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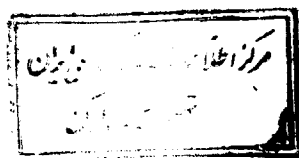
Tarbiat Modares University

۳۹۴۲۳

Faculty of Humanities

۱۳۷۹ / ۱۱ / ۲۵

July, 2000



This thesis

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entitled

***'The Relationship Between the Form of Material (Dialog vs. Monolog)
and Note-Taking, and Listening Comprehension
of Iranian EFL Learners'***

is approved

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

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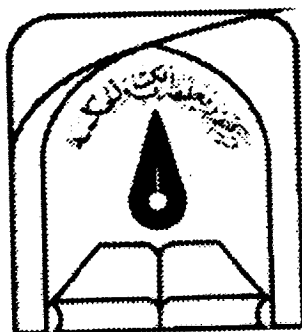
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and Listening Comprehension of
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The Thesis

Presented for the

Degree of Master in TEFL

School of Humanities

Tarbiat Modares University

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July 2000

TO

ALL THOSE WHO WORK FOR PEACE

AND EQUALITY

Abstract

Comprehension is a complicated process about which clear things have not been expressed. It can be the result of reading a text or listening to a speaker. But is it enough just to read the printed signs on a page in order to understand the message encoded in it, or just to listen to the sounds made by a speaker?

This study deals with the comprehension of spoken passages, i.e. listening comprehension, and tries to find out whether it makes any difference for a listener to comprehend the speech made by one person (a monolog) or the speech generated by two people. Moreover, it seeks to illuminate on the role of note-taking in either of the above listening situations.

To this purpose, two groups of Iranian EFL students were given dialogs and monologs. One of the groups took the tests routinely (Group A), while the other (Group B) was required to take notes when listening to the passages. Using t-tests, the mean scores of the resultant four testing situations were compared, but no significant difference was observed between dialog and monolog in group A, between dialog and monolog in group B, between note-taking and not note-taking in dialogs, and between note-taking and not note-taking in monologs.

Keywords: listening, listening comprehension, monolog, dialog, note-taking

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CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In reflecting on contemporary life, and orality and literacy from antiquity to the present, the renowned classicist, Eric Havelock (1986) concluded that as a result of the proliferation of electronic media, the presence of orality has become an accepted fact in contemporary society.

Teaching the comprehension of the spoken language is of primary importance if the communication aim is to be achieved. A frequently neglected area, listening comprehension, has its peculiar problems which arise from the fleeting immaterial nature of spoken utterances and the complicated ways we process what we hear.

In his synthesis of native language (NL) reading and listening comprehension research, Carrol (1977) noted the increase in the quantity of empirical research on native language listening during the 1950's and 1960's, although he found few of the investigations to be "sufficiently

penetrating and analytical" (p. 130). He observed that much of the research conducted in the 1950's and 1960's seemed focused on establishing "listening ability as a valid objective for the educational program, without determining its nature and parameters in a precise manner" (p. 130) and bemoaned the fact that even in the seventh decade of the twentieth century, "there did not seem to exist any comprehensive theory of listening behavior in relation to language behavior in general or to other modes of language reception" (p. 130).

Twenty years after Carrol presented his synthesis of the central foci and basic quality of the native language research conducted during the first seven decades of the 20th century, Witkin (1990) examined the state of the art of NL listening theory and research and pronounced it to be in a perilous state. According to Witkin, one of the chief problems facing the field of native language listening research is the lack of a generally agreed upon definition of listening. She notes that the vocabulary used to discuss NL listening is diffuse, with "some terms being on a highly abstract level, and some describing quite specific physiological or neurological processes" (p. 9). Wolvin and Coakley (1988) have also expressed their concern about the disaccord concerning definitions and operationalizations of the construct of listening comprehension in the native language. They found the following

numerous and varied differences in the meaning of the term *listening*. Researchers perceive NL listening to involve the hearer's "analyzing, concentrating, understanding, registering, converting meaning to the mind, engaging in further mental activity, responding, reacting, interpreting, relating to past experiences and further expectancies, assimilating, acting upon, selecting, receiving, apprehending, hearing, remembering, identifying, recognizing, comprehending, sensing, evaluating, emphasizing, and organizing" (p.57). There is much verbal confusion and overlap of meaning as well as general disagreement concerning the psycholinguistic process of listening, according to Wolvin and Coakley.

In an extension of Wolvin and Coakley's examination of the listening definitions given by 16 communication scholars between 1925 and 1985, Glen (1989) analyzed an additional 34 definitions of listening appearing in speech communication scholarly books and instructional texts. She concurred that there indeed appears to be no universally accepted definition of the construct of native language listening. Glen contends that the problem of definition limits communication research in listening and lessens the chance of finding effective methods of training individuals to be effective listeners (and speakers) of their native language. It also highlights the

difficulty of generating " a universal conceptual definition of listening from which operational guidelines may be established" (p. 29).

In addition to pointing out the "definition and operationalization" problem, Witkin (1990) identified several other problems endemic in theory building and research on NL listening comprehension. Most research on listening is not based on theory, the existing research is often contradictory, and almost no studies have been done to replicate or verify previous research. The problematic state of research may be due to the fact that there exists "a serious question among scholars as to whether indeed the processes can be observed and studied" (p. 7). This perception needs to be altered if we are to increase the quantity and quality of the empirical research base on listening, as well as the quality of listening training.

1.2. FACTORS AFFECTING NL AND L2 LISTENING

COMPREHENSION

NL researchers have sought to identify the factors "inside the head" and "outside the head" that influence comprehension of oral communication in positive and negative ways. Communication scholars, Watson and Smeltzer (1984), for example, highlight several internal or "inside the head" (i.e. the receiver) factors that can hinder NL listening comprehension: (a) personal

internal distractions (e.g., hunger, headaches, emotional disturbance); (b) personal disinterest in the topic of the message; (c) inattentiveness (e.g., daydreaming); (d) positive and/or negative emotional responses toward the speakers, topic or occasion; (e) detouring (what the speaker says makes you think of something else which is off the topic); (f) jumping to conclusions about what a person is going to say before it is said; (g) over-reacting to the language of the speaker (e.g., her or his use of slang, cursing); (h) over-reacting to the message of the speaker (reacting to the political implications of the message); (i) tending toward rebuttal (developing a counter-argument before the speaker is finished); and (j) rehearsing a response (thinking about what you have to say rather than what is being said).

Samuels (1984) discusses the impact of several additional factors internal to NL listeners, two of which are intelligence and language facility.

Carrol (1977) has identified several affective and cognitive variables that affect NL listening comprehension, including the listener's (a) degree of motivation to comprehend and learn the information contained in the message and the amount of interest in the topic of discussion; (b) ability to perceive relations among elements of the discourse, and ability to focus attention on the discourse and ignore distractions in the environment. Goss (1982) posits that essentially NL listening comprehension is a function of

the receiver's basic information-processing ability and level of cognitive complexity, the latter being operationalized as an ability to hold in focus and compare alternative perceptions on an issue.

Not only do internal factors affect NL comprehension, external factors also influence the success or failure of the comprehension or learning process. Carrol (1977) relates the ability to learn from being told to factors *external* to the native language learner: the rate at which the material is presented, and the conceptual difficulty and organization of the information presented, the (inverse) relationship between comprehension and length of the material, the repetition of the material heard (repetition on the part of both the speaker and the listener).

For L2 listeners, all of the internal and external barriers mentioned above undoubtedly serve also to confound comprehension of L2 messages, and SLA researchers are beginning to theorize about and investigate many of these factors as well as a number of additional factors that serve either to detract from or to support a receiver's L2 comprehension.

1.3. FUNCTIONS OF NOTE-TAKING

In the literature there has been an emphasis on two general functions of note-taking: encoding and external storage (DiVesta and Gray, 1972; Fisher