief that they can come close to the native English speakers once they do their best in pronunciation lessons. However, 16% of the students did not think that they would do their best due to the high influence of their mother tongue. Moreover, in regards to the feelings about their incorrect pronunciation patterns, 79% of the students claimed to be unhappy in instances where they could not pronounce correctly, while only 2% did not care about their pronunciation patterns. From the teachers teaching the pronunciation lessons, they claimed that most of the students responded positively in the English lessons and the students were in turn glad that the teachers pointed out their pronunciation mistakes.

*What is the difference between a lawyer and a liar? – The Pronunciation !- Aashya*

#### Activities beneficial to improving pronunciation

From the questionnaires given to the students they pointed out that diverse activities helped improve their pronunciation patterns. From the results 64% of the students, claimed that reading out loud, after the recorded English material helped improve their pronunciation patterns. Another 74% of the students claimed that reading out loud after their teachers also helped to improve their pronunciation while only 26% claimed that reading out loud helped but not to a



large extent. The second activity that received a lot of attention from the students shows that watching English programs and singing English songs also really helps in improving pronunciation patterns. However, reading out loud on recorded English materials by native English speakers, was identified as the most helpful activity that produced significant positive results. On enquiry whether the use of mini-pair exercises helps to improve pronunciation, 73% of the students thought it greatly helped, 82% found it to be helpful but sustainable while 49% did not think it helped at all to improve pronunciations. Lastly, on enquiry on how much reading helps pronunciation, all the students had varying opinions. 24% of the students preferred 'reading phonetic symbols aloud', 28% preferred 'reading sentences aloud', 18% preferred 'reading the whole passage' and 6% preferred 'reading words/phrases aloud.' From the results it is evident that most of the students don't think that it is very helpful to only read words/phrases/phonetic symbols aloud to improve pronunciation but rather to incorporate them with other styles that capitalize on pronunciation (Cruttenden, 2014).

*Pronunciation has made many an innocent word sound like a doctor's orders for a stomach pump-Zelda Fitzgerald*

### Pronunciation problems among Chinese Students

The field work and interviews conducted on the Chinese students from Columbia University and St. Johns University established that the Chinese students in the respective universities really did have problems with pronunciation. Notably most of the students struggled with pronunciation of specific sounds such as d/, /t/, /th/ and/v/, this was mainly attributed to the fact that there exists some vowel sounds and diphthongs which are not found in their native language. Another notable problem that was challenging among the Chinese interviewees is the fact that English

emphasizes on word stress while Chinese does not. Native English speakers, emphasis on the use of word stress all the time, therefore, even is one does not understand the spoken words clearly; the position of word stress makes it easier to pass across the message efficiently (Cruttenden, 2014). However, Chinese as a language does not have similar word stress, as such most of the students tend to speak English the same way they speak their native language, pronouncing all the syllables with equal emphasis thus making it harder for the English speakers to clearly understand what is being passed across (Burri, 2015). For this reason redressing the problem and finding viable solutions to the Chinese pronunciation problems is paramount so as to foster efficient communication patterns.

*To correct an Englishman's pronunciation is to imply that he is not quite a gentleman-* George

Bernard Shaw

#### Proposed solutions by the students to curb pronunciation problems

In response to the question, “What do you usually do to improve your pronunciation?” the answers from the students varied greatly. Most of the students pointed out that they improve their pronunciation through listening and speaking. They often listen to English songs, native speakers talking, singing English songs, watching English TV programs and seeing English movies. From the results many students expected that their facilitators should have standard pronunciation patterns, give the students more opportunities to practice English speaking, get the students to speak to one another in English in class and hope that the facilitators points out difficulty in pronunciation and corrects their mistakes. Quite a number of the students thought that having situational dialogues and giving English speeches helped them improve their pronunciation , and some students expressed their wish to learn to read phonetic symbols and features of stress,

rhythm, intonation among others. Some students believed that listening to the English test is equally helpful. Some students hoped that their facilitators could teach them pronouncing technique and special points such as features of stress, rhythm, intonation, linking syllables, ellipsis, among others.

From the responses of the students, it is evident that they desire to improve their pronunciation patterns and they hope that their facilitators could help them achieve the best results. Going by the fact that they have already devised ways that they think work best in favor for them shows that they are ready to adopt new strategies that could help them overcome the problem.

*I think my style as far as vocal delivery and even down to the pronunciation of certain words is so deliberate-* Miguel

#### Suggestions and Solutions to help overcome pronunciation problems

The result from the survey shows that Chinese students have some problems in learning pronunciation due to the fact that their first language interferes with correct English pronunciation. They have difficulty pronouncing certain words and phonetic symbols that do not exist in their mother-tongues. Many students wish to have a good mastery of pronunciation, this corresponds main subject matter of this research, that is, “mastery of the sounds and pronunciation of the target language is a high priority for most non-native speaker learners” (Gimson & Croterdan, 2001). The learners expect facilitators to correct their mistakes. Based on the findings of the research, below are some of the suggestions that could be adopted to enhance efficient command of correct pronunciation patterns and the level of efficiency the

solutions displayed on the interviewed Chinese students from Columbia and St. Johns University.

- a) Raising the learner's awareness of English pronunciation with related knowledge. If learners acquire phonetic and phonological awareness of English, they will know how to monitor their speech or employ other met- cognitive strategies. At the beginning of the student's learning, the facilitators may give clear and concise explanations and descriptions of pronunciation phenomena so that the students know the difference between their native mother tongue and the foreign language they are learning (Hasan, 2013). This can raise the learners awareness of English pronunciation and encourage them to produce English that is clearer and more comprehensible. When the learners have difficulties pronouncing certain sounds, the facilitators can treat the sounds specifically and point out the difference between English sounds and the similar sounds in L1 so that the learners are aware of the differences and pay special attention to them when pronouncing the English sounds.

### Application

Most of the students from Columbia and St. Johns University, pointed out their pronunciation problems arose from the fact that they were not aware of the pronunciation phenomena between English and Chinese. Nonetheless, concise explanations and descriptions of the differences in the pronunciation patterns in the two languages went a long way in producing positive results as it was easier for the students to pay attention to the different sounds and how they varied in the two languages.

- a) Some elements for pronunciation fluency cannot be ignored. “It is difficult to master phonological aspects of a language without some form of repetitive drilling” (Li, 2010). The students need to practice step— by— step elements such as linking , reduction, word and sentence stress, intonation, ellipsis, consonant replacements and inflectional endings. Minimal pair practice for both consonants and vowels could also be included in the pronunciation teaching, especially at an early stage of learning pronunciation, minimal pair exercises are still helpful, especially to those students with difficulties distinguishing some sounds. “Getting your students to learn and practice correct word stress is a relatively easy way to improve their pronunciation “ (Kelly, 2014). Many languages do not use word stress, while word stress is key to understanding spoken English. English speakers use word stress to communicate rapidly and accurately, even in difficult conditions (Burri, 2015). They vary their stress, rhythm and intonation to signal different attitudes in real communication and the supra— segmental features of stress, rhythm and intonation play an important part in oral communication. Practice of word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation are very important in pronunciation fluency. So emphasis should be given to supra— segmental features of stress, rhythm and intonation (Burri, 2015).

### Application

90% of all the Chinese students from both universities pointed out word stress as the main challenge since word stress in the two languages varied greatly. However, after about three sessions of practices of the stress features it became easier for the students to overcome the problem, as word stress tends to employ related segmental features like stress, intonation and rhythm. In my opinion, paying attention to the words to stress proved most efficient in

overcoming pronunciation related problems as it brought on board an American accent which was initially not present.

- b) The facilitators can provide a variety of exercises and activities, from controlled practice such as listening and production exercises concerning the shift of intonation and stress signaling attitudinal difference ,to more student- generated exercises including dialogues, paragraph readings, short presentations, picture descriptions and interview exercises The step-by-step exercises and activities may bring the students from the stage of word, phrase, sentence to discourse-level pronunciation, from controlled cognitively based performance to automatic skill-based performance, which enables the learners to involve themselves in interactive activities and enable them to get communicative fluency.

#### Application

73% of all the Chinese students had a preference for this technique as an effective way of learning the correct pronunciation patterns. Engaging in the interactive exercises like dialogues, paragraph readings, short presentations, picture descriptions and interview exercises helped the students not only command improved pronunciation patterns but also have more confidence in English speaking. In addition, as the students engaged in the interactive activities, most of them could pin-point their problems themselves even before the facilitators corrected them. Hence this was an equally effective technique for the Chinese students to have better pronunciation patterns.

- c) Based on the belief “Pronunciation forms a natural link to other aspects of language use, such as listening and vocabulary...” (Fang, 2007) , there should be interdependence and mutual reinforcement of pronunciation and listening. Listening practice must be an integral part of pronunciation. Listening exercises can include “listening for and marking

a particular aspect of pronunciation”, “filling in the blanks, listening for a particular feature”, “listening and repeating”, “creating sentences for other students to repeat”, “creating questions for other students to answer”.

### Application

The listening practice was preferred by about 86% of all the Chinese students as they could listen then try and imitate how the native speakers sounded like. The listening and repeating feature was especially most effective since most of the students had a lead on how best to pronounce given words. In my opinion, this is another very effective technique especially if repeated over time, since its results can easily be evidenced over a short period of time. As such, I would urge, more Chinese students struggling with pronunciation problems to pick this technique.

- a) It must be remembered that “part of speaking the English language competently is the ability to produce its sounds in ways that are intelligible to other speakers” (Gimson & Crutten 2001). The goal of learning pronunciation is intelligibility and communicative effectiveness, not native— speaking mastery. Therefore, the stress should be on developing intelligible and acceptable pronunciation. More emphasis should be placed on global learning (Ho, 2013). When the students speak complete sentences, they may get themselves across even if they have some problems with individual phonetic sounds. In a word, efforts should be made to help the students acquire comprehensible pronunciation and to help them to have correct pronunciation and speak intelligible and fluent English.

## Application

Most of the students made across better points when they spoke in complete sentences as opposed to passing across individuals words. Therefore, practice in regards to pronouncing words in complete sentences has better results as opposed to pronouncing individual words. 55% of the students even recorded better pronunciation patterns when they read out words consistently as opposed to reading out individual words.

- a) It is advisable to have the students listen to the recording of native English speakers as much as possible and imitate what they say. The material ranges from recorded talks, speeches, conversations of the native English speakers to English songs, movies and TV programs by native English speakers (Ho, 2013). The learners can have much fun in improving their pronunciation with a variety of listening resources. There is no doubt that the more learners are exposed to the native English speakers speaking of English, the better their pronunciation will become (Ho, 2013).

## Application

Although most of the students felt rather intimidated by native English speakers, 77% of the Chinese students pointed out that being around native English speakers helped improve their pronunciation patterns significantly. Another 22% of the Chinese students from Columbia University, pointed out that through the four years they had been in college their pronunciation patterns significantly improved due to being exposed to a variety of listening resources one being the other native white students in their class, without taking any pronunciation lessons. Such is to illustrate that exposure to a number of listening resources by Chinese students goes a long way to help the students better their pronunciation patterns.



- b) It is better not to interrupt fluency activities in order to correct pronunciation errors. Instead, write down mispronounced words (or words containing a problem sound on the board after an activity and have students mark the correct stress and practice pronouncing them.

### Application

For the 47 students from both universities, who were interviewed, they were opposed to the idea of open criticism in regards to their pronunciation even when they pronounced words wrongly. As such they preferred when all the words they wrongly pronounced to be pointed out so that it would be easier to learn of the progress they had made so far in mastering better pronunciation patterns.

- c) Learning pronunciation is a long term task. The teaching of pronunciation must be patient and persistent throughout the whole process of learning. It is important to keep the students aware of their pronunciation and constantly self-correct and improve their pronunciation spontaneously.
- d) In pronunciation teaching, individual student's needs should be considered. Students in one class may have different competency levels, learning speeds or expectations. Each student should be regarded as an individual with his/her own special needs and problems. The facilitators can conduct a student's needs analysis to prompt the students to reflect upon their learning strategies, language needs, learning enjoyment, motivation, language strengths and weaknesses. Knowing the special needs and problems of each student, the facilitators can help them work out a practical way of improving their pronunciation.

*Demosthenes overcame and rendered more distinct his inarticulate and stammering pronunciation by speaking with pebbles in his mouth- Plutarch*

In conclusion, like other English skills, English pronunciation and intonation is important for efficient communication. It is a basic skill required of students in their English learning. But it is difficult to have a good mastery of correct English pronunciation and intonation. However students from different non-native backgrounds have different problems. Even native English speakers have different accents when they speak English. It is almost impossible to expect the non-native students to have 100% percent accurate pronunciation. So, as one of the most difficult skills for non-native students, pronunciation and intonation is difficult not only for the Chinese students but also for students speaking other languages. Students whose native language is not English have different problems in learning English pronunciation. English learners understand the importance of having correct/natural pronunciation and desire to improve their pronunciation. There are efficient ways to successfully improve their pronunciation; the facilitators can adapt diverse strategies for teaching pronunciation. The supra-segmental features of stress, rhythm and intonation are important to pronunciation fluency and communicative tasks. Efforts should be made to help the students acquire comprehensible pronunciation and to speak intelligible and fluent English. Hopefully, the results of this research provides some insight into the students problems and needs in pronunciation learning so that the facilitators can adjust their teaching methods to the individual needs of the students.

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