

Abstract

This study aims at studying the effect of L1 in learning a L2 in speaking. Fifty undergraduate students (15 males and 35 females) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong were recruited in either the stressed or unstressed conditions. Gating and lexical decision experiments were given to them. Analysis of covariance was used to analyze the findings. The overall results found out that Mandarin speaking participants performed better than Cantonese speaking participants in both experiments. In the gating experiment, both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers performed better in the unstressed condition. In the lexical decision experiment, Mandarin speakers and Cantonese speakers did not differ much in performance with Mandarin speakers performed slightly better. These findings suggest that the better performance of Mandarin speakers can be postulated to the presence of some language characteristics i.e. “neutral tones” in Mandarin that is similar to the stress patterns in English that facilitated their performance. An absence of these characteristics in Cantonese might explain the poorer performance in speech perception of English. Future research might be done on examining the relationship between Cantonese and English in stress perception in speech.