

Abstract

The present study concentrates on the perception of voicing contrasts in English, Polish and Mandarin Chinese stops by Poles. Three groups of students are compared: (1) advanced Polish learners of English and Mandarin: adults; (2) beginner Polish learners of English: children with no knowledge of Mandarin; (3) elementary-intermediate Polish learners of English: adults with no knowledge of Mandarin. The results show that the perception of voicing contrasts in English and Mandarin differs with language experience and age. Advanced users of English and Mandarin consistently divide stops into lenis (/b d g/) and fortis (/p t k/), whereas categorisation of voicing contrasts for short-lag stops (0 – 20 ms VOT) is more difficult for adults at low L2 and L3 proficiency levels. Children show the most chaotic pattern in reacting to English lenis stops, but as faced with Mandarin lenis stops, they tend to categorise them as fortis.