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List of Abbreviations

CG	Control group
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EG	Experimental group
FL	Foreign Language
SLA	Second language acquisition
ESL	English as a second language
SILL	Strategies Inventory for Language Learning
MALQ	Meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Comprehension Questionnaire

Abstract

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between the listening strategies that were used by teenagers and adult EFL learners in their listening class and the relationship with their listening achievement in a language institute in Kerman. The goal was making clear if the use of particular strategies can have any impact on the listening achievement of the learners. Two groups established the participants of the study: adults and teenagers. To homogenize these candidates in both groups, Oxford Placement Test was administered. Based on the test of listening, the learners were classified into three groups of high, mid and low for both groups. For this study, three instruments were used to collect the required data: 1) Oxford Placement Test, 2) listening strategies questionnaire (Vendergrift, 1997) and 3) PET listening test. The questionnaire contained 21 items. Based on achieved data of the study, it was proved that the adult and teenager candidates used some listening strategies more than others. The mean score for direct attention category was calculated to be 4.63 for the adult learners. It means that the adult learners used more direct attention as the dominant listening strategy. Based on the ranks for each category, the first ranking was given to direct attention, the second to planning and the third to problem solving and the last to mental translation. As it was discussed before, in two cases, problem solving and mental translation, meaningful relationship could be observed between the levels and categories. In other words it was discussed that the three levels of teenagers responded differently to these two categories and they had different views towards them.

Key words:

Listening Strategies, Listening Skill, EFL.

Chapter One

Preliminaries

1.1. Introduction

Being the two main channels of language input, reading and listening play a vital role in FL learning. The more learners read and listen, the more they are exposed to language. This exposure is what leads to language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Peterson, 2001). It is therefore safe to say that language learning is contingent on how much learners read and listen to the FL. Listening is even of more importance to language development than reading because it is the most frequently used language skill (Ferris, 1998; Vogely, 1998; Morley, 1999).

Through listening, language learners internalize linguistic information without which they cannot produce language (Brown, 2001). Listening is also crucial to the development of other language skills, especially speaking (Rost, 2002). For FL learners, listening is more demanding than reading. This demanding nature is evident in Purdy's (1997, p. 8) definition of listening as "active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings." The ability to comprehend spoken language entails complex, instant and simultaneous processing of different types of information. To comprehend spoken language, one needs to coordinate sounds, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and background knowledge (Vandergrift, 1999). Many scholars therefore assert the difficult nature of listening (Vogely, 1999). Empirically, several factors have been found to contribute to the problematic nature of FL listening (e.g. Underwood, 1989; Long, 1990; Vogely, 1998). For instance, Underwood (1989) identified seven problematic areas that may hinder listening comprehension: lack of control over the speed of delivery, lack of repetition in the listening material, limited vocabulary, failure to recognize discourse markers, lack of contextual knowledge, inability to concentrate in a FL, and established learning habits such as a wish to understand every word. For many years, listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching since it was widely assumed that listening skill is a passive skill, one that should not be thought apart from the other language skills. However, in 1970's,

researchers began to understand the importance of listening comprehension (LC) in language development and placed more value on listening skills in their language instruction approaches (Krashen, 1982). This recognition has inspired researchers to review the factors that may influence LC.

Listening plays an important role in communication as it is said that, of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking , 25-30%; reading 11-16%; and writing, about9% (Mendelsohn,1994). Although the teaching of listening comprehension has long been” somewhat neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs” (Mendelsohn,1994).Thus, the label of passive skill applied to listening is a misnomer.

1.2. Background of the study

Language learning strategies (LLS) have attracted growing interest in second or foreign language (L2 or FL) learning for the past thirty years or so. Research into this defined discipline has yielded a bulk of publications, including Oxford (1990), O’Malley *et al.* (1985), Rubin (1981), Graham (1997), Vandergrift (1997; 2003), Goh (2002) and Bacon (1992). These studies have shown that L2 learners employ conscious techniques to enhance using or learning the target language, and to achieve communicative competence. The deployment of the strategy use implies the optimal goal of self-regulated or autonomous learning in education, whereby learners make their own choices, set the learning objectives, monitor the learning progress and evaluate the learning outcomes. However, research into the interrelationship between specific language modalities (e.g., speaking or writing) and varied factors (e.g., learning preferences or personalities) has been a less investigated area. In particular, the relation between listening comprehension and learning style is the least examined area (Macaro *et al.* 2007). As speculated, there is a close relationship between learners’ strategy use and their cognitive or learning styles. When a learner sets a goal and carries out a series of actions or strategies to achieve the

intended goal, it is considered an overt behavior. On the contrary, the cognitive style of the learner is covert or unobservable behavior.

So, the cognitive style would be readily accessible by the conscious strategy deployment (Ehrman *et al.* 2003). A few researchers have attempted to investigate the relationship between the listening strategy use and listening ability in L2, such as O'Malley *et al.* (1989), Vandergrift (1997; 2003), and Goh (2002). Those studies primarily focus on the mental processes of listeners during the three distinctive processing stages (perception, parsing and utilisation). An effective listener is able to concentrate on what is being heard, to plan what to listen for, and to interact with both textual cues (bottom-up) and personal prior experience (top-down); whereas an ineffective listener employs predominately bottom-up processing, listening for single words, and using strategies at random. Similarly, the research findings by Goh (2002) reveal that a more proficient listener uses both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to achieve a meaningful interpretation of a text, and demonstrates the ability to use prior knowledge, linguistic cues, and contextual information. On the other hand, a less proficient listener is often distracted by unfamiliar lexis or expressions, and has a limited range of strategies. Listening proficiency and listening strategy use, 36 junior high school students of French in Canada were recruited for listening strategy elicitations. The study found that the more proficient listeners employed metacognitive strategies more frequently than did the less proficient listeners, and the variations in this type of strategy use had a statistically significant relation across the listening ability. Thus, the study suggests that teaching less proficient listeners to use metacognitive strategies would enhance their listening performance. This is to say, the metacognitive process engages a listener in a sequence of conscious actions: analysis of the listening task requirements, activation of appropriate listening processes, making predictions of the task, and monitoring and evaluating one's comprehension.

In Vandergrift's (2003) investigation, which aimed to examine the relationship between listening proficiency and listening strategy use, 36 junior high school students of

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In addition to listening strategy use, learning style refers to information processed in a preferred way according to one's habitual style or characteristics. Some individuals may prefer learning aurally by using cassettes or videotapes, while others may have visual preferences for learning through reading books or graphics. However, it is believed that successful learning is attributable to an individual's inherent characteristics. In the L2 language learning field, cognitive style has been extensively researched in Willing (1988), Wintergerst *et al.* (2003), Oxford and Nam (1998), Hansen and Stansfield (1981), and Ehrman *et al.* (2003). For example, Willing (1988) proposes four distinct types of learning style, including communicative (e.g., watching TV in English or using English in shops), authority-oriented (e.g., studying grammar, or through a teacher leading to learning), concrete (e.g. learning through games, or using cassettes), and analytical (i.e., studying alone). In Willing's (*ibid.*) project, the learning styles of 517 multi-national adult immigrants studying at an English language program in Sydney, Australia, were empirically assessed. His research findings indicate that authority-oriented and analytical styles are highly valued by Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, South American, and Polish students. The mostly preferred items are 'practicing sounds and pronunciation in English' and 'everything explained by their teacher', and the least preferred ways of learning are 'playing games' and 'watching films'.

1.3. Statement of the problem

During listening process, different factors may cause uneasiness and tension for language learners and result in poor listening. Young (1992) stated that poor listening ability results from many factors such as insufficient emphasis on listening, immature teaching methodologies, ineffective listening strategies, and students lack of vocabulary.

Listening is a highly-complex activity (Barnes, 1984) in which listeners interact with speakers to contract meaning within the context of their experience and knowledge. As Barnes mentioned, listening is a complex activity and there are different obstacles which effect efficient listening comprehension. Speakers' speed in speaking, listeners limited knowledge of vocabulary, lack of clues such as facial expressions, nods and gestures are the most important problems because of which listeners fail to understand the speaker.

According to Anderson and Lynch (1988), arguing what is successful listening argue that understanding a speaker is not something that happens because of what a speaker says: the listener has a crucial part to play in the process, by activating various types of knowledge, and by applying what he hears and trying to understand what the speaker means.

EFL learners in Iran are always weak in listening and have problems with understanding of the audio text. There are some causes behind this deficiency. This can be proved by observing the scores of standard examinations where the Iranian candidates have had very poor performance. Learners have very weak notion what listening strategies are. Unfortunately these strategies are not taught or presented in the language classes and learners have very little idea about what is meant by listening strategies.

Another problem about the listening failure is lack of the required motivation which EFL learners need so as to improve their listening skill. In fact, it is felt