

Error Analysis of -ia and -ie for Thai Students Learning Chinese at
Walailak University
การใช้สระพินอิน -ia และ -ie ของนักเรียนไทยสาขาภาษาจีน สำนักวิชาศิลปศาสตร์
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Abstract

To day in Thailand, learning Chinese receives tremendous attention is regarded as important as learning English. It follows that the development of teaching and learning Chinese is equally important as it is for learning English. Currently, there exists many issues relating to teach and learn the Chinese language that have not been studied or even addressed for example, listening and pronunciation should be a priority issue. Phonetics in the Chinese language are many. So many in fact that Thai students' pronunciation is generally incorrect for example -ia and -ie vowels are one of the common vowels that Thai students get wrong, because they sound quite similar and this causes Thai students to feel confused to the point of mispronunciation. Therefore, this research is conducted to learn if the mispronunciation of vowels -ia and -ie is a result of the students' inability ability to distinguish these two vowels sounds only by listening. A listening test was conducted using 14 questions, with 83 first-year Chinese language students of Walailak University to identify whether the vowel sound is -ia or -ie. The result was all students passed the test, which means the students can distinguish the different between -ia and -ie. Therefore, the research found the error in Chinese phonetics among Thai students is not caused by listening, but caused by mispronouncing unfamiliar vowels that are not used or found in the Thai language. The technique to pronounce -ia correctly is to open mouth as o and when pronouncing -ie correctly as in smiling, with the wide mouth. It was found that these two techniques do help to reduce confusion, while overcoming any mispronunciation; to an acceptable degree.

Keywords: Thai students, ia, ie, errors

บทคัดย่อ

ขณะนี้การเรียนภาษาจีนในประเทศไทยได้รับความสนใจและมีความสำคัญพอ ๆ กับภาษาอังกฤษ ดังนั้นการพัฒนาการเรียนการสอนภาษาจีน จึงเป็นอีกเรื่องที่มีสำคัญ และในปัจจุบันนี้ยังมีปัญหาที่เกี่ยวกับการเรียนการสอนภาษาจีนอีกหลายด้าน ที่ไม่ได้ยังไม่ได้ทำการพัฒนาและศึกษา ด้านการฟังและออกเสียงก็เป็นปัญหาอีกด้านหนึ่งที่น่าสนใจ ดังนั้นในบทความนี้ผู้เขียนจึงเลือกทำการศึกษาวิจัยในด้านนี้ เสียงในภาษาจีนที่นักเรียนไทยออกเสียงผิดพลาดมีค่อนข้างเยอะ จากงานวิจัยของ Cao Wen's (2012) "Thai students' errors in Chinese phonetics" พบว่านักเรียนไทยมักจะออกเสียงพยัญชนะดังต่อไปนี้ผิดพลาด ได้แก่ k , h , j , q , x , z , c , zh , ch , sh and r. ส่วนเสียงสระที่ออกผิดพลาดบ่อยได้แก่ o , e , ü , -i , -i , ao , ei , ie , ua , uo , iu , ui , ian , ün , un , -ng and er ดังนั้นผู้เขียนจึงเลือกทำการวิจัยเสียงสระ ia และ ie เนื่องจากเสียงสระ 2 เสียงนี้ ออกเสียงค่อนข้างคล้ายคลึงกัน ซึ่งเป็นปัญหาให้นักเรียนเกิดความสับสนและความผิดพลาดในการออกเสียง บทความวิจัยนี้ได้ทำการศึกษาวิจัย ถึงสาเหตุการออกเสียงที่ผิดพลาดของเสียงสระ ia และ ie ว่ามีสาเหตุจากการฟังที่ไม่สามารถแยกความต่างของเสียงสระสองเสียงนี้ได้ใช่หรือไม่ โดยผู้เขียนได้ทำการทดสอบการฟัง กับกลุ่มตัวอย่างนักศึกษา สาขาภาษาจีน มหาวิทยาลัยวลัยลักษณ์ ชั้นปีที่ 1 จำนวน 83 คน โดยใช้แบบทดสอบจำนวน 14 ข้อ ให้นักเรียนฟัง แล้วทำการวงกลม เสียงคำที่ได้ยิน ว่าเป็นเสียงสระ ia หรือ ie ผลทดสอบพบว่านักเรียนทุกคนสอบผ่านแบบทดสอบ และนักเรียนทั้งหมดได้คะแนนเกินครึ่ง นักเรียนสามารถฟังและแยกเสียง ia และ ie ได้เป็นอย่างดี ดังนั้นปัญหาการออกเสียงที่สับสนและผิดพลาด จึงไม่ได้เกิดจากการฟัง แต่เกิดจากการพูดเสียงสระที่ไม่คุ้นเคยและไม่มีในภาษาไทย ภาษาไทยไม่มีเสียงสระ ie มีเพียง ia ที่ใกล้เคียงกับ "สระเอีย" ดังนั้นนักเรียนใช้จึง "ie" แทน "ia" ดังนั้นวิธีแก้ไขการออกเสียงคือ เมื่อออกเสียง ia ให้ทำปากกลม ๆ กว้าง ๆ เป็นตัว o และเมื่อออกเสียง ie ให้ออกเสียงเหมือนตัวเองกำลังอ้าปากกว้าง ๆ ก็จะช่วยลดความสับสนและความผิดพลาดในการออกเสียงได้ในระดับหนึ่ง

คำสำคัญ: นักเรียนไทย, ia, ie, การใช้คำผิด



Introduction

Similarities and differences between Chinese and Thai speech, Thai and Chinese both belong to the Sino-Tibetan tonal language family. The smallest unit of organisation structure for a

sequence of speech sounds is a syllable, and each syllable is made up of three parts as consonant, vowel and tone, like “ไ้” (kai) and เมีย (mia).

Table 1

“ไ้” (kai) and เมีย (mia).

Word	Initials	Vowels
ไ้ (kai/ 蛋/egg)	ข (k)	ไ้ (-ai)
เมีย (mia/ 老婆/wife)	ม (m)	เมีย (-ia)

However, differences exist between initials, vowels and tones in three aspects. Consonants in Chinese can appear in front of the vowels and can also be used after the vowel. Chinese vowels can only appear after consonants except for the zero consonants; however, Thai vowels can appear around the top and bottom of consonants and also have sub-short and long tones.

Difficulties encountered by Thai students in learning Chinese phonetics mainly occur in two aspects. The first is the initial consonant problem which is centred on k, h, j, q, x, z, c, zh, ch, sh, and r. The second is vowels and occurs mainly for ie, uo, and ao.

Objective

1. To address the problem of -ia and -ie sounds in Chinese of Thai students whether their listening skill caused confusion, so that they pronounced the same sound.

2. To find the solution and select the proper lesson for Thai students to clearly pronounce -ia and -ie as native speakers.

3. The result would be beneficial to students and teachers of Chinese language in the future in order to improve and elevate Chinese lesson.

Literature review

Error Analysis not only enjoys its significance in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), but also is a sphere that always needs much attention and must-have methodology in the Chinese-Thai education and research. In the 1960s and 1970s, Peter Cod, a British specialist in Applied Linguistics released *The Significance of Learner Errors*, a classic academic paper. It marked the origin of the whole sphere of foreign research on SLA and Error Analysis, so this paper

has been regarded as the rite of passage in this field. Selnik came up with the famous concept of interlanguage in 1969, aiming to discover and study the linguistic system and the learning regularity of SLA learners when acquiring this certain language. It laid a solid foundation for Error Analysis and related research on SLA of later generations. Jianji Lu, the leading guru in China's Error Analysis, published papers generally clarifying the definitions of error and interlanguage, distinguishing a pair of seemingly the same concepts, error and mistake, and detailing the origin of interlanguage.

The past decades have seen that quite a few scholars conducted study and research on phonetic errors in Thai's acquiring Chinese. Some of the examples are as follows:

By comparing Thai and Chinese in terms of initials, finals, and tone, Hongyin Li (1997) discovered that the phonetic errors mainly appear in /zh/, /ch/, /sh/; /r/; /h/; /k/ and the distraction from Thai nasal sound. Finals errors are mainly embedded in /ua/ & /uo/, /ia/ & /ie/, /ei/ & /ü/. According to the author, Negative Transfer in first language mostly contributes Error Analysis. The author always made the own discovery: (i) the forwardness of Chinese characters, though rarely noticed by most people, do exist in the general regularity of accent backwardness in Chinese characters; (ii) it is such forwardness that mainly leads to error in accents of Chinese characters so that the particularity of the small number of "accent-forward" characters should be emphasized in teaching of Chinese among Thais.

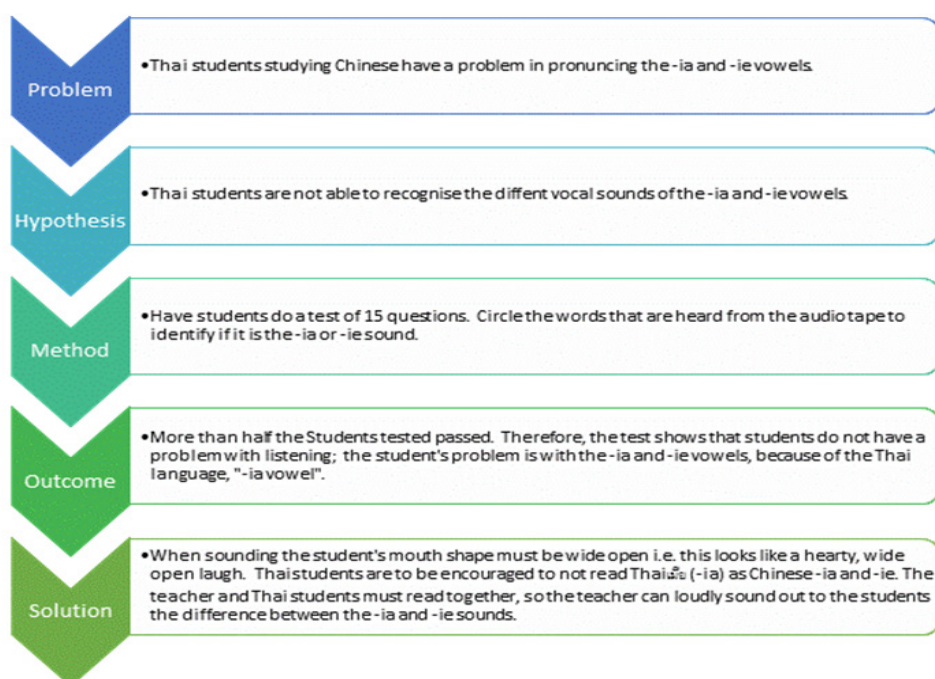
Yinlian Jiang (1996) did research on students subject of Silpakorn University. By comparing the phonetic systems of Chinese and Thai, the author claimed that initial errors mainly appear in /j/, /q/, /x/; /z/, /c/, /s/; /zh/, /ch/, /sh/; final errors /ü/ and finals with /i/ or /u/ as the initial vowel

sound. The author offers some solutions to errors: contrast and sound-prolonging should be applied to /z/, /c/, /s/; whole-syllable pronouncing /zh/, /ch/, /sh/; analysis on pronouncing principles /j/, /q/, /x/; medials of finals with /i/ or /u/ being the initial vowel should be pronounced as short vowel sound in Thai [i] or [u] when students encounter finals with /i/ or /u/ being the initial vowel. The author holds that Negative Transfer in first language mainly contributes to error. The major standpoints are: contrast and mimicking are more important than other methods; distraction in first language is the fountainhead of error; source of distraction should be found out through thorough contrast analysis in two languages to exclude distraction in first language.

Mei Chen (2010) studied students subject of Rajabhatrajanarindar University Thailand, Dhaiboonrittaya School. By simply comparing the phonetic systems of Chinese and Thai, the author

concluded that those students' initial errors in Chinese mainly appear in /z/, /c/; /r/; /h/; /j/, /q/, /x/; /zh/, /ch/, /sh/; final errors /ü/; /er/; /uo/ & /ua/; /ie/ & /ia/. Solutions are provided as follows: gustures-pronunciation should be applied to /z/, /c/; analysis on pronouncing principles /r/; vibration (of vocal chords=) /h/; graphic presentation graphic presentation /j/, /q/, /x/; whole-syllable pronouncing /zh/, /ch/, /sh/; vibration (of vocal chords) /ü/; exaggerating-transition /er/; contrast /uo/ & /ua/, /ie/ & /ia/. The author holds that Negative Transfer in first language mainly contributes to error. The major standpoints are as follows: the teaching and learning of phonetics and pronunciation is the crux in that of languages; only the prominence in phonetics and pronunciation can facilitate the teaching tasks of other related aspects.

Conceptual framework



Methodology

To find The reasons why Thai students cannot hear the difference between the two sounds ia and ie were investigated, using the distribution of questionnaires to test the listening sounds that are Pinyin ia and ie with Walailak University students Chinese language

Population and Sample

Student of 83 Thai first-year Chinese students at Walailak University

Table 2

Length of Chinese language study

Study time	No. of students	Percent (%)
2 months or less	26	31.36
1 year	5	6.02
2 years	3	3.61
3 years	45	54.21
4 years	2	2.40
6 years	1	1.20
11 years	1	1.20

The respondents were divided into two groups according to their language study time.

First group : First-year students majoring in Chinese at Walailak University who had studied Chinese for less than two months. Second group : First-year students (57) majoring in Chinese at Walailak University who had studied Chinese for more than one year. A total of 49 (54.21%) students had studied Chinese for 3 years or more.

after listening to the ia and ie sounds. The first part included the name of the respondent and the time spent learning Chinese. The second part contained the ia and ie strategy scale of Chinese listening comprehension.

Two options were offered to distinguish between the ia and ie sounds as contents of the phonetic rhyme ia and ie and related topics (jia, jie), (qia, qie), (xia, xie), and (lia, lie). The scale consisted of a total of 14 items.

Research Tools

A questionnaire was used to examine why Thai students failed to distinguish between Pinyin

Data Collection

Results were as follows:

Table 3*Study time of two months or less*

Score	No. of students	Percent (%)
2	1	3.84
5	1	3.84
6	1	3.84
7	2	7.69
8	1	3.84
9	1	3.84
10	2	7.69
11	3	11.53
12	4	15.38
13	3	11.35
14	7	26.92

The first group of Chinese learners had studied the language for two months or less. Average score was 10.84 with a pass mark at 8. Out of the 26 students, 21 (81%) passed. Most

of the students achieved a perfect score so the time length for learning Chinese did not affect their ability to distinguish between the ia and ie sounds.

Table 4*Study time of more than one year*

Score	No. of students	Percent (%)
9	3	5.6
10	6	11.31
11	11	20.75
12	16	30.18
13	13	24.52
14	22	41.50

The second group of Chinese learners had studied the language for more than one year. Average score was 11.04 with a pass mark at 8. All of the 53 students passed. The lowest score was 9 points. These students had no listening ability problems in distinguishing between the ie and ia sounds.

Statistical Analysis

The first group made errors in the ia sound at 45% and the ie sound at 55%. The second group made errors in the ia sound at 48% and the ie sound at 52%. Both groups made errors in the ia and ie sounds with more errors in ie than in ia.

Table 5*Errors made by Walailak University students in ie and ia sounds*

Study time	ia	ie
Two months or less	45%	55%
More than one year	48%	52%

Analysis of the causes of errors

There is no ie [iɛ] in Thai, and the approximation is only [i: a], so students often use this instead of both 'ie' and 'ia'. There are 10 complex vowels in Chinese and 30 in Thai. The complex vowel sounds are different and there is no Thai equivalent for the Chinese [au] [ia] [ou] [iao] [iou] [uei] and [uei]. Thai has several similar tonal sounds as [au] [ia] [iu] and [ui], so students use these sounds instead of Chinese and errors occur (Chen E, 2006).

Result

Thai students learn Chinese Pinyin ia and ie and the pronunciation differences are not adequately distinguished. Most of the students could distinguish between ia and ie, but if left to pronounce these sounds on their own they made errors because there is no ie in the Thai language.

Discussions

ie and ia are free variants of the same phoneme in Thai and are often confused with each other. To rectify such errors, students need to first recognise that the Chinese uo and ua, and ie and ia belong to different phonemes; they cannot be mixed. Students must remember that Chinese words which sound as uo, and ie are read as ua and ia, and then this problem should be

solved. (Chen E, 2006)

It becomes important to know that the a is following behind ia, so the mouth shape must be opened large. When pronouncing the sound ie, this looks like laughing. Thai students must be reminded not to read Thai เมีย (ia) as Chinese ia and ie. These sounds must be read at the same time to the students so that they can hear the difference between them.

Recommendation

Chinese teachers at Walailak University use Boya Primary Chinese1 to teach students. However, Boya Primary Chinese 1 does not refer to the most common errors of Thai students when learning Chinese. The phonetic exercises in Boya Primary Chinese 1 for Junior 1 are not difficult for Thai students to learn Chinese. This book does not adequately assist Thai students to comprehend and master difficulties of pronunciation.

Research deficiencies

1. The Questionnaire only examined the syllables of a word. The phonemes -ia and -ie were not placed in sentences which might give different results.

2. The questionnaire used only two option questions of -ia and -ie so the difficulty of choosing the correct answer was relatively small.



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