

The Impact of Study Abroad Experience on Interpreting Performance

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Abstract : The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between working memory (WM) capacity and Chinese-English consecutive interpreting (CI) performance in interpreting learners with different study abroad experience (SAE). Such relationship is not well understood. This study also examines whether Chinese interpreting learners with SAE in English-speaking countries, demonstrate a better performance in inflectional morphology and agreement, notoriously unstable in Chinese speakers of English L2, in their interpreting output than learners without SAE. Fifty Chinese university students, majoring in Chinese-English Interpreting, were recruited in Australia (n=25) and China (n=25). The two groups matched in age, language proficiency, and interpreting training period. Study abroad (SA) group has been studying in an English-speaking country (Australia) for over 12 months, and none of the students recruited in China (the no study abroad = NSA group) had ever studied or lived in an English-speaking country. Data on language proficiency and training background were collected via a questionnaire. Lexical retrieval performance and working memory (WM) capacity data were collected experimentally, and finally, interpreting data was elicited via a direct CI task. Main results of the study show that WM significantly correlated with participants' CI performance independently of learning context. Moreover, SA outperformed NSA learners in terms of subject-verb number agreement. Apart from that, WM capacity was also found to correlate significantly with their morphosyntactic accuracy. This paper sheds some light on the relationship between study abroad, WM capacity, and CI performance. Exploring the effect of study abroad on interpreting trainees and how various important factors correlate may help interpreting educators bring forward more targeted teaching paradigms for participants with different learning experiences.

Keywords : study abroad experience, consecutive interpreting, working memory, inflectional agreement

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