

Zhang, H. (2015). "Positional Effects in Second Language Chinese Tones," *Journal of Chinese Language Teaching*, Vol.12, No. 2, pp.1-30.

Abstract:

Although tone error analysis has been the focus of research in the study of second language acquisition of Chinese, very little of this research investigates the positional effects in a cross-linguistic context. The present study looks into the positional effects of Chinese lexical tones in L2 research data at both word and sentence levels in varying prosodic units including prosodic words, phonological phrases, intonation phrases, etc. It surveys the performance of non-native tonal productions, particularly the error rates of each tone type, made by sixty learners of modern standard Chinese with different first language backgrounds: English, Japanese, and Korean. As a result, similar error patterns across these three groups regarding the positional effects were found. For pedagogical purposes, this study identifies four types of the most vulnerable positions (i.e., with the highest error rates), and concludes that the majority of them are located at prosodic unit edges. These positions include the word- and phrase-final positions for rising tones, word- and phrase-initial positions for falling tones, and the syllables immediately preceding sentence focus.