Comprehension of Chinese Classifiers in Preschool Normal Hearing and Cochlear Implanted Children

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Previous studies have examined the relationship between phonological processing skills and language performance of children with cochlear implants. Their limited and deficient auditory access is one of the primary causes of speech and language development delay. The present research aimed to investigate the differences between preschool normal hearing (NH) and CI children’s comprehension of Chinese classifiers (CL). Age-matching normal hearing and CI Chinese-speaking children between age of 4 and 6 were recruited and participated the experiment. Both shape-based and features-shared classifiers were prepared for the test of CL-picture pairing, in which one target CL was presented with three object pictures. The finger-touching responses were recorded as scores of comprehension. The results showed that, compared to NH children, CL children had lower comprehension level for the 3 and 4 age groups. Particularly, CL children performed better for the shape-based classifiers than the features-shared classifiers. However, NH children performed evenly on the two types of classifiers across the age groups, suggesting that NH, not CL, children not only use shape salience to learn Chinese classifiers, but they are also sensitive to feature relations between objects categorised by classifier. It is suspected that the semantic transparency between classifiers and objects varies considerably in CL children at earlier ages, possibly due to their deficits of hearing. Nevertheless, learning experiences might override the inferiority of establishing the semantic form of classifier-noun bound.

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