ANALYTIC CHINESE CHARACTER RECOGNITION AMONG NONNATIVE SPEAKERS

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The recognition of Chinese characters or words may be holistic or analytic. The two processing strategies differ in terms of whether a character is treated as a single processing unit or processed sublexically, or in terms of whether the components of a character (strokes, radicals, stroke patterns) are processed in parallel or serially. The comparison of native and nonnative speakers in this regard has received limited attention in previous research and the results have been inconclusive. This presentation reports the results of three experiments involving three different paradigms: the stroke number effect, the priming paradigm, and a false-memory approach. Findings from all three experiments demonstrated the adoption of a more analytic strategy among nonnative speakers. Specifically, in a lexical decision task where the number of strokes was manipulated as a primary independent variable, nonnative speakers showed a stroke number effect (i.e., longer reaction time for characters of more strokes) where native speakers did not. Second, nonnative speakers showed a whole-component character priming effect with prime-target pairs such as 安-女 while no such priming effect was found among native speakers. Finally, preliminary data showed that nonnative speakers were more likely to produce a false memory effect than native speakers in character recognition. In this case, participants were shown a set of Chinese characters in the study phase and were asked to decide if they saw a character in the test phase. Nonnative speakers were more likely to produce an incorrect positive response to a character (e.g., 女) in the test phase that was not present in the study phase but was embedded in an earlier-encountered character (e.g., 安). We will discuss a) the causes of the nonnative speakers' tendency to process Chinese characters analytically, b) the relationship between analytic processing and reading development, and c) strategies to help learners transition from analytic to holistic processing.