The significance of vocabulary knowledge, word recognition speed and metacognitive knowledge to Chinese listening proficiency

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships among linguistic competence, strategic competence and second language (L2) listening proficiency. In this study, linguistic competence is confined to word knowledge and word recognition speed; strategic competence refers to the use of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension. Specifically, this study addresses the following two questions: 1) What are the contributions of vocabulary knowledge, word recognition speed and metacognitive knowledge to Chinese listening proficiency? 2) Are there any interactions among the three factors?

The rationale for conducting this research project is as follows. First, little research has been conducted to gather quantitative data on the relationships among various linguistic skills, metacognition and overall L2 listening proficiency. This research project aims to fill in the gap. Findings of this study inform the listening comprehension model. Secondly, there exists a conflicting view on whether a “strategy-based” approach (Mendelsohn, 1995:134) or “skill-based” (Field, 1998) and “signal-based” approach (Field, 2003) takes primacy in teaching L2 listening. This study will help language instructors to focus their teaching.

Listening comprehension is a complicated process. Anderson (1995) proposed a three-stage model for first language comprehension. Based on this model, comprehension comprises three stages: perception (transforming sound into word representation), parsing (combining word meanings to form a mental representation) and utilization (using sentence meaning to respond to a message, to make inferences, etc.). In the perception and parsing stages, linguistic knowledge, such as word and syntactic knowledge, plays the most important role; in the utilization stage, the use of various strategies is crucial. In addition to linguistic and strategic knowledge, fast and efficient processing of information seems to be important for successful listening as the transient nature of listening taxes the limited capacity of working memory heavily. The current study aims to examine the applicability of this model to Chinese listening comprehension.

22 subjects participated in this study. They were learners of Chinese who took Chinese courses at the University of XXXX for more than two years. The instruments used in this study included a Chinese listening proficiency test, a vocabulary knowledge test, a metacognitive knowledge questionnaire and a word recognition speed test (in the form of a gating task). Statistical analyses were run in the SPSS software to examine the relationships among the three factors and listening proficiency. The result reveals a correlation relationship between the factors and the overall listening proficiency. The pedagogical implications are then discussed.

References