

The Impact of Listening Strategies on Improving Learners' Listening Skill

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Abstract

Viable listening comprehension skills are essential as the world gets to be more and more worldwide. Multimedia and the web get to be discussions for English communication. English Language Learners (ELL) struggle to grasp oral English writings in their listening comprehension categories. In this study, a group of 100 ELL learners from undergraduate level in college participated in this study and answered a general proficiency test and 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 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 general traditional instruction. The treatment included introduction, modeling and practicing the listening strategies. A post-test of listening section of TOEFL was administered to both groups. The results imply that listening strategies can be taught.

Keywords: Effective and Ineffective listening Strategy, EFL Learners, Language Proficiency, Listening Skill, Listening Strategies, Meta-Cognitive Awareness.

Researchers from diverse areas of the globe have tried to stipulate the characteristics of strategic learners and the kinds of ways these 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. 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 of the strategies that learners use for learning foreign language or second language and the variables associated with effective strategy use together with language proficiency and meta-cognitive awareness. These investigations range 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 findings suggest 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 shows 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, varieties of tasks from these studies typically indicate that strategy coaching is effective in the growth of the performance of pupils on a large bunch of listening comprehension 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.

Research Method and Design of the Study

We decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation is to use Ex post Facto design due simply to the fact that there was no causal relationship between the variables under investigation. Our goal was to attempt 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, and linguistic backgrounds 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 from the college 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 50 effective and 50 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.

Participants

100 students took part in this study. They were the II and III year undergraduate students of Coimbatore. The mean age of the students of the study was about 18, ranging from 18 to 22, and all were female students, who had 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 course 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 100 students for the study. In order to have a homogeneous sample, we also took into consideration the students' scores in achievement tests in different terms. 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). 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. Among the 100 Undergraduate students, 50 students were assigned to control group and 50 students to experiment group.

Procedures

The main aim of our hypothesis, the subjective criteria employed by O'Malley, Kupper and Chamot (1989) included the following: 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. 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". Thus, application of subjective criteria as well as objective measurement resulted in the selection of experimental group as effective and control group as ineffective listeners. Then, the students responded to a Likert scale listening strategy questionnaire.

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 probing questions to give them some hints to stimulate their thinking-aloud. Before the actual session of think-aloud, the students were briefly trained on thinking aloud through introducing the concept and modeling by the teacher.

Results and Analysis

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. The table illustrates, t-observed is above t-critical, and so the null hypothesis was rejected at .05 level of significance. Thus, it is possible to teach the listening strategies to the students.

The frequency analysis shows another point of interest in that 90 percent of effective listeners utilized socio-affective strategies. 75 percent of effective listeners made use of meta-cognitive listening strategies. And lastly, 65 percent of effective listeners reported using cognitive strategies. 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.

Discussion and Conclusion

Present study was designed to determine the impact of listening strategies on improving learners' listening skill among the students and focusing on identification, description and classification of listening comprehension strategies. The findings of this study show that language learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular can explain some of the differences among students 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 make 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 students who received listening comprehension strategy coaching performed much better than people who failed to receive the strategy coaching. By comparison of the results, 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.

The question we must ask is how one can help learners to acquire listening skill and to train 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 learners of all levels of language learning. The finding of this investigation is that language learning strategies generally and listening strategies particularly can bring 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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