

# *The Positive Transfer Effect of Chinese Tone on English Stress Learning*

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**Abstract:** In the large-scale investigation and research of Chinese primary and secondary school students' oral English mastery in various aspects, it is found that at present, primary and secondary school students have little learning and practice of oral English, and English stress is the pain point, which directly causes the distinctive oral pronunciation of primary and secondary school students, and indirectly causes dumb English and other problems. Therefore, this study tries to analyze the similarities between Chinese tone and English stress based on the Chinese tone familiar to Chinese learners from three reasons: society, school education and students, for which English stress learning is neglected. Starting from the similarities of language system, this study makes use of the positive transfer effect of Chinese tone on learning English stress. Aiming at the common English stress problem of domestic learners, we strive to form specific and efficient training methods to improve learners' stress level.

## 1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standards (2022 edition) has revolutionized the English learning standards for primary and secondary school students, highlighting the definition of the essence of the curriculum and emphasizing the value orientation of the English curriculum. The comprehensive requirements for students' English learning are gradually transferred from the initial high requirements for knowledge mastery to the communicative use of language, which greatly shows the importance of oral English.

At the same time, the rapid development of society and economy in the new era requires the majority of learners to have practical skills and be able to combine theory with practice. English language exists not only in books, but also in people's conversation. We should improve our practical skills and apply what we have learned. We should be able to write as well as speak

This study lays a solid foundation for this research by focusing on the rules of English stress, and then analyzes the characteristics of Chinese tone. It hopes to combine the Chinese tone learning of English language learners whose first language is Chinese, and try to find more efficient and fast Chinese tone from the similarities between Chinese tone and English stress. The auxiliary training method is more conducive to the learning of stress for Chinese English learners, and further improves the confidence and ability of Chinese learners in learning English on the whole, so as to

change from dumb English to happy speaking, daring to speak, and wanting to speak English, so as to improve their English language ability.

## **2. Related Concepts and Theories**

### **2.1 Chinese Tone**

[1]Chinese tone refers to the change of the pitch of a syllable when it is pronounced. The key of the tone system is to take a single syllable as the carrying unit, belonging to the pitch change within the syllable. Chinese tone in modern Chinese phonetics refers to the inherent in Chinese syllables. It can distinguish the meaning of the sound level. The pitch of a tone is relative, not absolute; The change in tone is sliding, not moving in leaps and bounds like from one scale to another. [2]The height of the tone is usually marked by five degrees: a vertical mark is set up, the middle is divided into 5 degrees, the lowest is 1, the highest is 5, divided into Yin ping, Yang ping, upper voice, and four kinds of sound, and the corresponding simplified name is the four tones in Mandarin. [3]Chinese stress is based on tone, and the stress is expressed through tone, and the words are represented as left heavy, right heavy and equal heavy.

### **2.2 English Stress**

[4]English belongs to the accent language system, while Chinese belongs to the tonal language system. This is because stress and tone occupy different positions in the two languages. English is a tone sensitive language, emphasizing stress, while Chinese is a pitch sensitive language, emphasizing tone. From this, we can understand that although English stress and Chinese tone come from two different languages with different nature and origins, the status of Chinese tone and English stress is equal in language function, and they play a similar role in oral output. Tone gives Chinese cadence and stress gives English a sense of fluctuation, and both give oral output life. Tone is the foundation of Chinese pronunciation, just as stress is one of the foundations of English pronunciation. Both of them are the most difficult barriers for foreign language learners to learn oral expression.

### **2.3 Positive Transfer Theory**

The theory of positive transfer comes from the theory of language transfer. [5]Robert Lado, the originator of the theory of language transfer, believes that in the process of foreign language acquisition, learners will transfer the features of their mother tongue into the target language, including the form, meaning and culture of their mother tongue. When the learner's target language is similar to the structure of his mother tongue, there will be a forward transfer, which makes learning easier, and vice versa. For example, the mastery of subject-verb-object concepts in Chinese promotes the learning of English sentence components in positive transfer, while the humility emphasized in Chinese culture impedes the learning of English confident culture in reverse transfer.

[6]When we compare the stress of spoken English with the intonation of spoken Chinese, we can find that English pronunciation is composed of phonetic symbols and assisted by stress, while Chinese pronunciation is composed of pinyin and assisted by tone. The spoken English without accent lacks the charm of language just like the spoken Chinese without intonation. Therefore, the stress, non-stress, sub-stress and Chinese tones in the English language system have the same pronunciation to a certain extent, which can promote our learning of English stress, and belong to the positive transfer effect of language acquisition. Since Chinese language learners are more familiar with Chinese tones and Chinese tones are more dominant in phonetic transcription, we aim

to use Chinese tone symbols to form a training method to guide and train learners to detect and adapt to English stress.

### **3. The Relationship between Chinese Tone and English Stress**

#### **3.1 English Word Stress is Similar to the Fourth Tone of Chinese Tone**

Most English words have their own stress, that is, word stress. When you read a word, the part of the tone of the word stress will suddenly increase, so that the word has a sense of beauty. This is similar to the fourth tone of the Chinese tone. In the fourth tone, the pitch will suddenly decrease from 5 degrees to 1 degree, so we can use the Chinese tone of the fourth tone instead of English stress. For example, the word “bitter” /bitə/ can be added to “teer” to accentuate our impression of word stress.

#### **3.2 The Second Stress of English Words is Similar to the Fourth Tone of Chinese**

In words with more syllables, we not only have stress, but also secondary stress. The secondary stress and stress of English words are similar to the fourth tone of Chinese tone, but they are slightly weaker in intensity. We can understand that the tone is reduced from 3 degrees and 4 degrees to 1 degree. For example, the “ques” on a “questionnaire” is pronounced as de-stress, but it is not as pronounced as stress. De-stress can also be added as “question” or “-” to distinguish stress from sub-stress

#### **3.3 The Unstressed Part of the English Word is Similar to the Third Sound of the Chinese Tone**

In English words, there are emphasized parts, and there must be parts that are not stressed. In order to highlight the stressed part, the non-stressed part of English words will be read lightly and vaguely, similar to the third tone of Chinese tone, which decreases from 2 degrees to 1 degree and then increases to 5 degrees, and the tone is first pressed down and then raised to pave the way for the stressed part. [7] This part of the word is not easy for learners to notice and master, so pay attention to its distinction with the stress.

#### **3.4 English Sentence Stress is Similar to Chinese Sentence Stress**

[8] English sentences also have sentence stress, but different from the fixed word stress, each sentence emphasizes different content. Sentence stress is generally the focus of the whole sentence. It is composed of structural auxiliary words and basic content words. The basic content words are sentence stress. The emphatic tone is the same as the emphatic tone in Chinese sentences. With the same tone, the accent tone presses down to express emphasis, while the tone goes up to express surprise and doubt, so that the meaning of the sentence can be accurately received by the listener.

### **4. The Positive Transfer Effect of Chinese Tone on English Stress Learning**

#### **4.1 Form English Stress Corresponding Training Methods to Assist Teaching**

As for the training methods of word stress, we should practice constantly on mastering the rules of word stress. When we learn new words, we should mark the stress of the words with Chinese sound, and practice repeatedly to form a sense of language. For example, “questionnaire” becomes “question”, “\_\_\_” means the secondary stress, and “ˊ” means that the stress is pronounced as the

Chinese intonation. Right now, “compare” is the third sound, meaning the unstressed part of the word is used for some words that are confused and the third sound is obvious. For example, “compare” is a two-syllable word, and the stressed part is marked as”.

As for the sentence stress training method, learners need to add Chinese intonation on the basis of reading and understanding the sentences, and through practice in the later stage, they can pay attention to the sentence stress while delivering the spoken language, so as to make progress from ignoring the sentence stress to adding it consciously and then adding it unconsciously. Like the word stress mark, we can add a de-stressing sound to the stressed part of the sentence to serve as a reminder, for example: “I want to go to zoo.” The sentence stress uses an enlarged version of the de-stressing symbol “↓”. And when we see the question, we can indicate the rising intonation by adding the second sound of the enlarged Chinese tone “↑”. “Would you like to go to the park?” It is used to remind learners to notice the difference in tone of the sentence. These are all based on the understanding of the general idea of the sentence. While practicing sentence stress, the key parts of the English sentence can be extracted. This is a way to understand the sentence and structure, and also helps learners improve their ability to write and remember.

#### 4.2 To Establish a Flipped Classroom Based on the Positive Transfer of Chinese Tone

We can make English stress knowledge into a flipped classroom and spread it to every student through the Internet, so that students have more opportunities for self-practice. The flipped classroom based on the positive transfer of Chinese tone should combine Chinese tone with English stress, explain the importance of English stress in language learning based on students’ understanding of Chinese tone, and allow students to learn the pronunciation points of new words in advance in the form of Chinese tone annotation, so as to make use of after-class time to promote classroom learning efficiency.

[9]Flipped classroom should show the reason and form of adding Chinese tones, which is different from the usual way of only adding stress on phonetic symbols. The method of directly marking words is more conducive to students’ long-term memory, because students usually only read and recite how to spell words when learning words, and are not sensitive to phonetic symbols, resulting in the neglect of stress. At the same time, flipped classroom should decompose words according to their roots and deduce the stress placement of words with the same root based on the stress marking of a word, which is more conducive to learners’ learning of the source, nature and characteristics of words. For example, to mark “forecast”, first of all, the word should be divided into syllables “fore” and “cast” according to the pronunciation, combined with the Chinese meaning for forecasting, and the corresponding meaning of “fore” and “cast” is understood while marking the formation of “cast”. When students encounter “foregoing”, they can derive the pronunciation as “fore” based on the syllable “fore” with stress and meaning preceding.

At the same time, we can understand some English words composed of meaningful roots into a Chinese phrase, and the combination of the stressed part and the non-stressed part of the English word can be understood as the phrase composed of two or more tones. This method is more helpful to understand the components of the word.

## 5. Conclusion

This study uses the theory of forward transfer to form stress training with Chinese tones, aiming at helping Chinese learners to quickly establish the concept and usage habits of stress in oral English, which is more conducive to Chinese learners to form authentic English accents and make English learning “listening, speaking, reading and writing” develop in an all-round way.

English teaching should take learners as the main body. [10]When we introduce concepts to

learners, we should clarify the meaning and use of the concepts to generate learning motivation. At the same time, we will use the existing knowledge concepts to help students build Bridges between known concepts and unknown concepts according to their aptitude, so as to reduce the impact of learners' thinking when facing new concepts. English teaching should pay attention to the all-round development of learners, get rid of utilitarian teaching and learning, learn both theory and practice, and establish the foundation for students to form a complete language model. English teaching should keep up with the times and combine the goals of learning and teaching with the requirements of the times.

But at the same time, there are still some shortcomings in this study. For example, the application time of the positive transfer effect of Chinese tone on English stress is not clear, and premature application will make students' stress position judgment unreliable; Too late use, learners have formed their own oral English habits, so that stress training just surface. In addition, the stereotyped effect of learning is easy to occur. Learners may equate English stress with Chinese tone, and rely too much on the method of marking stress in Chinese tone, so that they cannot use stress independently and naturally in spoken English output.

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