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The Effect of Strategies-Based Instruction on Listening Comprehension, Anxiety, Tolerance of Ambiguity, and Risk Taking: A Case of EFL Intermediate Learners

A thesis

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آن مدعیان که در معنی سفتند | و از چرخ به گونه گون سخن ها گفتند
آگه چو نبودند از اسرار نهان | با خود زنخی زدند و آخر خفتند
آنان که محیط فضل و آداب شدند | در جمع کمال شمع اصحاب شدند
ره زاین شب تاریک نبردند برون | گفتند فسانه ای و در خواب شدند

To my parents with
deep gratitude
for their love, patience, and support

Π

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Researcher's Educational Background

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Abstract

In second language acquisition, Listening comprehension (LC) has been regarded as a long-neglected language skill due to the oversimplified assumption that a learner's ability to comprehend spoken language would develop entirely on its own in an inductive way, through repetition and imitation (Jung, 2003; Vandergrift, 2004).

So many factors are involved in a successful listening comprehension like linguistic, conceptual, discourse, acoustic, environmental and psychological variables (Boyle, 1948; Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Goh, 1999; Rost, 1990; Sheils, 1988). Among these factors three psychological variables are selected to be investigated under the Strategies-Based Instruction (SBI). The most important point to mention here is that, the foundation of the study, according to O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo & Kupper (1985), "the learning styles of different cultural groups need to be taken into account in planning strategy training, since different tasks and types may result different results" (p.57) which shows the importance of uniqueness of strategy training. So, the point that makes this study unique form those related ones that have been investigated the effect of SBI on different parts of language, Bialystok, 1983; Brown & Perry, 1991; Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985; Cohen & Aphek, 1980; O'Malley et al., 1985; politzer & McGroatry, 1995; Wenden,

1987, is in using different tasks, level of proficiency, context of the study, materials, and three different affective factors.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher investigated strategies-based instruction in two video classes each included twenty-five participants, both male and female that were grouped on the basis of convenient sampling, which were taught through SBI and traditional way of teaching listening comprehension via *Interchange.* The results which had been obtained from two classes were compared to find out the effect of instruction on the risk taking, anxiety, and tolerance of ambiguity of EFL intermediate learners during their listening comprehension. Furthermore, the overall effect of instruction on listening comprehension has been investigated.

A pre-questionnaire, post-questionnaire administration had been used for answering the first research question which tried to find out the effect of instruction on the anxiety, tolerance of ambiguity, and risk-taking. On the other hand, a pretest-posttest design was used for answering the second research question which figured out the effect of SBI on listening comprehension. Two research instruments were used in this study (questionnaires and a test): Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (1986) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, Venturesomeness subscale of Eysenck `s IVE questionnaire (1995), Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (SLTAS)(Ely, 1995), and Huang & Eskey (2000) listening comprehension test. Groups were analyzed

using paired t-test, matched t-test, and means. Comparing two groups, the results showed that the SBI has had a significant effect on learners' listening comprehension scores and anxiety in such a way that those in the experimental group performed significantly better than ones in control group. A positive correlation between SBI and tolerance of ambiguity and risk-taking was analyzed. The results for the effect of SBI on risk-taking were not significant, though. For the second research question, results were rewarding in figuring out the outperformance of the experimental group in comparison to the control one. No need to say that results will be provoking in the context of teaching listening comprehension to Iranian learners.

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1.1. Introduction:

For many years, listening skill did not receive priority in language teaching since it was widely assumed that listening skill is a passive skill, one that should not be thought apart from the other language skills. However, in the 1970's, researchers began to understand the importance of listening comprehension (LC) in language development and placed more value on listening skills in their language instruction approaches (Asher, 1977; Gattegno, 1972; Krashen, 1982; Lozanov, 1979; Terrell, 1982).

In classrooms, students always do more listening than speaking. Listening competence is universally "larger" than speaking competence (Brown, 2000; p.247). According to Morely (1991; p.82), "we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read and five times more than we write". On the other hand, listening, as the most widely used language skill, is often used with the other skills of speaking, reading and writing (Rost, 1994; p.7). Moreover, for language learners, listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands, because learners must store information in short-term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information. Thus, despite the recognition of the critical role it plays in communication, listening remains one of the least understood processes in language learning (Morley, 1986).

However, listening skills have come into fashion over the last two decades and have been addressed by methodology text writers and publishers, such as Asher's Total Physical Response (1977), Gattegno's Silent Way (1972), and Lozanov's Suggestopedia (1979). In addition, this recognition has resulted in an increase in the number of listening activities in the student textbooks. Although a great deal of attention has been devoted to listening skills in recent years, comprehension gaps (i.e. comprehension problems) often occur and special efforts to deduce meaning are required. Different factors may influence

learners' listening comprehension and lead to listening problems; for example, features of the listening text, characteristics of the speaker, and learner strategies (Brown, 2001).

Teaching strategies to learners would help them to save themselves among the horde of words to which they are posed, rather just leaving them in a desperate condition. In the real life, when we listen to our environment, in addition to the physical events in which the sound waves are received through the ear and nerve impulses transform them to the brain, some other crucial elements are necessary. Since listening comprehension is an interactive process, schemata and culture background are determining in a mutual understanding. Considering the context of interaction, interlocutors can understand each other better. Using gestures and pacing them with the speech could create some mnemonics that can convey meaning more easily. But when it is bound to classroom conditions in which some other elements like anxiety and stress of being observed by the teacher and other peers, time limitations for answering to pertinent question, lacking enough strategies (cognitive, and specially meta-cognitive ones) for facilitating their burden are added, the circumstance would change. In addition, affective factors can compound the listening comprehension problems. What is the best way to cope with these problems?

The point that makes this study unique from those studies that have been investigated is the effect of Strategies-based instruction (SBI) on different parts of language (e.g. Bialystok, 1983; Brown & Perry, 1991; Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985; Cohen & Aphek, 1980; O'Malley et al., 1995; politzer & McGroatry, 1985; Wenden, 1987) is in using different task, level of proficiency, context of the study, materials, and three different affective factors.

So in this study, the researcher tries to find out the effect of SBI on anxiety, tolerance of ambiguity, and risk-taking among intermediate foreign learners (EFL) (first research question). Also, the effect of SBI will be investigated on listening comprehension scores of EFL learners in another research question.

For the purpose of the study, two video classes, both male and females each include twenty-five learners who are grouped on the basis of convenient sampling, are taught through two different conditions via *Interchange*, Third edition. A pre-questionnaire, post-questionnaire administration is used for gathering information to answer the first research question. For the purpose of the second research question, a pretest-posttest design is used. The results which had been obtained from two groups were fed into statistical analysis to find out the effect of instruction on risk taking, anxiety, and tolerance of ambiguity of EFL intermediate learners.

1.2. Statement of the problem:

Second language listening comprehension is a complex process and crucial in the development of second language competence; yet, the importance of listening in language learning has only been recognized relatively recently (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Nunan, 1998). Since the role of listening comprehension in language learning was either overlooked or undervalued, it merited little research and pedagogical attention in the past. But at present, some researchers have devoted some time to listening and believe it to be an important skill in teaching and learning. For instance, Nunan (1998) believes that:

> Listening is the basic skill in language learning. Without listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate effectively. In fact over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening… (p. 1).

Learners especially those who are not still advanced learners have difficulty with using strategies and techniques that can facilitate the listening process (Gass & Neu, 2006). Usually they are bound to exercises in the books and repetitions that occur after each pause in one episode. On the other hand,

learners often after listening to a fairly difficult episode, while they seem frustrated, ask “why can’t we understand it?”, “how much difficult is that?”, “is that appropriate for our level?”, “They talk too fast”, and the most important enquiry of them is that:”is there any way to understand better” (Brown, 2001; p.56)? So many factors are involved in a successful listening comprehension like linguistic, conceptual, discourse, acoustic, environmental and psychological variables (Boyle, 1948; Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Goh, 1999; Rost, 1990; Sheils, 1988). Among these factors three psychological variables are selected to be investigated under the Strategies-based instruction (SBI) (more studies are needed to enquire the effect of other variables on listening comprehension via SBI, though).

The most important point to mention here is that according to Chamot, Kupper, Michael, O’Malley, Russo & Stewner-Manzanares (1985), “the learning styles of different cultural groups need to be taken into account in planning strategy training, since different tasks and types may result different results” (p.557) which shows the importance of uniqueness of strategy training (in this study, via SBI) considering different contexts of the study. No need to say, generalizations on the basis of studies which are unrelated to specific context is useless. This problem signifies conducting a research in this area.

1.3. Significance of the study:

Contextual variability indicates that listening is more often taught than caught, and so are listening strategies (Zhung, 2008). This is particularly true of L2 contexts. Scholars such as Cohen, Crookall, Lavin, Nyikos, Oxford, & Shutter (1990) started their training program based on solid understanding of the utility and teachability of learner strategies in language learning. Results in different skills were satisfactory (e.g. Abdulhai, 1999; Cohen, Weaver, & Tao-yuan li, 1995; Ozeki, 2000; Thompson & Rubin, 1996). But, on the other hand,

(Chamot et al, 1996; Ehrman, 1999; O' Malley, 1985; Oxford & Politzer, 1985; Wong-Fillmore, 1982) have shown the task and type of language instruction affect the use of strategies-training and strategies using. Therefore, investigating the effect of SBI on listening comprehension in the Iranian EFL context is significant and demanding in order to see whether the same results will be brought up or not. Here, the task is considered as the material and specifically the textbook (*Interchange*, Video book), which is widely used in Iranian institutes. Furthermore, according to "build strategies techniques table" which is suggested by Brown (2006), pertinent strategies will be used to investigate their effect on anxiety, risk taking ability, and tolerance of ambiguity.

1.4. **Purpose of the study:**

The aim of the study is to investigate the possible differences between traditional way of teaching listening and strategies-based instruction (SBI), and also the effect of each on the tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking, and anxiety among Iranian intermediate EFL learners (both within-group and between groups). The study seeks to find a more salient and effective way to teach listening which can help learners to enjoy their time in class with lowering the disturbing factor (in this study, debilitative anxiety) and increasing good techniques and factors (risk taking, tolerance of ambiguity). Hence, this study intends to answer the following research questions in two phases. In the first phase, the overall effect of the treatment, SBI, will be investigated using the final scores of groups, to see which one is more conducive to ultimate success in their listening comprehension, and in the second phase the effect of SBI will be examined through questionnaires to figure out its effect on anxiety, risk taking and tolerance of ambiguity considering EFL Iranian context. The results hope to be considered as pedagogical contribution to the field.

1.5. Research questions:

1- Is there any difference between strategies-based instruction and traditional teaching on listening comprehension scores of EFL intermediate learners?

2- Does strategies-based instruction have any effect on the risk-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, and anxiety of EFL learners during their listening comprehension?

Null hypotheses:

1- There is no difference between strategies-based instruction and traditional teaching on listening comprehension among EFL intermediate learners?
2- Strategies-based instruction has no effect on the risk-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, and anxiety of EFL learners in their listening comprehension?