

Correlation between the Initial Consonants and Tone Perception Patterns

Guohua Hu

University of Gothenburg/ Gothenburg, Sweden

Key words: L2 Chinese, Disyllabic Words, Perception, L1 Swedish

ABSTRACT

Many tests have been performed in order to find out how adult learners perceive the tones of Standard Chinese and also how they manage to produce them. The conclusions are that the students master the Standard Chinese (SC) tones (T) when it comes to the so-called static tones (in isolated syllables). However, most modern words in SC are di- or polysyllabic so one tone has to combine with another one (dynamic tones), the so-called tone combinations (TC). Earlier studies on the perception of Chinese tones (i.e. Chuang, et al. 1972; Gandour 1978; Guo 1993:330-334; Kiriloff 1969; Klatt 1973) have claimed that the more syllables a word contains the higher is the ratio of misperceived tones. Yet the tests almost exclusively used monosyllabic words. According to the results of their studies the most common misperception, regardless of what non-tonal L1 the listeners might have, has shown to be that of T2 and T3.

No studies were, however, found investigating how Swedish students perform so a test was presented. It was the listening test of their annual exam (25 words) which pushed the participants to perform well. The results show that

- (1) on monosyllable level (each syllable in disyllabic words) most of the confusions are, in accordance to earlier studies, between T2 and T3;
- (2) the stops may be the cause for the confusions between T2 and T3;
- (3) the neutral tone in the second syllable is always confused with T4;
- (4) on disyllabic level most TC confusions fall upon 2+3 and
- (5) the commonmost misinterpretation response is 2+4 which to a certain degree sounds similar to the Swedish grave or acute accent.