

## **SCAFFOLDING LITERACY LEARNING: VYGOTSKY IN THE CLASSROOM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Problems Faced by Mandarin Speaking Chinese Students in Learning English as a Second Language  
WONG HON CHENG 1.0 Introduction The use of English in this country can be traced back to the British colonial rule in Malaya. After Independence, English became an official language. When the National Language Act was passed, English became the second language (L2). Despite being the L2, English is still widely used in the business, academic, professional and recreational fields. It is a means of communication in everyday life. From the educational point of view, English is being taught as an L2 at both Primary and Secondary levels. However, the standard of English is not what it was five or ten years ago. This has been proved by last year's SPM (School Leaving Examination) English Language results. This decline in the standard alarmed the Ministry of Education which has taken several immediate steps to remedy this situation. The training of more English teachers both for the primary and secondary schools, the twinning programmes between local training colleges and United Kingdom universities or colleges, the intensification of the in-service courses for TESL are some of the Ministry's programmes. In line with the Ministry's efforts to raise the standard of English in this country, a study of the problems faced by the Chinese students in learning English will be appropriate because they constitute one of the major components of the student population in Malaysia. Most of the Chinese students speak either Mandarin and/or one of the Chinese dialects at home like Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, Teo Chew, Hainan etc. The speaking of English is limited to the English lessons in the classroom. 53 Students seldom speak English to their teachers or to their friends. In spite of the fact that so many difficulties and problems confront the Chinese students in learning English, very few related studies have been conducted in Malaysia. A study on this topic will help the learners and the English language teachers to locate and understand precisely the areas of difficulty. Conducting such a study will therefore be pertinent to their needs. The language teachers in school may have had the experience of teaching Chinese pupils, yet few have kept a systematic record and analysis of errors made by them. A study of this kind may in some ways help the language teachers gain a better insight into the exact learning problems of his students, and therefore be in a better position to give appropriate guidance. English Textbooks and Readers in the market cater in general for all students. Few are written to cater exclusively to the needs of the Chinese learners with regard to emphasis on their particularly difficult areas in the learning of English. It is hoped that this study will provide the teacher or writer of English textbooks and other

supplementary teaching materials, with a guide to the areas of learning that need special attention and emphasis. Chinese students lack confidence in their learning of English. Xu Li Hua (1991) pointed out: "The Chinese students are comparatively quiet and shy, which works to their disadvantage in speaking. They are afraid of making mistakes. They feel uncomfortable in their first attempt at speech in English and they are afraid of failure, laughter and ridicule." This comment is very true. If the learner knows the specific areas of his weakness or the cause of his difficulties, he will psychologically be more prepared to deal with his problems. If he knows precisely the source of his difficulties, he will know where to focus his attention and hence, feel more equipped to overcome his problems.

2.0 An Overview of Related Studies Research on the difficulties of Chinese speakers learning English began in the early days of Contrastive Analysis and 54 Audio-lingualism (Reed, Lado and Shen 1948). A series of contrastive studies by Shen (1949, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959) deal with Mandarin speakers' problems with the sound system of English. Attempts to identify universal phonological processing, strategies and explain errors made by Chinese speakers (among others) in non-transfer terms (Sampson 1971; Tarone 1976) have met with only limited success. Saunders (1962, 1963) and Hart (1969) continuing in the Contrastive tradition, turned their attention to speakers of South Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Hokkien or Amoy, and Hakka) in South East Asia. Syllabic structure is studied in Tjee (1969 on Mandarin speakers) and Anderson (1982, 1983; on Mandarin and Amoy speakers) and included in a more general survey of pronunciation difficulties by C.Y. Chen (1976). Han and Koh (1976) focus on aural discrimination difficulties of Chinese speakers (Cantonese and Hokkien) but their findings naturally bear on pronunciation also. The following common problems are repeatedly noted by researchers: final consonant deletion, consonant cluster simplification, vowel simplification, unreduced vowels in unstressed positions and epenthesis, substitution of individual segmental phonemes, and difficulty with voicing and aspiration, will vary according to the native dialect of the learner. From existing research, it seems that a contrastive approach is useful in studying the aural discrimination and oral production difficulties of Chinese learners of English especially if the effort adopts an empirical, systematic, learner-centered, and performance-based approach. It is well known that errors in intonation are likely to be perceived as more serious than errors in segmental production. Given this, it is surprising to find so little work done so far on the possible effects of the tonal properties of Chinese on the learning of English speech contours. Intuitively, it seems plausible that speakers of Chinese, a tone language, would have trouble with English, a language in which tone is non-phonemic. Tucker (1969) hypothesizes that a Cantonese learner of English may be "predisposed" to hear as several words the same English word uttered with different intonation patterns. The learner "attends to the tone and stress of each word in a sentence and finds it 55 difficult to learn to attend to the sentence intonation patterns." Han and Koh (1976) make a similar suggestion. Pronunciation is intimately related to group identity (see for e.g. Stevick 1976; Scovel 1977; Bourhis 1979). Given the complex history of interaction between Chinese speakers and English speakers in various colonial and quasi-colonial situations, inquiry into this aspect of English learning should be pursued.

3.0 Problems faced by the Mandarin-speaking Chinese students in learning English as a Second Language

3.1 Phonology Generally it is not easy to coax a Chinese student with a Chinese educational background to speak in English. The reluctance to speak may be due to the vast difference in phonology between English and Mandarin thus giving rise to difficulty in pronunciation of words, phrases, etc. The "Common Speech" is a kind of modern dialectal Chinese spoken in Northern China. The phonetic system of this modern Chinese is called "Hanyu Pinyin". It is a system of Chinese phonetic alphabets first introduced in 1958. It consists of a set of Roman alphabets used to translate Chinese characters. The system makes the Chinese language much easier for foreign learners. The phonological system of Mandarin consists of 23 consonant sounds and 36 vowel sounds, while in English there are 24 consonant sounds and 20 vowel sounds. Mandarin English Consonant sounds 23 24 Vowel sounds 36 20 59 44 Each word in Mandarin consists of only one syllable (monosyllable) which may be a

vowel sound or a consonant sound plus vowel sound. The consonant sound always occurs in the initial position or not at all except in the case of /n, ʔ / 56 Mandarin phonology 23 consonant 36 vowel 4 tones for each sounds sounds sound vowels diphthongs vowel/diphthong+ voiced velar nasal which is classified into the vowel sound group in Mandarin as shown in the table above. The most distinctive difference between Mandarin and English phonetically is that Mandarin is a tone language. A different tone or pitch of a sound would in most cases refer to a different word with a totally different meaning. For every syllable there are 4 different tones. The following extract will help to illustrate the point. "In addition to consonants and vowels, there is a third constituent element of the Chinese word. This is the height and movement of the fundamental pitch of the voice, known as tone. Tones have often been described as a device to distinguish words ... The sounds of the 4 tones in Mandarin are (1) high level (-), (2) high rising (/), (3) low rising (v) or low dipping, and (4) high falling to low (\). The majority of words that differ only in tone are quite unrelated -fei (fly); fei (fat); fei (bandit); fei (waste, spend)." (from World Book Encyclopedia) Besides differences in the consonant and vowel sounds, the employing of the four tones to make sounds of different pitch to denote different characters in Mandarin is the most important difference between English and Mandarin phonology. In English, sound variation for different words is affected by varying the vowel or consonant sounds. These fundamental differences make it difficult for the Chinese student to master the English sounds. Usually, the Chinese student will use the mono-syllabic sounds with the tone closest to the one he hears to code the pronunciation of new words as he has no other means to do so. 57 This results in a typical Chinese accent when he reads or speaks, which further discourages him from speaking. The Chinese phonetic system employs 25 Latin or Roman alphabets, excluding the letter "V" which is only used in the Hakka dialect. About half of the total number of Chinese consonants correspond to the English consonants.

### 3.1.1 Approximately close consonants

From a comparison of the two sound systems, the following consonants are found to be approximately close: /b, d, g/ They are not exactly corresponding, they are only approximately close. The difference being /b, d, g/ in Mandarin are unvoiced, while the English /b, d, g/ are voiced. Problems Minimal: The Chinese students tend to pronounce these consonants less forcefully. However, some students tend to pronounce /dog/ as /tog/ with the replacement of the voiced dental plosive by a voiceless, unaspirated plosive It!, as /d/ in Chinese is not voiced. The student will not attempt to vibrate his vocal chords while pressing the tongue-tip against the alveolar.

### 3.1.2 Consonants which are vastly different

Below are some sounds of Mandarin which may cause problems for those learning English.

#### 3.1.2.1 (zh) and (ch) are both pronounced as voiceless affricates with the tongue-tip curling towards the hard palate. (j) and (q) are both pronounced as voiceless palatal affricates. These sounds tend to interfere with /tʃ/ a voiceless palatalalveolar affricate, and /tʃ/ a voiced palatal-alveolar affricate. The curl of the tongue (or retroflexion) interferes with the right pronunciation of English sounds. Take for example, the English words chill /tʃɪl/ and Jill /dʒɪl/. The initial consonant would be pronounced with the tongue curled at the hard palate and merely dropping the jaw instead of distinguishing the initial sounds by voicing. 58

#### 3.1.2.2 Two other Mandarin sounds which may interfere with the learner's acquisition of English speech sounds are (sh) and (x). (sh) is a blade palatal voiceless fricative pronounced by curling the tip of the tongue against the hard palate. (x) is a voiceless palatal fricative. These sounds interfere with /ʃ/ a voiceless palatalalveolar fricative. Once again retroflexion influences the pronunciation of the English sound so that a word like shot hot! would have the initial consonant approximating the Mandarin (sh).

#### 3.1.2.3 Let us now consider (z) and (c) which are both voiceless affricates, except that the latter is aspirated. They are articulated as if a plosive is released into an affricate. (z) therefore, sounds more like [tzu]. For the English word zoo, the learner might substitute [tzu].

### 3.1.3 English Consonants that are Absent in Mandarin

The following English sounds are absent in Mandarin: /v/ /O/ / / As these sounds are absent, students tend to substitute them with the nearest sound of their mother tongue. I v / a voiced labio-dental fricative. Students tend to substitute it with (w) a bilabial semi-vowel eg. van is pronounced as wan / ? / a

voiceless dental fricative. Students substitute it with (d) and (t) eg. In /tʃn/ is pronounced as /tʃn/ or /gʃn/ a voiced dental fricative. Students substitute it with (d) a voiceless alveolar plosive for eg. then becomes /den/ father becomes /fɑdʒ~/ brother becomes /brʌdʒ~/ 59

### 3.1.4 The Voiced Mandarin Consonants

There are very few voiced consonants in Mandarin, these are (m) (n) (ŋ) (l) and (r). The voiced or unvoiced feature is not as important as the aspirated or unaspirated feature in Mandarin. This lack of prominence has led to problems in pronouncing the voiced English consonants, for eg. pleasure is pronounced /plɛʒə/ measure is pronounced /mɛʒə/

### 3.1.5 A Comparison and Identification of the Mandarin and English Vowels and the Problem Areas

#### Similarities

The following Chinese vowels are similar to English vowels: (ai) (ei) (au) (ou)

#### Differences

Levels of vowel sounds: Mandarin vowels have five levels of sound. These levels are slightly different in the two phonological systems in the "openness" of the mouth, the level of position of the tongue and the ways lips are stretched or rounded. The Chinese student has difficulty in pronouncing certain vowels, due to the fact that he does not open his mouth wide enough or shape his lips as needed to produce the sounds correctly. This gives rise to errors like: /a/ sound. Students tend to pronounce "heart" [hɑ : t/ as "hut" /hʊt/ (mouth not open wide enough); "dark" /dɑ : k/ as /dʌk/ "duck"

### 3.1.6 The Long and Short Features of English Vowels

A prominent feature in English vowels is the lengthening of vowels. This poses a problem for the Chinese learners when pronouncing English vowels because Mandarin does not have this feature. Problems A learner is often confused over words like these: 60 ship - sheep man - men fit - feet pat - pet chip - cheap bad - bed

### 3.1.7 Vowels

The difference between English and Chinese vowels and the absence in Chinese of some of the English diphthongs lead to inaccurate pronunciation of vowels, leading to the wrong words being said. for eg. affect/effect rise/raise vocation/vacation parameter/perimeter adopt/adapt campus/compass light/lit In some cases a combination of poorly produced consonants and vowels leads to confusion both in speech and in writing. For eg. met/made lose/lost lever/level disease/decease data/delta process/progress attitude/altitude daily/dairy

### 3.1.9 Phonemes

There is a vast difference between the phonemes of English and Mandarin. Elliott said: "There is not a one-to-one relationship, much less an actual identity, between the phonemes of Mandarin and English. So for the Chinese learner of English, there may well be confusion in the aural perception of English words which will later lead to confusion and error in the reproduction of the words both in speech and in writing." The Mandarin phoneme has a tonal element which is not present in English. To the Chinese, strict adherence to the specific tone of a Mandarin word is crucial to clear speech. The habit of speaking in the mother tongue has evidently influenced the student's performance in reading English, his reading is found to be choppy and monotonous. The aspiration feature is present in both languages but they have different functions. In English, the distribution of the phoneme determines whether the same phoneme is aspirated or unaspirated. 61 For eg. /p/ in the initial position of "peak" is an aspirated [p] but after "s" in "speak" it is not. In Mandarin, however, aspiration is an important phonemic factor because it makes a difference in the meaning of the word. For eg. [gɑ] unaspirated means "should" but [kɑ] aspirated, means "to open".

### 3.1.10 Problems with Consonant Clusters and Final Consonants

Consonant clusters is another feature where problems can be expected as there are no such combinations of consonant sounds in Mandarin. MacLeish (1967) said: "Consonant clusters present high frequency problems to any speaker who is learning English as a foreign language. This is so because clusters are often combinations of problem sounds; or the combination of familiar consonants does not occur in the native language in clusters." Groups of consonants within one syllable that occur before or after a pause are called "clusters" and those that occur intervocalically at syllable or word boundaries are called "sequences" (Bowen 1975). Initial clusters refer to groups of consonants occurring at the beginning of words after a pause, and final clusters refer to groups of consonants at the ends of words before a pause. Consonant combinations with sibilants pose special difficulties for Chinese students. (i) Initial cluster with sibilants in the initial peripheral position "st" - stem is pronounced as /sætəm/ "str" - string is pronounced as /stɹɪŋ/ "dr" - drain is pronounced as /dɹ/

re?n/ "skr" - skrew is pronounced as /s?k?lu/ "spr" - spring is pronounced as /s?p?l??/ (ii) Consonant clusters with sibilants in the medial position sister - is pronounced as /sit?/ (the central "s" is dropped). 62 (iii) Consonant clusters in final position tests - is pronounced as /tes/ desks - is pronounced as /des/ lists - is pronounced as /lis/ or /list/ (iv) Other consonant clusters: The following are examples of some consonant clusters which Mandarin speakers find very difficult: eg. /nt? s - thousandths /ks? s/ - sixths (v) "thr" three - is pronounced as /tri/ throw - is pronounced as /tr?? / (vi) "tn" and "dn" forgotten is pronounced as forgo-ten instead of /f?gotn/. wooden is pronounced as woo-den instead of /wudn/. hidden is pronounced as hi-den instead of /h?dn. Chinese students are often not aware of the difference between "bag" and "back" as in Mandarin they do not voice /g/. The following are examples of words which are difficult for the Mandarin speaker to distinguish: dog dug leg log dock duck lake lock

### 3.1.11 Inflections for past tense, plurals and adjectives

As there is an absence of inflections in Mandarin, tense inflections and plural markers are not enunciated by Chinese students. The following are often wrongly pronounced: Tense inflection walked watched wrapped finished danced Plural markers walks watches bushes dresses Adjectives blessed - is pronounced as /bles/ instead of /blest I learned - is pronounced as /l?:n/ instead of /l?:n?d/

### 3.1.12 Stress

Unlike Mandarin, if a word in English has more than one syllable, one or more syllables are stressed. If more than one syllable is stressed, one syllable receives more stress than the others. In utterances of English, the degree of stress on words within the sentence, too, does make a difference in meaning. An English monosyllabic word in isolation has only one primary stress but in connected speech, some monosyllabic words may have less stress. This is due to the fact that the syllable stress in a monosyllabic word is variable as it is dependent on its position or function in the sentence. For e.g.: She sings like a lark sings. (The first "sing" is stressed more heavily than the second.) This becomes very complicated for the Mandarin speaker. Under the influence of the tonal element in Mandarin, Chinese students will find it difficult to "see" or "hear" even the stress in a polysyllabic word like "photograph"; it will be pronounced as a monotoned sound "photograph". The following are examples of words commonly stressed wrongly: table instead of table many instead of many teacher instead of teacher mother instead of mother shining instead of shijning slowly instead of slowly beautiful instead, of beautiful Examples of wrong sentence stress due to wrong word-stress or syllable stress: My mother is going to the market instead of My mother is going to the market. Since students who are unable to apply the right stress to their speech or reading will have difficulty in having their speech or reading understood, this causes intelligibility problems for Mandarin speakers.

### 3.1.13 Phrasing and Link-up Breathing

phrasing and pause are closely related. Sufficient breath should be taken at the beginning of a sentence or phrase. If the sentence is too long, it should be divided into meaningful parts. Linking is another essential factor in the effective flow of speech. The lack of link-ups between words in the utterance of a phrase or sentence is another major problem area for Chinese learners of English. Link-ups are totally absent in their speech. The result is an overall staccato or choppy effect in speech.

## 3.2 Grammar

The written form of Mandarin uses characters and not alphabets. Features such as affixes, bound morphemes, inflection and derivation are not noticeable. It is in this area that a Chinese student experiences the most difficulty as these features are all new to him. Besides having to cope with the rules, one is also further confused by the numerous variations and exceptions to the rules. In Mandarin, there are no articles. When the need arises, Mandarin uses specific numeratives or classifiers. Mandarin is rich in the use of classifiers. Specific words are used with numerals to denote animals and things. For e.g., Mandarin uses an expression like "a tail of fish" which has no English equivalent. The use of definite articles and indefinite articles is therefore a problem for Chinese students. Errors usually arise out of the wrong use, indiscriminate use or just not using the articles at all. Here is an example of English usage by a Mandarin speaker: I enclosed for you is Mount Kinabalu. The Mount is in Sabah. It is a beautiful Mount.

### 3.2.1 Tenses

Perhaps the most serious problem faced by a Chinese student in the learning of English is tenses. First the student is not familiar with the existence of verb forms. There are no

inflections and no verb forms in Mandarin. The use of the verb forms in specific combinations to form the numerous tenses in English is a strange and bewildering experience for the Chinese student. 65 The passive voice further complicates matters and so do irregular verbs. Errors in tenses and verb patterns constitute a large percentage of the common errors among Chinese students. Examples of these errors are shown below: 1. There are swimming in the sea, people who could not swimed they use the float. We also can found some people were sun-bathing on the seaside, some children were played games on the seaside too. 2. I am sorry to hear that you are failed in your examination. 3. By the time I cycle home it is already dusk. After dinner I reading some of my lessons for the next day. The last week-end is undoubtedly the best day of the week because it is a day of relaxation and enjoyment. 4. We played is very happy soon I was tired and I went to under a tree and eat some food and drink water. 5. Pupils and the old man to fall into the water. If he cannot to swim then he will to die. In Mandarin, past action is usually indicated with a marker after the verb. A common error for Mandarin learners is equating "-ed" with the Mandarin past tense marker and applying the "-ed" marker to all verbs (even inflected forms). We then get words like \*wented. Sometimes however, the opposite is true and students drop or do not use the "d" or "ed" form. For e.g.: "... when they have reach" "... until they are big enough for their skins to be remove." Some developmental errors might be the result of faulty comprehension of grammatical distinctions in English or poor gradation of teaching items. There are errors like: 1. the animals were died 2. they are went Here the (be + verb stem + ed) was used for the (verb stern + ed). Sentences like "he is jumped before me" reveal how 66 the Present Continuous form is falsely hypothesized. In Mandarin, the verb stem always remains unchanged while tense forms would be indicated by other words. There is no difference between the Present tense or the Present Continuous, with the result that the learner usually equates all Continuous forms in English with the Past or Past Perfect tenses. The structure "There is/are a tree/some trees in my garden." is a difficult structure for Chinese students as in Mandarin, one character is used as both "have" and "has" and also "there is/are/was/were". Thus the students will translate the above sentence as "In my garden have a tree/some trees". Such errors as those which occur in the sentences below, are the result of the absence of tense and number in Mandarin. 1. There have two popular beaches. 2. The beach have many people sun-bathing. 3. If a person have good health. 4. Sometimes you has been playing. In the case of the question form, especially questions formed by reversing the order of subject + verb e.g. "Can he come?" the same question in Mandarin can be formulated from the statement: "He can come" + "ma?". In Mandarin, questions can be formed by adding "ma" to statements instead of resorting to word order as in English. Chinese students will take some time to learn the question forms in English due to the difference in structure between the two languages. As there are no inflections, tense, number indications for nouns and verbs in Mandarin, there is no agreement or concord between English and Mandarin. Students can be expected to get confused in these areas. Chinese students are also confused by the fact that the singular marker for English verbs coincides with the plural marker for English nouns, Students are usually confused as to why we sometimes add the inflections "s/es" to make a 67 singular noun plural and sometimes do the same to make a plural verb singular. For example: The apples (plural) She sings (singular) In Mandarin, comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives and adverbs use standard qualifiers. It is therefore natural for students to produce terms like "gooder" or "more good" or "more better" as a general rule for comparatives. Elliott (1983) stated that there is a considerable overlap between superlatives and intensification. Errors made by some Chinese learners are as follows: 1. "It is not much significant." 2. "more louder" 3. "very much ... than" 4. "They have best morale" 5. "This is best entertainment for us" 6. "They may not do their jobs better" 3.2.2

Interference from L1 In her research, Tan (1978) said that grammatical interference occurs when the student forces a sentence in English into the grammatical pattern of Mandarin. For eg. You wait me. ( ) Often a word in English becomes associated with one in Mandarin and then reused as if it was a Chinese word. There have been cases when students have written the Mandarin equivalent in place

of the English word as in You have to be (??) (careful) 68 Morphological interference takes place when the rules in the production of a morpheme in Mandarin are applied to a morpheme in the English language. For e.g., the negative morpheme is formed by adding ? or before a verb, adjective or adverb. Many students equate all negative morphemes in English with the Mandarin equivalent eg.: He not come ? Angela Lee (1986) detected difficulties faced by Chinese students in writing especially words which carried the "a" form e.g. "months" was written as "month". According to Lee, this inclination to drop the "s" from plural words indicates that the students faced Li interference. Classifiers are used before nouns and after a number instead of articles in Mandarin and as such the students might not remember to add the "s" to words in the plural form.

### 3.2.3 Countable and Uncountable Nouns

In Mandarin, rules governing countable and uncountable nouns are less complicated. Countable nouns are expressed as follows: Unit+ + Noun On the other hand, nouns become uncountable with the use of before it as in for "much water" Students face great difficulties with the numerous rules governing countable and uncountable nouns and the singular and plural forms. To simplify matters, they often subcategorize certain "count" nouns as "non-count" and vice versa. Many errors appear in written and oral work, like: homeworks peoples many works many money

### 3.2.4 Prepositions and Particles

Chinese students face the problem of using prepositions and particles correctly. Some of the errors are: 1. He is going to participate an important examination. (It should be "He is going to participate in an important examination.) 69 2. I do not wish to interfere you. (I do not wish to interfere with you.) 3. cures man from his illness. (Cures man of his illness.) 4. good for me to listen some music. (Good for me to listen to some music.) 5. discuss the matter over (discuss the matter) 4. Lexis This is the most difficult area as it involves knowing the difference between the languages and their usage and cultural background before predicting the difficulties that pupils are likely to experience. The meanings of the words and expressions also pose a problem. R..Lado in his "Linguistics Across Cultures" (1957) states: "It is quite an illusion to think, as even literate people sometimes do, that meanings are the same in all languages, that languages differ only in the forms used for meanings. As a matter of fact the meanings into which we classify our experience are culturally determined or modified, and they vary considerably from culture to culture. Some meanings found in one culture may not exist in another." 1. In short, wherever two languages are lacking in precise lexical one-to-one equivalents, this can give rise to interference errors. For e.g., "leg" and "foot". The Chinese "jiao" refers to the entire lower limb below the thigh and hence the Chinese L1 student learning English as L2, makes the wrong choice and refers to his "foot" as "leg". 2. Similarly, the English think that the pig is lazy and the donkey, stupid. The Chinese on the other hand think that the worm and melon are better examples (Lazy worm and stupid melon). 3. The English read newspapers. To the Chinese, "read" has the connotation of reading aloud which makes it absurd to do what is reported in a printed paper - thus "see report paper". 4. The early Chinese must have believed that thinking was the function of the heart, thus the expression "I heart inside think" which means 'In my heart, I think." 70 5. 'One morning" or "That morning" is incomplete in Mandarin, as morning, afternoon, or night is part of a day. Sentences like the examples below are very common among Chinese students: 1. I usually wake up very late at that day morning. 2. Last holiday's morning my friends and I Conclusion From the above discussion it may be seen that Chinese students face many problems in learning English as a second language. However, this situation can be improved with the cooperation of the students, the school, the Ministry of Education, the textbook writers and most important of all, the language teachers. The following are some recommendations: 1. Exercises in pronunciation and phonetics should be intensified in the Upper Primary School English Syllabus. This is to help students hear the different sounds as well as enable them to read or look up their phonetic transcriptions in order to learn the correct pronunciation. To quote Pierce (1973): "If the students do not learn correct pronunciation of sounds (phoneme) in the very early phases of the course, they rarely ever learn to pronounce correctly," It has been found that students write English as it is spoken by them. They do not know how to read the transcriptions to

the correct pronunciation of words found in dictionaries. Perhaps a basic exercise in phonetics would help to solve the problem. Students should be given considerable practice in pronouncing sentences with consonant clusters. They should be learning the stress, rhythm and intonation patterns of English. This will facilitate the fluent pronunciation of sentences, Aural exercises are often neglected in English lessons in class and more emphasis should be given to this skill to train students to discriminate between sounds. For eg., the /ʔ/ from the // and the /t/ sound. The well-known substitution 71 error Chinese students make when attempting to produce the /r/ and /l/ can affect intelligibility and this requires attention. 2. A lack of vocabulary has been found to be a major problem. One useful measure for the students to improve their vocabulary is to encourage them to cultivate an interest in reading extensively. A possible means of arousing their interest in the reading habit would be to encourage them to read contemporary magazines and materials that are in keeping with their level of proficiency in the language. Articles from newspapers are examples of such materials that could be used by the classroom teachers to generate an interest in reading. 3. The students could be asked to keep a scrapbook of newspaper/magazine articles which would be periodically checked by the teacher and the latter could also use one of the periods in class to allow a student the opportunity to orally communicate a summary of the content of an article to the class. This would enhance the oral communication ability of the students. 4. The language teacher could circulate an article and an exercise on registering new words could be carried out, Students would be asked to write down the difficult words and their meanings. The students could also be asked to produce or build sentences based on the new word. This would further enhance the students' usage of the new words and would reinforce their comprehension of new lexical items. Exercises in which one word in a sentence is replaced with a new word from a list has been said to have reinforced the illusion that words are interchangeable. 5. To teach the plural form in English, I would advocate providing meaningful explanations to the uses of the "a", "es" and "ves" forms before proceeding to drill students in the use of the forms. These drills could be incorporated into doze as well as error identification exercises which constitute part of the English Syllabus. 6. In error identification exercises, correct and incorrect plural forms of nouns could be provided and the students would be required to pick out the incorrect responses. 7. In the case of the students' inability to use the "d" and "ed" form of the past tense and the passive form of the regular verbs, some preliminary exercises could be 72 conducted to help the students recognise the regular from the irregular verbs. Exercises could be designed to help the students in the use of the past tense of regular verbs. These could be in the form of filling in the blanks exercises, with original verbs given in parentheses, changing the present into the past, and for better students, doze exercises with special emphasis on the use of the past tense. Once proficiency in the use of the past tense is gained, the language teacher could introduce exercises in the use of the past irregular and relate these exercises to the use of the past participle. 8. As for poor spellers, perhaps single exercises based on the spelling rules would in some small measure help students become better spellers. For students with lower proficiency in English, perhaps spelling tests could be resorted to. 9. Lastly, dictation as a learning and teaching tool which incorporates the transcribing of orally presented information into the written form has been found to be well accepted. Above are just some of the teaching strategies which English teachers can use in order to upgrade the standard of English among students. It is hoped that in the near future, more research can be carried out on the problems faced by Mandarin-medium students in learning English in Malaysia. References Anderson, J.I. (1983). The difficulties of English syllable structure for Chinese ESL learners. *Language Learning and Communication*, 2. Brown, H.D. (1980). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. Chen Chung-Yu. (1976). Pronunciation of English by students from the Chinese stream in Singapore: Some salient features. *RELC Journal*, 1 (2). Cheung Yat Shing. (1984). The uses of English and Chinese Languages in Hong Kong. *Language Learning and Communication*, 4. Chung Lai Har. (1984). A study of pronunciation and auditory discrimination of Chinese primary school pupils. Institut Bahasa (TESL project). 73 Corder,



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