

Abstract

The present study investigates Chinese EFL learners’familiarity with and listening comprehension of English texts with native, local and novel accents (American, Chinese and bhutanese respectively), with the aim of verifying whether there is an“accent familiarity advantage” in L2 listening comprehension.

Introduction

Accents are related to pronunciation patterns and pronunciation habits, usually with regional or community characteristics(Wardhaugh & Fuller 2015). We divide L2 accents into native accents and non-native accents.The latter can be further divided: for non-native speakers with the same or similar mother tongue, their second language accents are their own or local accents; for non-native speakers with large differences in their mother tongue, their second language accents are unfamiliar to each other accent called novel accent.

Prolonged exposure to an accent and gaining relevant language experience can improve accent familiarity(Nejjari et al. 2012; Browne & Fulcher 2016) Accent familiarity enables listeners to decode speech more accurately and proficiently, which is helpful for listening comprehension(Kennedy & Trofimovich 2008), Ockey & French (2016: 708) call this the "accent familiarity advantage"

Taking English as a Second Language/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) as an example, learners' listening comprehension of native accents such as General American English and Standard British English pronunciation is generally better than that of non-native accents such as African, Chinese and Indian.(Ortmeyer & Boyle 1985; Major et al. 2005; Matsuura et al. 2014).

On the other hand, the "shared-L1 effect" (Harding 2011)in L2 listening comprehension cannot be ignored. This is mainly manifested in two ways: (1) the learner's listening comprehension of the native accent is better than that of the second language native accent(Wilcox 1978; Yule et al. 1990; Peng & Wang 2016; Arabani et al. 2019) (2) There is no significant difference between the learners' listening comprehension of the second language native accent and the native accent.(Tauroza & Luk 1997; Liu & Reed 2019; Korpál & Sobkowiak 2020)

Study Design

Research questions : (1) Is there an “accent familiarity advantage” in second language listening comprehension? If so, (2) Is the accent familiarity dominance consistent in listening comprehension of different level groups?

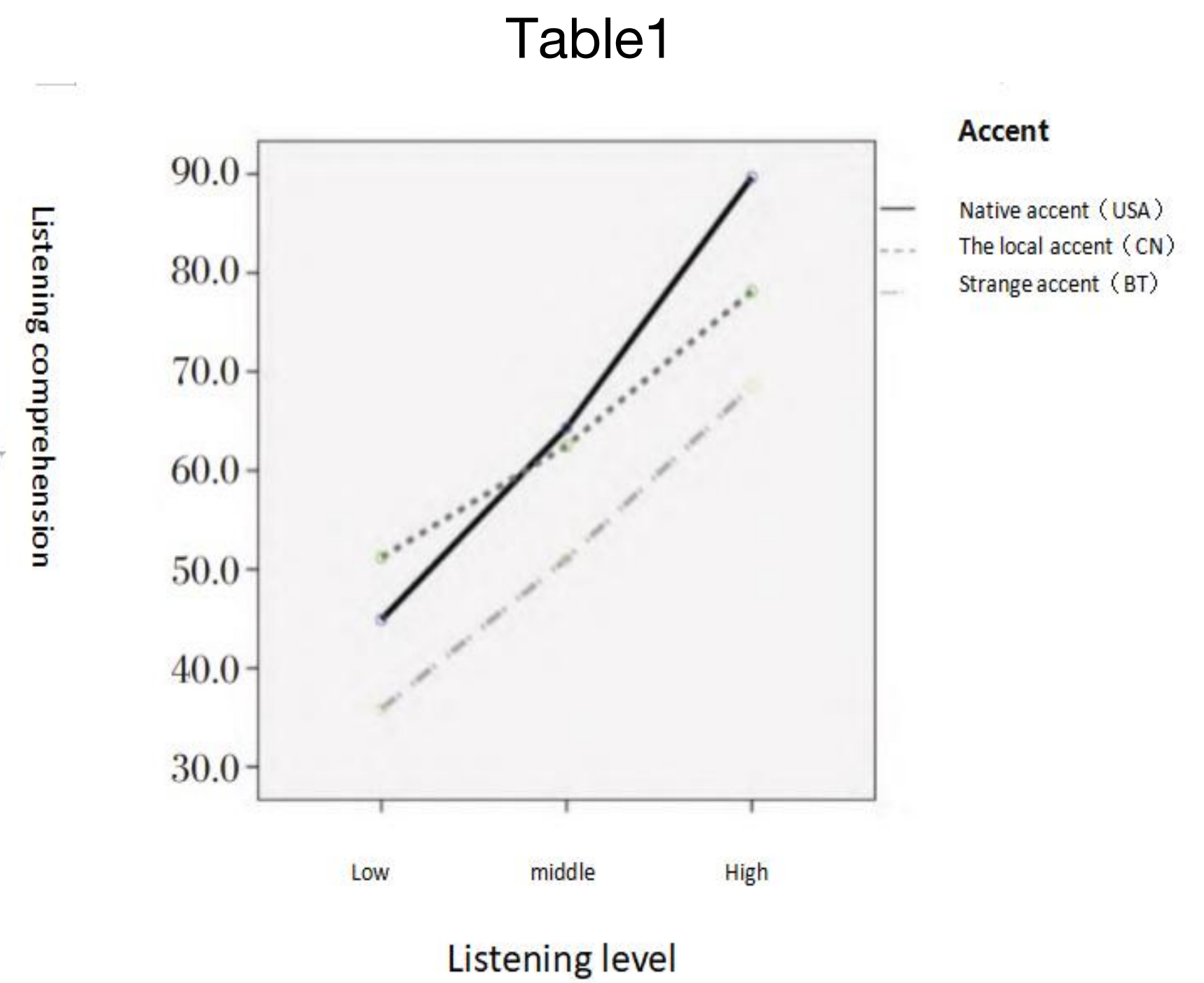
Research subjects: The subjects of this study were 32 Chinese students (13 females and 19 males) in the senior year of an international high school in China. First, they were given a second language listening proficiency test, and the questions were selected from the listening part of the China National College English Test (CET-4), all of which were life and health topics.

The test questions are read aloud by adult males whose native language is American English, Mandarin Chinese and Bhutanese, with a full score of 100 points.

According to the test results, 8 people were randomly selected from each of the three score ranges of 0~49.5, 61.5~70.5, and 84.5~100, and they were selected as the low, middle, and high listening level groups, with a total of 24 people (9 women, 15 men).AVOVA and Tukey's post hoc test showed that there was a significant difference in hearing level among the three groups ($F(2, 57)=38.07$, $p=.000$; Tukey p-values were all .000).All 32 students participated in the experiment, but only 24 subjects in the three level groups were subjected to data analysis.

Results

Using SPSS 19.0 software to analyze the data of accent familiarity assessment and listening comprehension test, the results are as follows:



Results show that (1) on the whole, the participants performed significantly better with the native accent than the novel accent, testifying the existence of an “accent familiarity advantage”; (2) the“accent familiarity advantage”varied when subjects’L2 listening proficiency differed; and (3) no significant difference was found in the listening comprehension of the native and local accents by all proficiency groups, suggesting a“shared -L1 effect”. These findings provide insight for the research and instruction of L2 listening

Conclusions

In addition to the above theoretical contributions, this research also has the following practical significance: when introducing non-native language accent materials into listening teaching, the learners' second language listening level should be considered, and teaching and practice should be carried out step by step.

Table2 Descriptive data and Tukey test results of familiarity of three accents in groups at each listening level

Listening Level	Accent	Descriptive Data		Tukey's post hoc test		
		Average Value	Standard Deviation	Comparision	Standard Deviation	<i>p</i>
Low-level	USA	2.95	.945	USA-CN	.55	.073
	CN	2.4	.754	USA-BT	1.60	.000
	BT	1.35	.587	CN-BT	1.05	.000
Middle-level	USA	3.45	.999	USA-CN	.60	.197
	CN	2.85	1.268	USA-BT	1.55	.000
	BT	1.9	.968	CN-BT	.95	.021
High-level	USA	4.2	.696	USA-CN	1.60	.000
	CN	2.6	.995	USA-BT	2.60	.000
	BT	1.6	.754	CN-BT	1.00	.001

Figure 1.Table1

Figure 2. Table2.

References

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