# Influence of Phonics learning on Chinese Children's Phonological Awareness

## Introduction

Phonological Awareness refers to the awareness and application of the sound structure in spoken language. The development of phonological awareness has an important influence on the spelling and reading ability of language operators. A large number of studies have found that English phonological awareness, as an important indicator, can predict children's literacy ability, and phonological awareness deficiency is the most important cause of children's dyslexia (Torgesen, Wanger&Rashotte, 1994). Relevant studies have revealed the important role of explaining the reading development of Chinese children and the formation of Chinese phonological awareness of dyslexia, which also shows some similarities and cross-language commonality in different languages.

For many people, English is learned as a foreign language, and the cultivation of phonological awareness is regarded as the most basic step in English learning. Therefore, in recent years, many domestic English education institutions have adopted phonics as the main English teaching method for children, which has been widely promoted. There is ample evidence that phonics teaching plays an important role in cultivating beginners' reading and writing ability. At the same time, the intervention of English phonics ability is also of great significance for learners to recognize false words, spell true and false words and complete long sentence writing. Therefore, for beginners, English phonics is the beginning of the cultivation of phonological awareness ability. However, English spelling skills with Chinese pinyin spelling process exists convergence and some of the pronunciation of similarity, this can make the learners in learning English natural spell and the influence of the Chinese phonetic pronunciation, which is why a lot of people in the process of learning English in English below highlighted in pinyin or Chinese character for English pronunciation.

Language transfer is a phenomenon in which individuals interact with each other in the process of multilingual speech, and it is a fundamental issue in cross-language research. The main reason is that there are differences and similarities in the language systems of different languages, which causes that cross-language learners are more or less influenced by other languages in the process of learning different languages. For those who have mastered their mother tongue, they will consciously or unconsciously make use of their language thinking, language comparison and language understanding in the process of learning a second language. Therefore, learners will inevitably use the acquisition process of the first language (L1) to master the second language (L2). However, for children who have initially mastered the pronunciation essentials of their mother tongue, the pronunciation system of their mother tongue is not perfect, and they are in the process of continuous learning and consolidation. Therefore, in the second language (L2) teaching at this stage, the types of transfer and the possible critical period of transfer between children's foreign language learning and their mother tongue are worth exploring. Studies on early language transfer mainly focus on the negative transfer of second language acquisition and the differences between Chinese and English. In recent years, the research

object has shifted from negative transfer at syntactic, semantic and textual levels to positive transfer. So far, there are no relevant articles on the transfer effect between English phonics and Chinese pinyin phonics.

Our research will be based on phonological awareness in Chinese and English, describe the influence of phonics on phonological awareness in Chinese and English as well as the differences and similarities with Chinese pinyin phonetic system.The purpose of this study is to investigate the promotion effect of Phonics on Chinese children's English pronunciation and the language transfer phenomenon of phonological awareness of Chinese pinyin.

## The research context

### Phonological Awareness

**Concept**

Treiman (1991) defined phonological awareness as "the awareness of phonetic units in language pronunciation, including syllable, phoneme and consonant-vowel awareness." This definition more clearly analyzes the syllables, phonemes and consonants-vowels in phonological consciousness.

While McBride-chang (2004) gives a more universal and inclusive definition, which defines phonological awareness as the recognition and approach of the sound structure of a language, namely, a phonological awareness study centered on speech. Similarly, China has not formed a unified definition of phonological awareness. Xu Fen and Ren Ping (2004) believe that phonological awareness is the ability to recognize, analyze and synthesize the pronunciation structure of language.

Generally speaking, phonological awareness is defined as the cognitive ability to recognize, analyze and manipulate phonetic units (vowels, consonants, tones, phonemes and syllables, etc.) of text. It is the comprehensive ability to recognize, distinguish, perceive and manipulate phonetic units.

Phonological Awareness in English and Chinese word Recognition

Many studies have clearly pointed out that phonological awareness plays an important role in English learning. Many studies on Chinese have also stated that primary school students' phonological awareness is closely related to Chinese character recognition.

The relationship between phonological awareness and Chinese reading is still controversial. However, many studies have found that intonation and syllable awareness in phonological awareness can significantly predict Chinese reading level. Shu Hua et al. (2008) explored 202 pre-school children's phonological awareness and Chinese word recognition, and found that syllable awareness, tone awareness and rapid naming tasks could effectively explain differences in Chinese character recognition or reading. This finding highlights the unique importance of tonality awareness and syllable awareness in early Chinese children's acquisition of Chinese characters.

In general, phonological awareness is an important factor in English and Chinese vocabulary reading. Although the contribution of phonological awareness is still controversial, the predictive effect of

phonological awareness on word reading is undeniable.

**Phonics**

Phonics is a teaching method that teaches English learners how to read and write English. Phonics involves teaching learners how to associate spoken English sounds with sounds of individual letters or combinations of letters (for example, the/k/sound can be represented by spelling the letters C/k/ck/ch), and teaching learners to mix the letters to produce similar sounds for unknown words Wikipedia, The Free English phonics is both a teaching method and a learning method. According to the natural laws of English pronunciation, it is the pronunciation of letters or different letter combinations themselves. By finding out the same sound source, it is systematically and systematically integrated. Recognizing the correct pronunciation of letters and letter combinations is a widely used method of reading and decoding words.

**Similarities between English Phonics and Chinese Pinyin**

Xu Tongqiang (1991) divided the existing human languages into 13 language families and 45 language families. Among them, Chinese and English belong to Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European languages. From 1955 to 1957, the State Language Commission adopted Chinese Pinyin as the phonetic standard of modern Chinese, and formulated the latinization plan of the official Chinese characters phonetic notation. According to the Chinese pinyin scheme, the international alphabet of 26 letters is used to mark Chinese pronunciation and is only used in Chinese phonetic teaching. English also uses the 26-letter Latin, and each letter has not only its own sound (Aa, pronounced/ei /) but also a phonological sound (Aa, pronounced/ae /).

English alphabet and Chinese Pinyin share a same alphabet system, and the pronunciation of Chinese and English letters are similar. Since Chinese Pinyin in Chinese is similar to consonants and vowels in English (Zhang Bei, 2015), learners who have mastered Chinese Pinyin systematically before will easily learn phonics.

Also, they have something in common, which will promote students' English learning with the application of timely and effective teaching methods. Both Chinese and English pronunciation consists of syllables. Pinyin consists of 24 finals and 23 initials, including single finals, compound finals and nasal finals. In English, initials and consonants are almost the same, as are vowels and initials. Therefore, Chinese pinyin techniques can be applied to the learning of English phonemes.

Meanwhile, similarities between Chinese and English also improve spelling and memory. For example, the pronunciation of the word "Function" can be learned by using Chinese Pinyin. First of all, change the English decomposition pronunciation of the word "F-u-n-c-tion" into the Chinese decomposition sound "F,and,k,sh", so that English learners will easily accept the English pronunciation. Then, the word is read by combining consonants and vowels using the Chinese pinyin spelling method. Finally, it can be seen that the way of writing Chinese Pinyin is very similar to phonics. Therefore, learners are advised to make full use of Chinese Pinyin to memorize the pronunciation of words, and then memorize the spelling of words according to the pronunciation. This is consistent with the results verified by Lu Zhengli (2004), that is, learners who have mastered Chinese Pinyin are feasible in the

process of acquiring English pronunciation.

## Theoretical basis

### Critical period hypothesis

A critical period is a period of time in an organism's life during which certain external conditions can affect the organism more than they would otherwise. The critical period of language acquisition has long been studied. Those who believe that "The earlier you start to learn a foreign language, The better The results will be" often cite The "Critical Period Hypothesis" in academic theory to prove this point. In 1959, neurophysiologists Penfield and Roberts proposed that the age before the age of ten was the best age to learn language from the perspective of brain plasticity.Eric Heinz Lenneberg (1967), professor of psychology at Harvard University, systematically explained the critical period of language learning from the perspective of "neurophysiology" based on medical clinical experience. He believed that the human brain began lateralization at the age of two. Before the completion of lateralization, people learned language with the whole brain. Around the age of 11 to 19, the brain finishes marginalization, and from then on the left side of the brain is responsible for language learning. Language learning is not as good as whole brain learning after brain "edging". Therefore, language learning is best done before the brain has completed its marginalization, which is also known as the "critical period of language learning."

Researchers have studied the critical period hypothesis of second language acquisition from three perspectives: neurolinguistics, psychology and psycholinguistics. ① Neurolinguistics suggests that first language (L1) and second language (L2) are represented and stored in different brain regions. Weber-fox and Neville (1999) found by fMRI that, for late sla learners, there is a partial overlap between the cortical areas of first language (L1) and second language (L2). In contrast, the first language (L1) and second language (L2) are represented in the same brain region for early sla learners. ② Psychology explains the critical period from the perspective of working memory capacity . Accumulating language learning is closely related to expanding resources (working memory). In different stages of language learning, if the previous stage of learning is successful, the resources on which the learning mechanism depends must be expanded to adapt to the next stage of learning (Hurford & Kirby, 1999). ③ the most famous psycholinguistics studies are J ○ hnson (1989, 1991,1992) and Newport (1989; 1991)The results showed that the language proficiency of subjects who emigrated to the United States before the age of seven was no different from that of Americans, while those who emigrated between the ages of seven and 15 showed a marked decline in maturity.

The most representative research supporting this hypothesis is the experiment of Johnson&Newport (1989); The results showed that subjects who immigrated to the United States after puberty were as likely to be as good at English as native speakers. On the basis of synthesizing human research results, three conclusions were put forward which were widely cited later: first, under the condition of constant learning time and input, adults learn better than children in the early stage of syntactic and morphological development; Adolescents learn faster than children in the early stages of syntactic and morphological development, with constant learning time and input. Second, children can achieve a higher level of second language fluency than adults in a natural acquisition environment. A comparative analysis of Krashen, Long and Scarcella's research and Johnson and Newport's research

shows that age has a prominent influence on learners in the process of second language acquisition.

The above description supports the opinion of some researchers that there is a critical period for second language acquisition, and the second language training of learners in the critical period can promote the learning effect of learners. According to the content of the critical period of second language acquisition and the characteristics of language transfer, this research defines the critical period of transfer as the stage in which language transfer is prominent in the learning process of second language acquisition. Based on the results of previous studies, this study took primary school children aged 6-9 as subjects to explore whether there is a critical period of phonological awareness in foreign language learning.

**Error analysis hypothesis**

The theoretical founder of error analysis hypothesis is Corder (1981), who applied Chomsky's view of language acquisition to expound "the meaning of learner error". He believes that target language learning and mother tongue acquisition are restricted by the same mechanism, procedure and strategy. Errors in second language acquisition indicate that the independent language systems of the learner's mother tongue and target language are constantly developing in the process of second language acquisition. Such "errors" should be distinguished from "errors", which is evidence of excessive competence. Error analysis can assist teachers in what they need to teach, inform researchers of how learners conduct language learning, and help learners test themselves as a means.

(1) Sampling: it can be divided into natural sampling method and induced sampling method according to different research purposes; According to the sampling direction, it can be divided into longitudinal sampling and horizontal sampling.

(2) Recognition: to distinguish the types of errors in second language acquisition. Identification errors are divided into two types, the first is the difference between implicit errors and explicit errors. Implicit errors are errors that do not meet the standard of the target language. For example, when the learner means "This apple is delicious", he or she actually says/writes "This apple is tasted good". . On the face of it, there are no obvious grammatical errors, but the sentence should actually say/write: "This Apple tastes good." Mistakes like this are implicit errors. The explicit error is that what the learner wants to say is not what he or she wants to say. The second case is whether the error is a violation of customary rules or rules of use. For example, putting "Where are you going? Say/write "Where are you going? This is an idiomatic error, but in western pragmatics, asking "Where are you going? It's an invasion of privacy, which is a violation of the language rules.

(3)Description: It refers to using the target language to reconstruct the meaning the learner wants to express, and then comparing the differences in language features between the learner's interlanguage and the target language.

(4) Explanation: indicates the source of the error and the reason for the error.

(5) Evaluation: The purpose is to see the impact of learners' mistakes on readers' or listeners'

understanding or emotions.

Through these five steps, we can accurately analyze and judge the transfer errors in the process of second language acquisition and find the source of the errors. This study intends to discuss and analyze the possibility of error transfer phenomenon between children's Phonics and Chinese Pinyin through error analysis theory (Study 1).

**Language transfer**

Language transfer has been an important subject in second language acquisition, applied linguistics and language teaching for more than a century (Odlin, 1989). From its prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s to its decline in the 1960s and 1970s, and then to its rise in the middle and late 1980s, the process of language transfer has gone through twists and turns. Until now, language transfer has once again become one of the very important contents in the study of second language acquisition.

Behaviorists believe that language transfer is a result of habit formation, and it is the language habit of mother tongue that influences the acquisition of target language. Then, learners' errors in acquiring a second language (L2) are caused by transfer (Lado, 1957; Corder, 1971). Richards (1971) pointed out that the errors of second language learners were partly due to the transfer of first language (L1) strategies, while Jain (1974) confirmed that transfer was the only source of errors. Later, the role of language transfer in forming errors during second language acquisition was gradually diminished (Corden 1981). In turn, a new term "interlingual influence" was formed to replace "language transfer" (Scharwood&Kellermen, 1986). Interlingual influence is a new concept, including language phenomena such as transfer, interference, borrowing, avoidance and language loss.

The word "transfer" comes from psychology and is a phenomenon of transfer and substitution. Faerch & Kasper (1987) defined "transfer" as the influence of the acquired language competence of L2 learners on their L2 acquisition process. Ellis (1994) believes that language transfer is the influence between different languages including the second language, including the negative transfer and positive transfer of target language to mother tongue, as well as the avoidance and overuse of target language.

With the deepening of research on language transfer, the definition of language transfer has been constantly improved. Until 1989, Odlin summarized the phenomenon of language transfer in second language acquisition and gave it an accurate and widely cited definition: That is, transfer refers to the effects of similarities and differences between the target language and any other acquired (or not fully acquired) language.

As one of the important components of the language system, speech is the sub-system of language. The learning and communication between different languages will affect each other, and speech transfer will occur at this time. Therefore, speech transfer can be said to be the influence of the knowledge of language sound system mastered by human on the perception and production of another language sound (Jarvis&Pavlenko, 2008). Speech transfer has been recognized by many researchers as a language transfer phenomenon. Just as Odlin (1989) said, few people question the view that "the phonetic system and phonological system of mother tongue have a great influence on the pronunciation

of second language". Therefore, fruitful research achievements have been made on speech transfer, involving languages such as Chinese, English, Spanish, Korean, German and so on. The research objects include long and short vowels, minimum sound pairs, segments, syllable structure, intonation and other dimensions. For example, Dong Yanping and Lu Shouchun (2010) proved the reverse transfer of English learning to Chinese Pinyin.

To sum up, inspired by language transfer and teaching experience, we will further discuss the positive transfer effect of improving phonics ability in English phonetic awareness on the development of Chinese pinyin. Although there have been some studies on the effect of English learning on positive transfer of Chinese Pinyin, most of the studies are theoretical, and few mention how to help learners make full use of positive transfer to promote learning. Therefore, this study will verify the transfer effect of English phonics training on Chinese Pinyin, and how to use the transfer effect to simultaneously consolidate the phonological awareness of the two languages.

## Research design and research hypothesis

**Problem posing**

Phonological awareness has always been the most popular research topic in the field of meta-language. Every language has its corresponding phonology, and different phonology learning methods are different. In recent years, the popular teaching method of Phonics in China has been recognized by educators and parents, and more and more Chinese children are engaged in the study of English phonics. English phonics is an English phonetic learning method, which involves the learning of speech decoding, speech recognition and phonics in speech awareness. This method is the first teaching method for native English speakers, and it is of practical significance for teachers, parents and children whether this method is beneficial to the cultivation of Chinese children's Chinese and English phonological awareness.

For L2 learners, language transfer occurs in different degrees and dimensions at the beginning of L2 learning. The dimension of research on language transfer at home and abroad varies from contrastive analysis to conceptual analysis. The influence of transfer from mother tongue to target language and from multiple languages; The lateral transfer from positive and negative to language; From phonological and lexical semantic transfer to syntactic, pragmatic and textual transfer. There are various kinds of studies on language transfer, but with the continuous development of language contact, the research on the phenomenon of language transfer is also deepening. From the phonetic level alone, the study of its transfer gradually extends to the development of segmental, syllable structure and supramolecular level.

At present, there are few studies on children's language transfer in China. These studies are mostly qualitative summary statements based on comparative findings in the teaching process, lacking empirical data support. Therefore, it is necessary to further understand the development of language transfer in children, especially the development of speech transfer in children. In particular, it is worth exploring whether the influence of phonetic transfer exists in the case that the pronunciation of initials and rhymes contained in Chinese pinyin is similar to that of English phonics, and the pronunciation of

both languages is composed of syllables.

**Qualitative research**

interview

We will interview English teachers and Chinese teachers in target schools using phonics. The interview content mainly focuses on two questions: whether English phonics will affect English phonics awareness, and whether the teaching of English phonics will affect the development of Chinese phonics awareness.

Before the interview, we will introduce our research questions to the interviewees, briefly sort out the directions and questions of the interview, and ask whether it can be recorded. Interviewees will sign informed consent after they understand all the contents. After the interview, we will ask interviewees their feelings and opinions on the interview, and if they have any questions about the research project, and leave their contact information. Then organize and record the content of the interview.

Observation

As the experimental subjects are 6-9 years old children, we will observe the selected subjects for 3 months, and record their performance in class, oral progress and sensitivity to phonics to confirm whether phonics has an impact on the development of phonological awareness.

**Quantitative research**

Study 1: Effects of Phonics on Chinese children's Phonological awareness

Does phonics affect the phonological awareness of Chinese children aged 6-9?

Research hypothesis:

Study 1 (a) : Phonics has different effects on Chinese children's English phonological awareness;

Study 1 (b) : The transfer effect of Phonics on Chinese children's Phonological awareness Possibility;

Study Design:

Study I (a) :

3 English phonics (short term, medium term and long term) * 2 English phonological awareness level (true word recognition, false word recognition);

Study I (b) :

English phonics (short term, medium term, long term) * 3 Chinese phonological awareness level (finals, initials, phonemes).

Study 2: The effect of Phonics training on Chinese children's Awareness of English phonics

Research Question: Does phonics training affect the development of Phonological awareness in Chinese children aged 6-9 years?

Research hypothesis:

Study 2 (a) : English phonics training improves Chinese children's English phonological awareness during a short period of school hours

Increase speed is greater;

Study 2 (b) : English phonics training has a tendency to transfer Chinese children's Spelling ability;

Study Design:

Study 2 (A)： 3 English phonics class hours (short-term class hours, middle class hours, long-term class hours) * 2 English phonological awareness level (true word recognition, false word recognition)

Study 2 (b) :

3 English phonics (short term, medium term, long term) * 3 Chinese phonological awareness level (vowel, initial, phoneme);

Study two participants underwent three months of phonics training.

**The research object**

This study took 70-100 Chinese children from an English school, which is an extracurricular interest school featuring phonics and taught by native English speakers. None of the students had learned English phonics before entering the school. All the subjects had similar English phonics learning background and had already completed the learning of Chinese Pinyin. In order to ensure the reliability of the experiment, this study followed the randomization principle of sample selection.

At the same time, the study conducted a survey on the family information of the subjects through social and economic questionnaire (SES), and further screened the objects with similar family conditions.

**The materials of experiment**

In order to avoid the influence of the difficulty difference of experimental materials on the results, the tasks in Study 1 (a) gradually deepen the difficulty of words from simple two-letter words according to the difficulty degree of words, while the tasks in Study 1 (b) are matched according to the age characteristics of subjects and the degree of pronunciation mastery.

English phonological awareness task

The phonological awareness task includes true word part and false word part. The task referred to The Test of Word Reading Efficency (TOWRE), which measures a person's ability to sight word and phonemic decoding, Identify early phonological awareness and reading ability in children.

Chinese phonetic awareness task

Chinese phonological awareness task is divided into three sub-tasks: initial deletion, vowel deletion and phoneme deletion. In each task, the master read the task topic to the subject, and the subject listened carefully and said the pronunciation after deleting an initial, final or phoneme.

**Timetable**

From the beginning of the school year in September, teachers' interviews and students' family situation surveys were conducted for three weeks, followed by study 1. Students were observed during a 3-month interval between study 1 and Study 2. And then a month to sort out the data.

**The data analysis**

SPSS23.0 data processing was used for statistical analysis, and GRAPHPAD PRISM6.0 was used for

chart production. Correlation analysis was conducted on the pre-test results of phonics, pre-test results of Phonological awareness, post-test results of phonological awareness, and pre-test results of phonological awareness.

**Ethnical issues**

This study was carried out with the permission of the students' school and their parents, as well as the consent of the parents and the students' voluntary participation in the experiment. The experiment took place in a quiet room at the school. Both students and their parents were informed of the content of the experiment before it was carried out, and students could withdraw at any time during the experiment. The data will not be available to the public, only to the researchers.

We will protect the privacy of students and parents during the experiment, and all participants will receive a small gift.

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