Teaching English Stress: Can Song-Lyric Reading Combined with Mobile Learning Be Beneficial to Non-English Majors?

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Abstract

Although stress patterns in English and Chinese are strikingly different, most English learners in China have overlooked or ignored this difference, resulting in poor speaking performance. In an attempt to approach this issue, this study designs the mobile assisted language learning (MALL) based instruction by integrating stress lessons on the mobile application and adopting song lyric-reading as stress pattern training, aiming to help college students improve their speaking performance in terms of English stress. Two groups of Chinese freshman (N=60), non-English majors, participated in the study by separately receiving the MALL-based lyric-reading instruction and the in-classroom lyric-reading instruction. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. Quantitative data comprise scores of both pre- and post-test, and qualitative data include an interview used to gain participants’ insights after the experiment. The results suggest that students with the former instruction achieve a better learning outcome. The study also extends the theoretical sphere of English stress learning by providing empirical findings such as stricter scoring rubrics for reading-aloud tests and the Chinese pronoun-fossilization influence on stress acquisition.

Keywords: English stress instruction, college non-English majors, mobile assisted language learning (MALL), song lyric-reading

Introduction

English is a stress-timed language where each syllable in a word or each word in a sentence gains unequal prominence in speaking (Archibald, 1997, p.263-264). Put another way, word stress and sentence stress constitute the two main types of English stress, which is the instrumental nature of English that second language (L2) learners need to master. However, the stress nature of English has been overlooked or ignored by most Chinese learners, especially those college non-English majors. Lack of English stress knowledge results in wrong placement of high pitch or long duration on syllables in speaking (Zhang,