



香港城市大學
City University of Hong Kong

A study tool for improving English pronunciation for Cantonese-speaking students

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Wai Sum LEE

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Abstract:

The proposed project designs a study tool for improving Cantonese-speaking students' English pronunciation by bringing awareness to them the differences in the sounds and sound systems between the two languages. Many Cantonese-speaking students, after taking many English lessons, nonetheless pronounce the sounds of English with heavy Cantonese accent. Heavily accented speech not only affects communication to varying degree, it may also stigmatize the speaker. The sound systems of English and Cantonese differ in many ways. A significant difference is while English is a stress and polysyllabic language, Cantonese is a tone and monosyllabic language. The two languages also differ in sound inventory, arrangement of sounds in sequence and syllable structure. Language teachers of English are generally not familiar with the sound system of Cantonese and are unable to diagnose and effectively correct the English pronunciation mistakes. The study tool imparts to students the knowledge of the sound systems of English and Cantonese and their differences. Students are made aware that it is the substitution of the Cantonese sounds and tone for the English sounds and stress that causes Cantonese accent in their spoken English. The expected result is that students will be able to self-correct the English pronunciation errors. The study tool will contain (1) a concise summary of the information on (i) the sounds and sound systems of English and Cantonese and the differences, including the sound inventories, articulatory characteristics of the sounds, sequential constraints of the sounds and syllable structures between the two languages, and (ii) the nature of the stress system in English and tone system in Cantonese and the differences between the two systems; (2) all the possible cases of mispronunciation of the English sounds and errors in English stress patterns; and (3) a guide for correcting the mispronunciations and errors.