Skills and strategies in Chinese listening

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to synthesize two active but separate lines of research in second language (L2) listening, which emphasize the roles of skills ("competencies which native speakers possess" (Field, 1998:117)) and strategies (cognitive and metacognitive tactics) respectively. Building upon existing research, this study examines the relative contributions of skills (sound discrimination skill, lexical skill and grammatical skill) and strategies (metacognition) to L2 listening and find out the effect of language heritage on the relationships among the factors. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) Are there any correlations among sound discrimination skill, lexical skill, grammatical skill, metacognitive knowledge and listening proficiency? 2) What are the contributions of sound discrimination skill, lexical skill, grammatical skill and metacognitive knowledge to listening proficiency? 3) Are the relations among the factors the same for heritage and non-heritage Chinese learners?

Existing research reveals some factors affecting L2 listening comprehension, such as vocabulary knowledge (Kelly, 1991), syntax (Call, 1985), linguistic knowledge combined with background knowledge (Park, 2004), metacognitive knowledge (Vandergrift, 2006), and so on. Most studies confined their examination to one or two factors only. Vandergrift (2007:205) called for a need to examine some "hypothesized factors" and examine them as a cluster. This study aims to fill the gap. Findings of this study will inform the listening comprehension model and help language instructors to focus their teaching.

Fifty-one Chinese learners participated in the study. Twenty-seven participants are heritage learners; twenty-four participants are non-heritage learners. Four tests and one questionnaire were used to examine the subjects' listening proficiency, sound discrimination skill, lexical skill, grammatical skill and metacognitive knowledge.

The results show that vocabulary knowledge and grammar knowledge are highly correlated with listening proficiency and that vocabulary knowledge contributes more to listening proficiency than sound discrimination skill, grammar knowledge and metacognitive knowledge. This study also reveals marked differences between heritage and non-heritage learners: heritage learners performed better on the listening proficiency test, vocabulary knowledge test and grammar knowledge test, but less well on the sound discrimination test than non-heritage learners; grammar knowledge significantly predicts listening proficiency for heritage learners but not for non-heritage learners, whereas vocabulary knowledge significantly predicts listening proficiency for non-heritage learners but not for heritage learners.

References

