

# Chapter One

## Introduction

This chapter presents the general issues related to the present study, including the background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, scope of the study and organization of the thesis.

### 1.1 Research Background

#### 1.1.1 Research Theory Background

The types of languages according to their lexical syntax, a general division can also divide languages into tonal and non-tonal languages. The most significant difference between the two is whether tones are included. The main function of tones in a tonal language is to distinguish tones. Tonal languages do not have strict restrictions on the number and types of tones (Huang Borong, 2007, p132). For example, the more representative Chinese phonetic system contains four tones, the Thai phonetic system contains five tones, and so on. Non-tonal languages convey meaning through the arrangement and combination of letters to form words with fixed meanings. Even if the tone changes, the basic meaning of the words does not change, such as English, Indonesian, Spanish and so on. On the other hand, August Schleicher (1998) established three language types: inflectional language, agglutinative language and isolating language in his book "*Looking at European Languages from a Systematic Perspective*" (Schleicher, 1998. p11). He roughly divided all languages in the world into three categories, and summarized the common characteristics of these three categories of languages so that people can distinguish languages.

An isolated language is a language in which each word is composed of a very low morpheme rate. In extreme cases, a word is composed of a morpheme. It is

characterized by the lack of rich morphological changes, and its grammatical meaning is mainly represented by word order and function words. Such as Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. The characteristic of glued language is that various morphemes can be accumulated and added to the verb endings to express different semantics, and case particles are generally used to connect words (Humboldt, 1995. p84). Such as Indonesian, Mongolian, Japanese, etc.

Therefore, the research objects of this paper, Chinese and Indonesian, are very representative tonal languages and non-tonal languages. Chinese is a typical tonal language, and Indonesian is a typical non-tonal language. There is a very significant difference between the two languages. Tonal language conveys meaning through tones. Different tones represent different meanings. Through the arrangement and combination of pinyin letters, different tones form the words needed in interpersonal communication. The meaning of a non-tonal language does not need to be expressed through tones, but is conveyed through different combinations of letters. Artificially changing the tones can only convey emotions, but the meaning of the words themselves will not change.

However, unlike other tonal languages, Chinese not only distinguishes meanings through tones, but also has its own specific rules for the arrangement and combination of letters. Generally speaking, Chinese Pinyin is divided into two-pinyin syllables and three-pinyin syllables (Huang Borong, 2007). As the name suggests, two-pinyin syllables refer to a syllable composed of a consonant and a single vowel, such as "ji" (Chicken, Self, Hit, Squeeze, Send, etc.). Among them, "j" is a consonant, and "i" is a single vowel. The two can form a meaningful pinyin, and have all four tones. Three-pinyin syllables are three phonemes in one syllable. For example, "jia" (Home, Add, Fake, Good, Married, etc.), where "j" is a consonant, and "i" and "a" are single vowel. In addition, there are three pinyin syllables composed of consonant, single vowel and overall syllables, such as "jiang" (River, Ginger, Will, Drop, etc.), where "j" is a consonant, "i" is a single

vowel, " ang" is a overall syllable.

Therefore, this paper selects the three-pinyin syllable "jiang" as the research object. There are three reasons: First, the syllable "jiang" contains vowels, consonants and overall syllables, which can be regarded as a collection of types of Chinese pinyin. The phonemes contained in the second syllable "jiang" overlap with Indonesian phonemes, but the pronunciation is different, which can better explore the pronunciation problems of non-tonal language learners when learning tonal languages. Finally, the second tone of the syllable "jiang" has no actual use meaning, and there is no corresponding Chinese character for it, which belongs to a relatively special type, but the first tone, third tone and fourth tone The tone and "jiang" all have corresponding Chinese characters, and the number is considerable, which can meet the research needs.

"jiang" is a syllable with more typical characteristics of Chinese pinyin, but also has its own personality characteristics. More importantly, the phonemes contained in the syllable "jiang" coincide with the native phonemes of the research subjects, but the pronunciations of "j" and "ng" are different. Therefore, the syllable "jiang" is the most suitable research object of this paper.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties for Indonesian speakers in learning Chinese “jiang” syllable?
  - a) Difficulties in pronunciation of tones.
  - b) Difficulties in distinguishing Chinese characters only by pronunciation.
  - c) Difficulties in distinguishing meaning only by pronunciation or Chinese characters.

d) Difficulties in distinguishing meaning in the context communication.

2. What are the causes of these difficulties?

### **1.3 Research Purposes**

As mentioned in the background, the study aims:

1. Summarize the difficulties encountered by Indonesian students in learning the Chinese "jiang" syllable.
2. Analyze the reasons why Indonesian students have difficulties in learning the Chinese "jiang" syllable.

### **1.4 Research Scope**

The research object of this paper is the "jiang" syllable in Chinese, and the difficulties encountered in the process of learning this syllable by Indonesian-speaking students. The research subjects are Indonesian undergraduate students majoring in Chinese, and the learning period of Chinese is 0-12 months's student.

### **1.5 Significance of Research**

Theoretically, Chinese is the most representative isolating language. Taking Chinese as an example to study the difficulties of non-tonal language users in learning tonal languages, the research results are more significant and representative. Secondly, the relevant research on Indonesian and Chinese is still relatively scarce. This paper hopes to provide other researchers with a research idea for studying Indonesian and Chinese through the comparative study of non-tonal language and tonal language.

Practically, from a macro perspective, tonal languages account for a relatively small proportion of global languages, and the types of difficulties encountered by non-tonal language users in learning tonal languages are limited. Therefore, this paper hopes to summarize some effective methods to solve these problems, to facilitate the learning of tonal languages by non-tonal language speakers.