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THE LISTENING STRATEGIES OF IRANIAN EFL SCHOLARS: A STRATEGY BASED APPROACH TO LISTENING TO ORAL ENGLISH TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Viable listening comprehension skills are critical as the world gets to be progressively worldwide. Multi media and the Internet get to be discussions for English communication. EFL learners struggle to comprehend oral English writings, in their listening comprehension classes. The present study studies about the reasons that Iranian EFL learners experience issues in understanding oral English transactional writings. This paper also examines the type of needs analysis and diagnostic tools which students can use in the listening classroom to raise strategic awareness and how the process of listening can also assist students in designing strategy, strategy-based theoretical framework, questionnaire, interviews, listening diaries, and think-aloud protocols with Iranian university EFL learners to identify the listening strategies that they use and the obstacles that they encounter while they listen to oral English transactional texts. The findings of this study demonstrated that Iranian EFL learners were dynamic in the listening process and utilized a few strategies to help them understand some texts. Notwithstanding, when they experienced listening obstructions throughout the listening process, they were not able to organize their strategy use and neglected to understand the texts. By proposing courses for listening appreciation, educators consolidated system instructing, evaluated oral writings, and socially proper undertakings so that listening impediments could be minimized and strategy organization could be expanded.

KEYWORDS: Listening Strategies, EFL Learners, Oral Text, Strategy Based Approach

INTRODUCTION

Mendelsohn coined the term a "strategy-based" approach and proposed that the classroom curriculum for a listening course should include instructing listeners about listening strategies. Listening strategy instruction functions as "spinal cord" or pillars upon which a listening course is built. Mendelsohn defines a "strategy-based" approach as follows: A strategy-based approach, then, is a methodology that is rooted in strategy training . . . . It is an approach that sees the objective of the English as a Second Language (ESL) course as being to train students how to listen, by making learners aware of the strategies that they use, and training them in the use of additional strategies that will assist them in tackling listening tasks . . . Learners have to be weaned away from strategies that are unhelpful or even destructive, like grabbing for a dictionary . . . , and these have to be replaced by such helpful strategies as guessing the meaning of a word from the context. Researchers from different parts of the world have tried to outline the characteristics of strategic learners and the type of strategies those learners use in specific language learning tasks (Birjandi, Mirhassani, & Abbasian, 2006). For example, Oxford (2002) suggests that the development of learners' communicative competence and language proficiency is associated with the strategies they use. Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, and Al-Shaboul (2010) draw attention that EFL learners may favor some strategies over others. This raises a concern regarding the identification of commonly used strategies and less frequently used ones and their influence on improving language learning. During many years of

teaching, listening comprehension to university students in Iran, EFL students have a very difficult time of understanding oral texts in their listening comprehension classes. Teachers repeated an oral text record on an audio CD many times, but the students were often unable to understand the words or the meaning of the text. Listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. Learners want to understand second language (L2) speakers and want to comprehend a variety of L2 multimedia. At the same time, listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA) (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). SLA studies have demonstrated that comprehensible input is critical for language acquisition as well as comprehensible output (Swain, 1995).

Rost (2001) 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" (p. 94).

In spite of its importance, L2 learners often regard listening as the most difficult language skill to learn (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2003). As Vandergrift (2007) points out, one of the reasons might be that learners are not taught how to learn listening effectively. In reflecting on contemporary life, orality, and literacy from antiquity to the present, the renowned classist Eric Havalock (1986) concludes that as a result of the proliferation of the electronic media, the presence of orality has become an accepted fact in the contemporary life. Freedman (1982) asserts that we have slowly but emphatically shifted our means of communication from the printed word to images and sounds, from books to television, movies, radios, and recordings. Instead of reading today, most of us prefer to look and 'listen'. Wolvin and Coackly (1988) calculate that in the United State, young people, from ages two to eighteen, spend more than 20,000 hours before television sets, which is over 7,000 hours more than they spend in school from kindergarten through 12th grade. The speech of technology also holds promise for advancing the efficiency, systematicity, and validity of assessing l2 listening comprehension proficiency. Therefore, to keep abreast of the advances in modern technology in general and speech technology in particular, a paradigm shift away from other skills to listening is felt quite necessary.

Although the need for research into listening comprehension is vital, there has been little attention and work in this regard. Candlin and Widdowson (1988) believe that the number of research studies into listening is relatively small. Two basic reasons are given for this: 1) Listening comprehension does not lend itself so easily to research studies, and 2) Listening comprehension has been regarded as a 'passive skill ' in the previous decades .Maybe, that is why a more dependable criterion for the development of the listening comprehension text / tests is yet to emerge. To find a remedy for this problem, some research studies are needed to investigate the different aspects of listening strategies. This study is significant for these entities which we explain.

Listening comprehension is a required course for all first- and second-year Iranian universities students and, consequently, it is important in the English program. Therefore, the difficulty Iranian EFL students have understanding oral English texts and learning from those texts is a crucial problem.

Listening is a vital skill which progresses faster than speaking and often influences the progress of reading and writing proficiency in learning a new language (Scarcella and Oxford, 2000; Oxford, 1993). This is because one takes input through listening to instructions or interpretations before replying orally or in writing. Listening is also not an easy dexterity to be acquired because it needs listeners to make meaning from the oral input by receiving their precedent knowledge of the world and of the second language (Nagle & Sanders, 1986; Young, 1997) and create information in their long term memory and form their own explanation, of the spoken passages (Murphy, 1985; Mendelsohn, 1994, 2008; Young, 1997). In other words, listeners need to be active functors of information (Young, 1997). Meanwhile, Vandergrift

(1996, 1997, 2003, and 2011) demonstrates that listening is an intricate, active process of interpretation in which listeners endeavor to adapt what they hear with their previous knowledge. It is more abstruse for second language learners who have confined memory capacity of the target language (Richards, 1983) thus they need to apply different listening strategies. These strategies are paces taken to chip them to get, store, regain, and/or use information (O'Malley, Chamot, & Küpper, 1989; Vandergrift, 1992). Listening is a strenuous process that requires figuring out and creating meaning from verbal and non-verbal messages (Nunan, 1998) Impressive communication obliges that learners develop the listening skills regarded necessary for grasping input for any learning to begin listeners set an arrangement of mental processes typically connected to as listening comprehension strategies. (Coskun, 2010) observed learner's actions that make language learning more impressive and researches indicate that this process, locates a challenge that is hard to encounter for many L2 learners, particularly in EFL positions where learners want enough disposal to the target language (Graham, 2003, Chang & Read, 2006). The focus of earlier listening comprehension materials was primarily on testing students' ability to listen to oral discourse and then answer comprehension questions based upon the incoming information (Field, 1998). However, in the past few years the interest in teaching the listening skill has grown. Nowadays it is not regarded as a neglected skill anymore. Many people, including learners, need the listening skill in diverse settings such as school, travel, and work. Developing the listening skill is considered to be a significant goal in many language teaching courses. According to Brown (2001), listening is an important skill through which language learners internalize linguistic information. Rubin (1994) reviewed over 130 studies and concluded there are five major factors that researchers believe which affect L2 listening comprehension: (1) text characteristics, (2) interlocutor characteristics (3) task characteristics (4) listener characteristics, and (5) process characteristics. Listener characteristics include language proficiency level (knowledge of the world for cognitive processing), memory, and attention, affect and background knowledge. Process characteristics include (a) Bottom up, top down and parallel processing, the use of which relates to learner proficiency level. (b) Listening strategies which are related to different strategy patterns and proficiency level. (c) Strategy training which emphasizes teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies. These factors are closely related to learners' basic L2 proficiency level, L2 knowledge and listening comprehension strategies.

The definitions provided by several researchers imply that there is more to add in what is called "listening." It is not difficult to conclude that listening involves processing. The literature suggests that processing can occur in two different types: bottom-up processing and top-down processing (e.g., Mc Bride, 2011; Richards, 2008). Bottom-up processing refers to using bits to make the whole; that is, making use of individual sounds, words, or phrases and discourse markers to comprehend the input by combining these elements (Brown, 2006; Harmer, 2001; Mc Bride, 2011; Richards, 2008)

Top-down processing, on the other hand, refers to inferring message from the contextual clues with the help of background knowledge (Brown, 2006; Harmer, 2001; Mc Bride, 2011; Richards, 2008).

After gaining its long deserved importance, listening has become the interest of many researchers. There have been various research studies on how to develop listening comprehension (Brown, 2007; Hayati & Mohmedi, 2009; Vandergrift, 2007) including a number on the development of listening strategies (Berne, 2004; Jia & Fu, 2011). Another subject of debate in the English Language Teaching (ELT) literature is integrating different language skills to reinforce learning (Brown, 2001). Iranian EFL learners are not strenuous in the listening process, they have problems in understanding oral English texts, and they often use ineffectual listening strategies. Also, they encounter difficulties that

prevent or hold up them from using listening strategies with little or no means to dominate these problems. The importance of the issue and conducting the present study seemed to be necessary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early in the 20th century, the sole purpose of English language learning (ELL) was to understand literary works. Teaching listening was not regarded as an important component of language teaching and English language researchers and teachers focused primarily on reading and grammatical skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, changes in approaches to language teaching led to changes in classroom applications and breeding a fluctuation in the attention given to listening. In the 1970s, listening became increasingly integrated into English teaching curricula and has preserved its place until today (Cinemre, 1991). Now, there is a considerable number of researchers and scholars who give paramount importance to the skill (e.g., Berne, 2004; Brown, 2008; Jia & Fu, 2011). As Lundsteen (1979) states, "listening is the first language skill to appear. Chronologically, children listen before they speak, speak before they read, and read before they write" (p. xi).

What Lundsteen emphasizes; that is, listening is the basis for other skills, is true for second language (L2) as well as first language (L1) acquisition. Learners need to listen to language input in order to produce in other skill areas; without input at the right level, no learning will happen (Rost, 1994). Therefore, the importance of teaching listening can well be seen. For being a complex phenomenon, teaching listening has caught the attention of many researchers (e.g., Brown, 2007; Hayati & Mohmedi, 2009; Vandergrift, 2007) and teachers in pursuit of finding ways for classroom instruction. Nunan and Miller (1995) categorize these ways as follows:

1. Developing cognitive strategies 2. Developing listening with other skills 3. Listening to authentic material 4. Using technology 5. Listening for academic purposes 6. Listening for fun.

Applying strategies into the listening learning/teaching process has become a mounting concern for both teachers and learners. However, learners" employing strategies alone will not promote developing listening skills; seeing the need, teachers' attempt to include various techniques in their classes. . Chamot (1989) defines learning strategies as "the steps, plans, insights, and reflections that learners employ to learn more effectively" (p. 13). Learning strategies for listening comprehension has been an interest of many researchers (e.g. Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Murphy, 1985; O "Malley & Chamot, 1990). In a similar vein, Vandergrift (1999) presents listening strategies in three categories as metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and socioaffective strategies. According to Vandergrift (1997), metacognitive strategies are defined as "mental activities for directing language learning" (p. 391) which include planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's comprehension. These strategies refer to the thinking about the learning process such as selective attention and comprehension monitoring (also Goh, 1998). Buck (2001) presents a very similar definition to these strategies as "conscious or unconscious mental activities such as assessing the situation and self-testing that perform an executive function in the management of cognitive strategies" (p. 104). Cognitive strategies are "mental activities for manipulating the language to accomplish a task" (p. 391) that involve applying specific techniques to the learning task such as elaboration and inference. Also Buck (2001) defines these strategies similarly as "mental activities related to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long term memory for later retrieval" (p. 104). Vandergrift (1997) also adds socioaffective strategies, which involve cooperating with other learners or the teacher for clarification, and/or employing specific techniques to decrease anxiety. These strategies include activities involving questioning for clarification, cooperation, lowering anxiety, self-encouragement, and taking emotional temperature. Whatever strategy may

be referred to, in order to develop listening skills, it is crucial to employ listening strategies. It is vital for every single learner that s/he apply individual strategies according to her/his own learning (Mendelsohn, 1995).

Goh (2002) investigated the learners" use of strategies and their sub categories that she names "tactics" and found out that in addition to the suggestions of the previous literature, two new strategies and their tactics, fixation and real-time assessment of input, are employed by learners. In a study by Abdelhafez (2006), the effect of particular strategies on developing listening skills was explored. The results showed that training in (metacognitive) strategies helped learners develop listening skills. In many other studies the findings indicated that more-proficient listeners used strategies more often than less-proficient listeners (e.g., Chao, 1997; Moreira, 1996; Murphy 1987; O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Vandergrift, 1997b). More proficient listeners also employ wide variety of strategies and more interactive strategies, and are able to activate existing linguistic knowledge to help with comprehension (Berne, 2004).

Strategy has often been conducted without grounding it in a theoretical model. This is a short-coming that Macaro (2006) talks about in his article, "Strategies for language learning and for language use: Revising the theoretical framework." Therefore, we have coupled a theoretical model with listening strategies. This model is composed of three elements, a cognitive model (Anderson, 1983, 1993), a working memory model (Baddeley, 2002, 2009) a comprehension model (Kintsch, 1998), and strategies.

Much research has been conducted in the area of learning strategy use. Vandergrift (2006) concluded in his research, L1 listening ability is a factor when L2 learners read or listen to second language texts. He also supports the claim that L1 listening ability can be used by L2 learners when they listen to oral English texts, although he did not identify whether it is contingent on the degree of difficulty of the task or text. In addition, both researchers and teachers have indicated that all learners use learning strategies to complete a learning task or activity (Lyke & Young, 2006S;Rost, 2002; Vermunt & Vermetten; 2004; Vinther, 2005). Anderson and Vandergrift (1996) claim that EFL students can be made aware of their L1 learning strategies thereby incorporating these strategies to help them learn a foreign language. These strategies can give EFL learners the tools they need to understand and learn a foreign language. According to the research in listening comprehension (Berne, J., 2004; Flower dew& Miller, 2005; Goh, 2000; Mendelsohn, 1995; Vandergrift, 2003a), all EFL learners use some strategies to help them understand an oral English text. More proficient EFL learners are more aware of the strategies that they use and employ these strategies more effectively than less proficient EFL learners. Many researchers (Berne, J. 2004; Goh, 2000; Mendelsohn, 1995; Vandergrift, 2003a) encourage EFL learners to identify what strategies they use when listening in their first language and then to employ these strategies when listening to English. This process helps EFL learners become aware of the strategies that they have automatized when listening to their first language.

Methodology

Our research was an endeavor to bring a tremendously required qualitative methodology to strategy research that incorporates the EFL learner's human measurement and arranges strategies as a vital a piece of their cognitive handling. Moral Considerations: A key part in qualitative exploration studies was considering the members' welfare when directing the study. The reason for this study was to find the issues that Iranian EFL learners have when listening to oral texts so that to have the capacity to join distinctive methods for showing and diverse methods for students learning.

Thusly, a definitive reason for this study was to profit the Iranian EFL learners by enhancing their learning and showing environment so they would have the capacity to comprehend oral English transactional texts. We obtained volunteers to complete the questionnaire by attending each of the first and second-year listening comprehension classes, explaining the purpose of the questionnaire to the learners, and asking for volunteers to complete the questionnaire.

The selection process for the interviews, diaries, and think-aloud protocols was different from the process for obtaining volunteers to complete the questionnaire. We attended and observed each class with the teacher's permission. We used an observation rubric as a starting point for focusing our inquiry while observing the students, the teacher, and the interaction between the students and the teacher. The primary purpose of these observations was to notice teacher-student interactions, listening problems that students had during class, and socio-affective and metacognitive strategies that they were using while listening to an oral English text. The main part of the questionnaire was a strategy inventory, which was a structured survey that contained statements relating to learning habits to which the respondent must make a fixed response; these individual Likert items, each linked to particular listening strategy (Oxford & Crookall, 1989).

The motivation behind the gathering interview was to test the more profoundly into the particular issues Iranian EFL learners had in understanding oral English texts in their classrooms, and the purposes behind these issues. We directed individual interviews with 36 members; 24 of the 36 additionally partook in group interviews. Six of these members had low capability, twenty had moderate capability, and ten had high capability. Rubin and Rubin (2005) portray the methodology of picking interviewees. As indicated by their viewpoint, interviewees ought to have significant direct data about the subject and they ought to be generally educated about it. We utilized listening diaries as an alternate technique to gather information. Diaries help learners to get more mindful of their learning courses of action and the strategies utilized. Diaries help learners to get more mindful of their learning courses of action and the systems utilized (Oxford, Lavine, Felkins, Holloway, & Saleh, 1996, pp. 20-21).

The fundamental purpose behind requesting them to compose in these self-reflective diaries was to find how the members utilized techniques while they were included in listening to oral messages in a college listening cognizance setting. As indicated by Maxwell (2005), transcription is critical, on the grounds that it is generally less difficult to break down a transcript than to dissect a sound recording. It is likewise paramount to translate the information on the grounds that the whole time, investigation starts and the specialist gets a great deal more familiar with the information that has been recorded. Throughout this procedure, analysts compose notes or updates to help them later with the dissection. We decided to transcribe those parts of the recordings which identified with the learners' system utilize and listening appreciation issues that they experienced as per our exploration questions. Similarly as with the interview, we interpreted the verbally process conventions before dissecting them. In like manner, we just interpreted those partitions that identified with learning procedure utilize or listening cognizance deterrents. We precisely marked every convention with a member recognizable proof number and a convention fragment number so that we could later connect the convention with the review interviews.

Before we investigated the data, we had to transcribe it into composed structure. After the transcription and interpretation process, we decreased the data by utilizing updates, rundown structures, coding, and association procedures. Notices permitted us to recognize developing classifications from the information. Synopsis structures and coding empowered us to decrease the extensive measure of data that we needed to perceive similitudes and contrasts between bits of data. Connection strategies helped us to see the relationship of different stories members identified with particular learning methodologies and listening perception issues.

Findings

The aftereffects of the questionnaire showed that the respondents "constantly" utilized one metacognitive strategy, arranging. At that point, they "generally" utilized two cognitive strategy, affiliation/elaboration and particular consideration. Next, the results communicated that they every now and again utilized one metacognitive strategy, assessment; one cognitive method, rehearsing; and one socio-affective strategy, addressing/clearing up. They regularly utilized one metacognitive technique, observing; three cognitive procedures, symbolism, practice/redundancy, and outlining/note-taking; next, the results demonstrated that the respondents now and again utilized two cognitive techniques, dissecting/thinking and inferencing.

Aftereffects of gathering interviews showed that cognitive strategy, guessing, which was positioned decently high in the questionnaire, was referred to by just 25% of the group interview participants. At last, the socio-affective strategy, using breathing methods was just specified by one member. This last system is a powerful method in which the participant finished to diminish their nervousness. Participant depicted three sorts of focus. They utilized while they listen to oral English texts, Key Word Focus, Task data Focus, and Topic Focus. With respect to Word Focus, the group participants, they concentrated on catch phrases in the content in one of two ways; they either concentrated essential words from the content focused around their understanding of the content's setting, or they listened for clear words in the content and afterward recorded these or attempted to recollect them.

This development of data experiences four unique cognitive procedures as portrayed by Wenden (1991). Subsequently, as per this discoveries, the strategies that the members utilized at the appreciation level were not as powerful as those methodologies that they utilized at the architectural level. We credit this to them utilizing widespread techniques at the architectural level, which are strategies that might be utilized viably with any dialect.

However, the strategies they used at the comprehension level, especially at the word identification level, were language specific strategies, based on learning a Persian -based syllable-timed focus, which were not effective when they listened to oral English texts. We discovered the proficiency of the participants had no relationship to how successful they were able in completing listening tasks. From the findings of this research, it seems that the theoretical model we have adopted accurately depicts the process that Iranian EFL learners use to understand oral transactional text in English. In addition, this theory has helped to identify where misunderstanding or non-understanding can happen.

CONCLUSIONS

We started this study to better comprehend the reasons that Iranian EFL learners experience issues in understanding oral English transactional texts .We noticed through our exploration that Iranian EFL learners are dynamic audience members, they are mindful that they utilize procedures while they listen to oral transactional messages in English, and the procedures they utilize are a necessary a piece of the hypothesis that we recognized. Despite the fact that they may not be mindful of the majority of the techniques that they utilize, they are mindful of numerous procedures that encourage the stream of data all through the cognitive design framework and that encourage the cognizance process. The principle cognitive listening strategies the members distinguished were an attentional methodology which focus; two practice procedures, Memorization and note-taking; symbolism methodology, picture matching; an affiliation procedure, Association; two elaboration methodologies, Note-taking and Paraphrasing; a practice procedure, Listening Many Times; and an inferencing methodology, Guessing. .Notwithstanding the listening procedures likewise found that certain content

and undertaking deterrents hindered the members from viably utilizing their techniques and comprehension the oral content. They reported experiencing some of these impediments in their listening appreciation classes and reported experiencing some of these impediments while they were listening to messages and finishing related assignments throughout our research. We ordered the deterrents that the members specified by into five classes: content exchange deterrents, content perception impediments, undertaking snags, outer deterrents, and emotional obstructions. The fundamental content exchange hindrances they experienced were a quick content rate and a long content. They additionally experienced content perception deterrents. Two of these were new vocabulary and new linguistic developments. A third content perception impediment was not listening to particular words. Next, they referred to some undertaking hindrances; errand intricacy and assignment length were specified as the powerlessness to listen and compose critical data. They likewise reported a few snags relating to variables outside the content and errand: sound clamor, foundation sounds in the sound, and classroom clamor. At last, the emotional snags they experienced throughout the examination were negative emotions about the content, negative emotions about the subject, and negative judgments about the speaker. The discoveries from our examination that have an effect on listening cognizance exploration are capability, division methodologies, and listening issues.

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