

The Impact of Listening Strategies on Improving Learners' Listening Skill in Iran

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Abstract—Viable listening comprehension skills are essential as the world gets to be more and more worldwide. Multi media and the web get to be discussions for English communication. EFL learners struggle to grasp oral English writings in their listening comprehension categories. In this study, a group of 103 Iranian EFL learners participated in this study and answered a general proficiency test of Nelson and 81 students responded to the listening section of TOEFL. Students were classified into effective and ineffective listeners by application of O'Malley et al's subjective criteria (1989) and the scores of students in TOEFL. To elicit the listening strategies of each group, listening strategy questionnaire was developed. A Case II t-test analysis of the questionnaires ($P < .05$) showed a meaningful difference between effective and ineffective listeners. The subjects were divided on the basis of their pre-listening scores into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received the instruction of listening strategies and control group received the placebo treatment. The treatment included introduction, modeling and practicing the listening strategies. A posttest of listening section of TOEFL was administered to both groups. The results imply that listening strategies can be taught

Index Terms—effective and ineffective listening strategy, EFL learners, language proficiency, listening skill, listening strategies, meta-cognitive awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers from completely different area of the globe have tried to stipulate the characteristics of strategic learners and the kind of ways those learners use in specific learning tasks (Birjandi, Mirhassani, & Abbasian, 2006). For instance, Richards (2008) suggests that the growth of learners' communicative ability and language proficiency is related to the strategy they use. Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, and Al-Shaboul (2010) draw attention that EFL learners might favor some strategies over others. This raises a priority concerning the identification of remarkably used strategies and less remarkably used ones and their influence on increasing learning. Rost (2001, p. 94) mentions that "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition".

There has been a widespread investigation within the strategies that learners use for learning foreign or second languages and in variables associated with effective strategy use together with language proficiency and meta-cognitive awareness. These investigations vary from studies on the employment of all strategies to thorough exploration of certain strategies related to specific skills or language areas (Eckerth, Schramm & Tschirner, 2009, Vandergrift, 2006). The body of findings suggests a potential relationship between strategy use and second language acquisition success. This interest has additionally given rise to variety of studies in language learner strategy instruction that has some proof on the probability that learners use strategies effectively (Coskun, 2010; Macaro, 2006; Ratnaningsih, 2015).

Listening strategies determine activities or techniques that directly contribute to the comprehension of listening input and its recall (Chamot, 2004). In line with general learning strategies classified by O'malley and Chamot (1990), listening strategies are classified into 3 types: psychological features (mental activities for manipulating the language to accomplish a task), meta-cognitive ones (mental activities for steering language learning), and socio-affective ones (activities involving interaction or emotional management in acquisition (Vandergrift, 2007, 2011).

Psychological strategies in listening comprehension are classified by (Chamot, 2004) into top-down and bottom-up processes. top-down process strategies measure listening for the major purpose, predicting, drawing inferences, and summarizing whereas bottom-up process strategies embody listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, and recognizing word-order patterns. An additional intensive taxonomy of psychological strategies is usually recommended by Bacon (1992) that adds report, translation, elaboration, and transfer strategies to the above-named top-down and bottom-up process varieties. However, Vandergrift (2006, 2007, and 2011) presents a comprehensive list of psychological strategies, together with inference, elaboration, report, translation, transfer, repetition, responding, grouping, note-taking, deduction/induction, and substitution. About Meta-cognitive strategies, Bacon (1992) classifies meta-cognitive methods into 3 varieties that are used before, during, and via listening. In before listening, the learners

make themselves ready for listening through manipulating the setting, focusing attention, applying advance organizer, selective attention, and deciding to assume in English. Throughout listening, they fight to direct their attention, monitor their listening, and specify their interest. In via listening, they judge their comprehension and check out to spot what helps to be attentive in future. On the other hand, Goh (2008) typically classifies these strategies into planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's listening. However, Field (2010) considers meta-cognitive strategies as a region of meta-cognitive awareness that additionally includes person's information. In this classification, meta-cognitive strategies are composed of 4 factors: planning/evaluation, directed attention, bottom-up finding, and avoiding mental translation. Socio-Affective strategies, Bacon (1992) regards appealing to facilitate and request confirmation because of social strategies and consoling oneself and also because of the affect strategy in her taxonomy. However, Vandergrift (2011) adds cooperation to the social strategy list and lowering anxiety and also taking emotional temperature (awareness of one's emotions when listening so as to avert negative emotions and to form the maximum positive emotions) to the affect strategies.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Influenced by the findings from humanistic and psychology, nearly all classroom lecturers and teaching methodologists and language learners are eagerly examining the tasks set for the pupils will be improved or modified. Here, humanistic psychologists stress the importance of self – concept and affective factors within the learning, whereas cognitive psychology emphasizes a lot on the learner's mental processes, claiming that the pupils are engaged within the processes of learning like selective attention to tasks, testing, reasoning, comparing, reconstructing the concepts, exploitation the previous information and activating connected schema.

Besides, the trends of teaching have more and more shifted to the learner-centered approaches, shedding lights into autonomous learners. These approaches focus, to a bigger extent, on why some learners are a lot flourishing than others, ideally, learners in such trends have learning strategies, the data regarding learning, and therefore the attitudes that change them to use the abilities and data effectively, with confidence and independently of a teacher (Brown, 1987; Brownell, 2015; Chastain, 1988; Lee, 2015). Wenden, 1991; Richards, 1995).

Of the many procedures focusing on the tenet of making the learner a better learner is the question of language learning strategies and its related practices which lead to an improved change in the learning and the learner (Van, 2016). Scholars describing this approach recommend that learner autonomy be included as an objective to language programs (Wenden, 1991). The new trend encourages teachers to help learners learn how to learn better. In fact they go beyond the linguistic domain (Chang, & Liu, 2013; Elis & Sinclair 1990; Hallam, Cross, & Thaut, 2016; Rubin, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Although researchers have recently paid close attention to the language learning strategies, such skills have actually been used though unsystematically for thousands of years (Oxford, 1990). Approximately, since the early 80s, learning strategies have extensively been talked about throughout language methodology and especially, teachers are starting to discuss learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

These scholars have identified, classified and also evaluated language learning strategies. The most interesting point to be mentioned seems to be the increase in the numbers of language learners beginning to recognize the power of their own strategies.

The term "Good language learner" is the indispensable part of language learning strategies. Ellis & Sinclair (1990) have summarized characteristics of good learner into seven categories. They are: self-aware, inquisitive and tolerant self-critical, realistic, willing to experiment, actively involved and organized. Anyhow it is felt that all language learners use language strategies of some type in a way or another, but the frequency and variety of use varies between different learners, and it is generally agreed that the use of language learning strategies is positively associated with language acquisition, although it appears that good language learners combine their use of particular types of strategies in effective ways (Purdie & Oliver, 1999).

But since a psychological theory of learning is very important in delineating what is happening in the mind of a good learner while dealing with a particular task, we start with cognitive psychology because of its emphasis on the autonomous learner and its cognitively based theory in second language acquisition. It is felt that second and foreign language acquisition cannot be vividly understood and touched upon without understanding the nature of interaction between language and cognition.

The concept of strategy, has typically become influential in education and its role is worthy paying attention in the language learning achievement. This term is mainly associated with the "Good language learner". In other words, each learner develops strategies and techniques which best suit his or her individual needs and personality (Goh, 1997; Wilson, Saygin, Sereno, & Lacoboni, 2004). Due simply to individuality of strategies and their high amount of mentality, researchers, somehow, fail to give an agreed-upon and a definitive list of language learning strategies. But findings so far, allow certain generalizations regardless of learner differences. Back to the theoretical aspect of the issue one may refer to the learning psychology to trace the signs of language learning strategies. In cognitive psychology, studies of learning strategies with learners have focused on the consequences of strategy coaching on totally different

varieties of tasks and learners. Findings from these studies typically indicate that strategy coaching is effective in the growth of the performance of pupils on a large bunch of reading comprehension texts and problem-solving tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). one of the foremost vital outcomes of those psychological studies is that the formulation of learning strategies in information-processing model.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the study

It was decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation was to use Ex post Facto design. Due simply to the fact that there was no causal relationship between the variables under investigation rather it was attempted to find the degree of difference between them. As Hatch & Farhady (1994) say: When there is no possibility of random selection of students, instead of abandoning the research, we simply have to limit the domain of our claims. We have to avoid making cause-and-effect statement (P.26).

Here, language learning strategy was the independent variable and listening comprehension was dependent. Sex, Motivation, linguistic background were our control variables. To get the homogeneity of the students, Nelson test was used with the reliability index of .90 and also students' scores in the achievement tests in different terms of schooling in Iran Language Institutions were taken into account. Then, the listening section of Longman TOFEL test was administered with the reliability index of .68. Application of subjective criteria proposed by O'Malley et al. (1989) and the listening test's scores resulted in the selection of 32 effective and 35 ineffective listeners.

To elicit the potential strategies, a listening strategy questionnaire was developed and it was mainly based on the literature of learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular and also on the available strategy questionnaires such as SILL. The items were carefully translated into Persian. The question items were changed and revised on the feedback from some fully fledged Persian language instructors of senior and junior high school to control the level of grammar, vocabulary and comprehension.

Participants

103 students took part in this study. They were in the eighth semester of Simin Educational Association, accredited by the ministry of Education. The mean age of the students of the study was about 15, ranging from 13 to 17, and all were male, and enjoyed almost the same level of language proficiency. Based on the syllabus of the English Institute and also according to the statements of its managers, this group of subjects was roughly considered as pre-intermediate.

Although the students in this study were in the same class and had passed different achievement tests to get to this level and could be taken as linguistically homogeneous, in order to have a more homogeneous sample, the Nelson proficiency test was administered. This resulted in the selection of 81 students for the study. In order to have a homogeneous sample, not only did I take into consideration the students' scores in achievement tests in different terms, but also Nelson Test 150 was administered. Afterwards, a listening strategy questionnaire was designed to grasp the possible listening strategies hidden in the pupils. The model for developing such a questionnaire was the framework of O'Malley & Chamot (1990) proven by Rubin (1994) and also Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) written and validated by Oxford (1990) and as well as on a learning strategy questionnaire designed and validated by Mazlum (2015).

Although it was felt that there is no reason to go through factor analysis to get the construct validity of the questionnaire, since the questionnaire was based on the works of some scholars, a factor analysis was also used in order to have a better interpretation of the underlying construct of the questionnaire. Furthermore, a verbal protocol analysis was utilized as Alderson (1991) says, to get the validity of the questionnaire.

The listening strategy questionnaire was developed based on the works of Brown (1987), Chastain (1988), Mazlum (2000), O'Malley & Charnor (1990), Oxford (1990), Richards (1995), and Wenden (1991). Based on the inventory of listening strategies driven out of their works that could meet the requirement of the study, the needed questionnaire was developed. Syntactically and lexically speaking, all the items of listening strategy questionnaire were directly taken out of the works of the specialized scholars of this field. Proved to be valid (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991), verbal protocol analysis or think-aloud procedure was used to examine the validity of the questionnaire as Alderson (1991) mentions.

The subjective analysis of the subjects' think-aloud transcripts indicated that they understood the items of the questionnaire and the answers chosen by the Richards (1995), were nearly what they really wanted to say. And also, they were asked to write their understanding of different scales. For example, they were asked to write, "What do you mean by never, seldom, etc. Alongside it, a background questionnaire introduced by Oxford (1990) was administered, in order to get the subjects' motivation, cultural and linguistic background. To test our null hypothesis, those students whose scores in listening test were one standard deviation above and below the mean index were selected. Having selected 63 students, they were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. For our hypothesis, a pre- test and post-test control group design was used: G1 (random) T1 x T2 G2 (random) T1 T2

Procedures

Having administered the Nelson Test number 150c ($X=30.6$) and $SD=6.6$), 81 students whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean, were selected. To distinguish effective listeners from ineffective ones, which was the main aim of our hypothesis, the subjective criteria employed by O'Malley, Kupper and Chamot (1989) consisting of 1) Attentiveness in class 2) Ability to follow directions without asking for clarification 3) Ability

and willingness to comprehend the general meaning of a difficult listening passage 4) Ability to respond appropriately in a conversation 5). Ability and willingness to guess at the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases, and the listening section of Longman TOFEL which was also the pre-test of listening were utilized. The students whose scores were two standard deviations above the mean were called "effective" and those whose scores were two standard deviations below the mean, were labeled "ineffective". This criterion was on the basis of the critical comments of some scholars. Thus, application of subjective criteria as well as objective measurement resulted in the selection of 32 effective and 35 ineffective listeners. Then, the students responded to a 40 item_ Likert scale listening strategy questionnaire. The listening strategy questionnaire was developed based on the works of O'Malley &Charnor (1990), Wenden (1991), Oxford (1990) and Mazlum (2000). Based on the inventory of listening strategies driven out of their works that could meet the requirement of the study, the needed questionnaire was developed. Syntactically and lexically speaking, all the items of listening strategy questionnaire were directly taken out of the works of the specialized scholars of this field. Proved to be valid (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991), verbal protocol analysis or think-aloud procedure was used to examine the validity of the questionnaire as Alderson (1991) mentions.

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Therefore, after two weeks and for the second time, students were asked to verbalize their thoughts while they were doing the questionnaire. The session was conducted chorally and instead of tape-recording, the subjects were asked to write down whatever comes to their minds, while they were completing the questionnaire. Whenever it was felt that the students stopped writing, they were asked some probe questions to give them some hints to stimulate their thinking-aloud. The questions were typically as: "what is your idea about the item?", "what do you mean by that?", "what is it meant to you?", "do you have any example?", "why do you choose this answer?" Before the actual session of think-aloud, the students were briefly trained on thinking aloud through introducing the concept and modeling by the teacher.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

To get the homogeneity of the students, Nelson test was used with the reliability index of .90 and also students' scores in the achievement tests in different terms of schooling in Iran Language Institutions were taken into account. Then, the listening section of Longman TOFEL test was administered with the reliability index of .68. Application of subjective criteria proposed by O'Malley et al. (1989) and the listening test's scores resulted in the selection of 32 effective and 35 ineffective listeners. To elicit the potential strategies, a listening strategy questionnaire was developed and it was mainly based on the literature of learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular and also on the available strategy questionnaires. The items were carefully translated into Persian. The questionnaire was modified and revised on the base of feedback from some experienced Persian language teachers of senior and junior high school to check the level of grammar, vocabulary and comprehensibility.

Findings show that when a questionnaire is driven out of the literature, its construct validity can be guaranteed and there would be no need to utilize some other statistical techniques to measure the validity of the questionnaire (O'Malley et al, 1989; Mazlum, 2000). But "Think-aloud" procedure was used to check whether students have truly understood the items and the intention of the researcher and also whether they have answered what they wanted to answer and whether the scales in the answer sheet were meaningful to them and could serve their intention in answering the items of questionnaire.

T-test was utilized to see the difference between experimental group who received explicit and implicit strategy instruction and control group who underwent the normal instruction in the classes. As table 1 illustrates, t-observed is above t-critical, so the null hypothesis was rejected at .05 level of significance. Thus, it is possible to teach the listening strategies to the students.

TABLE 1.
RESULTS OF THE T-TEST FOR - EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

	X	SD	d. f	t-observed	t-critical
Experimental	20.8	3.9	61	3.8	2.000
Control	17.5	3.3			

p<.05

The frequency analysis shows another point of interest in that, 90 percent of effective listeners utilized socio-affective strategies whereas 45 percent of ineffective listeners used socio-affective strategies. 75 percent of effective listeners made use of meta-cognitive listening strategies. But in this category, just 37 percent of ineffective listeners used them. And lastly, 65 percent of effective listeners reported using cognitive strategies. Whereas 49 percent of ineffective listeners used cognitive type of listening strategy. The results indicate that effective listeners outperformed the ineffective listeners in all the variables especially the difference in meta-cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies is more than that of cognitive strategies.

Among the cognitive strategies, text-gist and clarification are respectively the most and least used strategies employed by the effective listeners, whereas ineffective listeners reported using guessing strategy more and clarification less than others. Organization and purpose strategy as a kind of meta-cognitive strategy was used more than others, and evaluation was the type of meta-cognitive strategy least employed by effective listeners, whereas, planning and monitoring strategies are the most and least used strategies employed by the ineffective listeners in the meta-cognitive section respectively (table 2).

TABLE 2.
THE PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO USED EACH STRATEGY

Strategy	Effective Listeners	Ineffective listeners
Repetition	71.8%	34.2%
Clarification	18.7%	17%
Note-Taking	56%	45%
Deductive Reasoning	84%	28.5%
Recombination	68%	31%
Contextualization	68%	40%
Guessing	75%	65%
Inference	59%	48.5%
Memorization	65%	34%
Text-gist	87.5%	54%
Monitoring	75%	20%
Organization and Purpose	84%	45%
Background Knowledge	71.8%	34%
Planning	78%	48.5%
Evaluation	68.7%	40%
Socio-Affective	90%	45%

Table 3 illustrates the correlation coefficient between total sum of variables constituting the cognitive, cognitive and socio-affective. It also confirms that the test takers' total scores are more correlated with their scores in the meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies than socio-affective strategies. Moreover, the test takers' scores in the meta-cognitive are moderately correlated with their scores in cognitive section ($r = 0.57$), indicating that these two strategies contribute to each other; however, this contribution is not strong enough to claim that they share same construct. The correlation between cognitive and socio-affective is very low ($r = 0.29$) which implies a weak correspondence between these two sets of strategies. In this respect, meta-cognitive section is highly correlated with socio-affective ($r = 0.75$) implying that these strategies have some common components.

The correlation coefficient analysis of individual strategies indicates that there exists almost no significant correlation among the individual strategies. This can suggest that the strategies measure different constructs. Anyhow, a few considerable correlations were found among some particular strategies. For example, evaluation and guessing were moderately correlated ($r = 0.46$), monitoring with deductive reasoning ($r = 0.41$), note-taking with deductive reasoning ($r = 0.50$), planning with background ($r = 0.43$) and finally socio-affective with evaluation ($r = 0.42$) were moderately correlated.

The findings were supported by factor analysis. Except deductive reasoning which was loaded on factor one and note-taking loaded on factor two, each pair of strategies was loaded on the same factor. The strength of correlation between variables indicates that they relatively share the same underlying constructs.

TABLE 3.
CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

	Cognitive	Meta-cognitive	Socio-affective	Total
Cognitive N=81	1.000	.5729	.2964	.8414
Meta-cognitive N=81	.5729	1.000	.7571	.9113
Socio-affective N=81	.2964	.7571	1.000	.7088
Total N=81	.8414	.9113	.7088	1.000

One-way ANOVA was used to compare several group means simultaneously. In other words, through one-way ANOVA, the means of all the 81 students on the cognitive and meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies were compared. And comparing the F-critical (3.04) with F-observed (1307.47), it was shown that our F-observed is large enough to conclude that there is a trend toward meaningful difference (Table 4). To see where the difference between the strategies lies, Scheffe test was utilized. Table 5 shows that the highest amount of difference is observed between Socio-affective and Cognitive Strategies and lowest amount between Meta-cognitive and Cognitive Strategies.

TABLE 4.
ONE-WAY ANOVA

	Sum of Square	d.f	Mean Square	F	F-Critical
Between Groups	120993.9	2	60496.93	1307.47	3.04
Within Groups	11104.19	240	46.27	1307.47	3.04

TABLE 5.
SCHEFFE TEST

Factor I	Factor J	Mean Difference	Sig.
1.00	2.00	35.13	.000
	3.00	53.82	.000
2.00	1.00	35.13	.000
	3.00	18.69	.000
3.00	1.00	53.82	.000
	2.00	18.69	.000

P<.05

Factor 1: Socio-affective Strategies

Factor 2: Meta-Cognitive Strategies

Factor 3: Cognitive Strategies

V. DISCUSSION

Present study was designed to determine the impact of listening strategies on improving learners' listening skill in Iran and focusing on identification, description and classification of listening comprehension strategies. Our findings of this study show that language learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular can explain some of the differences among pupils considering their performance in the listening comprehension skill. The results of our analysis supported the findings of Coskun (2010), and Selamat & Sidhu (2012), and Sheshgelani, Sadeghli and Aidinlon (2013). Coskun (2010) in his study found that the advantage of meta-cognitive strategy use might alter the learners into proficient listeners. Selamat & Sidhu (2012) cited that learners often used meta-cognitive strategies within the listening tests, and also the meta-cognitive strategies assisted them to induce the listening comprehension to accumulate the data. Sheshgelani, Sadeghli and Aidinlon (2013) claimed that the pupils who received listening comprehension strategy coaching performed much better than people who failed to receive the strategy coaching. By comparison the results of those 3 studies, it is understood that that meta-cognitive strategies not only facilitate the listeners to set up and value their own listening learning, but also aid their listening comprehension. Those studies showed that the need of learning reinforced the learners' mind to accumulate the data and also the motivation of achieving success fostered the learners' skills to do something to achieve proficiency level of learning.

Even though we believe that our research has provided some new insights into Iranian EFL learners in employing listening, it also has some limitations. First, the purpose of the research was to examine listening strategy use of Iranian EFL learners. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if the findings of this research can be applied to EFL listeners in other similar contexts. Second, we conducted our research at only one site in Iran. Further research should be conducted at other sites in Iran to determine the extent to which the findings of our research can be applied to other Iranian EFL learners. Third, our purpose in conducting this research was not only to answer our research question, but also to begin a process whereby listening comprehension teaching of EFL learners in Iran can be improved. Additional teacher-centered research still needs to be done. More research also should be conducted in identifying new pedagogical approaches that can help learners employ in their ability to understand texts in English.

Other similar studies also report the same statements. We can talk of O'Malley et. al (1989) who indicated that the effective listeners make use of a particular set of listening strategies which differentiate them from ineffective ones or Hosenfeld et al. (1981) who found significant difference between good readers and not-good readers, or Wenden (1998) who reported that meta-cognitive awareness can result in the better performance in the listening skill.

Oxford & Crookall (1989) cites that Language Learning Strategies research is very problematic. It has provided us with many informative information into how students have problems with learning (bad instance) or become successful in learning them (good instance). Moreover, a very important point is that less is clear about how to help learners become more successful pupils.

One other major point or problem O'Malley & Charnot (1990) call our attention to is that strategy use varies with the type of language activity. Thus, language learning strategies including listening ones are more task-dependent not learner-dependent. In fact, it is quite possible a listener who is labeled ineffective can be named effective in other type of task.

The question we must ask is how one can help students learn to listen to a foreign language and maximize what they take away from a listening task. Vogely (1995) backs up the concept that certain listening methods for certain texts can be taught to pupils of all levels of language learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

What can be inferred from the findings of this investigation is that language learning strategies generally and listening strategies particularly can explain some of the differences among students with respect to their function in the listening comprehension skill. The difference between effective and ineffective listeners is not just the number of hours they allocate for practicing listening skill nor can it be due solely to age, sex, motivation, cultural and linguistic background or even level of IQ. It is felt that a part of difference lies not in the above-mentioned factors but in the type of listening strategy they employ in an appropriate situation in order to tackle a particular task consciously.

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