

THE
AMERICAN
ACCENT GUIDE
FOR
Chinese
SPEAKERS

By



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In this guide, you will learn about the most common pronunciation challenges Mandarin Chinese speakers face, how to overcome them, and how to PRACTICE effectively in order to become more clear in English. Daily practice and repetition of sounds will help you create awareness, and help you develop the muscle memory needed to pronounce the sounds and words with little effort!

Here are the 5 most common challenges Mandarin Chinese speakers face:

► Remember to [listen to the audio](#) and to practice along

CHALLENGE #1

Breaking Consonant Clusters

In Chinese, there are no clusters at the end of syllables, while at the beginning of syllables there can only be 2 consonants in a row, but only if the second consonant is a Y or W sound.

Therefore, Chinese speakers tend to break clusters in English words in one of two ways, either by adding a vowel between them, or by dropping one or more consonants. For example, a word like 'camp' might be pronounced as 'cam', a word like 'bring' might sound like 'bwing', and a word like 'ask' - as 'as-ke'.

Practice the words and make sure you don't add a vowel or drop a consonant.

Spin	Card	Parked
Pray	Belt	Checked
Sphere	Burn	Missed
Glory	Mark	Escaped
Strange	Text	Developed

CHALLENGE #2

Simplifying Diphthongs

Chinese has the same diphthongs as in English (except for 'oy') and several more, but they tend to change into monophthongs, where only the first vowel is pronounced. Chinese speakers sometimes apply this in English as well, so in fast speech a word like 'pain' may sound like 'pen', and 'night' like 'nut'.

Pronounce the following pairs, making sure they don't sound the same.

(0:55)

Bet-Bait

Saw-So

Pen-Pain

Ball-Bowl

Bell-Bail

Bought-Boat

Sell-Sail

Law-Low

Tell-Tale

Claws-Close

CHALLENGE #3

No Dark L

The L in Mandarin Chinese is light - /l/, and it's not permitted at the end of syllables. When MC speakers switch to English, they hear that there's a difference in pronunciation, and they associate the dark L /ɫ/ with a different sound, not an L.

As a result, and especially because /l/ is not permitted at the end of syllables, they tend to replace the L with a vowel, usually [ə] or unrounded u. For example, a word like 'people' might sound like 'pipo', and a word like 'feel' might be pronounced like 'fiu'.

▮ Pronounce the following words slowly and make sure you pronounce the dark L clearly (1:55)

Bell

Help

Meal

Elbow

Cruel

Sculpture

Table

Balcony

Soul

Railway

▮ Pronounce the following pairs and make sure they don't sound the same (2:33)

Go-Goal

So-Soul

Row-Role

Mow-Mole

Bo-Bowl

CHALLENGE #4

Applying Chinese Prosody

In Mandarin Chinese syllables are generally stressed evenly, unlike in English, where more important words are longer and different in pitch, while less important words (function words) are usually reduced. MC speakers may carry over the stressing pattern of MC into English, and as a result it may affect their flow and intelligibility, as there is no distinction between important words and less important words, as required in English.

Also, applying tones onto English unintentionally may also affect the speaker's intelligibility, as higher pitch (the result of applying certain tones) is associated with emphasis and as a result, less important words seem to be stressed.

Practice: Read the following sentences out loud and make sure you're only raising the pitch in the words marked in bold. (3:10)

My **car** has been in the **garage** all day.

I can't **tell** if he wants me to **go**

Don't let your **dog** stay **outside** in the pouring **rain**

We **all know** what you **did** yesterday

There are some **vegetables** in the **fridge**

CHALLENGE #5

Replacing N with NG

In Mandarin Chinese, the /n/ may be dropped at the end of a syllable. MC speakers tend to keep their tongue down instead of lifting the tip for the /n/, and instead, nasalize the vowel before. This frequent nasalization of the vowels is responsible for the nasal voice quality of MC speakers. As a result, it may seem as if the /n/ is replaced with /ŋ/ (the NG sound), and words like 'sin' and 'thin' might sound like 'sing' and 'thing'.

▮ Pronounce the following pairs, making sure they don't sound the same.
(4:45)

Sin-Sing

Win-Wing

Ton-Tongue

Thin-Thing

Ban-Bang

And remember...

Speak Up!

(making mistakes is the only way to learn)