

Individual Dynamic Assessment: An Analysis of Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Errors

Marzieh Emadi

Department of English Language Teaching, Golestan Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran;

Department of English Language Teaching, Gorgan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran

Ali Arabmofrad

Department of English Language and Literature, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran

Abstract—Error analysis is very important in facilitating listening comprehension. By error identifications, teachers can help learners to practice more in the problematic areas. However, only a few research studies investigated error analysis in listening comprehension and nearly no study has been conducted on the analysis of errors in a dynamic assessment-based (DA) instruction; therefore, the present study tends to investigate the listening source of errors which hinders listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this, the present study conducted a detailed description of the listening process framework in an interactive EFL listening classroom. That is, an interactionist dynamic assessment-based approach was applied to investigate the source of EFL learners' listening comprehension errors. The participants included six lower intermediate students. The materials used in the enrichment sessions (eight sessions lasting for one hour in DA-based instruction) were listening tracks taken from *Listening Advantage Book 3*. The qualitative analysis of data revealed that the learners' listening comprehension problems could be categorized into (1) unknown words, (2) grammatical structures, (3) pronunciation, (4) lengthy sentences and (5) unfamiliar phrases or collocations. Finally, according to the findings, it can be concluded that learners' errors are indicators of learners' mastery in a performing task therefore; teachers can both figure out the level of their students and are able to understand what kinds of problems students encounter while practicing listening comprehension in classes and instruct them accordingly.

Index Terms—dynamic assessment, listening comprehension, error analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening is considered as the most critical language skill for language learning and a prerequisite for the developments of other skills (Vandergrift, 1997). Following Nunan (2002), listening is a receptive skill and the manipulation of the receptive skills is both hard to achieve and needs a lot of patience on the part of both the teachers and the learners. However, in respect of listening process, the teacher can help the learner to actively engage himself/herself in learning.

Central to the entire discipline of teaching listening is the concept of error analysis. Errors are at the heart of our understanding of the learners' mastery in performing a task and a teacher can easily figure out their students' level on the basis of the committed errors. Not only error investigation could be of great help for teacher to plan instruction for remedial teaching but also the learners can figure out the problematic sources and practice more to progress. However, far too little attention has been paid to error analysis in the listening comprehension in general and in Iranian context in particular; therefore, the present study seeks to identify the learners' listening problems by analyzing the source of errors in Iranian EFL learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Dynamic Assessment (DA)*

Assessment is a fact of daily life. In today's world, people are assessed to gain promotion at work, education or to get a driver's license. To do so, people make great effort to succeed and even any assistance during assessment is considered unfair (Birjandi & Mosalanezhad, 2010). The first serious discussions and analyses of dynamic assessment emerged more than 80 years ago by the Russian psychologist, L. S. Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) found out that what a learner can do independently is only the existent ability or knowledge, and a learner can act better even with others' assistance. (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004, p. 50) defines this approach to assessment as: "Dynamic assessment integrates assessment and instruction into a seamless, unified activity aimed at promoting learner development through

appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual's (or in some cases a group's) current abilities. In essence, DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and promoting development that takes account of the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development."

Back to previous debate, a large and growing body of literature has investigated dynamic assessment as an approach to assessment which varies from the former kinds of assessment. Anton (2009) believes that DA is as an alternative to traditional assessment not a complementary to them. DA allows observing individuals' independent performance to reveal the learners' existent knowledge. If one wishes to understand the processes of development, to help individuals overcome learning difficulties and to support the ongoing development, then merely solo performance observation as a former kind of assessment is insufficient. Instead, what is needed is active collaboration with individuals to enhance learner's development. Educationally, this means that assessment – understanding learners' abilities – and instruction – supporting learner development – are as integrated activities. This pedagogical approach is known as dynamic assessment (Poehner, 2008).

B. Approaches to Dynamic Assessment

Lantolf (2009) states that there has been two approaches to dynamic assessment. interactionist DA and interventionist DA. Considering both approaches, instruction as mediation and assessment are joined as a single activity with the aim of recognizing learning potential and promoting development. These two approaches have general kinds of mediation in common which could be available for the mediator. The latter encompasses a set of predetermined hints and clues that is offered to the learner through the learning process. The arranged hints are scaled from implicit to explicit. A distinctive feature of this approach is that mediational strategies do not depend to the responsiveness of the learners; henceforth, mediation could be provided to a large number of individuals simultaneously. According to Minick (1987, p. 119) interactionist dynamic assessment follows Vygotsky's preference for "qualitative assessment of psychological processes and dynamics of their qualitative development". Following Vygotsky as cited in (Lantolf, 2009), in educational assessment we cannot measure the learners' knowledge; in fact, interpretation of learning is needed and it can be provided by interaction and collaboration within learning. Consequently, mediation in interactionist DA is in contrast with mediation provided in interventionist DA; that is, mediation is not prefabricated but is negotiated and is in accordance with the learner responsiveness.

C. Corrective Feedback

The role of context-sensitive feedback has been less explored in language learning and it is almost ignored by former types of assessment (Ellis, 2009). Generally, the only feedback students received was their marks on the achievement tests and in fact, there was no immediate feedback regarding the context and the learning process. More precisely, the only focus was on the learning product (i.e., the marks) and almost all teachers followed product-oriented approaches to learning. Corrective feedback could be recognized as a helpful strategy in a dynamic-based instruction class. According to Ellis (2009) corrective feedback is a means of creating motivation and helps linguistic accuracy; that is, it allows learner to self-correct by the help of the teacher.

Following Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), corrective feedback may happen explicitly or implicitly. In form of comprehension and checking, it occurs implicitly while, in case of providing the correct form by the teacher, or others, it may come by explanations that occur explicitly. They proposed a regulatory scale that moves from implicit to explicit feedback. Following the scale, the teacher encourages learners to self-correct, ask peers to help and finally teacher provides explicit feedback in form of explanation. Error correction in the learning process could be analyzed during active collaboration between learners and tutors. By providing feedback, self-correction is activated, so learners have more time to rethink and regulate their thought about the ongoing task.

D. Assessing Listening

Following Rost (2001), listening in language teaching is a complex process that helps people to understand the spoken language. It is very important for acquiring other skills and is very important to acquire a new language. "Listening is the channel in which we process language in real time- employing pacing, units of encoding and pausing that are unique to spoken language." (Rost, 2001, p. 7). According to Yun Kul (2010), a person who is learning a foreign language is expected to speak in that language, but in fact listening is a prerequisite for learning other skills as seen in children listen months before starting to talk. Particularly, listening comprehension lessons are good tools for teaching grammatical points and the new vocabularies in a contextualized context. In any language classroom, listening plays a crucial role in the development of other language skills and language learning. Listening can help students have a better comprehensible input and a better output while communicating.

Nunan (2002) believes that in the past, listening comprehension tended to be testing not teaching as the teacher played a tape and asked the learners to answer comprehension questions but the learners were not taught how to understand the text. In fact, a product-oriented approach was selected to test the listening and only the answers were important to the teacher not the process of acquiring the answers. There are other weaknesses that made this approach more testing than teaching. First, the students had no pre-listening activity in advance so, they had no idea of what is going to be heard and it can be called a highly unnatural situation. Second, the students were not informed what kinds of questions they would be asked after listening so, no choice but to listen to every detail and finally the listening material

was usually audiotaped, without almost any visual aids. On the contrary, dynamic assessment as a kind of process-oriented approach focuses on teaching the listening by manipulating the listening process through providing appropriate feedbacks.

Approaches to assessing listening

Following Buck (2001) there have been three approaches to assessing listening: discrete point approach, integrative approach and communicative approach.

Discrete point approach

Buck (2001), during the dominance of Audio-lingual method, discrete point testing was the most common approach to testing which is advocated by Lado. The fundamental idea in discrete point testing is the possibility of isolating the separate units of linguistic knowledge and test each separately. According to Lado (as cited in Buck, 2001) listening comprehension is a process of discriminating the sounds of language. Mainly, selected responses are used in discrete point testing. The most common ones are true/ false and multiple-choice options. Phonemic discrimination tasks, paragraph recognition and response evaluation are among discrete point testing tasks.

Integrative testing

Oller advocated integrative testing. "Whereas discrete point items attempt to test knowledge of language, one bit at a time, integrative tests attempt to assess a learner's capacity to use many bits all the same time" Oller (as cited in Buck, 2001). The basic idea is about using a language not knowing about it. Listening close, dictation, sentence repetition, statement evaluation and translation are the tasks in integrative testing.

Communicative testing

Communicative testing developed in response to communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching is based on the idea for communication, in a particular situation with a particular purpose. Following Widdowson (as cited in Buck, 2001), by communicative testing, it is claimed to test the use of language not the usage and distinguishes between Chomsky's competence and performance and added that communicative tests should test performance not competence: simply put, they should test the language use in ordinary situations.

E. Error Analysis (EA)

Error analysis was proposed by Corder in the 1970s. Following Nzama (2010) error analysis (hereafter, EA) is a type of systematic, linguistic analysis of errors committed by the learners. Errors indicate the learners' level in their target language developmental stages (Lengo, 1995). As he continues, errors contain valuable information on how foreigners acquire a language. "They are significant in three different ways. First, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn" (Corder, 1967, p. 161).

Regarding errors, native and foreign speakers differ greatly as a result of competence. Errors committed by language learners are due to the linguistic deficiency while the errors native speakers make, are as slips of the tongues (Lengo, 1995). "The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. In this respect it resembles methodologically the study of the acquisition of the mother tongue. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process." (Corder, 1967, p. 125).

Following Al-haysoni (as cited in Sawalmeh, 2013) errors are advantageous for both the teachers and the learners. Errors provide valuable information for teachers in three ways. First, it help teachers to correct their errors second, to reinforce their teaching and finally to design remedial teaching. Corder (1981) believes that remedial teaching would be necessary if a mismatch is found out. Remedial teaching happens for the situations or the problematic areas in which they are contrary to the teachers' plan in teaching. Besides, learners are aware of their problems and plan to spend more time practicing the problematic areas.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Students learning a foreign language encounter many problems. EFL learners have more problems in listening skill due to the fact that language teachers have ignored teaching the listening and just viewed it as testing. A great deal of researches have focused on testing the listening while teaching listening is of great importance. Teachers should help the learners how to come to the right responses by manipulating the listening process. In the present study, an attempt was made to help the learners by applying a dynamic-based instruction in listening class while providing context-sensitive feedback for individual learners. Meanwhile, errors are recognized by the instructor to identify the problematic sources for learning. Far too little attention has been paid to error analysis in listening and particularly listening in a dynamic-based instruction class; therefore, the present study aims at providing in-depth knowledge of the problematic areas hindering listening comprehension.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

- From analyzing the learners' responses in the listening practices, what factors do interfere with students' listening comprehension?

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The initial sample consisted of 20 students studying English as a foreign language. Finally, after administering Oxford Quick Placement test, six lower intermediate students ranging in age from 18 to 25 were excluded for the study on the basis of their level. Due to the guidelines of this test, those who scored 16-30 out of 40 were considered as lower intermediate learners and so were selected for the present study. Persian was the first language of all participants and they were selected from the students of Hafez English Language Institute in Tehran, Iran.

B. Instrumentation

Quick Placement Test

Quick Placement Test (QPT) is a time-saving and reliable English language proficiency test developed by Cambridge ESOL and Oxford University Press and validated in 20 countries by more than 6000 students. Considering practicality, it is quick and easy to administer. There are two versions of QPT: a paper and pen (P&P) version and a computer-based (CB) version which is an adaptive multiple-choice test marked by computer. In the present study P& P version consisting of two parts was used). Part 1 (question 1-40) was taken by candidates who are at or below intermediate level. Part 2 (questions 41-60), is taken only by who have higher ability. The participants of the present study took only the first part due to their proficiency level.

C. Instructional Materials

The main material in the present study was Listening Advantage Book 3 written by Kenny and Wada (2009). This book was a supplementary book for the lower intermediate students. Some units were chosen on the basis of students' familiarity with the topic in their main course book of the institute. The tracks used in enrichment sessions and DA-based listening instruction were similar in terms of the level of difficulty and delivery speed since they were chosen from one book.

D. Procedure

The following steps were taken as the procedures of the study (Table 1):

First, the class started with a warm up to bring the students into the topic. Then, the students listened to the listening track at first to the end to get familiar with the overall theme and context. After that, the teacher (mediator) replayed, paused portion by portion and asked any individual learner to repeat and finally while every student tried to repeat and make guesses, the mediator provided feedback according to the student's response. These mediations are in line with Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) regulatory scale, moving from implicit to explicit varying from learner to learner.

TABLE 1
EXPERIMENT DESIGN: DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT SESSIONS

Assessment	Task Description	Materials	Mediation Offered
Placement test	Listening to a listening test in L2	Texts from listening advantage book	None
Enrichment program: Week 2 (two sessions per week)	1. Listening to a text in L2; 2. Independent oral text recall in L2 3. Oral text recall in L2 after mediation	A listening track selected from listening advantage book(using computers)	Flexible interaction(implicit to explicit) with the mediator
Enrichment program: Week 3 (two sessions per week)	1. Listening to a text in L2; 2. Independent oral text recall in L2 3. Oral text recall in L2 after mediation	A listening track selected from listening advantage book(part-time jobs)	Flexible interaction(implicit to explicit) with the mediator
Enrichment program: Week 4 (two sessions per week)	1. Listening to a text in L2; 2. Independent oral text recall in L2 3. Oral text recall in L2 after mediation	A listening track selected from listening advantage book(friends)	Flexible interaction(implicit to explicit) with the mediator
Enrichment program: Week 5 (two sessions per week)	1. Listening to a text in L2; 2. Independent oral text recall in L2 3. Oral text recall in L2 after mediation	A listening track selected from listening advantage book(health and body)	Flexible interaction (implicit to explicit) with the mediator
Enrichment program: Week 6(two sessions per week)	1. Listening to a text in L2; 2. Independent oral text recall in L2 3. Oral text recall in L2 after mediation	A listening track selected from listening advantage book(study after school)	Flexible interaction (implicit to explicit) with the mediator

The menu of the mediational strategies move from the most abstract (implicit) to the most concrete (explicit). After completion of DA-based instruction in listening, the data was recorded on a digital audio recorder and transcribed finally, the process of error analysis and specification was carried out.

VI. RESULTS

By analysis of the learners' responses a typology of problematic areas were identified which follows as:

Problematic areas
Unknown words
Grammatical structures
Pronunciation
Lengthy sentences
Unfamiliar phrases or collocations

Figure 1 Typology of problematic areas

Unknown words

Limited vocabulary knowledge is an important factor in comprehending the spoken discourse (Hsieh, 2009) In this situation, the learner could not recognize the word even with the teacher's feedback as it was absent in his/her schemata. The student tried to guess but it was unsuccessful and caused the learners' silence. Unknown words are indicators of learners' inability in comprehending the spoken discourse. As indicated in protocol 1, in lines 1 and 5 the learners' silence is seen.

Protocol 1

The speaker said: They started by teasing me.

S: silent

T: replayed

S: they started by.....

T: this is a verb and replayed

S: silent

T: introduced the verb and explained the meaning of "teasing"

S: repeated the entire sentence.

Grammatical structures

Sometimes, the grammatical structures are the main problems hindering the learners' listening comprehension. Mainly, the linguistic information causes trouble understanding what learners hear. Here, as seen in line 2 of protocol 2, the students were dealing with recognizing what kind of grammatical structure it was and so lost their concentration.

Protocol 2

The speaker said: I guess I could use my cellphone.

S: I guess I could using my cellphone.

T: asked "using" with a questioning tone and asked can we use "ing" after could?

S: oh, yes and repeated the entire sentence.

Pronunciation

Sometimes, the students are familiar with pronunciation but fail to recognize the word (lines 1 and 3). Mainly, the learners cannot recognize the words for the way they are pronounced. Following Ur (1984) if a word is pronounced differently from what is heard or learnt, it is natural that learners do not recognize it or even they think such a word does not exist. In addition, wrong pronunciation hinders listening comprehension so teachers should guide learners to listen to exact pronunciation of words and by doing that they will get the native speakers' utterances effective and efficient.

Protocol 3

The speaker said: I am new at doing it online.

S: I am new at myline

T: repeated what the student said and replayed

S: I am new on my line

T: asked "my line" with a questioning tone and replayed

S: guessed and repeated the entire sentence correctly.

Lengthy sentences

Hamouda (2013) states that long sentences could distract the learners' concentration and it is difficult to interpret the meaning of lengthy sentences. Moreover, it is very difficult to understand the meaning of any single word coming out of spoken discourse and the students feel disappointed while they do not understand long sentences. In addition, lengthy sentences can bring fatigue for the learners and need lots of energy to concentrate and comprehend. Totally, long sentences make lots of challenges for learners to comprehend the spoken discourse.

Protocol 4

The speaker said: John, you will be here most of the time standing just inside our shops welcoming the customers.

S: John you will be here most of.....

T: replayed

S: John you will be here most of the time standing..... Its too long teacher.

T: paused at shorter portion

S: repeated what he/she has heard.

Unfamiliar phrases or collocations

Phrases and collocations are a group of words that comes together and have a single meaning. According to Hsieh (2009) unfamiliar phrases or collocations seems as cluster of sounds for the learners which is meaningless too. When the learner heard the phrase, he/she had the tendency toward being silent and did not try to make any guesses for comprehending as it can be seen in lines 1 and 3.

Protocol 5

The speaker said: by that time, your name popped up.

S: by that time, your name.....

T: replayed

S: I cannot understand.....silent

T: popped up means appeared

S: repeated the entire sentence.

The primarily objective of the present study is to recognize the source of learner's errors and then help teacher for the adaptation of the remedial strategies in future teaching. Finally, after analyzing the learners' responses, the frequency of the learners' errors are presented below (Table 2).

TABLE 2
THE ANALYSIS OF ERRORS IN DA LISTENING CLASS

Dynamic assessment sessions	Unknown words	Grammatical structures	pronunciation	Lengthy sentences	Unfamiliar phrases or collocations
DA 1	5	5	8	10	4
DA 2	6	8	7	9	5
DA 3	5	9	7	11	4
DA 4	5	7	6	10	3
DA 5	3	6	8	8	5
DA 6	4	5	7	9	4
DA 7	2	6	7	6	2
DA 8	3	3	5	6	3
DA 1-8	33	49	55	76	30

VII. DISCUSSION

The present article set out with the aim of analyzing the source of learner's errors which hinder their listening comprehension. As indicated in table 2, the most interesting finding is that the lengthy sentences were the most frequently problematic area for the learners. To avoid this problem, language teachers should focus more on the lengthy sentences by spending more time practicing them and better comprehending for learners respectively.

Another important finding was that pronunciation was the second frequent problematic area for the learners. Unfortunately, pronunciation is ignored by both the language instructors and students. In addition, good pronunciation can bring about fluency too. Furthermore, grammatical structures and unknown words were analyzed as the third and fourth problematic areas as obstacles in listening comprehension. Finally, it can be noted that unfamiliar phrases or collocations did not cause much serious trouble for the students in the present study.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has given an account of and the reasons for the widespread use of error analysis on listening comprehension for EFL learners. The findings suggest that in general, both the lengthy sentences and the pronunciation were the most problematic areas for the learners in hindering their listening comprehension. Moreover, unfamiliar phrases or collocations affect listening comprehension for less. These analysis offer insight for teachers to care more about the learners' errors and plan future instruction respectively.

The present study, however, makes several noteworthy suggestions for teachers. To avoid losing concentration of the learners in lengthy sentences, teachers could shorten the long sentences to shorter portions and help students to comprehend. Regarding pronunciation, language teachers can offer students to listen to the precise pronunciation of words and then they will have a better tendency toward listening. Considering unknown words, teachers can introduce the important words which have high meaning load in listening in order to help students overcome their obstacles for comprehending. Finally, while teachers understand the linguistic problems of the learners, they can plan for the instruction of the difficult linguistic items.

These findings also enhance the learners' understanding of overcoming their difficulties by improving their listening comprehension through listening strategies.

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Marzieh Emadi was born in Gorgan, Iran in 1986. She is an MA holder in TEFL from Gorgan IAU. She has been teaching English in language institutes in Gorgan and Tehran for nearly 8 years. She has presented a paper on TEFL issue in Sabzevar national conference. As an EFL teacher and researcher her main research interests include FL listening and language assessment.

Ali Arabmofrad received his PhD in applied Linguistics from University of Tehran, Iran in 2014. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran. His area of interest includes psycholinguistics and pragmatics. He has published a number of articles in both national and international journals and has given lectures in a number of local and international conferences.