



An investigation of English Listening Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine learners' use of listening strategies focusing on two main aspects: the listening strategy groups and the individual listening strategies used by EFL learners and the differences in the ways the listening strategies were used by effective and less effective listeners. To collect the data, the instrument was a questionnaire. The findings demonstrated that the participants were aware of listening strategies at the average level.

Keywords: *Listening strategies, listening strategy groups, individual listening strategies.*

1. Introduction

a. Background of Study

English is widely accepted as an international language for communicating among people who speak different languages all over the world. In the present situation where technology brings people close to one another, face to face communication becomes even more important, requiring people to interact in real time, using the skills of listening and speaking. In Oral communication, they directly involves both listening and speaking, people need to listen to what their interlocutors say and respond to it. If they are unable to listen effectively, their communication will break down (Anderson & nch,1998). Especially, one of the most difficult language skills learners need to acquire is listening skill (Teng, 1997; Chen, 2002). For this reason, research on listening strategy

(LS) use to facilitate listening comprehension process has attracted growing interests in second or foreign language learning. Even though listening courses are continually introduced into language curriculum, especially the higher education level in order to develop students' listening competence.

b. Aims of the Research

There are two aims in this study, first, to investigate listening strategies used by English Department students, and the last to examine the differences between the effective learners' and the less effective learners' use of LSs. Do students use listening strategies? To what extent do they use:

- (a) Memory listening strategies,
- (b) Cognitive listening strategies,
- (c) Compensation listening strategies,

- (d) Metacognitive listening strategies,
- (e) Affective listening strategies,
- (f) Social listening strategies?

2. Literature Review

a. Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension, or speech perception, refers to active and very complicated mental processes (interactive and interpretive). It is the activity in which listeners need to concentrate on utterances spoken in a particular language, to recognize a certain amount of vocabulary and grammar structures, to separate each utterance into small meaningful units, to translate it with the help of stress and intonation and keep all of the components in. Listening comprehension, or speech perception, refers to active and very complicated mental processes (interactive and interpretive). It is the activity in which listeners need to concentrate on utterances spoken in a particular language, to recognize a certain amount of vocabulary and grammar structures, to separate each utterance into small meaningful units, to translate it with the help of stress and intonation and keep all of the components in. Listening comprehension is regarded as a complex, interactive process in which listeners are involved in a dynamic construction of meaning. Listeners understand the oral input from sound discrimination, prior knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, as well as other use linguistic, paralinguistic, or even non-linguistic clues in contextual utterance (Rost, 2002).

Teng (1997) addressed the relationship of listening comprehension to spoken language. She stated that listening consists of active and complex

processes that would determine the level and content of comprehension. Anderson (1983) divided the listening comprehension process into three stages: the perceptual, parsing, and utilization. During the perceptual process listeners focus their attention on the oral text and preserve the sound in echoic memory. However, listeners were affected by selective attention due to the limitation of their echoic memory. Listeners almost immediately transferred the information in echoic memory to short-term memory to process the sounds for meaning. In the next stage, the parsing process, listeners constructed meaningful mental representations by using words and messages. They reorganized the information into a meaningful unit that could be stored in short-term memory. In the utilization process, the final stage, listeners utilized long-term memory in order to link the incoming message to their existing knowledge. If the new input and existing knowledge matched, comprehension occurred (Anderson, 1983).

b. Listening Strategies

In the 1980s, the research by Murphy (1985, 1987) explored the types of strategies used by various types of students and made a contrast of strategy usage by students of different proficiency levels. Murphy (1985) investigated college students by analyzing their oral and written responses to listening selections. Seventeen specific strategies were identified and categorized. The results show that both more and less proficient listeners could be distinguished by the frequency of the strategies they used. For instance, more proficient listeners used the strategies of elaborating, inferencing, anticipating, conclusion

drawing, self-description, etc., more frequently than less-proficient learners.

LSs can be understood to be similar to all other LLS, and they have the same characteristics as other language strategies. Specifically, in studies into LSs, some researchers have proposed even more specific definitions of LSs. For example, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) propose that LSs are behaviors and thoughts that a listener engages in during listening that are intended to influence the listener encoding processing. In 1987, Rubin indicates that LSs are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper (1989), and Vandergrift, (1997) define listening comprehension strategies as steps taken by learners to help them acquire, store, retrieve, and/or use information. Among the researchers' definition above, Vandergrift's definition (1997) seems the easiest to understand but not to be general. Consequently, LSs in the current study adapted from Vandergrift (1997) are considered as devices that individuals use not only to facilitate acquisition, store, retrieve and use information but

also to achieve the purpose of listening comprehension of spoken input.

Moreira (1996) found that the same strategies were reported by learners at low, middle, and high levels of listening proficiency. However, those with high levels of listening proficiency used strategies more frequently than learners at middle or low levels of listening proficiency. The high-proficiency listeners also seemed to be more aware of their strategy use in a more flexible way. In addition, high-proficiency listeners reported that they were able to distinguish between important information and details on both recall tasks. Overall, according to Moreira, it appeared that high-proficiency listeners had a clearer picture of their strategy use than did low proficiency listeners.

Oxford's classification system of LLS applied not only in learning language, but also in learning language skills such as reading, listening, writing and speaking, is divided into two general types of strategies, direct strategies and indirect strategies. In this study, the two general types of strategies are also analyzed and applied to learning listening skill.

Oxford's Strategy Classification System (1990, Pp 18-22)

Strategy group	Strategy set	Specific strategies
Memory Strategies	Creating mental linkage	Grouping Associating/ Elaborating
	Applying images and sounds	Semantic mapping
Cognitive Strategies	Practicing	Recognizing and using formulas and patterns Repeating
	Receiving and sending message	Getting the idea quickly
	Analyzing and reasoning	Analyzing contrastively (across language) Transferring Translating
	Creating structure for input and output	Note-taking

Compensation Strategies	Guessing intelligently	Summarizing Using other clue Using linguistics
Metacognitive Strategies	Centering your learning Arranging and planning your learning Evaluating your learning	Paying attention Setting goals and objectives
Affective Strategies	Lowering your anxiety Encouraging yourself Taking your emotional temperature	Self-monitoring Self-evaluating Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation Listening to your body Discussing your feelings with someone else
Social Strategies	Asking questions Cooperating with others	Making positive statements Asking for clarification or verification Cooperating with peer

3. Methodology

The subjects participating in this case study were second semester English Department students studying English in UIN SUSKA RIAU. Their learning experience of English ranged from elementary to senior high school. At university, they are supposed to study four years to have a S. Pd, which will enable them to work as teachers. Most of the modules studied are based on lectures.

A questionnaire is the instruments for collecting the data. It was given to the participants so as to uncover their strategies. The items of the questionnaire were in the form of frequency rating scales. Each item asked about how often the participant would employ a particular strategy. The points in the scale ranged from never to always.

The 23 strategy items directly related to listening skills from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners) were used to examine the frequency of strategy use. The questionnaire was composed of two parts: personal background information

and listening strategy items to rate the frequencies of strategy use with five rt-scale responses, ranging from 1-5 (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=usually, 5=always) (Oxford, 1990).

4. Finding

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that the students were generally strategic listeners. Their awareness and perceive of use of LSs in listening comprehension were at the average level ($M= 3.13$). This can be explained that they were conscious of LS use to assist their listening comprehension, their awareness was slightly high. As a result, the students' ability in their listening comprehension was rather low. In addition, it was found in the current study that the most frequently used was memory strategies. The result was consistent with the findings from previous studies conducted by Politzer (1983) and Kao (2006), who reported that Asian students preferred memory strategies. As Duong (2009) stated that memorization is traditionally popular in language classes as well as many other content subjects in Vietnam and in

many other Asian countries. The fact that the students in the researcher's school used more memory category than any other categories was understandable. This could be explained that they tried to memorize as much as possible to help them get information; however, they easily forgot what mentioned before. Furthermore, the results of the current study identified that the least frequent use was *social strategies*. This result was consistent with that of the previous studies by Noguchi (1991) and Kao (2006), which proved that the *social strategies* were used the least frequently. One reason for the least frequent use of social strategy could be explained that the students in the researcher's school were afraid of making mistakes or being laughed by their friends. Thus, they were not eager to ask for clarification from their teachers or cooperate with their partners. Lee (2003) also stated that "Asian students generally resist using participating in social interaction as a mean to learn their second and foreign language" (p.25).

Among twenty three individual listening strategies, *translating* and *repeating* were strategies of frequent use ($M= 3.75$ and $M= 3.72$). The current study suggested that students often used their native language, i.e. Indonesia, to assist English listening comprehension. For instance, *translating* was most often employed among twenty three strategies. Beside that, *repeating strategy* was used by the students at a high-frequency level. This could be assumed that the students had habit to repeat the words they did not understand one or more times to guess the meaning. Meanwhile, the least frequent use was *note-taking strategy* ($M= 2.50$). The finding concluded that the students in this university were probably not familiar with taking notes.

It means that the students did not have enough time to take notes because they needed to concentrate on their listening.

The findings are expected to be beneficial for teachers to help students become aware of the significance of listening and benefits of using the right strategies with the right tasks. They can also serve as guidelines for teachers who would like to provide strategy training in English listening instruction, especially for university students who need sufficient language skills for both social and academic purposes. Moreover, taking notes while listening and lowering anxiety, which were indicated to be beneficial for the students in comprehending listening texts, should also be emphasized.

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