

Metalinguistic Knowledge at Work: The Case of Written Production by Chinese Learners of English

Guangwei HU
Nanyang Technological University

A fundamental belief underlying traditional Chinese approaches to second language (L2) instruction is that explicitly represented knowledge about the target language can become increasingly available for spontaneous use through practice. The present study addresses this belief by investigating whether instructed Chinese learners' metalinguistic knowledge about English is mobilized in their production and what psychological factors may impinge on access to such knowledge. Drawing on previous work on knowledge representation, information processing, and human categorization, it was hypothesized that real-time access to metalinguistic knowledge in L2 production would be affected by the amount of attention allocated to formal accuracy, the level of automaticity reached in processing such knowledge, and the linguistic prototypicality of the target use concerned. These hypotheses are supported by the results of a quasi-experiment on 60 instructed Chinese learners of English.