Title: Joint Contributions of reading subskills at different levels to lexical inference in L2 Chinese

Abstract: (no more than 500)
Recently, Chinese as a second language (L2) has received surging interest in the world. Yet, L2 learners often feel extremely challenged in reading Chinese because of its unique orthographic writing system. Therefore, it is vital to help L2 Chinese learners develop their reading comprehension abilities. According to a componential view of reading (Carr & Levy, 1990; Koda, 2005), reading comprehension is a complex and multifaceted process, which entails a set of distinct, yet interdependent subskills from the lower levels to higher levels (Nassaji, 2003). Lexical inference, a proxy for reading comprehension (Wesche & Paribakht, 2010), is affected by various subskills, such as morphological awareness, morpheme knowledge, vocabulary knowledge and grammar knowledge. Morphological awareness refers to learners’ sensitivity to a printed word’s morphemic structure, and morpheme knowledge refers to learners’ ability to establish a link between a morpheme’s meaning and its graphic form. However, previous studies focused on the effects of higher-level subskills on L2 lexical inference (e.g., Jeon & Yamashita, 2014; Kaivanpanah & Alavi, 2008), but few studies investigated roles of lower-level reading subskills in L2 lexical inference. In particular, it remains unclear how learners simultaneously use reading subskills at the different levels during the process of lexical inference in L2 Chinese. To investigate how to help L2 Chinese learners develop reading abilities, this study addresses two research questions. (1) What are the relationships among L2 learners’ morphological awareness, morpheme knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge and lexical inference ability? (2) To what extent do these reading subskills independently and jointly contribute to L2 learners’ lexical inference ability? To answer these questions, this study included 73 intermediate-level L2 Chinese learners at XXX. They completed five tasks (one computer-administered and four paper-pencil), including a morpheme segmentation task, a morpheme recognition task, a vocabulary size task, a grammar knowledge task and a lexical inference task. The reliability of all the tasks was acceptable (Cronbach’s α >.70). The main findings based on hierarchical multiple regressions showed that morphological awareness and morpheme knowledge significantly explained 28% of the variance of lexical inference, F(2, 70)=13.61, p<.001. In addition,
vocabulary knowledge and grammar knowledge were still significant predictors of lexical inference, F(4,68)=11.12, \( p<.001 \), with an \( R^2 \) of .395, explaining an addition of 11.5% of the outcome variance. These findings further our understanding regarding how lower-level subskills facilitate L2 learners’ lexical inference as well as how lower-level and higher-level subskills jointly contribute to lexical inference in L2 Chinese.

References


