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Production and perception of tones by Dutch learners of Mandarin

The function of pitch movements varies across languages. Tone languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, use pitch configurations to differentiate between word forms. For non-tone languages (such as Dutch and English), pitch information is mainly used at the post-lexical level, e.g., to signal sentential prominence or delimit prosodic constituents. Therefore, learning to use lexical tones is always difficult for non-tone second language learners of Mandarin who are not familiar with using pitch information in a lexically contrastive way.

This thesis investigates various aspects of production and perception of tones by beginning and advanced Dutch learners of Mandarin. Through a series of four experiments, this thesis examines the developmental path of Dutch learners of Mandarin at the university level in their acquisition of fine-grained tonal coarticulation patterns, distribution of attention between segments and tones, phonological processing of tones and using tonal information in spoken word recognition. The mechanisms underlying the learners' tone acquisition are discussed with reference to current theories and models of second language acquisition and spoken word recognition.



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