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An Investigation of [l]-[n] Merger among Hubei Dialect Speakers: Cross-Linguistic Evidence from Perception and Production

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Abstract

This study investigates Hubei dialect speakers' ability to distinguish and identify Mandarin and English words with [l]-[n] onsets through AX discrimination and identification tasks, along with their production in Hubei dialect, Mandarin, and English. Results showed lower accuracy in discriminating [l] and [n] in English and Mandarin, especially with stimuli containing a high vowel, nasal coda, or diphthong beginning with a high or front vowel. Participants with more dialect use and later Mandarin acquisition were less sensitive to the contrast. Directionality of merger varied across participants. No significant effects of linguistic or social factors were found in identification, except a positive effect of initial high vowels in Mandarin diphthongs. Acoustic measures showed no significant differences, suggesting an [l]-[n] merger. These findings provide insights into non-native speech perception and production and suggest implications for pronunciation training.