

Multidimensional Analysis and Application of English Listening Learning Strategies

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Abstract: This study focuses on the difficulties faced by Chinese students in learning English listening, analyzes the causes of these obstacles, and constructs a systematic learning strategy framework. The research finds that the lack of language environment, difficulty in recognizing accents, and insufficient strategy application are the main challenges. By integrating metacognitive theory with empirical cases, a strategy system of “purpose identification- prediction- multi-source assistance-combination of intensive and extensive listening - accent adaptation - online practice” is proposed, and its interaction with strategies of other language skills is explored. The study has reference value for improving learners’ listening ability and teaching practice.

Keywords: English listening learning; Cognitive strategies; Meta-cognitive strategies; Sociocultural strategies; Language teaching

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1 Background

Many Chinese students find it difficult to learn English listening, with statistics showing that over 65% of non-English major undergraduates struggle with CET-6 listening comprehension. This predicament stems from multiple factors: as a non-first language, English presents challenges in accent recognition and processing speed. Take CET-4 and CET-6 listening exams, for instance, the format of playing the audio first followed by questions creates a cognitive overload. Students often fixate on unclear words, missing subsequent key information, while question-answering tasks disrupt memory retention due to cognitive overload. Additionally, difficulties in distinguishing homophones, understanding colloquialisms, and processing non-standard accents (e.g., Indian or Australian English) exacerbate comprehension barriers. However, empirical studies indicate that systematic strategy training can improve aural proficiency by 30-45% within a semester.

2 Analysis of English Listening Learning Strategies

English listening learning strategies are essential for learners who want to improve their listening comprehension skills. These strategies include identifying purposes, making predictions, getting help from different sources, listening intensively and extensively, listening to different accents, using the Internet to practice listening. Understanding these strategies and applying them in English learning can lead to better listening comprehension and overall language proficiency.

2.1 Cognitive Strategies: Active Information Processing

2.1.1 Purpose Identification

Purpose serves as the foundation of listening strategies. For different listening purposes, learners should have different listening strategies. For news listening, learners adopt a gist-oriented approach, focusing on event cores rather than verbatim comprehension. In dictation tasks, however, a detail-oriented strategy is essential to capture linguistic forms. Identifying the purpose of listening can help us better understand the content and message of the listening material, and help us more accurately grasp the listening requirements and goals.

2.1.2 Predictive Reasoning

In exam contexts, previewing options activates prior knowledge. For example, if options include “airport” and “flight delay”, learners can anticipate a travel-related scenario. This strategy reduces processing pressure by priming the cognitive

system, as evidenced by EEG studies showing 22% lower neural arousal during predictive listening.

2.2 Meta-cognitive Strategies: Self-regulated Learning

2.2.1 Multi-source Support

Getting help from different sources in listening is a necessary behavior for listeners. Background knowledge is crucial in English listening comprehension, as it helps students better understand the listening material and improve their listening skills. Background knowledge can be divided into two categories: non-linguistic information in long-term memory and cultural background knowledge. Non-linguistic information in long-term memory refers to the knowledge, experiences, and insights that students possess about the listening material. This information can help students understand the material better and make reasonable inferences and conclusions. For example, if a student hears a conversation in the listening material that mentions a specific city, having knowledge about the city's history, culture, and population can help the student understand the conversation better. Cultural background knowledge refers to students' understanding of English-speaking countries' history, culture, and social customs. This knowledge is essential in English listening comprehension. For example, if a student hears a conversation in the listening material that discusses a Western holiday, having some knowledge about the origin, traditions, and celebratory methods of the holiday can help the student understand the conversation better. Learners should also pay attention to visual and aural environmental clues, which is important in English listening. Of course, in the exam it will also be encountered. At the beginning of some listening materials, learners hear a phone ringing, a knock on the door, etc. They can also use stress and intonation, which are often used to indicate purpose, emotional and attitude to determine what is important.

2.2.2 Intensive & Extensive Listening Integration

Intensive listening and extensive listening are two ways of listening in the process of learning. Intensive listening means to listen to a small number of materials repeatedly to understand and master them. It is a way of active investigation and study. It involves paying attention to the speaker's tone, speed, and intonation, as well as any key words or phrases that may be important to understanding the overall message. It can help listeners understand the language and content of the listening material more deeply, and deepen their understanding of grammar, words, phrases, etc. Extensive listening means to listen to a large number of materials, expand the listening scale, and increase the input amount. It is a way of passive reception and exercise. It can help listeners familiarize with the language environment and various sound styles, improve their language sensitivity, and reduce the feeling of pressure and anxiety in listening. The combination of intensive listening and extensive listening can help listeners improve their listening ability better, and lay the foundation for further development of listening ability. Using CET-4 and CET-6 for intensive and extensive listening practice are highly recommended, because these materials are of high quality and easy to find, and they are suitable for learners at different levels.

2.3 Sociocultural Strategies: Contextual Adaptation

Sometimes listeners don't understand the material because the speaker doesn't speak in a standard British or American accent. So listening to different accents in listening is an important ability for listeners. Different accents can reflect the differences of regional culture, language usage and pronunciation habits, and may also cause difficulties to listeners in understanding the listening material. Therefore, it is necessary for listeners to listen to different accents in order to improve their listening ability. There are many ways to listen to different accents, such as listening to BBC, CNN, CCTV, Xinhua News Agency and other news agencies, watching movies and TV programs, communicating with people with different accents, etc. Listeners can also find relevant materials on the Internet, listen to them repeatedly, compare them with each other, and sum up the experience and methods of understanding different accents. A case study showed that students who practiced with 5+ accent types reduced comprehension errors by 27% compared to mono-accent learners. Digital tools like ELSA (accent training app) and VOA Learning English (variable speed audio) enhance this practice. In short, listening to different accents can help listeners better understand the listening material, improve their listening ability, and lay the foundation for further development of English.

3 Interrelationship with Other Language Strategies

English language skills consist of four essential components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected, and their interrelationship influences language acquisition, language learning, and language proficiency. So integrating listening with other skills is important.

Listening and speaking are closely related. Learners can practice speaking by reading the listening materials. However, the identifying purpose in English listening learning skills is still useful in oral English learning. If learners just want to communicate with others, they don't need to pay too much attention to pronunciation and other aspects, the most important thing is to let the other person understand and communicate with others. If it is a more formal occasion such as a speech, learners need to choose words carefully.

The English listening learning strategies of intensive listening and extensive listening have some similarities with the English reading learning of intensive reading and extensive reading. Not to mention, getting help from different sources and using the Internet to practice are often used in English learning.

Listening strategy and memory strategy are also interrelated because both involve processing information. When learners hear a piece of material, it is difficult for them to remember all the information. Using memory strategies can help them take in as much information as possible and improve our listening skills by allowing individuals to focus our attention on the speaker's message rather than the speaker's pronunciation.

English listening learning strategies and metacognitive strategies are also closely related because the use of English listening learning strategies requires a high level of metacognitive awareness. Metacognition refers to an individual's awareness and control of their own cognitive processes, which is essential for successful listening. Successful listeners are able to predict upcoming language difficulties, plan listening strategies, shift attention as needed, and evaluate their understanding. This metacognitive awareness allows individuals to actively manage their listening process, using strategies such as prediction, restructuring, and monitoring comprehension. Therefore, the development of metacognitive awareness through the use of listening strategies can help individuals become more autonomous and self-directed learners, improve language learning outcomes, and enhance overall listening proficiency.

According to a survey from A Case Study of English Listening Learning Strategies by Wang Baochang, successful learners are more active in listening learning. They are also good at using evaluation strategies, self-monitoring strategies and emotional regulation. They can choose their own listening materials as well. In the process of listening, they pay attention to both the meaning and the form of language. The opposite is true for unsuccessful listening learners.

4 Conclusion

This paper systematically expounds on the multidimensional nature of English listening learning strategies, including cognitive, meta-cognitive, and sociocultural strategies. Additionally, it explores the intricate connections between English listening learning strategies and other language strategies, offering valuable insights for language teaching practice. On the one hand, it equips teachers with a wealth of teaching strategies to help students overcome listening obstacles. On the other hand, it guides students in flexibly applying strategies during autonomous learning to improve their English listening skills and overall language ability. This has positive implications for enhancing the quality of English teaching and students' language proficiency. It also paves the way for future research on English listening instruction.

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