

Title III Grant, Strengthening Institutional Program
 Innovations in Learning Project Proposal – A module for Computer-Aided Interactive Chinese
 Diacritics Learning (CAICDL)

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Project Description

Introduction: Pronunciation is indisputably one of the most complicated yet significant aspects of teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language. Successful communication cannot take place without correct pronunciation, and poorly pronounced speech may disorient the listener and inhibit comprehension. Developing a successful teaching method for non-native speakers is particularly important, because it is often their first exposure not only to a variety of sounds but also to a tonal system.

The role of tonal accuracy in the development of spoken competence in Chinese cannot be underestimated. Different levels of pitch and the contours of pronunciation engender vastly dissimilar meanings. For instance, **bā**, pronounced 1st tone, high and level, means “eight”; **bá**, 2nd tone rising from middle to high means “to pull out”; **bǎ**, 3rd tone first falling then rising means “target”; and **bà**, 4th tone falling from high means “dad”.

The following list illustrates the changes in meaning when either a front nasal ending (+n) or a back nasal ending (+ng) is used.

Front Nasals + n	Back Nasals + ng
欣欣 【xīnxīn】 thriving; flourishing;	星星 【xīngxīng】 star
不信 【bùxìn】 ; distrust;	不幸 【bùxìng】 misfortune; unfortunate;
金银 【jīnyín】 honeysuckle	经营 【jīngyíng】 manage; engage in
园林 【yuánlín】 gardens; park	园陵 【yuánlíng】 mausoleum
亲近 【qīnjìn】 be on intimate terms with	清静 【qīngjìng】 quiet
弹琴 【tánqín】 to play a musical instrument	谈情 【tánqíng】 to talk about feeling;

Problem: Mandarin Chinese pronunciation has been taught in our level 1 elementary Chinese course using a Romanization system with diacritics known as *hanyupinyin* (汉语拼音). - It is one aspect of a general curriculum that includes reading, writing, listening, and conversational oral skills. However, whereas students have access to written materials at all times, they have only three hours a week of access to an instructor who can provide demonstrations and criticism

with regards to pronunciation. Moreover, since teaching pronunciation requires a high degree of personal attention and providing students with sufficient individual attention is a perennial problem in the classroom, this language skill has been unfortunately overlooked. As a result, many of our learners show little improvement in their dialectal way of pronouncing Mandarin Chinese after four years of learning Mandarin Chinese here at Ohlone College, and no significantly greater accuracy in tonal production. Some learners feel embarrassed pronouncing “weird” sounds and, with time, decide that Chinese Mandarin pronunciation is next to impossible to attain.

Solution: We believe that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence and that teachers can improve the success of their instruction if they integrate an increased emphasis on pronunciation work into our already planned classes, particularly through the use of computer software. We will do two things: 1) rethink and revise our level 1 Chinese course by introducing new instructional methods and recalibrating the balance of priorities to allow adequate opportunities for students to build a good phonetic and phonological foundation; 2) develop a module for Computer Aided Interactive Chinese Diacritics Learning (CAICDL) to allow students repeated and interactive pronunciation exercises both during class time and lab time, as well as greater control over their own learning process.

Project Outcomes

1. Student feedback suggests the need for a constant source of pronunciation guidance. Using CAICDL, students will have a way of correcting and learning their pronunciation even when the instructor is working with other students. Additionally, the student would be able to make pedagogical choices for him or herself, thus fostering a sense of constant and individual learning.
2. A combined visual-audio approach towards pronunciation instruction provides students with a dual and integrated methodology towards mastering the production of new sounds. Students will recognize how his/her pronunciation compares to the target pronunciation by viewing audio-visual displays provided by the CAICDL module; these diagrams show students how to shape their mouths to produce a sound accurately. Pronunciation exercises combined with visual aids (such as intonation graphs) are other pedagogical techniques that will benefit from the inclusion of these technologies.
3. Students can compare their pronunciation with a target pronunciation by recording the voice. This can be repeated endlessly until a student is satisfied with his/her results. Requiring the handing-in of recorded auditory exercises also provides instructors with a way to make sure that students have been practicing outside the classroom.

4. Many language learners feel self conscious and negative about their pronunciation. The chance to practice pronunciation in the privacy of the home will provide a great psychological boost for students who are inhibited by the social atmosphere of the classroom. Since students cannot engage in learning and achieve success if they are self conscious every time they open their mouths, providing a way to practice pronunciation effectively at home may be the watershed aspect of many learners' Mandarin Chinese education.

Assessment Strategies

Because the Ohlone College Chinese Program is divided into many classes at each level, it is possible to instantiate a controlled assessment of the success of this project. Initially, CAICDL module will be introduced to two groups of students randomly selected from two of the Level 1 classes. One group is used as the base for comparison and the other will be instructed with CAICDL module. At the end of the project, a comparison will be made in the pronunciation proficiency of the two groups. Additionally, students in the latter group that adopted the new technology can be surveyed during the project to gain information on how to improve the program.

Project Implementation Timeline

January 2008: The instructors will introduce the exercises from the CAICDL module to their lesson plans. February through May 2008: Students/instructors will use/evaluate the module during the class.

Faculties Responsible for Development and Implementation

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Technology and Software Requirements; Distribution

In CAICDL, the core software packages to be used in the classroom are TELL ME MORE and Fayin, which runs on PC. It costs \$234.99 and \$39.95 per set respectively, and will have discounts if more purchase is made. In development of the CAICDL module we would like to buy two sets first. If it is truly helpful, we would like to add 10 more sets.

Price for 10 Packets of TELL ME MORE	\$2200
Price for 10 Packets of Faying	\$399.50