

Perceiving Casual Speech: A Gating Experiment with French Listeners of L2 English

Authors : Naouel Zoghlami

Abstract : Spoken-word recognition involves the simultaneous activation of potential word candidates which compete with each other for final correct recognition. In continuous speech, the activation-competition process gets more complicated due to speech reductions existing at word boundaries. Lexical processing is more difficult in L2 than in L1 because L2 listeners often lack phonetic, lexico-semantic, syntactic, and prosodic knowledge in the target language. In this study, we investigate the on-line lexical segmentation hypotheses that French listeners of L2 English form and then revise as subsequent perceptual evidence is revealed. Our purpose is to shed further light on the processes of L2 spoken-word recognition in context and better understand L2 listening difficulties through a comparison of skilled and unskilled reactions at the point where their working hypothesis is rejected. We use a variant of the gating experiment in which subjects transcribe an English sentence presented in increments of progressively greater duration. The spoken sentence was "And this amazing athlete has just broken another world record", chosen mainly because it included common reductions and phonetic features in English, such as elision and assimilation. Our preliminary results show that there is an important difference in the manner in which proficient and less-proficient L2 listeners handle connected speech. Less-proficient listeners delay recognition of words as they wait for lexical and syntactic evidence to appear in the gates. Further statistical results are currently being undertaken.

Keywords : gating paradigm, spoken word recognition, online lexical segmentation, L2 listening

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