Oral Reading Accuracy and Fluency among Lower-Level Chinese as Second Language Learners

Reading in a second language (L2) is a complex process that poses formidable obstacles for readers, especially those in the initial stages of learning (Melby-Lervag & Lervag, 2014). The challenge is particularly daunting for lower-level Chinese L2 readers with an alphabetic first language (L1) background because Chinese is a logographic, deep orthography with unique linguistic features that necessitate specific reading processes and skills. It has been shown that oral reading accuracy and fluency are highly correlated with reading comprehension (Grabe, 2009) and oral word and text reading are commonly utilized indices for reading proficiency in L1 English reading field (Gillet, Temple, Temple, & Crawford, 2011). However, research on the effectiveness of oral reading as reading diagnostic assessment tools among Chinese lower-level L2 learners is lacking. It also calls for more studies on the identification of oral reading accuracy and fluency indices to define reading performance at each sub-proficiency level to better assess learners' reading performance and monitor their development. The investigation of the effectiveness of oral reading tasks in measuring comprehension and the analyses of students’ oral reading task performance will contribute to a deeper understanding of the L2 Chinese reading constructs and their development, and offer assessment tools for classroom teachers of Chinese L2 reading to identify reading problems and provide timely interventions and remediation during instruction.

This study explored the applicability of oral character, word, and text reading as diagnostic assessment tools to measure comprehension among 70 English-speaking, lower-level Chinese L2 learners as well as compared oral reading accuracy and fluency of students at three sub-proficiency levels. Participants completed a reading proficiency test, which serves as the measurement of comprehension and the criterion of dividing participants into low, mid, and high sub-proficiency levels. Participants read aloud a set of characters, words, and paragraphs, which were designed to detect word recognition and surface-level textual comprehension. Correlation analyses were conducted to identify the relationship between oral reading accuracy & fluency and the proficiency test. Results showed a significant, positive correlation between oral reading tasks and the proficiency test, indicating the effectiveness of oral reading tasks in measuring reading comprehension. Participants at low, mid, and high sub-proficiency levels differed significantly in oral reading accuracy and fluency, displaying an ascending developmental pattern. The findings suggest that oral reading tasks can be used as to evaluate students’ reading performance and to monitor their reading development.

References