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Contrastive phonetic analysis and laboratory methods in exploring pronunciation errors of Hungarian learners of Mandarin (co-authors: Qiuyue Ye, Nikoletta Tusor)

Panel: Modern education technologies and Chinese language teaching

In this paper we demonstrate the use of contrastive analysis paired with experimental research in pinpointing key errors displayed in the speech production of Hungarian learners of Mandarin (HLM). In particular, we focus on pronunciation errors in the production of consonants and tones. The findings point to the interference effect of the Hungarian articulatory basis on the acquisition of the M consonant system. Tones, a feature entirely absent from Hungarian, is shown to pose predictable but less serious difficulties.

Contrastively comparing the consonant systems of Hungarian and Mandarin we can easily pinpoint three potential areas of difficulty for HLM:

1. The aspiration-based contrast among M obstruents is absent from H, but is often erroneously linked up with the voicing contrast present in H but absent from M.
2. There are no retroflex consonants in H., and these sounds of M will be replaced by many HLM with H dorsal postalveolar consonants, which HLM perceive as similar.
3. The M consonants with dual (alveolar + palatal) articulatory gestures: HLM almost invariably drop one of the events, and produce monogestural palatals (or apico-alveolars).

Tones: While various problems (duration, contour, range) were identifiable in the tone production of HLM, yangping and shangsheng turned out to be the most problematic tonal values, and their F0 contour and range proved to be the most significant problem areas.

A further discovery: while the variety of pronunciation errors narrows with the time of learning, the most characteristic error types fossilize heavily (i.e., become a permanent feature of the speech of the learner, rather than an error with random manifestation), and turn into a problem very difficult to correct and remedy later.