

On the Role of Distinctive Features of British English Sounds in the Cartoon *Peppa Pig* for Chinese Learners to Conquer Mother Tongue's Negative Transfer

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ABSTRACT

With the process of globalization and integration, more and more people tend to be bilingual. Undoubtedly, mastering a second language is significant. This thesis aims to explore how to conquer the difficulties in learning British English sounds through analyzing a British cartoon *Peppa Pig*. Chapter one begins with the research background, significance and purpose of research. The thesis takes the cartoon *Peppa Pig* as the starting point to demonstrate the role of distinctive features for Chinese learners to conquer negative transfer. The empirical research could be found in Chapter two, because of requiring to know the concrete circumstance of Chinese learners. Through the collection and analysis of data, we can know these problems which Chinese learners exist in the process of learning British English. Based on the comparison of Chinese and British English, Chapter three clarifies the difficulties in learning British English. As for Chinese learners, mastering distinctive features can promote learners to master British English sounds better than stress and rhythm. Chapter four states the role of the distinctive features in helping conquer Chinese negative transfer in the cartoon *Peppa Pig*. The final chapter is the conclusion of this thesis and involves a new study for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds under the distinctive features.

1. Introduction

With the process of globalization and integration, foreign languages have become a window for people to know the world, which makes it necessary for Chinese learners to master the language of English.

The thesis mainly researches the difficulties and key points that Chinese learners have confronted in learning British English. In the process of learning English, pronunciation is an essential part. For non-native English learners, whether they can have a fluent tone and standard

pronunciation is closely related to their listening, speaking, reading, understanding and perception. In order to arrive at a harmonious and successful communication, the study shows that Chinese learners still need to promote their English pronunciations learning at first.

For non-native English learners, mastering standard and fluent English pronunciations requires not only making full use of the technological convenience, but also paying attention to the change of concepts and modes of thinking.

First of all, the thesis probes into the general difficult

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British English sounds for Chinese learners by means of the empirical findings. Second, factors resulting in negative transfer were clarified. It is more important for Chinese learners to master the difficulties than the study of stress and rhythm of British English sounds. Besides, the role of the distinctive features is stressed, which is good for Chinese learners to conquer Chinese negative transfer. And in the last chapter, it is the conclusion of this thesis and involves a new expectation for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds under the distinctive features.

To sum up, the study has certain guiding significance for Chinese learners to learn British English pronunciation and overcome the negative transfer. They should deepen their understanding of the differences in phonetics between English and Chinese. Only in this way can they promote the levels of speaking British English.

2. An empirical Research

2.1 Research Questions

Is there negative transfer for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds? If the answer is yes, how can we conquer the negative transfer?

2.2 Hypothesis

Negative transfer is the very source for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds. Negative transfer could make it difficult for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds. Differences between Chinese and British English sounds are the source of negative transfer for Chinese learners.

2.3 Design

Through survey for learners, we can roughly find out the phonetic errors faced by Chinese learners in learning English sounds at this stage. Due to the limitation of comprehension ability for the second language's learners, some difficult sounds are hard to master.

The reason why many incorrect sounds in pronunciation are hard to correct is that they have a very close relationship with their native language expression. Sometimes, some subtle mistakes are hard to detect for Chinese learners and require feedback from teachers or classmates.

For this problem, learners are bound to make the same mistake again and again without obtaining comprehensive feedback. These habitual errors in learning the target language can be classified as a kind of errors.

Error analysis, put forward by S.P.Corder in the 1970s, is a systematic analysis of mistakes made by learners in British English learning, and a study of the causes of er-

rors, so as to reveal the process and principles of learners' second language acquisition.

To understand the errors in the process of learning English, we are supposed to know the different types of errors. Corder divides inaccurate points into two types: performance errors and competence errors^[1]. Performance errors refer to the accidental slips of tongue or pen made by learners when they are tired or hurried. Normally, this kind of error has no regularity. It happens occasionally even for native speakers, and thus the performance errors are not serious and can be avoided with little effort by the learners.

Competence errors, on the other hand, refer to a regular error caused by inadequate competence of the target language, which is more serious than performance errors. It deviates from the track of the target language and reflects the speaker's language ability and level. For instance, Chinese learners often forget to add "s" to the verb of the third person's present tense. Another striking example what can express the error of Chinese learners is Chinese learners' habitual mixture of personal pronouns (e.g. the misuse of "she" and "he" in conversation).

For such errors, learners are difficult to detect and correct themselves. Most importantly, the same errors will occur repeatedly in the use of the Chinese learners. Therefore, in the process of learning English, the emergence of errors should be paid enough attention by Chinese learners.

2.3.1 Choice of Material

The fact proves that, the study will be instructive for Chinese learners to conquer negative transfer and grasp British English sounds.

Through a comprehensive consideration, the cartoon *Peppa Pig* was judged as a better choice for Chinese learners to learn English and overcome negative transfer. The specific reasons are as follows.

For starters, there are frequent and exaggerated sounds in the cartoon. It is the feature that can arouse the learners' attention to certain words or sentences. Through the cartoon *Peppa Pig*, the audience can appreciate the humorous stories, and master some typical pronunciations.

Secondly, these sentences used by *Peppa pig* are simple and short; these representative sentences exist in every aspect of life, which enables learners to recognize the differences more clearly.

Thirdly, the cartoon's speed is moderate. Such characteristics are suitable for learners of different ages. If they can follow the speed of *Peppa Pig*, it will be conducive to promote the capacity of hearing. Even if they may encounter a few problems and setbacks through the cartoon, they can overcome them by themselves.

Finally, the cartoon *Peppa Pig* involves many an interesting conversation, which can trigger Chinese Learners' interests to learn British English. Out of concern for the comprehensive consideration, this paper finally decides to take the cartoon of *Peppa Pig* as the starting point of the thesis.

Accordingly, based on the cartoon, the thesis expounds the phonetic features and the differences between British English and Chinese, which is beneficial for Chinese learners to learn British English sounds. The study not only can help Chinese learners to conquer the negative transfer, but also it is good for children to reshape accurate pronunciations of British English sounds.

Concerning the social background of learning English, scientific and technological product has brought us many pronunciations of learning English. That is to say, in the new era, people's linguistic concepts should master a language in a more scientific and effective way.

In the thesis, distinctive features are stressed, which distinguishes the difference between each phoneme and highlights the difficulty of learning British English sounds. Realizing the point, a series of studies is conducted gradually.

First of all, the study collects five clips from the cartoon *Peppa Pig*. And then, subjects are chosen from different majors and age groups. Finally, through analyzing the 34 samples, some statistics involving the British English sounds were shown clearly. Based on the research, the thesis analyzes some phoneme which is hard to speak for Chinese learners and makes a contrast with Chinese.

2.3.2 Data-collection

The aim of the study is to conclude general difficult British English sound for Chinese learners. At the beginning, select 34 samples as the objects of study (different genders, ages and majors). And then, the study collects five clips from the cartoon *Peppa Pig*. After having a general understanding of the above basic information, these people will be asked to read the same text in the next step (see the details in the Appendix to the text). Finally, their recordings will be analyzed to know which sounds are more likely to make mistakes for Chinese learners.

In the research, there are 10 males (accounting for 29.4%) and 24 females (accounting for 70.6%) in this research. Male and female were taken into consideration, which can the research objective and exclude the gender factors.

According to the Table 3, we can realize that different age groups have been studied. Therefore, the research result accord with different ages and the difficult sounds are suitable for different ages to learn British English.

Table 1. Age distribution of Chinese learners

Age	Account	Percent
A. under 15	3	8.8%
B. 16—25	23	67.6%
C. 26—35	6	17.6%
D. over 36	2	5.9%
Total	34	100%

Table 2. Major distribution of Chinese learners

Majors	Amount	Percent
A. English language majors	8	23.5%
B. French language majors	7	20.6%
C. Japanese language majors	3	8.8%
D. Artistic design majors	4	11.8%
E. Nursing majors	1	2.9%
F. Accounting majors	4	11.8%
G. Computer science majors	2	5.9%
H. Pre-school education majors	2	5.9%
I. Structural engineering majors	3	8.8%
Total	34	100%

The research covers as wide fields as possible, so that the analysis structure can be more objective and general. At the same time, the key and difficult pronunciations analyzed will be used more comprehensively by different majors.

3. Negative Transfer: Language Acquisition Difficulties Resulting from Language Differences

3.1 Negative Transfer Hypothesis

The theory of transfer was put forward by Robert Lado in the mid-1950s. In psychology, transfer refers to the influence of knowledge, skills, methods and attitudes acquired in the learning process on the learning of new knowledge and skills [2]. Some of these influences are positive and some are negative. Its positive and promoting effect is called positive transfer, and its hindering effect is called negative transfer, also called interference.

Robert Lado holds the view that positive transfer occurs where the structural features of the two languages are the same, while negative transfer occurs where they are different, which is the contrastive analysis hypothesis.

As for Chinese learners, the main difficulties to master second language come from the interference of Chinese. It is necessary to predict the difficulties and errors in second language learning by contrasting the similar and different points of the two language structures, so as to stress the difficult points and key points in the teaching process. Not

only can the idea overcome the interference of mother tongue but also establish new habits for Chinese learners.

3.2 Distinctive Features of Phonemes

The idea of distinctive features was first put forward by Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), one of the representatives of structuralism Prague School, in the 1940s as a means of working out a set of phonological contrasts or oppositions to capture particular aspects of language sounds. The pronunciation characteristic with the function of distinguishing phonemes is called the distinctive features of the phoneme.

Jakobson pointed out that the core of distinctive features is binary features and a phoneme is the sum of several distinctive features^[3]. The phoneme system of each language may only have a part of the distinctive features, but not all the distinctive features.

Each phoneme can be decomposed into several distinct features. It is easier to make clear the characteristics of phonemes in specific languages by using distinctive features.

3.2.1 The distinctive features of unvoiced and voiced sounds

Since the inception of the phonological analysis of distinctive features in the 1950s, features traditionally have been specified by binary values to signify whether a segment is described by the feature; a positive value, [+], denotes the presence of a feature, while a negative value, [-], indicates its absence.

Next, we compare the distinctive features of English and Chinese phonemic systems from two perspectives: pronunciation method and pronunciation location.

Table 3. Distinctive features of English and Chinese phonemic systems Features

Language \ Features	Place of Articulation		Manner of Articulation	
	Vowels	Consonants	Vowels	Consonants
English	[+palatal]	[+dental] [+glottal] [+Palatal] [+alveolar]	[±round]	[±unvoiced]
Chinese	[+palatal] [+apical] [+retroflex]	[+palatal] [+blade] [-palatal]	[±round]	[±aspirated]

Distinctive features are often regarded as Jakobson's greatest contribution to phonology. The table expounds the distinctive features of English and Chinese phonemic systems.

In the process of English learning, learners can also analyze every pairs' distinctive features (e.g. the difference of /p/ and /b/ is whether they are aspirated, hence the aspirated and unaspirated opposite is their distinctive features of /p/ and /b/). Accordingly, the contrastive research is expected to provide some implications and reference for the further research of the learning of British English.

3.2.2 The Importance of Distinctive Features

Through the analysis of the distinctive features, the subtle differences between languages can be highly strengthened in cognitive thinking, and the bad habits of learners in second language learning can be gradually corrected. When their problems are constantly overcome, the progress can be intuitively reflected in communication, and then their learning can also get positive feedback from others.

This kind of feedback is likely to become a benign trend. On the one hand, it can promote the improvement of level of learners in other aspects, such as listening, writing and reading. On the other hand, learners' interest in second language will be constantly stimulated, which makes learners more enthusiastic about learning a language.

3.3 Differences between Chinese and English Sounds

Understanding the differences between Chinese and English and highlighting the key points and difficulties is a new perspective for second language learning. This method could be useful than learning a language in isolation.

3.3.1 An Overview of Chinese and British English Sounds

Mastering a language involves the study of speech sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. Sounds are produced through the human vocal organ, respectively, the larynx and vocal cords. It is a medium that conveys semantic information and can be understood by the recipient. Sounds are a special physiological and psychological phenomenon.

Voice has three attributes: (1) physical attributes. They are pitch, intensity, length and timbre. Among them, Chinese belongs to tone language. The pronunciations of Chinese are mainly determined by pitch, while English is determined by intensity. (2) Physiological properties; Sounds were produced through the human vocal organ, respectively, the larynx and vocal cords. Human voice organs include respiratory organs, vocal organs and reso-

nance organs. Sounds are a medium that conveys semantic information and can be understood by the recipient. (3) Social attributes, which is the most essential attribute of speech^[4].

Chinese and English are different language systems, that is, Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European language^[5]. Both of them have a complete and very different phonetic system. Although many a morpheme is same or similar in the hearing, they possess subtle differences in the places and manner of articulation.

3.3.2 Different Vowel and Consonant Systems

In British English and Chinese, some phonemes seem to be the same, but in fact they are slightly different. English vowel system is relatively simple, consisting of 20 vowels and 24 consonants, while Chinese vowel system consists of 10 vowels and 22 consonants.

For the vowels and consonants of these two languages, if learners can clearly find out the differences and focus on learning, it will help Chinese learners to break through their obstacles of learning British English.

3.3.3 Different Characteristics of Syllable Structures

The syllable structures of the two languages are quite different. If they do not discern the differences in syllable structures between the two languages, Chinese learners are prone to meet many problems in conversation.

The syllable structure of Chinese has the following characteristics. First, the syllable structure is concise and the boundary is clear. A Chinese character is usually expressed as a syllable. Each syllable must possess a phoneme and must be a vowel. There are at most four phonemes, which constitute a rhyme head, a rhyme belly and a rhyme ending^[6]. Thus the boundaries between syllables and syllables are clear. (e.g. [tsuɑŋ]).

Secondly, most of the sounds are loud and melodious. As for Chinese, a syllable may have no consonants, but it must have vowels. Vowels are absolutely dominant in syllable structure. Two consonants are not allowed to appear continuously in the same syllable, that is to say, Chinese syllables do not have multiple consonants.

Third, the tones of each syllable in Chinese have their own rhythm. Every syllable must have a tone, which is an indispensable part of Chinese syllables. Even if two syllables are the same but the tones are different, they often have different meanings (e.g. mā, má, mǎ, mà).

Concerning the syllable structures of British English, there are several prominent features. On the one hand, its combination is free while the combination of Chinese

syllables is restricted by the pronunciations position and rhyme head. Furthermore, English has more types of syllabic structures in English than in Chinese.

On the other hand, in English syllables, there are more consonants than vowels, and there are consonant clusters^[7]. There may be two or three consonants at the beginning or end of a word continuously. In Chinese syllables, fewer consonants and vowels are dominant. Each consonant in the syllable has a vowel before or behind it.

Accordingly, when Chinese learners realize the differences in syllables between the two languages; they can highlight the key points of learning. For example, many a Chinese learner habitually adds vowels to English consonants. If they can realize the distinction, it will be a great progress in the process of learning English.

Realizing different characteristics of syllable structures, Chinese learners will establish a new recognition to the learning of the second language. If they talk with others with British English, or learn English through watching *Peppa Pig*, they will be subconsciously concerned about the differences in syllable structure between the two languages. This change is conducive to the mastering of English pronunciations.

3.3.4 Tone language and Stress Language

In a stress language like British English, intonation changes indicate attitudinal and emotional meanings, while in a tone language like Chinese, pitch changes in intonation mark different expressions of meanings^[8].

Based on the previous study, Chinese is determined by pitch while English is determined by stress. Therefore, that is why Chinese is called tone language while English is regarded as “sing-song” language.

Contrasting the difference of tone language and stress language, it would be meaningful for learners to learn a language. There is a common phenomenon to notice that western learners cannot distinguish the tones of Chinese (e.g. “bèi zi”, “bēi zi”). Conversely, Chinese learners cannot discern the stress of English (e.g. conduct /'kɒndʌkt/ noun, /kɒn'dʌkt/ verb). For Chinese learners, if they can fully realize the differences between the two languages, the pronunciation and intonation of British language will be more natural.

3.4 Difficulties for Chinese Learners to Learn British English

For Chinese learners, the mastery of stress and intonation is an important part of pronunciations learning. Because of the influence of Chinese tone language for a long time, it is not easy for learners to grasp English tone

naturally.

As for some typical phonemes, this chapter makes specific analysis and distinction from the two dimensions of place of articulation and manner of articulation. This is designed to help learners recognize the differences between the two languages, so as to better overcome the barriers of learning English.

3.4.1 Stress and Rhythm

To understand the knowledge of English stress and rhythm, we should know the changing rules of stress position and accurately grasp the stress of sentences according to a context or grammar.

The boundary of Chinese is clear among syllables, because each syllable has its own tone, and can speak clearly^[9]. Stressed syllables have high pitch value, clear and long pronunciation time. Weak syllables have low pitch and the pronunciations sounds vague.

For Chinese learners, what should they do is to avoid the influence of Chinese rhythm in English. On the contrary, several light syllables should be compressed together so that the pronunciation sounds native and easy to understand.

Many learners' English sounds are shown that they have no rhythm, cannot express certain emotions, and it is difficult to arouse the interest of the audience. If Chinese learners can grasp these characteristics and practice regularly, they will have a better grasp of the phonetic rhythm.

In terms of tone, although there are some similarities in pronunciations, Chinese tones only appear for a single word, while English tones act on the whole sentence. Therefore, different tones need to be considered according to different situations. However, Chinese learners do not have a good command of English pronunciation. Sometimes they put Chinese pronunciation habits into single English words, which will also cause difficulties or mistakes in English pronunciation.

Compared with the great difference between Chinese and English in terms of words and grammar, nevertheless, English pronunciation problems do not cause too much difficulty for Chinese students. In any case, if Chinese learners can pay attention to the above problems and carry out targeted training, it will be easier for Chinese learners to overcome the differences in stress and rhythm.

3.4.2 Analysis of Difficult Distinctive Features/Sounds for Chinese Learners

Undoubtedly, difficult sounds are the biggest obstacles for Chinese learners to master British English. Sometimes, for speakers, just several sounds were spelt incorrectly,

which makes the whole talk unnatural. Thus it is good for learners to promote their English levels through finding these sounds that were spoke habitually and trying to overcome it.

They should know which difficult sounds are before learners are determined to conquer non-standard pronunciation. C.Practor comes up with a difficulty level theory that divided difficulties into six levels, that is, from zero to five. With the higher the level, the more difficult it is.

According to the theory, difficult sounds which are hard to spell for Chinese learners can be divided two types: similar but different sounds and completely different sounds. If new knowledge or skill involves some content that have been mastered long before, it will be easier relatively. Because when a learner is triggered to establish a connection, the efficiency of learning knowledge is high.

On the contrary, if new knowledge differs with former contents completely, learners cannot build effectively the connection. At the same time, learners naturally do not produce knowledge confusion. However, when some contents are similar but different, learners could establish an incorrect connection. What's worse, it's hard for learners to detect their errors, so it's also very difficult to correct them. Involving the aspect of English phonetics, this problem is still prominent and hard to overcome. In the process of learning English, Chinese learners are disturbed by their mother tongue. When learning certain phonemes which is similar but different, learners are tend to make mistakes and hard to perceive. Theoretically speaking, similar but different sounds are harder to acquire than different completely sounds.

Furthermore, each learner has their own habits on speaking British English, therefore, different learners exist different difficulties in sounds. Even if that is complex, we can still get a general recognition of which sounds are hard to spell and often confused with their mother tongue. The research is conductive for Chinese learners to find several common difficulties and overcome the obstacles.

4. Distinctive Features: A Possible Solution to Conquer Chinese Learners' Negative Transfer in Learning British English

In the process of second language acquisition, there are two important linguistic concepts that need to be focused by Chinese learners, namely, the distinctive features of phonemes and the negative transfer. If we can establish a certain relationship between the two, it will help learners overcome the negative transfer to a large extent, and master a second language better.

4.1 Distinctive Features to be Mastered

Through the collection and analysis of 34 samples,

the result is presented in the form of data so as to clarify which concrete sounds are the biggest obstacles for Chinese learners to learn British English.

(1) The analysis of consonants in British English

The research divides consonants into two types, voiceless consonants and voice consonants. These tables show the consonants that Chinese learners habitually make when reading the text *Peppa Pig*.

Table 4. Percentage of pronouncing voiceless consonants incorrectly for Chinese learners

voiceless consonants	Amount	Percent
/f/	1	2.9%
/θ/	1	2.9%
/s/	1	2.9%
/ʃ/	4	11.8%
/tr/	3	8.8%
/ts/	1	2.9%
/tʃ/	2	5.8%
Total	13	5.5%

According to the survey data, /ʃ/, /tr/, /tʃ/ are often mispronounced (e.g. shopping, trolley and actually). According to the table, the sound /ʃ/ is misread most frequently. The reason why Chinese learners make the mistake habitually is that learners often confuse the sound with /ʒ/.

Two sounds have the same place of articulation. They are postalveolar and fricative. Voiceless consonants and voice consonants are their distinction. That is to say, when pronouncing these two sounds, we can observe if the cords vibrate to judge whether they are /ʃ/ or /ʒ/. If the vocal cord vibrate, this is the sound /ʒ/, and vice versa.

Table 5. Percentage of pronouncing voiced consonants incorrectly for Chinese learners

Voiced consonants	Amount	Percent
/d/	1	2.9%
/g/	2	5.8%
/v/	10	29.4%
/ð/	3	8.8%
/z/	4	11.7%
/ʒ/	3	8.8%
/n/	9	26.5%
/ŋ/	8	23.5%
/l/	3	8.8%
/dr/	1	2.9%
/dʒ/	6	17.6%
Total	50	13.4%

In the table of voiced consonants, /v/, /ð/ and /n/ are spoke habitually by Chinese learners. Meanwhile, learners often confuse these sounds with other similar sounds (/v/ and /w/, /ð/ and /θ/, /n/ and /ŋ/). Next, we will make an in-depth analysis to the three pair of similar but different sounds.

The fricative /v/ and the semivowel /w/. Two sounds similar extremely, but you can perceive the subtle dis-

tinction when hearing two pronunciations carefully and repeatedly, such as very and wine.

The former is not only a fricative, but also it is a labiodental. The latter is a semivowel. Because there is no the sound /v/ in Chinese, learners are not particularly familiar with it, therefore, they will habitually link with their mother tongues and find similar sounds corresponding to it. Chinese learners tend to articulate /v/ into /w/. This is a common phenomenon for most Chinese learners in the process of learning English.

The voiced consonant /ð/ and the voiceless consonant /θ/. The pronunciation parts of the two sounds are basically the same when they are pronounced. The tongue is placed between opened upper and lower teeth. The tip of tongue exerts as much force as possible on the lower teeth. The airflow is pronounced by friction between the tip of the tongue and the gap between the upper and lower teeth. The following is a detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between the two sounds.

On the one hand, they are both dental sounds which are made by the tongue tip or blade. Only fractures [ð, θ] are found to be strictly dental. On the other hand, they are fricative. A fricative is spoken when there is close approximation of two articulators so that the airstream is partially obstructed and turbulent airflow is produced.

However, whether or not the vocal cords vibrate during pronunciation is the subtle difference between the two sounds.

The distinction of nasal sounds: /n/ and /ŋ/. As for the two sounds /n/ and /ŋ/, nasal is their common feature. If the air is stopped in the mouth but the soft palate is down so that it can go out through the nasal cavity, the sounds are nasal stops. Even if both types of sounds are stops, phoneticians have retained the term stops to indicate a stop and used the term nasal to indicate nasal stops. [n, m, ŋ] are nasals found in both English and Chinese.

What distinction they exist is that the former is alveolar while the latter is velar. This is their main difference in sounds.

(2) The analysis of vowels in British English

In order to make a more accurate and objective analysis, the research divides vowels into two categories: monophthong vowels and diphthongs. The following tables show vowels that Chinese learners habitually make mistakes when reading the text *Peppa Pig*.

According to the table of monophthong vowels, it is clear that /e/ and /æ/ is spoken incorrectly by Chinese learners. Distinguishing the differences of vowels, we are supposed to consider the front, center, back of the tongue and the levels of tongue height.

The following is the difference of monophthong vow-

els /e/ and /æ/. The two sounds have subtle distinction. If learners ignore their differences and confuse /e/ with /æ/, their British English will sound unnatural. In the text *Peppa Pig*, it is too hard for Chinese learners to distinguish the difference between /e/ (e.g. head, *peppa*, red) and /æ/ (e.g. rash, actually, hat).

The level of tongue height is a main factor to distinguish the two sounds. The more open the mouth, the lower the level of tongue height. Therefore, contrasting the two sounds, the mouth is more open than the sound /e/ when spelling the sound /æ/.

Table 6. Percentage of pronouncing monophthong vowels incorrectly for Chinese learners

Monophthong vowels	Amount	Percent
/i:/	1	2.9%
/ɪ/	5	14.7%
/e/	10	29.4%
/æ/	10	29.4%
/ə/	6	17.6%
/ʌ/	2	2.8%
/ɔ:/	1	2.9%
/ʊ/	1	2.9%
Total	48	17.6%

Table 7. Percentage of pronouncing diphthongs incorrectly for Chinese learners

Diphthongs	Amount	Percent
/aɪ/	12	35.3%
/eɪ/	1	2.9%
/aʊ/	4	11.8%
/əʊ/	4	11.8%
/eə/	1	5.8%
Total	22	12.9%

Diphthongs are not as fixed as monophthong vowels. On the contrary, diphthongs slide from one vowel sound to another. The process leads the position of tongue and the shape of mouth to change.

Based on the table of diphthongs, we can know that the sound /aɪ/ is the biggest obstacle for Chinese learners in the learning of diphthongs. The reason is that learners cannot distinguish the difference between /aɪ/ and /eɪ/. In the research, many people speak incorrectly “hide and seek” as “head and seek” in the text of *Peppa Pig*.

As a matter of fact, as long as we can distinguish the difference between /a/ and /e/, the pair of diphthongs can be spoken accurately. When reading the sound /aɪ/, the mouth is rounded, the tongue rises, and the tip of the tongue shrinks backwards. The “/a/” sound transitions smoothly to the “/ɪ/” sound. This sound is the pronunciation of the letter “I” or “Y” in the word

When practicing this sound, the tip of the tongue touches the teeth and the lips are flat. From the “/e/” to the “/ɪ/”

long sound. It is the pronunciation of the letter “A”.

4.2 The Role

As an important factor, the negative transfer influences Chinese learners to master British English. The opinion that the mother tongue has negative impacts on the learning of British English was emphasized as early as the forties and the fifties by Fries (1945) and Lado. Until now, negative transfer has been recognized as an important factor in second language learning. The factors of negative transfer mainly include avoidance, fossilization, simplification, over-generalization, hypercorrection, inadequate learning, faculty teaching.

As for the hypothesis, Lado holds the point that we cannot make a comprehensive interpretation to the problems if the circumstance that students learn a second language has not been observed. Therefore, no matter what theory, research, behavior must be combined with the actual situation to get the correct results^[10].

In the process of learning English, besides recognizing the differences between Chinese and English in phonetics, Chinese learners should practice repeatedly, and gradually right their incorrect phonetic habits.

In addition, learners should actively use the second language to communicate with people, and pay attention to the mistakes they do not realize according to the effective feedback from others. Through feedback from others and their own practice, learners can effectively promote their own pronunciations, which is instructive to acquire a fluent and standard British English.

The distinctive features are an effective means for learners to overcome the negative transfer in learning a second language. By comparing and analyzing the two languages, learners can find out the subtle differences of phonemes and strengthen the learning of the key and difficult points in the process of second language acquisition.

If learners only learn a language in isolation, their perception of errors is also very one-sided. Therefore, the distinctive features are an important means for learners to overcome the negative transfer and master a second language. For example, Chinese learners have some difficulties in learning these /v/ and /w/. They tend to articulate /v/ into /w/. The former is not only a fricative, but also it is labiodentals, and the latter is a semivowel (see the details in the 3.23-3.24). When Chinese learners hear the exaggerated pronunciation and tune on the cartoon *Peppa Pig*, they can try to discern the distinction (e.g. Why is Papa so serious? George likes to play with his sister very much).

If learners try to connect the two languages and try to make a further distinction, the difference between them should also be the most important aspect which learners

should pay attention to. This way of learning enables learners to gradually change from single learning to conscious learning after they realize their mistakes.

5. Conclusions

There are similarities and differences in phoneme systems and pronunciation characteristics between English and Chinese phonetic systems. Understanding the differences in phonetic systems and the specific manifestations of negative transfer in Chinese can help Chinese learners overcome the negative transfer in English learning.

The contrastive study of English and Chinese has certain guiding significance for Chinese learners to learn English pronunciation and overcome the negative transfer. By means of comparative analysis, the learners make a basic comparison between English and Chinese about phoneme systems, syllable structure features and tones, and find out the differences between the two systems.

As for Chinese learners, in order to promote the pronunciation of spoken English, they should deepen their understanding of the differences in phonetics between English and Chinese. At the same time, learners can also listen to more original materials and watch films, imitating the outstanding features of native speakers and improving their English level. The reason why the thesis takes the cartoon *Peppa Pig* as the breakthrough point of the study is also considering this aspect.

In addition, learners are supposed to improve their ability of thinking in English and actively understand the differences between the two modes of thinking, so as to cultivate the capacity of perception to the British English, which is essential for Chinese learners to overcome negative transfer and master a second language.

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