

Disyllabic word category audio-video training for Mandarin tone production

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Previous studies have found that tone production can be improved using explicit instruction and training (Wang, *et al.*, 2003; Wang, 2010; Liu, 2011; Chun, *et al.*, 2013), but little is known about the influence of the meaningful inputs beyond explicit instruction. In this study, we explored whether and to what degree implicit focus on form versus explicit focus on forms (Long, 1991) can benefit tone training.

The study consisted of an online tone training project. Both audio and visual information were provided so that learners could compare their pronunciation with native speakers'. Audio information included native speakers' pronunciations and participants' pronunciations from an online recorder. Visual information included 1) pitch contours and 2) pictures conveying semantic information in the implicit group, or *Pinyin* Romanization providing pronunciation information in the explicit group. Words selected for the training were disyllabic and included different permutations and combinations of the four citation tones.

Thirty American learners of Chinese participated in the project. Ten received the implicit training, ten received the explicit training, and ten received no training. During the six-day training, the twenty training group learners followed the tasks online, including picture-naming, picture description and role-play in the implicit group, or just read-aloud in the explicit group. All thirty participants took the same test five times: a pretest, a post-test, and three retention tests at a week, a month, and four months after the post-test. At the end, the participants also took a simple survey.

The analysis included a perceptual assessment by native Mandarin speakers and an acoustic analysis of pitch track comparison. The results indicated that participants in both training groups improved more than those in the non-training group. However, the gain from implicit method is a little different from that from explicit method. Learners reported that the visual pitch contours provide concrete information for tone production.