

How does Working Memory Function in the Development of the Complex Language Skill of Interpreting?

Yanping Dong

School of International Studies, Zhejiang University, China

Abstract

Working memory (WM) is critical to interpreting performance, but it remains unclear how WM functions in the development of the interpreting skill, and research on this question has implications for studies on the language-cognition interaction, and on the development of a general language skill. The Attentional Control Model (Dong & Li, 2020) illustrates that, to ensure the two distinctive requirements of language control and processing control in interpreting, WM (as part of cognition control for interpreting) first ensures the normal functioning of focused attention and distributed attention, which then respectively interacts with what are required for language processing in interpreting (i.e., establishment of interpreting task schema; language processing efficiency). To further explore this issue about the functioning of WM, Yu and Dong (2022) conducted a series of testing for a large group of students at the beginning and end of a year's interpreting training, and found that for both interpreting directions, although WM correlates with interpreting performance at the beginning stage, a valid structural equation model can be established only for the latter stage (end of the training year). In this model, WM impacts on interpreting performance via language competence, indicating the underlying role of WM. Further studies are being conducted with more factors (e.g., psychological and cognitive control) involved, so as to depict the trajectory of how psychological and cognitive control factors impacts on the development of the complex language skill of interpreting.