Adaptive and Maladaptive Strategy Use in Computer-assisted Language Learning Activities for Listening Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

College students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Chile participated in an online mini-course designed to improve their listening comprehension. There were four experimental conditions: A) one in which participants listened to fast dialogues; B) one in which participants listened to slow dialogues; C) one in which participants were given an option as to which speed to listen to; and D) one in which participants could pause playback. Participants took a pretest and a posttest in both listening comprehension and written sentence comprehension. The listening comprehension test measured participants' comprehension on slow and fast dialogues. The participants trained on fast dialogues showed a drop in their listening comprehension scores. Participants given a choice of speed also showed a drop, but only with slow dialogues. Differences in participants' pretest to posttest gain scores on both listening and written tasks are explained in terms of the participants' use of learning strategies and working memory. The findings have implications for classroom instruction, CALL design, and listening comprehension assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Actions that second language (L2) learners can take to make their learning of the L2 more effective are called learning strategies (Oxford 1986). Instruction on the use of learning strategies can improve L2 learners' listening comprehension (Thompson & Rubin 1996). This enables the learners to direct their own learning and therefore makes them more independent and autonomous learners. Autonomy on the part of the learner is particularly important in the case of learners using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) materials when working