Investigating the relationships among knowledge, skills and strategies in Chinese listening

This study investigates the relative contributions of knowledge, skills and strategies to Chinese as a second language (CSL) listening and whether the contributions of knowledge, skills and strategies to CSL listening are the same for heritage and non-heritage learners. This study focuses on knowledge and skills at lexical and syntactic levels. Specifically, knowledge refers to vocabulary knowledge and syntactic knowledge; skills are word recognition skill and syntactic parsing skill; strategies are metacognitive strategies.

Little research has been done to examine knowledge, skills and strategies simultaneously and to find out their relative contributions to overall L2 listening proficiency. Findings of this study will contribute to the understanding of the complex cognitive processes of L2 listening and the development of much-needed theorizing of L2 listening. Research methods in L2 listening are still limited. By using methods that are rarely employed in L2 listening (the gating and reaction time tasks), this study will provide insight on the development of research methods in L2 listening.

This study is couched in the cognitive model of listening comprehension proposed by Vandergrift and Goh (2012, pp. 38-45). According to this model, knowledge at different levels comes into play in the perception, parsing and utilization processes. Phonetic knowledge is largely used to perceive sounds, although information from other levels also informs the perception process. In the parsing process, phonological knowledge and syntactic knowledge are used to parse the speech stream, assign meanings to words, and establish the “relationship between words at the discourse level” (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 24). In the utilization process, pragmatic knowledge, prior knowledge and discourse knowledge are activated to understand the intended meaning, enrich the interpretation of the message, facilitate the processing of linguistic input and anticipate oncoming information, and so on (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, pp. 24-26). Metacognition also plays an important role in that it regulates and controls these cognitive processes involved in listening through planning, problem solving, monitoring and evaluating (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The conceptualization of listening as a process that involves multiple levels of knowledge and sub-processes is helpful for identifying the knowledge and component skills that L2 listeners need to acquire.

Sixty Chinese learners (30 heritage and 30 non-heritage learners) at a post-secondary institution will participate in the study. Five tests and one questionnaire will be used to examine participants’ vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge, word recognition skill, syntactic parsing skill, listening proficiency and metacognitive strategies. Results of the study will be available when the conference convenes in late April. Based on my research and previous studies on second language listening, it is hypothesized that 1) knowledge, skills, and strategies all correlate with CSL listening, 2) knowledge contributes more to CSL listening than skills and strategies, and that 3) the contributions of knowledge, skills and strategies to CSL listening are different for heritage and non-heritage learners.

Reference