

Explaining Listening Comprehension among L2 Learners of English: The Contribution of Vocabulary Knowledge and Working Memory Capacity

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Abstract : Listening comprehension constitutes a considerable challenge for the second language (L2) learners, but a little is known about the explanatory power of different variables in explaining variance in listening comprehension. Since research in this area, to the researcher's knowledge, is relatively small in comparison to that focusing on the relationship between reading comprehension and factors such as vocabulary and working memory, there is a need for studies that are seeking to fill the gap in our knowledge about the specific contribution of working memory capacity (WMC), aural vocabulary knowledge and written vocabulary knowledge to explaining listening comprehension. Among 130 English as foreign language learners, the present study examines what proportion of the variance in listening comprehension is explained by aural vocabulary knowledge, written vocabulary knowledge, and WMC. Four measures were used to collect the required data for the study: (1) A-Lex, a measure of aural vocabulary knowledge; (2) XK-Lex, a measure of written vocabulary knowledge; (3) Listening Span Task, a measure of WMC and; (4) IELTS Listening Test, a measure of listening comprehension. The results show that aural vocabulary knowledge is the strongest predictor of listening comprehension, followed by WMC, while written vocabulary knowledge is the weakest predictor. The study discusses implications for the explanatory power of aural vocabulary knowledge and WMC to listening comprehension and pedagogical practice in L2 classrooms.

Keywords : listening comprehension, second language, vocabulary knowledge, working memory

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