Radical awareness, Character recognition, and reading comprehension ability: an examination of their relationship in learners of Chinese as a foreign language

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Reading comprehension is a complex activity that requires various components to cooperate and interact with each other. The component skill approach understands reading as “the product of a complex but decomposable information-processing system” (Carr & Levy, 1990, p. 5). According to Lexical Efficiency Hypothesis (Perfetti, 1985, 2007), word identification, the rapid retrieval of a word’s phonology and meaning, supports reading comprehension. A relationship between radical awareness and reading comprehension has also been established in learning Chinese as a foreign language (Taft and Chung, 1999; Shen, 2002; Shen & Ke, 2007; Su, 2010). However, questions remain about the relationship among radical awareness, character recognition, and reading comprehension. Adopting Component skills approach, this study intends to model the two components skills and evaluate their contribution to text level reading comprehension among adult learners of Chinese as a foreign language. The specific research questions are: 1). How well does the data fit the proposed model? 2). How much variance of reading comprehension can radical awareness and character recognition explain? 3). What is the relationship between radical awareness and reading comprehension? 4). What is the relationship between character recognition and reading comprehension? The latent variable radical awareness will be measured using two tests: radical knowledge test and character meaning matching test. The character recognition will be measured by a lexical decision task. The reading comprehension will be measured using four reading passages followed by multiple-choice questions. The radical awareness is hypothesized to both have a direct effect on reading comprehension and an indirect effect on reading comprehension through the mediation of character recognition. Character recognition is hypothesized to have a direct effect on reading comprehension. The proposed model will be validated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study intends to suggest a causal relationship between character recognition and reading comprehension, and an indirect effect of radical awareness on reading comprehension through the mediation of character recognition, and a causal relationship between character recognition and reading comprehension.