

THE EFFECT OF DISCOURSE CONTEXTS ON CHINESE LEARNERS' ONLINE COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH PSYCH CAUSATIVES

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English psych causative verbs (e.g. *satisfy*) are often stative psych verbs in Chinese (e.g. *manyi* / be satisfied with) and Chinese English learners found it hard to perceive the implicit causal meaning suggested by English psych lexical causative. Since language is used in contexts and should be learned in contexts (N. Ellis, 2006), we conducted three experiments (timed sentence comprehension and timed grammaticality judgement tasks) with psych lexical causative, investigating whether discourse contexts could facilitate L2 online processing of verb argument structures (VACs) with learning difficulties. **Experiment 1** (norming study) found that intermediate Chinese English learners (n=38) preferred psych analytical causatives (e.g. *The noise made the dancer annoyed*) to the typical psych lexical causative in English (e.g. *The noise_(Stimulus) annoyed the dancer_(Experiencer)*), while advanced learners (n=37) showed preference for psych lexical causatives as natives (n=29) did. When the Stimulus was animate entity, L2 subjects showed indeterminacy in deciding the Stimulus role, which was in line with previous findings (Zhang 2003; Chen 1996). In Experiment 2 and 3, we manipulated discourse contexts which may support the difficult thematic-syntactic mapping of psych lexical causative with animate Stimulus (e.g. ***The athlete annoyed the dancer***). Three discourse context conditions were devised, *Causal*, *Referent salience* and *Unrelated discourses*. **Causal discourse** sentences offered a cause for the target psych causative sentence (e.g. *An athlete smoked in the dancer's room*). **Referent salience discourses** were devised by negating the causal discourses, removing the causal events but leaving the Stimulus role salient as the topic/agent in discourse contexts (e.g. *An athlete didn't smoke in the dancer's room*). In **Experiment 2**, intermediate (n=41) and advanced (n=36) Chinese English learners and English natives (n=36) comprehended 72 target sentences with animate Stimulus in discourse contexts under time pressure. Results found facilitative effects of discourses with *causal cue* and *role salience cue* on intermediate learners' processing speed and comprehension accuracy with psych lexical causatives, but no such effects were found with advanced learners and English natives. Additionally, we found that the role salient cue in the referent salience discourses in Exp2 might be confounded by the causal scenario suggested by the content words (e.g. *smoke, in the room*) (Otten, 2007). To specify the effects of different discourse factors, we conducted **Experiment 3** with another group of intermediate learners (n=41) from the same participant pool and a native control group (n=36). Advanced group was not recruited due to their similar performance as English natives in Experiment 2. In Exp. 3, the *Referent salient* discourses were rewritten to include no content word indicating a cause for the target sentence (e.g. ***An athlete lived a mile away from the dancer***). Similarly, causal, role salience and unrelated discourses were arranged. The results showed that the *causal discourses*, but not merely the salient role facilitated L2 learners' accuracy with psych lexical causatives. The current study indicated that 1) supportive discourses would facilitate online thematic-syntactic mapping of difficult L2 VAC; 2) the richer information the discourses offer, the more effective they would be; 3) when learners acquired the structure, discourse effects may disappear.