Effects of Contextual Information and Cultural Familiarity on Chinese Colloquial Idioms Comprehension among Intermediate Chinese Learners of American and Korean

语境信息和文化熟悉度对中高级美国和韩国汉语学习者惯用语理解的影响

Yu Li 李昱

The University of Iowa

Abstract

Learning idioms has always been very difficult for second-language learners. Since 1980s, a lot of studies have been conducted on second language idiom acquisition, but we are still in the initial stages of understanding how non-native speakers acquire second language idioms. In the field of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), research on this topic is particularly scant.

This study aims to find out answers to the following questions:

How do CFL learners comprehend idioms? What strategies do they use to comprehend idioms? Do cultural differences have any influence on idiom learning? What should CFL teachers do to effectively teach idioms?

This study uses think-aloud protocols to investigate the influences of contextual information and cultural familiarity on strategy use of Chinese colloquial idioms comprehension by intermediate Chinese learners of American and Korean.

This paper investigates the effects of contextual information and cultural familiarity on Chinese colloquial idioms comprehension among intermediate Chinese learners of American and Korean.

Forty intermediate Chinese learners of American and Korean participated in this study. They were asked to verbally report their thoughts about 20 unknown Chinese colloquial idioms which were situated in 20 sentences respectively. The 20 target words varied in terms of contextual information and cultural familiarity.

The results show that there is no significant difference in American and Korean performance of lexical inference and strategy use, and both contextual information and cultural familiarity significantly affect participants’ comprehension on Chinese colloquial idioms. Six comprehension strategies are found in this study. They are sentence contexts, literal meanings, repetitions, asking for information, native language and background knowledge. Among them, sentence contexts, literal meanings, background knowledge and native language are the successful strategies. This paper also suggests Chinese teachers use these strategies to help Chinese learners master Chinese colloquial idioms in the Chinese-as-foreign-language teaching.