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Study on Metacognitive Strategies Application among Chinese Interpretation EFL Learners Based on CSE (China Standard of English)

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Abstract

English-Chinese interpretation imposes significant demands on EFL learners listening abilities and their application of metacognitive strategies. The English listening Listening strategy scale and interpretation strategy scale, based on metacognitive strategy classification, serve as benchmarks for assessing learners metacognitive strategies and listening skills, while also providing references for interpretation instruction in China. However, in CSE contexts, EFL learners exhibit distinct metacognitive strategy characteristics and face challenges in implementing, evaluating/remedying, and assessing these strategies. Addressing the metacognitive strategy characteristics and difficulties encountered by EFL learners in English-Chinese interpretation listening, this paper proposes teaching approaches and recommendations from a project-based teaching perspective, focusing on three key areas: listening context design, training priorities, and integration of listening with other skills, thereby offering valuable insights for interpretation education.

Keywords

Metacognitive strategies; English-Chinese consecutive interpretation; EFL learners.

1. Introduction

The English listening strategy scale and interpretation strategy scale within the China English Proficiency Scale have become the benchmark for assessing English listening abilities. Chinese university learners who study English as a second language employ listening metacognitive strategies in their Chinese-English interpretation learning, which are reflected in these scales. Based on CSE, EFL listening research, and interpretation listening studies, this study designed questionnaires and interviews, analyzed data using SPSS frequency counts, and examined EFL learners listening metacognitive strategies and challenges across three dimensions: planning, execution, and evaluation/remediation. The findings reveal that participants listening comprehension strategy proficiency reached Level 4 of the CSE framework, while their interpretation listening strategy proficiency fell below Levels 5–8 as defined by the CSE, with constraints arising from multiple metacognitive difficulties. In terms of execution strategies, participants predominantly employed bottom-up word-for-word translation and listening techniques, directly applying their Chinese language learning habits to English acquisition. When unable to comprehend source language information, they still took ineffective notes; when note retrieval failed, they relied on mental memorization to reconstruct understanding, often fabricating or omitting source language details to rationalize the content. Regarding evaluation/remediation strategies, participants frequently engaged in repeated listening or immediately ceased listening when comprehension failed, and conducted more post-translation evaluations rather than intra-translation assessments. Addressing these challenges, the study proposes...Develop corresponding teaching approaches and recommendations for

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English-Chinese interpretation and listening comprehension, aiming to align with the metacognitive strategy requirements outlined in CSE.

2. Research Review

2.1. Research on Listening Strategies

Strategies are the techniques and coping methods subconsciously employed during the learning process. With strategies, students can apply their acquired knowledge and skills across various learning contexts. Listening is crucial for EFL learners, who must utilize appropriate strategies and techniques to facilitate communication. Listening is the most widely used skill in English learning, accounting for 50% of daily English communication. This means EFL learners consistently encounter challenges such as word recognition, fluency, information loss during listening, memory decline, and difficulties in processing and comprehending discourse, all of which directly impact listening comprehension quality.

The listening comprehension strategy was proposed by Wittrock in 1974. The LCSUI (Listening Comprehension Strategy Use Inventory) questionnaire he developed covers both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Larry Vandergrift (2003).[1]It is proposed that learners can utilize pragmatic knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, and common sense to enhance listening comprehension. Metacognitive research focuses on strategies such as prediction, self-monitoring, evaluation, and problem-solving during the listening process. The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) developed by Larry Vandergrift serves as a valuable reference for studying listening strategies. Research indicates that effective listening comprehension stems from the integrated application of various strategies across diverse listening contexts; students with higher listening proficiency demonstrate greater proficiency in strategy integration, particularly in achieving self-exploration and monitoring through information assessment.[2]. Mulyadi (2018) [3]The study found that the application of cognitive and metacognitive listening strategies (M-CLS) proved highly effective in addressing listening difficulties among EFL students and enhancing their listening comprehension skills; Faradisa (2021).[4]30The study reveals a strong positive correlation between metacognition and listening comprehension improvement, with planning strategies and problem-solving strategies being the two most frequently employed metacognitive approaches by students. Research on EFL learners listening comprehension provides valuable insights for interpreting listening strategies. This study focuses on the perspective of EFL learners, analyzing how domestic undergraduate students apply listening comprehension metacognitive strategies in consecutive interpretation practice.

2.2. Research on Listening Strategies for Consecutive English-Chinese Translation

Consecutive Interpretation (CI) originates from the processes of information auditory processing and organization. As the core task at the initial stage of interpretation, auditory processing directly determines the effectiveness of both memory retention and note-taking phases, as well as subsequent output production.[5]After listening comprehension, the analyzed and understood information is stored in the brain, facilitating the English-to-Chinese translation through short-term memory. The resulting target-language (Chinese) output, in turn, enhances the comprehension of the source language. Thus, the quality of listening comprehension directly determines the quality of consecutive interpretation.[6]

Interpretation strategies refer to the techniques and methods employed in interpretation learning and practice to address challenges and enhance effectiveness. Observing students strategic choices, cognitive patterns, and behavioral tendencies during listening comprehension can help English learners understand the mechanisms of auditory learning.

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Therefore, reflecting on the difficulties learners encounter during the listening process in bilingual interpretation teaching is a crucial step in promoting the application of metacognitive strategies and enhancing metacognitive competencies [7]. Previous research on interpretation listening strategies has primarily focused on listening training, the impact of listening strategies, and the influence of cognitive and metacognitive approaches on bilingual interpretation output, while studies examining the difficulties and habits of EFL learners in strategy application during bilingual interpretation remain scarce. Compared to European translation majors, Chinese EFL learners generally possess weaker language proficiency [8]. Thus, thoroughly documenting and analyzing their bilingual interpretation processing mechanisms and strategy usage holds significant value—it allows for more insightful exploration of the underlying motivations behind bilingual interpretation outcomes than direct evaluations of performance or output results alone.

2.3. Research on Listening Strategies Based on CSE

China is a major country for EFL learners. In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the "China Standard for English Proficiency" (CSE).[9]This is an authoritative scale for assessing English proficiency. Listening comprehension, as a comprehensive cognitive ability, comprises various skills related to listening activities—including recognition, retrieval, generalization, analysis, critical thinking, and evaluation. For EFL learners studying interpretation at the undergraduate level, listening skills significantly impact translation quality. Interpretation courses are typically offered in the third year of undergraduate studies; although listening courses are available in the first and second years, most undergraduates develop a learning habit that prioritizes vocabulary over syntactic logic due to the prevalence of multiple-choice formats in current English listening tests (e.g., CET-4/CET-6). Consequently, even university students who pass the national college entrance examination in English still encounter substantial difficulties in academic lectures, oral communication, and daily English listening tasks. The lack of integration between early-year university listening courses and interpretation training, coupled with the absence of dedicated listening modules within interpretation curricula, results in a disconnect between language proficiency development and specific interpretive listening exercises.[10]Therefore, understanding the use of metacognitive strategies among domestic undergraduate EFL learners can reflect their proficiency levels in interpreting and listening comprehension. Murakami[11]The study indicates that listeners with stronger auditory abilities employ metacognitive strategies more frequently. Given the limited auditory skills of EFL learners in China, their use of auditory-related metacognitive strategies exhibits distinct characteristics.

In summary, this study integrates the Interpretation Strategy Table and Listening Comprehension Strategy Table from CSE, the Listening Comprehension Ability Scale, as well as research findings on metacognitive skills in EFL listening comprehension and consecutive interpreting metacognition, to develop a questionnaire assessing English-Chinese CI metacognitive strategies for EFL learners. The aim is to explore the specific application of interpretation-related metacognitive strategies within the CSE framework. This study addresses two key questions: 1. How are EFL learners metacognitive abilities in listening comprehension classified according to the CSE listening comprehension strategy scale and interpretation strategy scale? 2. What metacognitive strategies do EFL learners employ in English-Chinese CI, and what challenges do they encounter? Addressing these questions will not only provide insights for self-directed learning among EFL interpretation students but also inform consecutive interpreting instruction by evaluating learners metacognitive strategies and awareness in listening comprehension.

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3. Methodology

The study surveyed 104 third-year students majoring in English translation, cross-border e-commerce, and English literature. Specifically, 38 were from the translation program, 30 from the cross-border e-commerce program, and 36 from the literature program. A total of 97 valid questionnaires were collected. All participants had taken English listening courses—including beginner-level listening, intermediate-level listening, and phonetics—during their freshman and sophomore years. To ensure research validity and minimize interference from other consecutive interpretation sessions, participants underwent training in Chinese-to-English consecutive interpretation prior to the study, enabling them to master note-taking techniques and become familiar with the interpretation process. The questionnaire was distributed in advance to 30 students for reliability and validity testing, with results confirming its validity.

This study collected data using questionnaire surveys and interviews.

3.1. Questionnaire

This study questionnaire draws on research questionnaires related to EFL auditory metacognition (Larry Vandergrift, Ayami, and Lzzettin), the Alternative Interpretation Auditory Metacognitive Strategy Questionnaire, as well as the CSE Interpretation Strategy Table 67 and Listening Comprehension Strategy Table 24, and is tailored to meet specific research needs to develop an English-Chinese Alternative Interpretation Auditory Metacognitive Strategy Table.

The questionnaire employs a Likert scale, offering four response options—strongly oppose, oppose, agree, and strongly agree—with a total of 20 questions. Questions 1–10 are designed based on CSE listening comprehension strategies, while questions 11–20 are developed according to CSE interpreting metacognitive strategies, covering the three dimensions of planning, implementation, and evaluation/remediation of metacognitive strategies. After data collection, quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS software.

SPSS analysis revealed that the Cronbachs α coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.727, indicating high reliability and validity, making it suitable for this study. Prior to distribution, instructors provided explanations of the questionnaire content to facilitate student comprehension, and responses were collected in Chinese.

Table 1. Cronbachs Alpha Reliability Analysis – Simplified Format

number of terms	Sample Size	Cronbachs α coefficient
20	97	0.727

3.2. Interview

The interview consists of two components: a simultaneous interpretation test and subsequent interviews. First, participants were provided with two consecutive interpretation tasks from English to Chinese—one excerpted from VOA Slow English and the other from the National Personnel Departments Level 3 Interpretation Test (CATTI 3). To minimize vocabulary-related interference during the metacognitive strategy assessment for listening comprehension, all materials used in this study contained words of relatively low difficulty. After listening to the materials, participants performed the consecutive interpretation task upon hearing a "beep" signal, then submitted their notes and audio recordings.

After the interpretation session concluded, participants underwent interviews. Instructors supplemented the questionnaire with additional inquiries regarding their auditory performance and recorded students responses for supplementary analysis of the survey data. The interview panel consisted of instructors with over five years of experience in interpreting

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instruction and practice, who reviewed both the students bilingual (English-Chinese) interpretation recordings and notes.

4. Data Analysis

The SPSS frequency analysis results indicate that examining questions 1–20 of the questionnaire reveals EFL learners use of metacognitive strategies for listening comprehension during the English-Chinese interaction process.

Questions 1–3 focused on speech rate, linking patterns, and accent issues. SPSS analysis revealed that over 90% of respondents selected "agree." During listening comprehension, listeners must rapidly retain information, continuously process and identify linguistic elements throughout the speech stream, perform serial encoding, distinguish between different speech sounds, and recognize similar phrases, pauses, and segmented segments. Feedback from EFL participants indicated widespread difficulties in handling tasks during English-Chinese consecutive interpretation listening. The tendency to choose "agree" for Question 4 ("I quickly forget what I hear") was particularly pronounced, with 86.60% of respondents selecting this option. For Question 5 ("I can understand longer and more complex sentences"), 62.88% chose "disagree," indicating that EFL learners struggle to activate working memory information and translate literal meanings into underlying linguistic meaning and logic during English-Chinese listening tasks. The predominantly exam-oriented nature of English education in China results in generally low interpretation proficiency among undergraduate students, failing to meet the standards set by the Common Standards for English Interpreters (CSE).[12]

Regarding the aforementioned listening comprehension difficulties, the subjects strategy choices can be referenced from Questions 8 and 9. Statistical results show that the selection rate of "Agree" reached 84.53% and 82.84%, respectively. This indicates that when subjects cannot comprehend information in a single listening session, they often resort to repeated listening or immediate pauses—both of which significantly interfere with the English-Chinese interpretation process. This suggests that during the initial stages of interpretation learning, when EFL students fail to fully grasp the source language meaning, they predominantly employ a "bottom-up" listening approach, lacking the ability to utilize metacognitive strategies such as inference and prediction in context, and relying solely on repeated listening or immediate pauses. In interviews, subjects reported needing multiple listening attempts to fully comprehend the source language, and pausing when encountering unfamiliar words was a necessary measure to cope with the continuous influx of information.

Question 10: "I often translate word-for-word while listening." The response "Agree" accounted for as high as 80.52%, indicating that respondents tend to translate literally during listening sessions. Listeners with lower listening proficiency are more prone to this strategy; however, this overemphasis on literal comprehension consumes significant time for EFL learners, preventing them from keeping up with the native language flow. In interpreting contexts, this leaves learners with insufficient working memory to apply their background knowledge in processing linguistic meaning, necessitating the abandonment of literal translation habits. Interviews revealed, however, that participants perceived word-by-word translation in CI interpretation as providing greater security—a psychological cognitive strategy. Vandergrift suggests that EFL learners unconsciously transfer their Chinese learning habits into English acquisition.[13]Word learning is crucial in Chinese language acquisition. Consequently, EFL learners in China still employ such listening strategies in interpretation practice, adopting a "bottom-up" cognitive processing approach when processing speech streams—focusing solely on "lower-level" aspects like word translation, pronunciation, and grammar while neglecting "higher-level" elements such as context and logic. For Question 14, "When listening to information, I try to coordinate my mental recall with note-taking, but frequently miss

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important details due to constant note-taking," 90.72% of respondents selected "Agree." In EFL learning, notes typically serve as an auxiliary tool for processing speech streams, facilitating information retention and accelerating mental encoding.[14]However, in consecutive interpreting, the mismatch between written notes and mental recall stems from inadequate listening comprehension skills; even with continuous recording, the resulting notes are often ineffective. Interviews revealed that the more listening comprehension challenges students encounter, the more ineffective notes they tend to produce—serving as a form of psychological comfort and an attempt to capture additional information.

Question 15: "Even when I cannot clearly see or recognize my own notes, I can still recall the main content of the source language based on what I have heard." The response "Disagree" accounted for 54.64%, indicating that participants faced difficulties in coordinating brain memory with note-taking, information analysis, note content filtering, and memory retention of source-language information. Faradise[4]128The study mentioned that in the application of metacognitive strategies, when mental resources are limited, the external storage function of notes can be temporarily disabled, allowing for the processing of fully processed cognitive information through short-term memory and a return to the original linguistic logic. However, the findings of this study show significant divergence from this approach, as participants predominantly exhibited a tendency to prioritize note-taking over comprehension.

Question 18 reveals that participants generally recognize the importance of assessing listening comprehension processes, yet 81.45% of evaluations were conducted after interpretation concluded, while only 60.82% occurred during interpretation. This disparity stems from students inability to promptly reflect on, review, and assess whether they have fully captured source-language information and logic during consecutive interpreting sessions. In interviews, participants indicated that self-assessment (particularly teacher assessment) significantly enhances learning outcomes, and that evaluation encourages students to document listening comprehension difficulties and seek solutions.[15]

Questions 19 and 20 focused on "strategies employed when fully comprehending source-language information during listening comprehension," with 71.29% and 91.75% of respondents respectively choosing to fabricate or directly omit the incomprehensible content. Vandergrift posits that listening comprehension difficulties arise when information processing time is insufficient, working memory capacity is limited, and new information continuously flows in; in such cases, listeners attempt to infer the complete information through context or other means. Under significant time pressure, participants subconsciously fabricate logical connections or directly omit source-language content to rationalize the information.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

This study concludes that the application of metacognitive strategies by EFL learners during the listening comprehension phase of bilingual English-Chinese interpretation reflects their listening comprehension ability at CSE Level 4, falling short of the Level 5–8 standards outlined in the CSE Interpreting Scale. The strategic characteristics and challenges exhibited by participants during listening comprehension are as follows: In terms of strategy execution, EFL learners employed a bottom-up word-for-word translation approach, directly applying their Chinese learning habits to English acquisition; when unable to comprehend source-language information, they still took ineffective notes for psychological reassurance, and failed to reconstruct understood information through mental recall when note content could not be retrieved; they rationalized content reconstruction by fabricating or omitting source-language details. Regarding evaluation/remedial strategies, participants frequently sought psychological security through repeated listening or immediate cessation upon encountering

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incomprehension; they frequently conducted post-translation evaluations and reflections, while rarely performing rapid assessments of source-language information during interpretation.

5.2. Recommendation

Considering the current state of learners metacognitive strategies and the specific learning characteristics of EFL students in listening comprehension, this study proposes the following recommendations. First, in strategy planning, teachers should adopt project-based teaching approaches, reviewing background knowledge and vocabulary related to consecutive interpretation listening cases before class. This enables students to familiarize themselves with contextual materials while mastering relevant terminology and expressions, ensuring smooth comprehension processes and allowing teachers to more effectively assess students metacognitive strategy application after overcoming vocabulary barriers. Second, regarding strategy implementation, teachers should establish dedicated preparatory courses for English-Chinese consecutive interpretation listening to cultivate proper listening habits and skills, avoiding issues like word-for-word translation or rigid imitation of Chinese learning practices. These courses may include sentence structure analysis, shadow reading exercises, sentence restructuring tasks, and paragraph/logical structure reconstruction activities, aiming to enhance students awareness of English linguistic structures, help them overcome the Chinese language habit of overemphasizing vocabulary, and lay a solid foundation for consecutive interpretation. Third, concerning assessment and remediation strategies, teachers should integrate specialized listening comprehension courses into English-Chinese consecutive interpretation instruction, covering key characteristics, requirements, and materials for consecutive interpretation. Concurrent skill training should focus on note-taking techniques, short-term memory strategies, multi-task processing during interpretation, and effective energy management during oral delivery.Guide students to organically integrate listening comprehension skills with the consecutive interpreting process, achieving synergy between listening comprehension and other tasks through dynamic task allocation, while conducting in-translation assessment and remediation. Simultaneously, encourage students to engage in post-translation evaluation and self-reflection through tools such as interpretation logs, practice reflection reports, and online forms. Finally, consecutive interpreting listening comprehension instruction should align with the unique learning characteristics of Chinas EFL learners, emphasize formative assessment, and reference the listening comprehension components of both the CSE Listening Comprehension Self-Evaluation Scale and the Consecutive Interpreting Self-Evaluation Scale. This approach enhances EFL learners metacognitive awareness and strategic application abilities across three dimensions: planning, execution, and evaluation/remediation of metacognitive strategies.

The questionnaire used in this study can serve as a self-assessment tool for beginners in interpretation studies and help instructors understand the metacognitive strategies and cognitive characteristics of EFL learners, providing valuable insights for teaching. However, due to the limited sample size, the data collected from participants require further validation; future research should expand the sample size to conduct more in-depth analyses.

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