International Journal of Asian Social Science
ISSN(e): 2224-4441
ISSN(p): 2226-5139
DOI: 10.18488/journal.1.2017.710.846.854
Vol. 7, No. 10, 853-861.

URL: www.aessweb.com

LISTENING SKILLS STRATEGIES (P.I.S.A) USED IN MUET: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Shahirah Sulaiman[1+]
Nur Safura Abd Ghaffar[2]
Raimizar Rahim[3]
Azizah Abdul Majid[4]
Mohamed Akhiruddin Ibrahim[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]*Pusat Tamhidi, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia*

(+ Corresponding author)

Article History
Received: 6 June 2017
Revised: 13 October 2017
Accepted: 18 October 2017
Published: 30 October 2017

Keywords
Malaysian University English Test (MUET)
Listening Skills
Teaching
Learning strategies.

ABSTRACT

Malaysian University English Test (MUET) has been implemented by the Ministry of Education to prepare tertiary students with the necessary English language skills. These skills are significant not just for the sake of passing the examination but also to train the students with English medium instructions in the classrooms at the tertiary level. The abovementioned skills are reading, writing, listening, and speaking; which will be examined amongst students to aid them to secure a place in universities. The four basic skills may sound manageable to learn but there are still gaps in students' proficiency of the language which disrupt their competency, especially in their listening skills. Current researches show that students are not adequately prepared with listening strategies and listening comprehension instruction in the classroom. Thus, this study aims to investigate 60 undergraduate students' listening strategies; P.I.S.A (Predicting, Inferring and Selective Attention), in answering their listening tasks. A quantitative approach was employed with the use of a questionnaire as the instrument. The findings confirmed that a majority of the students adopted steadily these three strategies in their listening skills. This result may help to increase the basic listening competency and cognitive abilities among the undergraduate students and thereby ultimately enhance students' listening strategies of MUET at tertiary level.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature the preferred listening strategies undergraduates apply in their MUET (Malaysian University English Test) listening paper. Findings revealed that a majority of the students adopted steadily these three strategies in their listening skills (predicting, inferring, and selective attention). This result may help to increase the basic listening competency and cognitive abilities among the undergraduate students and thereby ultimately enhance students' listening strategies of MUET at tertiary level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is considered as one of the skills in language acquisition that is often neglected due to its low priority as it is considered an ability that could be developed without assistance (Fouad, 2012). It is essential in learning significantly as listening are information-gathering and pleasure, though there are other reasons such as empathy,

assessment and criticism (Wilson, 2009). It reveals that the lack of attention to the skill of listening which gives forth the reason for students' low listening competency skill.

Although neglected, the listening skill is still taken account for in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) as it is being assessed individually from the other three language skills (speaking, reading, and writing). Hence, the objectivity of this study is to identify the listening strategies that to be used; P.I.S.A (Predicting, Inferring and Selective Attention), in answering their listening tasks as similar to MUET listening test.

2. MUET LISTENING TEST

As mentioned previously, Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is consisted of four papers which are made compulsory for students to pass according to the required Bands (1-6) and programmes registered under universities. Instead of reading, students are required to listen attentively to five individual recordings in order to answer comprehension questions which are distributed beforehand. The test consists of three parts where the level of comprehension and critical thinking skills increase in each.

A total of 20 questions are included in the MUET listening test where Part 1 consists a mix of structural responses as well as objective questions, objective questions in Part 2, and fully structured responses for Part 3. Listening may be deemed as an easy task to conduct in the classroom but without proper strategies and attention, it could undoubtedly be the hardest skill in a L2 acquisition process.

Paper 1: Listening (800/1)

No	Item	Description
1	Weighting	15%
2	Duration	30 minutes
3	Number of texts	5
4	Basic criteria for text selection	Length, level of complexity (content and language), text type
5	Possible genres	Lecture, briefing, talk, discussion, interview, telephone conversation, announcement, instructions, advertisement, news, meeting, documentary
6	Number of questions	20
7	Possible question types	(i) Information transfer (ii) Short-answer questions (iii) 3-option multiple-choice questions (iv) 4-option multiple-choice questions

Figure-1. MUET Listening Test Components (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2015)

3. STRATEGIES IN LISTENING

Early listening researches on person's second language (L2) had an interest in a theory where comprehensible input is the key to improving listening skills and language acquisition, overlooking the process of listening itself. However, as more studies occur the focus shifted on how students manipulate the listening input and different strategies on listening became known. The interest in listening comprehension strategies has evolved in a number of studies (O'Malley *et al.*, 1987; Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Oxford and Crookall, 1989). The first identified strategies in listening were introduced by O'Malley and Chamot (1989) by categorizing them into two categories: cognitive and metacognitive.

Cognitive strategies are problem-solving techniques that students use to handle the learning tasks and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge or skill (Derry and Murphy, 1986). Metacognitive strategies, on the other

hand, are management techniques employed by students to have control over their learning through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying (Rubin, 1987). Subsequently, a third category was added to describe the learning that takes place when students interact with classmates, ask the teacher for clarification, or use specific techniques to lower their anxiety (Fouad, 2012). This category is known as a socio-affective strategy in listening.

These three strategies are prevalently known and discussed in the field of L2 listening and few were studied on other strategies which may also contribute to the understanding on how students tend to their listening. However, as discussed apart from the ones mentioned before, this paper would like to focus on predicting (P), inferring (I), and selective attention (SA) strategies in listening skills. This paper's focal point will be on the listening skills strategies aforementioned which may contribute to the understanding on how students tend to use it in their listening tasks. The strategies as in Figure 2 below, is hypothesized that L2 students would use these three different strategies in helping them to answer their listening task accordingly.

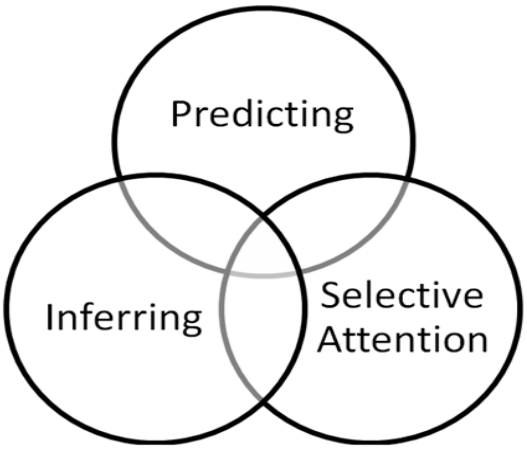

Figure-2. The Hypothesized Framework of Listening Comprehension that will be used by Students - P.I.S.A: Predicting, Inferring, and Selective Attention

3.1. Predicting Strategy

Early theories on listening comprehension strategies always take into consideration on listener's prior knowledge to help interpret the input received. This knowledge is often exploited at the word, phrase, or sentence level to enable the listener to comprehend the rapidly incoming input which is especially important for L2 students (McGruddy, 1995). This kind of strategy is called predicting where schema is of the essence to permit reasoning from incomplete information that has been made before and during the text was read. Default values supplied by general schema may be substituted in the description of an event when the explicit information supplied in the description is incomplete (McGruddy, 1995).

The background knowledge of students would include the schema on language structures, experiences in real-life situations, or even context similarities in other listening texts on more to what will happen next of the text read. Long (1989) stressed the significance of knowledge on content and formal schemata in a study which examined the variables revealed by research to influence both L1 and L2 comprehension such as; 1) effects of visual and verbal contextual organizers, 2) knowledge of story structure, 3) instantiation of relevant cultural schemata, 4) utilization of paralinguistic cues, 5) organization of input, and 6) prior instruction.

3.2. Inferring Strategy

In logic manner, when we hear a part of a conversation or sentence, we are able to guess unfamiliar words that have attracted much attention in the comprehension literature. This strategy that helps our listening comprehension is inferring. According to Haastrup (1991) lexical inferencing is

"...making informed guesses as to the meaning of a word in light of all available linguistics cues in combination with the students' general knowledge of the world, her awareness of context and her relevant linguistics knowledge..." (p. 197).

In Cai and Lee (2010) study, they investigated the role of contextual clues and language proficiency on unfamiliar word processing in listening comprehension. The results suggested that the effects of language proficiency on unfamiliar word processing in listening comprehension has demonstrated that language proficiency actually affects students' use of strategies and knowledge sources, that more proficient students were able to use their overall understandings of the text for inferring the meaning of unknown words and that less proficient students relied more on clues from the target words.

Researchers have confirmed that thoughtful, active, proficient readers are metacognitive; they think about their own thinking while listening during the text was read. Students can identify when and why the meaning of the text is unclear to them, and can use a variety of strategies to solve listening comprehension problems or deepen their understanding of the text that they have listened to Duffy and Roehler (1987).

Hence, inferring means the relationship between two pieces of information may not be directly stated, but instead has to be figured out by the students, from clues; as the students here are amongst the students. They need to listen not only for what is said, but how it is said, where and when it is said. When the students make inferences, they would get ideas about the clues in the text along with their own experience to help them to figure out what is not directly said, making the text personal pleasure memorable.

3.3. Selective Attention Strategy

Humans by nature as in this scope are among students; receives all types of input, whether it is through the normal process of formal learning of the process of experience gathering. Though this process of remembering, hearing or feeling, the information enters the senses but not all are recognized since we have a filtering system which actually chooses which aspect to focus on. This process is called selective listening (Driver and Baylis, 1998).

When we try to recall what we did in a day, often only those which we pay our attention to are remembered. We often only remember the significant data. Hence, it is of no wonder why it has been an aspect of cognitive psychology. At first, this theory focusses more on listening and how we could 'hear' only what we want to hear although the room is full of people talking or better known as the cocktail party effect (Arthur *et al.*, 1991).

On that note, researchers have collected data on how 'switching' takes place in the cocktail party to ensure that what is conveyed is actually stored by the listener (Altmann, 2006). Besides switching, the most important factor to consider for this paper is the fact that the students are L2 Acquisition or Second Language Acquisition (SLA) students. For SLA students, how to achieve the target language skills are of utmost consideration of the listening attention.

Schmidt (1990) states that how selective attention helps in L2 acquisition is what should be researched on. Robinson (1995) puts selective listening in two divisions of cognitive psychology. First, we only listen to one channel of discussion although there are many discussions going on at the same time. While, the second theory suggests that the input is only filtered when it has gone through the short term memory.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Instrument

A quantitative method was used for this study as percentages and means are sought using a questionnaire on the perceived use of strategies on listening comprehension. The questionnaire was adapted and combined from two previous studies one of which is entitled "Listening Comprehension Strategies of Arabic-Speaking ESL Students" by Fouad (2012) and the other "The Effect of Listening Comprehension Strategy Training with Advanced Level ESL Students" by McGruddy (1995).

Adjustments on some items and combination were made as a mean to answer the research questions as well as to suit the language competency of the samples. Four parts were carefully divided for the questionnaire which comprises of; Part A: Demographic Data, Part B: Predicting Strategies, Part C: Inferring Strategies, and Part D: Selective Attention Strategies. A total of 30 four-point Likert-Scale items were used in the questionnaire.

4.2. Sampling

A total of 60 students were selected as all the participants are enrolled in ESL classes from various programmes and are in their foundation year at the Islamic Science University Malaysia (USIM). The participants' levels of English competency are mostly intermediates and had exposure on the English language for 11 years starting from their primary and secondary schools.

4.3. Procedure for Data Collection

The Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire was distributed to all of the samples in their classes. The samples were required to answer the questionnaire in the class and collect them immediately upon completion. This is done in order to ensure a 100% return rate of the questionnaire from the samples.

4.4. Procedure for Data Analysis

The students' responses from the questionnaire were then analysed. Responses from the samples regarding their listening comprehension strategies were added up according to the values assigned. Each item were counted according to their percentages and mean scores and recorded using the SPSS software.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Predicting Strategy

Table-1. What I already know

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	3.3	3.3
	Disagree	12	20.0	23.3
	Agree	35	58.3	81.7
	Strongly Agree	11	18.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

The data shows that more than half of the respondents 58% agree that predicting the listening items from what they already know is one of the strategies used. The minority of approximately 23.3% disagree with the prediction strategy.

Table-2. Guess what will come next

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	25	41.7	48.3
	Agree	27	45.0	93.3
	Strongly Agree	4	6.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

When the respondents were asked on whether they were guessing what will come next, only 6.7 % (n=4) answered strongly agree and strongly disagree. The majority answered agree 47% and disagree 45% thus putting this category in a neutral stance.

Table-3. Thinking in my native language

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	14	23.3	23.3
	Agree	32	53.3	76.7
	Strongly Agree	14	23.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

When putting thinking in my language as a factor, 23.3% of the respondents responded that they disagree with the statement while 76.6% of the respondents answered agree 53.3% and strongly agree 23.3%. This shows that the students do think in their own language while doing the listening MUET exam.

Table-4. Use knowledge and personal experience

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	3.3	3.3
	Disagree	11	18.3	21.7
	Agree	31	51.7	73.3
	Strongly Agree	16	26.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

Using knowledge and personal experience are what most respondents 88.4% say they use when answering the questions as compared to only 22.6% say they did not use past experience as a method to answer the questions.

5.2. Inferencing Strategy

Table-5. Do not understand the whole conversation if confused on a word

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	8	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	31	51.7	65.0
	Agree	13	21.7	86.7
	Strongly Agree	8	13.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

The data illustrates the question on "Do not understand the whole conversation if confused on a word". 31% disagree and 8% strongly disagree that confusing words render their understanding in a converstaion. The remaining reponds indicate their agreement (35%) on this question.

Table-6. Decide whether conversation makes sense

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	3.3	3.3
	Disagree	7	11.7	15.0
	Agree	35	58.3	73.3
	Strongly Agree	16	26.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

Table 6 represents the decision of the respondents whether they can make sense of a conversation. More than half (73.3%) agree on this statement whilst the remaining 18% disgaree.

Table-7. Use the main idea of text to guess meaning of words

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.7	1.7
	Disagree	3	5.0	6.7
	Agree	34	56.7	63.3
	Strongly Agree	22	36.7	100.0
	Total	60	0.0	

In terms of using the main idea of the text to guess the meaning of the words, 93.4% of the respondents answered in the affirmative (56.7% agree and 36.7% strongly agree) while only 6.7 % (5% disgree and 1.7% strongly disagree). This shows that students are aware on the use of main ideas in answering listening questions.

Table-8. Each paragraph is important to understand whole conversation

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	8	13.3	13.3
	Agree	40	66.7	80.0
	Strongly Agree	12	20.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

Most of the respondents, 86.7% believe that each paragraph is important to understand the whole conversation thus making the understanding of the meaning of each paragraph an important element to include in the teaching of the listening component.

5.3. Selective Attention Strategy

Table-9. Have a plan on how to listen

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	12	20.0	20.0
	Agree	34	56.7	76.7
	Strongly Agree	14	23.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

On whether students do actually plan to listen or not, the data depicts that students do plan with 23.3% percent stating that they stongly agree while another 56.7% stated that agree on having a listening plan.

Table-10. Listen to intonations for important parts

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.7	1.7
	Disagree	13	21.7	23.3
	Agree	32	53.3	76.7
	Strongly Agree	14	23.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

For N=60 respondents for this survey, 14 of them answered in the negative as to whether they listen to the intonations of the important parts while 46 respondents answered in the affirmative showing that intonation of the speakers do influence the students' understanding.

Table-11. Adjust interpretations when it is not correct

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	11	18.3	18.3
	Agree	42	70.0	88.3
	Strongly Agree	7	11.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

The data provided show that the respondents adjust the interpretation when is not correct with the majority 81.7% answer that they do adjust their interpretations when it is not correct, thus showing that the respondents are aware of the intended meaning of a particular dialogue.

Table-12. Decide in advance what to listen for

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.7	1.7
	Disagree	13	21.7	23.3
	Agree	36	60.0	83.3
	Strongly Agree	10	16.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	

The table shows the decision in advance to what should be listened for in listening test. 76.7% respondents agree and strongly agree while another 23% disagree and strongly disagree on the statement. Therefore respondents have already selected what they choose to listen in listening test.

As a result, predicting, inferring and selective attention in listening comprehension seem pragmatic strategies opted by the students in the midst of their listening exams. Students can use their prior knowledge in facilitating the understanding of the listening content. These strategies are used based on the existing knowledge or guessing the next listening content but the train of taught are in their native language, as much as language proficiency is influencing the students' ability to understand a particular listening item.

This is parallel as what Cai and Lee in 2010 has investigated. They were varying the degree of agreement as to whether inferring does help in understanding the whole conversation with confused words. As a result, in this study it reflects that most students used the main ideas of the text to understand the meaning of the words. From this, it can be seen that students use various strategies to solve listening comprehension problems or get a deeper meaning.

In focusing on the selection strategy, students listen to every words, pay attention to intonation and adjust interpretation, amongst the strategy opted related to the selective attention theory. It shows that students select certain significant data that they want to remember which is a pre-selection decision; whereby it is the on-set of the listening test of what the students listen for.

6. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, students strongly projected the ability to use cognitive abilities in their listening MUET test. The overlapping use of predicting, inferring and selective attention strategies showed the competency of the students in coping with the test, making them manipulate the listening component content by using different strategies mentioned to increase basic listening and cognitive abilities amongst the undergraduate students.

Funding: This paper was funded by Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (PPP-USG-0116/TAMHIDI/30/13716).
Competing Interests: This study received no specific financial support.
Contributors/Acknowledgement: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

REFERENCES

Altmann, H., 2006. The perception and production of second language stress: A cross linguistic experimental study. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), University of Delaware.

Arthur, D., P. Lewis, P. Medvick and E. Flynn, 1991. A neuromagnetic study of selective auditory attention. Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology, 78(5): 348–360. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Cai, W. and B.P.H. Lee, 2010. Investigating the effect of contextual clues on the processing of unfamiliar words in L2 listening comprehension. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 33(2): 18.11-18.28. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Derry, S.J. and D.A. Murphy, 1986. Designing systems that train learning ability: From theory to practice. Review of Educational Research, 56(1): 1-39. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Driver, J. and G.C. Baylis, 1998. Attention and visual object segmentation. In R. Parasuraman (Ed.), The attentive brain. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp: 299-325.

Duffy, G. and L. Roehler, 1987. Teaching reading skills as strategies. Reading Teacher, 40(4): 414-418. *View at Google Scholar*

Fouad, A., 2012. Listening comprehension strategies of Arabic speaking ESL students. Colorado: Colorado State University.

Haastrup, K., 1991. Lexical inferencing procedures or talking about words. Tubingen: Gunter Narr.

Long, D.R., 1989. Second language listening comprehension: A schema-theoretic perspective. Modern Language Journal, 73(1): 32-40. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Malaysian Examinations Council, 2015. Malaysian University English Test (MUET) Regulations, Test Specifications, Test Format and Sample Questions: 6-19.

McGruddy, R., 1995. The effect of listening comprehension strategy training with advanced level ESL students. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

O'Malley, J.M., A.U. Chamot and C. Walker, 1987. Some applications of cognitive theory to L2 acquisition. Studies in L2 Acquisition, 9(3): 287-306. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

O'Malley, M. and A. Chamot, 1989. Listening comprehension strategies in second language acquisition. Applied Linguistics, 10(4): 418-437.

Oxford, R.L. and D. Crookall, 1989. Research on language learning strategies: Methods, findings, and instructional issues. Modern Language Journal, 73(4): 404-419. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Robinson, P., 1995. Attention, memory and "noticing" hypothesis. Language Learning, 45(2): 283-331. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Rubin, J., 1987. Learner strategies: Theoretical assumptions, research history and typology. In A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), Learner strategies in language learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. pp: 15-30.

Schmidt, R., 1990. The role of consciousness in second language learning. Applied Linguistics, 11(2): 129-158. *View at Google Scholar*

Wenden, A. and J. Rubin, 1987. Learner strategies in language learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall International.

Wilson, C., 2009. To direct or not to direct; that is the question. London: Training Journal.