The Pronunciation of Mandarin by Singapore Teochews: Some Salient Features

Abstract

Studies on the pronunciation of Mandarin in Singapore have been done since the government launched the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' in 1979. Most of these studies are rather broad-based, dealing with the pronunciation of Mandarin by different dialect groups. This study, however, aims to study the pronunciation of a specific dialect group, the Teochews. Ten informants, four male and six female aged between forty to seventy, were chosen for this study. Educationally, few have completed primary level of education. The pronunciation of these ten informants was recorded and analysed. The salient features in their pronunciation of Mandarin were then identified.

Some salient segmental features shown in the pronunciation of Mandarin by these ten informants were as follows: the non-use of retroflexive sibilant, the confusion in the pronunciation of the retroflexed liquid r with l, [dz] or n, the replacement of velar fricative h by f or [w] when it occurs.
before the vowel u, the confusion between i (or [ʌ]) and ü (or [œ]) was also prominent in the pronunciation of Mandarin. Other features include the difficulty in distinguishing between -n and -ng, the frequent use of ‘the fifth tone’ and the mispronunciation of words.