



دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی

پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی

رابطه درک شنیداری و اضطراب کلاس زبان خارجی در بین فراگیران زبان خارجی ایرانی

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اسفند ۱۳۸۶

۹۸۴۳۷

اطلاعات کتابخانه‌ای
کتابخانه مرکزی
سازمان اسناد و کتابخانه ملی
جمهوری اسلامی ایران

۱۳۸۷ / ۱۲ / ۲۸



Shiraz University
Faculty of Literature and Humanities

**M.A. Thesis In English Language
Teaching**

**LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM
ANXIETY AMONG IRANIAN EFL
LEARNERS**

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March 2008

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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CLASSROOM ANXIETY AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

BY

Seyed Mohammad Jafari

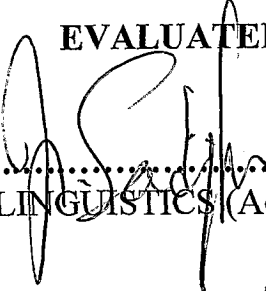
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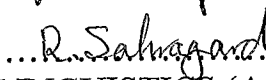
SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICE OF VICE-CHANCELLOR GRADUATE
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIERMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (MA)


IN

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)
SHIRAZ UNIVERSITY
SHIRAZ, IRAN

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**Dedicated
To my parents
and
Dr. Sahragard**

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Sadighi and Dr. Sahragard, for their invaluable comments and careful reading of my thesis and considerable guidance all of which were useful in fashioning the thesis and improving its quality.

I also wish to thank Dr. Mehrpour, whose scrupulous scrutiny of the thesis content contributed to a great extent to the accomplishment of the study. Moreover, I would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Saadat for her meticulous examination of this thesis.

I am also deeply indebted to my professors who taught me several courses during my M.A program at Shiraz University. I would also like to thank my friends, classmates and all the students who helped me conduct my research.

Last but not least, I wish to express my sincerest gratefulness to my parents who have always been a great source of support and encouragement, without which I would not have been able to accomplish this research.

ABSTRACT

LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

BY

Seyed Mohammad Jafari

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension (LC) and their foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Furthermore, it scrutinized the role of gender and years of university study on the one hand on LC and on the other hand on FLCA.

To achieve such the goals, eighty Iranian EFL students (40 males and 40 females), majoring in English Translation at the Abadeh Azad University participated in this study. The participants consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Two research instruments were used in this study: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) — reflecting three types of anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation— and listening comprehension portion of Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL test (Philips, 2001).

The data obtained through the FLCAS questionnaire and the LC test underwent a number of statistical procedures to determine the relationship between LC and FLCA and the role of gender and years of university study on LC and on FLCA.

The results of data analyses revealed that the relationship between FLCA and LC was negative and significant. That is, the higher the level of FLCA these students experienced, the lower the score they tended to attain on the LC test and vice versa. This result indicates that FLCA interferes with foreign language listening.

Likewise, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the level of listening proficiency contributes to the years of university study. That is, the level of LC proficiency increases as a function of years of university study. Considering the FLCA and years of university study, no relation was found. In addition, in this study females were found to be more anxious than males in listening settings.

Key words: Listening comprehension, Foreign language classroom anxiety

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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

ANOVA= Analysis of Variance

B.A= Bachelor of art

Cor. = Correlation

D.F= Degrees of Freedom

EFL= English as a Foreign Language

ESL= English as a Second Language

FL= Foreign Language

FLCA= Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

FLCAS= Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

L1= First Language

L2= Second Language

LC= Listening Comprehension

No. = Number

SD= Standard Deviation

Sig= Significant

TOEFL= Testing of English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

In this chapter, initially a general view of the topic of the present study is given. In addition, some terms related to the field of study are defined. Then, there is a section on the significance and objectives of the study.

1.1. Preliminaries

In second language acquisition, Listening comprehension (LC) has been regarded as the 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). 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, Gattegno's Silent Way, and Lozanov's Suggestopedia. 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). In addition, affective factors can compound listening comprehension problems. One problematic affective variable that EFL learners experience in listening comprehension is the negative kind of anxiety called “debilitating anxiety” because it harms learners’ performance in many ways, both directly through worry and self-doubts, and indirectly by reducing participation and creating overt avoidance of the language (Oxford, 1998, p. 60). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) found that anxiety plays an important role in determining learners’ success or failure in EFL classes. Besides making the classroom more difficult for students, foreign language anxiety can deter EFL learners from pursuing the language learning process. Some EFL learners report they become anxious when participating in skill-specific activities, for instance, speaking or listening. They try to avoid making any mistakes in order to save face, so the more nervous they become, the less meaning they can catch. In listening situations, because of this feeling, some learners lose interest in listening and some even abandon it (Arnold, 2000).

As a teacher of English at Shiraz private institutes, the researcher has had the opportunity to observe the same problem among dozens of Iranian EFL learners; this has inspired the researcher to investigate the role that this psychological construct may play in listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners.

1.2. Definitions and explanations of terms

Listening is more than just being in the environment of speech, sounds, and hearing. More carefully specified, listening is “attending to

and interpreting oral language". The listener "receives, analyses, and interprets the oral signals that come his way, recreating the message of the speaker" (Bowen, 1985, p. 88).

Listening comprehension (LC) is defined as "an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of oral input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge" (O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1989, p. 19).

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is defined as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process, takes in freezing in class, going blank in exams, and physiological reactions such as shaking and sweating" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 125).

English as a foreign language (EFL) is learned as a language that will not be used on a day-to-day basis. The learner probably will not have the need to use English within an English speaking community (Clement, 2007).

1.3. Objectives and significance of the study

Listening in a foreign language (FL) is a less thoroughly studied skill in general. We know even less about the interaction between listening and learning anxiety. Some instructors, for example, are unaware that listening exercises may arouse a debilitating anxiety in their students (Vogely, 1999; cited in Elkhafaifi, 2005). Krashen has noted that listening "is highly anxiety provoking if [the discourse] is incomprehensible" (cited in Young, 1992, p. 168). This study aims at

investigating the effect of foreign language classroom anxiety (as the independent variable) on EFL learners' listening comprehension (the dependent variable) with respect to moderating variables such as gender and years of university study.

The results of this study can be useful in theory and practice. Theoretically, they can be the basis of more research on listening comprehension in our country. It is hoped that the findings of this research will be useful in familiarizing teachers of English with the effects of variables such as gender and years of university study on LC and FLCA. Researchers such as Dunkel, 1991; Long, 1985; Rost, 1990; Vogely, 1999 stress that listening is fundamental for language acquisition because it provides the input that is the raw material necessary for the process to occur. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no inquiry into the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety, and listening comprehension per se, and personal variables, has been carried out to date at Shiraz University. Considering the above mentioned points, the researcher will try to seek answers to the following questions:

- 1) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' foreign language classroom anxiety and their listening comprehension?
- 2) Is there a significant difference between males and females in their performance on the LC test?
- 3) Is there a significant difference between males and females in terms of their foreign language classroom anxiety?
- 4) Is there a significant difference among learners with different years of university study in terms of their performance on the LC test?

5) Is there a significant difference among learners with different years of university study in terms of their foreign language classroom anxiety?

CHAPTER TWO

LITRETURE REIVIEW

2.0. Introduction

In order to discuss the theoretical and practical issues related to listening comprehension and foreign language classroom anxiety separately, this chapter is divided into two parts.

The first part presents the most relevant theoretical discussions on listening comprehension as well as language anxiety. It includes theoretical definitions of listening, types of listening, the meaning of comprehension and process, elaboration on the process of listening, features of listening comprehension, and role of listening in language learning. Also, what numerous researchers have written about anxiety in general, about the so-called trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety, as well as about anxieties that are thought to be “debilitating” or “facilitating” in academic situations will be reviewed. A definition of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCAS (Horwitz & Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) is presented.

In the second part, practical pieces of research done on listening comprehension and foreign language classroom anxiety are presented. The results of the research projects studying the relation between learner characteristics such as gender and years of study on the one hand and listening comprehension and foreign language anxiety on the other hand are discussed. In addition, the relation between listening comprehension

and foreign language classroom anxiety is taken into consideration by reviewing the relevant pieces of research.

2.1. Review of Related Theoretical Literature

2.1.1. Listening

At present, despite theoretical and empirical research, a consensus has not been reached on a definition of the L1 listening skill. Rost (2002) notes that lack of agreement upon a definition of listening is reflected in the wide range of vocabulary used in such definitions.

In addition to the definition given by Bowen (1985) which was mentioned in the introductory chapter, other definitions are adopted in other sources. Wolvin and Coakley (1996) view “listening as the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural and visual stimuli” (p. 153). Purdy (1991) has a similar approach to listening by defining it as “the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings” (p. 435). According to Ross (2004), the essentials of listening can be summarized as follows:

Listening is the active process of selecting and integrating relevant information from acoustic input. This process is controlled by personal intentions, which are critical to listening. This means that listening behavior is intertwined with the current and habitual motivational

order to obtain information and complete a comprehension task, without intervening or interacting for purposes of clarification or feedback (Richards, 1990; cited in Vandergrift, 1997).

Rost (1994) adds two other types of listening to the former list based on goals of listening—namely, critical and recreational listening as is shown in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Classification of listening situations adapted from Rost (1994, p. 11).

Type of listening	Listening goal
Transactional listening	Transition of information, as in instruction, intended to be stored in long-term memory for retrieval;
Interactional listening	Exchange of personal information, as in a personal conversation; information of rather transient nature;
Critical listening	Critical evaluation of the material, as in an expert hearing;
Recreational listening	Relaxation and entertainment, as in leisurely listening to the radio

Imhof (1996) identifies critical aspects of transactional listening in instructional settings as follows.

“The newness aspect: Information provided in transactional listening situations typically contains a substantial amount of new concepts for the recipient. The asymmetric interaction: Transactional listening is to some extent, characterized by a certain degree of asymmetry between the speaker and the listener(s) on the knowledge dimension” (p. 3).