

Do Students Like What is Good for Them? An Investigation of the Pleasure Hypothesis with Middle School Students of Mandarin

Christy Lao, San Francisco State University

Stephen Krashen, University of Southern California (Emeritus)

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Introduction

The Pleasure Hypothesis states that activities that are beneficial for language acquisition and literacy development will be considered to be pleasant by students and teachers. * (Note that the Pleasure Hypothesis does not claim that all activities that are pleasant are beneficial.) If the Comprehension Hypothesis is correct (Krashen, 2003), the Pleasure Hypothesis predicts that activities that provide students with interesting and comprehensible input will be perceived as pleasant, more pleasant than activities that do not provide comprehensible input.

Evidence supporting this prediction includes studies showing that students perceive free reading and hearing stories to be pleasant but are anxious about being forced to speak in class. Data on correction and grammar study is mixed, with some students claiming that they enjoy grammar and want correction, but student behavior does not correspond to their stated beliefs (Krashen, 1994).

In this study, we attempt to determine what activities middle school students of Mandarin in the US find effective and pleasant, hypothesizing that students will find activities that supply interesting and comprehensible input both more effective and more pleasant and that items that are considered more effective will be considered to be more pleasant; that is, there will be a positive correlation between effectiveness and pleasantness ratings.

Method

Twenty-one middle school children enrolled in a summer program in Mandarin in San Francisco filled out the questionnaire. All had previous exposure to Mandarin in school, and five children spoke some Mandarin at home. Nearly all were from middle- class families. No attempt was made to correlate background characteristics with the survey result because of the small sample.

Subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which took them approximately ten to twenty-five minutes, in class, at the beginning of the summer program.

Results

In Tables 1 and 2 presented below, the first four items are considered to be non- CI (not comprehensible input), and the last three are considered to be CI (comprehensible input).

Survey results reveal that stories and visual media were ranked the most effective (Table 1), although studying textbooks and practicing writing characters were not far behind. Statistical analysis (Table 3)

shows that non-CI items were rated as less effective than CI items. The difference fell just short of statistical significance ($p = .11$, one-tail).

Table 1: Judgments of effectiveness

	yes	not sure	no	Total score
Practice writing characters	14	3	4	52
Memorizing textbook lessons	9	9	3	42
Studying textbooks	15	3	3	54
Reading required Chinese books	10	4	7	45
Reading Chinese books of my own choice	13	1	7	48
Listening to Chinese stories	18	1	2	57
Watch Chinese cartoons/movies/ TV shows	17	3	1	58

“Yes” scored as 3, “not sure” as 2, “no” as 1

Table 2: Judgments of pleasantness

	yes	not sure	no	Total score
Practice writing characters	8	3	10	40
Memorizing textbook lessons	5	3	13	34
Studying textbooks	7	4	10	39
Reading required Chinese books	6	5	10	38
Reading Chinese books of my own choice	13	1	7	48
Listening to Chinese stories	20	0	1	61
Watch Chinese cartoons/movies/TV shows	19	0	2	59

“Yes” scored as 3, “not sure” as 2, “no” as 1

The results for pleasantness ratings were much clearer: all CI items were rated as more pleasant than all non-CI items (Table 2). Nearly all students considered hearing stories and watching Chinese cartoons/movies/ TV to be pleasant with self-selected reading a distant third. Non-CI items were rated as significantly less pleasant than the CI items ($p = .0023$). Maximum score for effectiveness and pleasantness is 63, minimum score is 21.

The difference between non-CI and CI item ratings was much greater for pleasantness ratings, as seen in the larger effect size for pleasantness ratings.

The correlation between effectiveness and pleasantness ratings was .78. Activities thought to be more effective were also considered to be more pleasant.

Table 3: Non-CI versus CI items: rated effectiveness and pleasantness

	Not CI (4)	CI (3)	t	p	effect size
effective	48.25 (5.68)	54.33 (5.51)	1.42	0.11	1.28
pleasant	37.75 (2.63)	56 (7)	4.9	0.0023	4.43

Discussion

Middle school students of Mandarin judged activities that were classified as providing comprehensible input to be somewhat more effective and much more pleasant than those classified as not providing comprehensible input. A positive correlation was found between effectiveness and pleasantness ratings for individual items.

All CI-related items were rated as more pleasant than all non-CI items. Listening to stories and watching TV and movies were the highest-ranking activities for both effectiveness and pleasantness, with reading self-selected books coming in fourth in effectiveness and third in pleasantness. The more modest approval for self-selected reading may be a reflection of the lack of good reading material for students at this level.

The results of this study provide clear support for the Pleasure Hypothesis. The modest sample and number of items, however, is a consideration. This study needs to be replicated with similar groups and with other groups of students, teachers, and non-professionals.

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References

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