

RAISING AWARENESS OF LEARNING STRATEGY IN LISTENING FOR TERTIARY EFL LEARNERS

Suyono

Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Jurusan Tarbiyah STAIN Batusangkar
Korespondensi: Blok F No. 7 Perumahan TPI Rambatan Batusangkar Sumatera Barat
e-mail: sotesol@gmail.com

Abstract

Suffering from lacks of supporting instructional materials and teaching methodology are suspected to be the sources of students' low ability in listening. Other source that influences the students' insufficiency is lack of learning strategy. In line with the awareness of learning strategy in listening, such concept is believed to contribute promising solution for two main reasons: clear theoretical framework and empirical experiences taking place around the world. Consequently, it is considerably important to teach listening by applying the concept of learning strategy within classroom learning process and outside as well.

Key words: learning strategy, listening, listening strategies, strategy-based instruction

INTRODUCTION

The early 1980s witnessed the rise of listening as one of the most contributing factors in second or foreign language learning (Carrier, 2003; Vogely, 1998). Consequently, language courses elsewhere have offered listening either integrated with other skills or as distinct subjects in their curriculum and established language laboratories to cater to the needs of teaching listening. Listening materials in books and accompanying cassettes or DVDs have been published worldwide and have been displayed in bookstores and libraries across the globe. Seminars and other professional meetings discussing the effectiveness of teaching and learning listening have been held in various regional and international conferences. Journal articles analysing the listening process and

research reports on learners' strategies in listening have frequently appeared in local and international journals as well. Teacher training institutes also put listening as part of their curriculum to be offered to their trainees. In short, after a period of negligence, listening has gained an important role in language learning and its impact on developing overall language proficiency (Rubin, 1994; Vandergrift, 1999).

The rise of listening in foreign language learning is stimulated by the downside of audio-lingual method which generally emphasises production before learners receive enough comprehensible aural input. The recognition of the information processing theory (Cross, 2009) in language learning intensifies the wide recognition of the subject and replaces the old passive listening view with an active process of attending the meaning

of the aural message. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of cognitive psychology theory which recognises the role of cognition in processing language input has further shaped the direction of listening in language learning. The theory encapsulates the listeners' engagement in listening through their cognitive and metacognitive endeavours to extract the meaning of the listening passages (Carrier, 2003; Cross, 2009). Thus, listening is not a repeat-after-me-process without necessarily knowing what is being repeated, as is generally applied in the audio lingual method. Rather, it is an active process which requires the listeners to make use of their cognitive resources to apprehend the meaning of the incoming input. These factors have obviously magnified the development of listening in language learning and have informed pedagogical considerations at the policy and praxis level (Rubin, 1994).

The rise of listening in foreign language learning reached Indonesia when the government introduced Communicative Language Teaching for secondary school as the endorsed curriculum in 1994 and further revised it in 2004. The 2004 curriculum suggests that listening in EFL should receive second priority after reading replaced speaking, as it was in the previous curriculum. The curriculum also indicates the importance of receptive skills over productive ones. Listening as one of the receptive skills which should be taught to the learners so that some degree of listening skills have been mastered upon commencement of higher level education.

Despite government support at the policy level, the EFL secondary graduates seem to suffer from insufficient listening proficiency. This is due to a number of reasons. First, scarce materials for listening are always the most often cited reason for the deficiency. While some rich private schools may

have such supporting materials, many secondary schools do not have enough supporting materials such as TVs, tape recorders, cassettes or DVDs to make listening possible for the learners. In some schools where I supervised my teacher training, students did not have such materials and predictably had never taught their students listening skills. Second, comprehension based teaching which generally emphasises product rather than process is another factor that may inhibit students' development of listening skills. Some fortunate schools which have supporting materials may teach their students with listening, but lack of teacher training in teaching listening may result in the teacher continuing to practise a listen-and-answer-question-comprehension approach. My undergraduate experience supports this suggestion. Instead of listening to learn, most teachers still use listening for testing (Sheerin, 1987). Third, an evaluation system which favours multiple-choice-comprehension-tests is believed to also complicate the problem. Such assessment obviously does not require the students to invest the utmost efforts of their cognitive resources.

While the record of students' engagement in listening is predictably lacking at secondary school level, learning circumstances at the university level which emphasise learner-centredness may put more burden upon the many unfortunate EFL learners. Instead of enjoying instructed learning from their teachers, they are required regulate their own learning to achieve their objectives (Oanh, 2006). Instead of listening only in the class, they may be asked to listen to a variety of sources with different kinds of listening passages. Therefore, listening instruction which allows learners to build up listening fluency and guides them to raise and develop their awareness of listening strategies is desperately needed.

In this article I would argue that raising awareness of learning strategies in listening is a vital role in improving listening proficiency in particular and English proficiency in general. The first part of the discussion highlights the importance of strategy awareness in listening, followed by a discussion on some strategies used in listening. In the end, I elaborate how such awareness can be raised up through strategy training inside and outside the classroom setting. The questions for this article are formulated as follows:

1. Why does awareness of listening strategy need to be raised?
2. What learning strategies are generally used in listening?
3. How can awareness of listening strategies be raised?

DISCUSSION

Why does awareness of listening strategy need to be raised?

Because listening strategy eases the complicated process of listening

Among other language skills, listening is widely viewed as the most difficult skill to approach in foreign language learning (O'Malley, Chamot, and Kuper, 1989; Vandergrift, 2004). Compared to other skills, such as reading or writing, which allow the language learners to have some degree of control over the process, listening only provides little, if any, control with which the learners to intervene. Once they miss part of the aural message while listening, they are very unlikely to return to that missing part without losing more parts of the input. While for the sake of learning, they may ask the teacher to repeat the missing part of the recording in a classroom setting, real life listening such as listening to news from CNN or BBC channels does not allow this control. Therefore, listening is a very complicat-

ed process for many learners to engage in.

Some of the difficulties associated with listening which make listening is so complicated are: pace and accent of the speakers, text load and level characteristics, learners' insufficiency of language and content knowledge and task and process characteristics (Rubin, 1994; Vogely, 1998). An unfamiliar accent used by the speaker in conjunction with high speech would definitely cause problems with listening. This will be further complicated when the text and task types are beyond the learners' linguistic and real world knowledge and training of listening strategies. Yet, knowing what to listen for and how is believed to relieve, to a certain degree, the complicated matter of listening. Therefore, training the learners to familiarise themselves with text and task types of listening and some strategies to approach them would be badly needed (Carrier, 2003; Cross, 2009; O'Malley, et al., 1989). The need for such training for Indonesian EFL learners is desperately needed as the discrepancies between Indonesian language and English and world knowledge of English and Indonesia is obvious. Such training obviously helps them overcoming the burden of listening.

Strategy is trainable

There is doubt whether strategies for listening exist and are thus teachable. Ridgway (2000) is one who argues that strategy is something subtle and people may not realise whether they are applying a particular strategy while listening. Furthermore, he maintains that having the learners aware of what is going on while they are listening to particular aural input would place greater burdens upon the students and is unrealistic; on one hand, they have to extract the meaning of the incoming input and on the other; they have to recognise the label of

the strategies they may apply. In addition, Field (1998, 2000) suggests that students' differences in temperament and whether the strategies meet students needs in long term use are other concerns raised to respond the trend of strategy instruction. Chen (2007) and Liu and Goh (2006) also suggest that some students are reported not to receive any benefit from strategy instruction and state that such instruction is useless.

Despite some concerns regarding strategy training in listening, most researchers in listening strategies maintain that strategy can be taught to the learners. The only difference is whether strategy instruction should be taught explicitly or implicitly and whether it should be embedded or at a direct level (Carrier, 2003; Chamot, 2005). In embedded and implicit instruction, the teacher guides the students through a listening activity without letting them know that a particular listening strategy is being put into action. On the other hand, explicit or direct instruction of listening strategy teaches the learners the label of the strategy and how it works. Chamot and Thompson (2005) and Rubin (1996) suggest that explicit instruction of listening strategies is more effective in boosting learners' listening fluency compared to the implicit instruction as it enables learners to transfer such knowledge to other contexts. Therefore, it is a gift for the students to have such training as their listening fluency might be enhanced.

Strategy is bound to success

Anecdotal evidence suggests that people who strategically strive for something in any field tend to get what they set out to achieve. Military operations apply certain strategies to occupy their enemy territory or to raid a certain target and they may achieve these goals after careful strategising: recognition of the target, planning the action, monitoring

the progress, overcoming any obstacles which may occur and evaluating the operation in the final stages. People in business do the same as the military, so do people in sport, politics, entertainment and so on.

With regard to strategies in listening, some people have questioned the impact of listening strategies in developing listening proficiency and suggest that such strategy instruction lacks theoretical and empirical support (Berne, 2004; Manchon, 2008). At a theoretical level, Manchon (2008) argues that strategies still suffer from weak conceptual frameworks so that their role is still 'at the level of isolated initiatives rather than at the mainstream pedagogical recommendations and practices' (p.221). At the empirical level, Berne (2004) and Manchon (2008) suggest that the research findings regarding listening strategy instruction vary from one research to another and are still inconclusive. They claim, therefore, that strategy instruction needs more theoretical and empirical evidence to gain wider and greater acceptance.

However, like other new ideas which struggle at the beginning, strategy based listening currently receives growing attention in pedagogical praxis and empirical studies. More and more studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of learning strategies in listening and most studies end conclude that there is a significant difference among those who received strategy instruction in term of strategy use, listening performance and motivation (Berne, 2004; Carrier, 2003; Chamot, 2005; Chen, 2007; Thompson and Rubin, 1996). Chen (2007) conducted a study on the impact of strategy training and reported improvement in students' task performance, which covers not only language features (such as grammar or lexis) and content knowledge, but also the students' interest in performing tasks

in a variety of different text genres and text-difficulty levels. In strategy use and repertoire, the subjects also reported becoming strategically aware in listening and being able to transfer the strategy into different contexts and even across to other language skills such as reading. Mendelsohn (in Berne, 2004) and Vandergrift (1999) also reported that strategy instruction can improve students' motivation in listening and replace and deploy a variety of different strategies to meet listening tasks effectively. In short, although a body of literature suggests the inconclusiveness of the strategy approach in listening, its impact on students' success is generally recognised.

Strategy leads to automaticity

Automaticity in listening refers to a self-moving process which works in the listener's mind while listening without necessarily recognising what is going on during the process. This process will likely happen when listeners have been already familiar with the text types, levels of difficulty and the purpose of the listening input (Cross, 2009; Vandergrift, 2004). To achieve such a state, the listeners need continuous experience through training and practicing with listening passages.

Learning to know and learning to do as suggested by the exponents of learning strategy (Liu and C.M.Goh, 2006) may represent an extra burden for beginners. However, once learners become familiar with processes which they need to be conscious of at the beginning of their learning, they will automatically utilise their listening strategies even without recognising it. Therefore, allowing learners to familiarise and practice listening strategies even from early learning would obviously lead the learners to reach the state of automaticity in listening.

Strategy leads to autonomy

Autonomy refers to the learners' choice in directing their own learning in listening. The choices include the choice of inputs they want to listen and the choice of strategies they want to apply inputs (Berne, 2004; Chen, 2007; Vandergrift, 2004). They can choose for their own sake listening to news, commercial advertisements, videos and film, live football matches and so on. They can also apply different kinds of strategies to meet their listening goals. They may specify particular strategies or combine two or more strategies for their own learning.

However, the learners would be unlikely to arrive at such independency in listening without receiving sufficient training. During the early stages, the teacher may take a greater role in choosing, familiarising and practicing the listening inputs and strategy use. By the time the learners are able to choose and confidence is reasonably high, they would obviously possess the maturity to use the strategies for their own learning.

What learning strategies are generally used in listening?

A wide array of strategies in learning a foreign language have been identified by scholars, namely cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are directly responsible for making sense of the incoming listening input, metacognitive strategies support the cognitive endeavour by planning, monitoring and evaluating the process of attending the inputs (O'Malley, et al., 1989). In addition, socio-effective strategies are other determining factors which indirectly also support the process of sensing the aural input. (Bacon, 1992; Chamot, 2005; R. Oxford and Crookall, 1989). The following discussing highlights some strategies that most scholars suggest for learners in listening.

Cognitive strategy

Cognitive strategy is a conscious effort made by the learners in order to identify, store and recall the incoming listening input (Rubin, 1994) so that the input becomes sensible and accessible for future reference. Some cognitive strategies which are normally used in listening are rehearsal, organisation and elaboration (O'Malley, et al., 1989). Rehearsal is repeating the name of particular new words, phrases or expressions from the listening input, while organisation is classifying or grouping information in particular accessible ways which enhance comprehension. Furthermore, elaboration is an attempt to clarify an incoming message by interconnecting the new information with the already known or relating one part to another of the listening passage.

C. C. M. Goh (1998) identifies some cognitive strategies in listening which include inferencing, elaboration, prediction, contextualisation, fixation and reconstruction. Inferencing means comprehending the meaning of unknown words or expressions by way of using context, key words, knowledge about the world, speaker's body language and visual aids. Prediction refers to anticipating the next part of the text after the other, while contextualisation is the attempt to make sense of new information in a wider context. While fixation allows the learners to solve possible confusion by searching for the correct spelling or meaning, or repeating and memorising. Reconstruction refers to attending the meaning of the listening input through activating language knowledge and real world knowledge.

In short, cognitive strategies allow the learners to directly digest the incoming information using cognitive skills such as making inferences, classifying and categorising input, memorising words or expressions and store the information in memory. With such

cognitive enterprises, the incoming listening input would be meaningful.

Metacognitive strategy

Metacognitive strategies are set of strategies which the listeners employ to govern the listening process from the beginning to the end of the listening process. Carrier (2003) suggests that a metacognitive strategy refers to the 'understanding when and where to apply and the gains produced by strategies when used (p.338). O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper (1989) and Rubin (1994) state that metacognitive strategies involve knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning activity. Goh (2006) suggests that metacognitive strategies refer to 'an understanding of the ways different factors act and interact to affect the course and outcome of cognitive enterprises' (p.92). In particular, O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) and Goh (1998) describe two strategies in monitoring processes while listening; namely selective attention and directed attention. Selective attention refers to focusing on specific information as directed when beginning to listen, while directed attention focuses on a general sense of the task demands and content. Vandergrift (2004) points out four metacognitive strategies namely prediction, monitoring, problem solving and evaluation.

In short, metacognitive strategies may include planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluation. In planning strategies, the learners may activate their background knowledge about the incoming input, set a purpose and propose some questions before listening. Monitoring deals with maintaining an awareness of what has previously been set up and tracking information if it satisfies the questions and tasks. Problem solving refers to identifying a particular problem that may occur while

listening and finding the solution to the problem. Evaluation allows the learners to reflect upon their involvement during the process of listening by identifying the strengths and weaknesses. Such strategies would obviously be applied throughout the pedagogical sequence of pre-listening, listening and post-listening activities so that such a sequence attains meaning (Vandergrift, 1999).

Socio-effective strategies

Another conscious effort that may smoothly support the process of constructing listening input is the involvement of the social and affective dimension in learning (Chamot, 2005). This involves peers, teachers or more proficient users of the target language to clarify or share the input and would obviously enhance the listening fluency. Having positive statements about the listening process such as *'this input will inform me much, I can handle it, and such positive statements'* would definitely ease the process of understanding the meaning of the listening passage (Bacon, 1992).

How Can Awareness Of Listening Strategies be Raised?

Ways of raising awareness of listening strategies can be many, depending on the circumstances of the learners and the coverage of the strategies. With low level learners, one may prefer to emphasise a low level of cognitive strategies such as differentiating diphthongs or morphemes, and so on. While for more advanced learners, they may introduce with more strategies and a higher level of cognition. In this study I emphasise raising strategy awareness which may be suited to new EFL learners in Indonesia, namely a guided process of listening through listening strategy instruction and self-directed listening through a journal or diary.

Listening Strategy Instruction

Listening strategy instruction relies upon the premise that knowing what to do is an entry point of success in understanding the message from listening input. It means that listeners should know what to listen for (task knowledge) and how to listen (strategic knowledge) (C. Goh and Taib, 2006) in order to understand the intended meaning of a particular listening input. Therefore, instruction is dedicated to making the student aware of listening strategies by familiarising, practising and encouraging the student to reflect upon these strategies.

There have been some models introduced by teaching professionals and researchers which introduce strategy instruction in listening. Either for the sake of research study or for pedagogical reasons, the instruction generally includes the explicit explanation of particular strategies, models and the practice of the given strategies, as well as reflection upon the application of the strategies.

Vandergrift (2004) introduces five stages with related metacognitive strategies. The steps include the planning or predicting stage which allows learners to familiarise themselves with the text type and predicts information or what they may hear. The next stage is the first verification stage which requires the learner to monitor their initial prediction and compare it to others. The second verification stage is the next step at which students verify points of disagreement and reconstruct general points of the text through monitoring, problem solving and evaluation. After that, they are allowed to proceed to the final verification stage where difficult information lies by selecting attention and monitoring. Finally, the last stage is reflection, where the students evaluate strategies and consider possible transfer to the next listening activity.

Liu and Goh (2006) also introduce five steps which include a pre-listening activity which allows the learners to work in pairs to predict what they are going to hear. This stage is followed by the first listening activity which allows the learners to verify their predictions and add new information in the 'first listen' column. After that, the learners listen to the text for the second time to solve any reoccurring problem and enter newly gained information in the 'second listen' column. Then comes the third listening, which is dedicated to allowing the learners to identify any missed information or difficult problems. The final step concludes with personal reflection.

Learning from the models suggested by Vandergrift (2004) and Liu and

Goh (2006) and the common sequence of classroom listening activities, I propose the following model (Table. 1). Most aspects of the afore mentioned models are still retained, yet it clarifies the steps, activities and their accompanying instructed strategies. The first column of the table contains the listening sequences followed by five classroom activities, which include planning the text and the first listen to orient the text. This is followed by the second listen to pick up any details of the text and followed by third listen to reconstruct the general message of the text. The next three columns contain the instructed chart that may accommodate the above model.

Table 1. Model of listening strategy instruction. Adapted from Vandergrift (2004) and Liu and Goh (2006)

| Listening sequence | Classroom Activities | Instructed strategies | | |
|--------------------|---|---|--|--|
| | | Cognitive Strategies | Metacognitive strategies | Socio-effective strategies |
| Pre-listening | Familiarising oneself with the topic through the activation of background knowledge | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting goals • Prediction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in pairs • Build positive statements |
| While listening | First listen - orient the text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification • Inferencing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring by directed attention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence building • Cooperation |
| | Second listen - verify the text content/details | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaboration • Visualisation • Contextualisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring by selective attention • Problem solving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming nervousness • Cooperation |
| | Third listening to check and reconstruct the overall message | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directed attention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation • Encourage yourself |
| Post listening | Personal and classroom reflection | Evaluation | | |

To help the students to work with such models, two complementary checklists need to be handed out, namely: a checklist for pre- and post listening activities and a checklist for listening activities. The first checklist, which is filled in before and after the listening activity respectively, may include questions that reflect the student's understanding of the text and task type, the purpose of listening to the text and the verification of these questions after listening. The other checklist is filled in during listening activities and can be filled in individually or working in pairs. With these aids, the students would be obviously familiar with what to know and what to do when listening and thus their awareness of listening strategies will likely be increased.

Diary or Journal

A dialogue journal is a reflection of students' experiences of involving themselves in listening activities outside classroom (Chen, 2007; Cohen, 1998; Pickard, 1996). It may contain information about the time when they plan and carry out listening activities, the types of listening inputs they engage with, the strategies they use while listening to the input, the follow up activities they have done and the reflection upon the overall process.

As it contains information about the learners' engagement in listening, a diary or journal may serve as a tool for investigating the learners' progress in listening and also as an aid to raise awareness. Pickard (1996) suggests that journals helped him to trace the learners' interest in what they listen to outside classroom and how well they interact with and enabled him to use that information for classroom purposes. Chen (2007) points out that using journals helped to learners in his study improve their exposure and attitude toward the

target language, increased listening comprehension, and enhanced their repertoire of listening strategies. In addition, Rubin (in Chamot, 2005) suggests that using diaries and journals helps students to develop awareness of their own learning process and strategies. In short, conceptual and empirical evidences suggest that a journal enables learners to raise their awareness of learning strategies in listening.

To help learners to work on a dialog journal, they require a model to see how it works. Chen (2007) provides a model in which each page of the journal was divided vertically in half. The first half contains the listening tasks and the other half is reserved to students' comments relating to the progress they make, the strategies they apply and any other comments they wish to add. Liu and Goh (2006) give a plain model for diary recording called 'a guide for self-directed listening' which is divided into three parts, namely goal definition, action plan and evaluation.

For this study, I develop a journal which acknowledges the aspects of the above mentioned models. The table format model (see table 2) consists of the time students are involved in listening, the text type and purpose for listening, the strategies deployed for listening engagement, a summary of the text and a reflection upon the overall process of the listening. This model is believed to allow the learners to work without necessarily having papers with questions ready to answer. Rather, they are encouraged to use their own expertise to fill out the table.

My experience using such model with my students indicated that the majority of the students willingly completed their expected listening activities. Some showed their interest by doing more works in listening and creating their own model to meet the self-

learning expectation. Others simply did what they had told to do. Still, some did not satisfactorily complete their self-learning repertoire. Overall, this model evidently provides support the students

in encouraging their involvement in listening real life listening from TV channels or radios using listening strategies.

Table 2. Model for Journal

| Time and date | Text type and purpose | Strategy use | Text summary | Overall reflection |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|

CONCLUSION

To sum up, EFL tertiary learners in Indonesia seem to suffer from less listening proficiency as material, and methodological supports are still lacking. Therefore, adequate assistance needs to be given to resolve this problem.

The wide recognition of learning strategies in the pedagogical field has allowed listening strategy instruction to find its momentum and play an important role in helping learners with listening problems. From a theoretical view point, listening strategy instruction is believed to aid learners in improving listening skills as it may ease the complicated nature of listening and lead to automaticity in processing information while listening. In addition to this, it may also build autonomy in learning. From an empirical view point, the body of research studies into listening

suggests that listening strategies significantly help and improve students' performance in listening. Therefore, listening strategy instruction which allow the learners to know explicitly what and how to use strategies in listening is highly recommended.

To help the students raise their awareness, a model on listening strategy instruction has been proposed. The model provides a guide for learners and teachers learning listening strategies in a classroom setting. Outside a classroom setting, such awareness can be build up by introducing the students to a journal. The proposed journal model discussed above with its simpler look may help to raise awareness of listening strategies. With such aids, it is very likely that the EFL learners' English proficiency in general and listening fluency in particular will improve.

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