

İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN DİNLEME BECERİLERİNDE KULLANDIKLARI STRATEJİ VE TAKTİKLER

The Strategies and Tactics the Efl Students Use in Listening Skills

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ÖZET

Problem: İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler dinleme becerileri derslerinde çeşitli strateji ve taktikler kullanarak dinledikleri metinleri anlamaya çalışmaktadırlar.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu araştırmanın amacı anket ve görüşmeler kullanarak öğrencilerin dinleme becerileri dersinde kullandıkları strateji ve taktikleri belirlemek ve başarılı-başarısız öğrencilerin strateji kullanıp kullanmadığını ya da eğer kullanıyorsa hangi stratejileri kullandıklarını belirlemektir.

Yöntem: Araştırmanın evreni Erzurum Atatürk Üniversitesi Kazım Karabekir Eğitim Fakültesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim dalı hazırlık sınıflarıdır. Örneklem ise anabilim dalındaki 107 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Anket yoluyla elde edilen veriler, SPSS For Windows 17.0 paket programından yararlanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Verilerin çözümlenmesinde, frekans analizi ve yüzde alma tekniği kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca öğrencilerle yapılan görüşmeler de bulgulara temel oluşturmuştur.

Bulgular ve Sonuçlar: Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgularda, öğrencilerin kullandıkları strateji ve taktikler bilişsel ve biliş ötesi olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Ayrıca öğrencilere strateji kullanımı eğitimi verilebileceği de ortaya çıkmıştır.

Öneriler: Dinleme becerilerinde istenen seviyeye ulaşılması için üniversitelerin eğitim fakültelerinde eğitim vermekte olan metodologlar Özel Öğretim Yöntemleri derslerinde dinleme becerileri öğretimine daha fazla ağırlık vermelidirler. Dil öğrenimi dil hakkında her şeyi bilen öğrencileri yetiştirmekten vazgeçip dili kullanabilen özellikle araştırma konumuzun merkezindeki dinlediklerini anlayabilen kişiler haline getirebilmek olmalıdır. Okul müfredatlarında dinleme becerileri dersleri mekanik dinlemeyi hedef almaktan öteye bilişselliği önemseyen aktiviteler yer almalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinleme stratejileri, strateji öğretimi, öğrenme taktikleri, bilişsel ve bilişötesi stratejiler.

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ABSTRACT

Problem: EFL students use various strategies and tactics in listening skills to understand the person or the text they are listening.

Aim Of The Search: This study tries to define the strategies and tactics of students by conducting questionnaires and interviews. Also it is aimed to describe what kind of strategies the poor or successful students use or don't use.

Method: This study has been conducted at Ataturk University Kazım Karabekir Education Faculty ELT department. The sample consists of 107 students at prep classes of the department. The data were analyzed using SPSS For Windows. Frequency analysis and percentage techniques were used in the study. Besides, the interviews were commented.

Findings and Results: The strategies and tactics were classified as cognitive and metacognitive from the findings from the study. Furthermore it was found that strategy instruction could be applied in the classrooms.

Recommendations: In order to reach the desired level in listening skills the methodology teachers should focus on more to the teaching of listening skills in Language Teaching Methodology courses. Language teaching should be directed from teaching everything about language to teaching to use the language especially in listening skills. The school curriculum should include more cognitive activities for listening courses rather than mechanical exercises.

Key Words: Listening strategies, language learning, strategy instruction, learning tactics, cognitive and metacognitive strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening comes from the emergence of the human being. It has always been a crucial part of interaction. It is not just hearing the other side but through the message having an agreement or giving the right response with the help of grammatical knowledge. One of the definitions of listening is;

'Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously.' (Howatt and Dakin, 1993:16).

This definition makes listening more complex than the other skills. It is well known that listening comes before speaking; one should listen enough to produce the right utterances. But there are certainly some difficulties in listening; the first is that people cannot communicate face-to-face unless the two types of skills (listening/speaking) are developed in tandem. Rehearsed production is useless if the interlocu-

tors are unable to respond to the reply generated from our interlocutor (Anderson and Lynch, 1988:1) So, here, the agreement is that speaking is the result not the cause of listening. And David Nunan is seen to support this idea as “*For most people, being able to claim knowledge of a second language means being able to speak and write in that language. Listening and reading are, therefore, secondary skills- means to other ends, rather ends in themselves.* (Nunan, 1998 p.1).” This idea does not put the listening skill into the second plan but implies the importance of the skill and also supports the idea that listening lies behind speaking and what makes it successful. The second problem is that under many circumstances listening is a reciprocal skill. People cannot practice listening in the same way as they can rehearse speaking, or at least the part of speaking that has to do with pronunciation, because the listener cannot predict the communication (Anderson and Lynch, 1988). Another problem connected with the second one is comprehension of what they are listening to as English has become a worldwide language and there are millions of people learning and speaking it, the main learning problem is that they cannot understand what they are listening. The learners may have developed other skills to some degree but English teachers recognize that listening is the major skill enabling the learners to use their other skills. In Turkey, as in many countries, learners have great complications in understanding what they are listening to and in producing the right response. Learners face this problem as soon as they begin their formal education; many of the instructors, unfortunately, do not have the proficient teaching techniques which the students need in listening. Even proficient teachers are able to benefit from further training in teaching listening; there is still something more to do. Teaching can be considered successful if the learners can change the learned knowledge into behavior. So in order to maximize one’s listening skill Willis (1981:134) lists a series of micro-skills of listening. These are:

- predicting what people are going to talk about
- guessing at unknown words or phrases without panic
- using one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one understand
- identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information
- retaining relevant points (note-taking, summarizing)
- recognizing discourse markers, e.g., *Well; oh, another thing is; now, finally;* etc. recognizing cohesive devices, e. g., *such as* and *which*, including linking words, pronouns, references, etc.
- understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress, etc., which give clues to meaning and social setting
- understanding inferred information, e.g., speakers’ attitude or intentions.

These skills are more easily described than they are applied. Supposing that a listener is able to predict the topic, tries to grasp unknown words or utterances from

the context, uses his knowledge of the world, find the main idea by deleting or adding the utterances around the main idea under the light of discourse matters, it may easily be concluded that the English teacher has had a positive influence. Research has been unable to test whether speed of the discourse permits the listener the chance to process many of the cognitive processes explained above by Willis.

Also as the strategies and tactics the students use or should know in listening is significant in determining their success. Because human brain never lets us see the listening process, this study will deal with the strategies and the tactics that the learners use. These strategies lead the learners to more successful listening as much as possible.

It is possible to define the strategies as cognitive and metacognitive ones the first involves active manipulation of the learning task which contributes to learning directly; the second involves knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning activity and which contributes to learning indirectly because learners can facilitate their own learning and provide themselves new and interesting opportunities to learn in an effective way (Chamot, 1982)

As a result, although these strategies are valid for all skills, listening may be perhaps one of the latest and most important issues to deal with this point of view. Accepting the comprehensible input theory, a theory coined by Krashen stressing the understandable input by learners in discourse, learners should be able to make themselves understood by their addressees in different situations with the help of the comprehensible input they gain from listening during their learning in discourse or classroom situations. This skill has to be investigated much more in order to improve the quality of learning and to make the students feel that they are learning with successful listening abilities.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Although many researches have been conducted in listening throughout the world, there are few studies in Turkey. Researches have been done on many areas of ELT and the other three skills but listening has been left untouched. As English language teaching has been an obligatory course at primary, secondary, high schools, and universities in Turkey, ELT departments have been established at education faculties in state and private universities. One of the Education Faculties is Kâzım Karabekir Education Faculty at Atatürk University that was founded in 1981. It aims to train teachers in sixteen different departments. One of these departments is the ELT Department. The duration of the English language department course is five years. The preparation class is the first year of the program. The four-year period of the program includes eight terms. According to the regulations of Higher Education Council

(YÖK), listening as a separate course is taught in the preparation class of the program. In other words, teaching listening as a part of four language skills is based on the speaking courses, which take place in the first and second terms of the eight-term program. In particular, the methodology of teaching listening skills is not dealt with in any period of the program. In the ELT Department program, listening is not given as a course except in the preparatory school. In all lectures students are required to listen, take notes and respond in English. Especially in School Experience courses, which are given at the seventh, and the eighth terms, the student teachers of the ELT department experience great difficulty in executing the listening courses and teaching listening. All course book materials used in high school education include listening cassettes or videos, and thus there is a strong need for the English teachers or student teachers to be aware of the methodology concerning how they can endow their students with skills related to listening. A student teacher who hasn't been instructed in the listening methodology concerning the syllabus, strategies and tactics might be unable to produce effective techniques leading to the complete failure of the program or avoidance of the listening activities in the course books or materials. In sum, this study focuses on strategies and tactics that can be employed in improving listening skills of the students attending the ELT Department of Kâzım Karabekir Education Faculty of Atatürk University. There are two main reasons for conducting this study. First, there has not been a detailed study on listening strategies of Turkish students. Second, there has been a methodological inefficiency for the ELT students of Kâzım Karabekir Education Faculty. What makes this study unique is that learners are not lectured about the technique, procedure and design on listening skills during their education.

3. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

The instruments in the study are divided into three categories; as an indication of prior achievement of the participants, the proficiency exam scores at the beginning of the first term will be used for both the control and the experimental groups. Three instruments will be used to estimate the participants' level of listening skill. The first instrument is a questionnaire given to the group in order to detect what kind of strategies and tactics they use which the other group doesn't use. The second instrument is pre-tests and post-tests giving the students a four-month interval between the tests. For all of the tests, a scoring criterion will be developed. The third instrument is the learners' diaries. All the scoring guidelines will be in a scale ranging from 0 to 100. One instructor, who teaches listening and applies listening tests in the ELT Department will score pre-test and post-test papers. The questionnaires and the diaries will be evaluated through the SPSS and the methodology for the verbal data evaluation is as follows:

In this study a descriptive research model was used because it involves a collection of techniques used to specify, delineate, or describe naturally occurring phenom-

ena without experimental manipulation. Descriptive research shares characteristics with both qualitative and experimental research designs. The research uses tests such as writing a composition, surveys and questionnaires, self-reports and interviews as well as observations. The descriptive study is also quantitative besides being qualitative. So this feature of the research gives the researcher the ability to process the data both quantitatively and qualitatively (Seliger, W. Herbert, Shohamy, Elena, 1990).

The questionnaire used in this study consists of 18 questions seeking the cognitive strategies and 9 questions for the metacognitive strategies. Each question is designed to define the percentage and frequency of strategies. While preparing the questionnaire Goh's (1988) listening strategies table was used. The strategies discovered through the questionnaire are divided into two sections: The first part is about the cognitive strategies.

Questions from number one to three are about the use of *inferencing* strategy. Questions from number four to five are about *elaboration* strategy questions six and seven are about the usage of *prediction* strategy. Questions from eight to ten are about *contextualisation* strategy. Questions from eleven to twelve are designed to seek *translation* strategy. Questions from thirteen to sixteen are about the use of *fixation* strategy. Question seventeen is aimed to see if the subjects use and -if they use- the frequency of *visualization* strategy. The last question in this part focuses on the usage of *reconstruction* strategy.

The second part of the questionnaire seeks to find the percentage and the frequency of the metacognitive strategies. While questions one and two are structured to see the *pre-listening preparation*, question three and four are directed to the use of *selective and directed attention* strategies. Questions five, six and seven are designed to see the *comprehension monitoring* strategy. Question eight seeks to find the *real time assessment of input* while the last question checks for *comprehension evaluation* strategy.

4. APPLICATION

The university administration was contacted to get permission for the application of the tests. The aim of the research was explained to the administrators of the EFL department. The research began in the spring season of the 2001 – 2002 academic year and ended four months later.

During the four-month period, the following procedure was followed:

The students who succeeded in their university entrance examination and passed the Foreign Language Proficiency Examination were the participants of this study. They were approximately 106 students. Two of the subjects were taken out from the research because it was understood that they didn't enter the proficiency examination

at the beginning of the term. The ELT department of Kazım Karabekir Education Faculty is using another Proficiency test, which includes writing, grammar, vocabulary, speaking and listening questions, the whole making 100 points. The students less than 60 points became the students of preparatory school for one year. At the end of the preparatory school they are given another proficiency test to decide if they can continue the first year or not.

The first proficiency test used two aims;

1. The experimental group included the students who scored under 60. The students who scored more than sixty were excluded from the study because the first year students do not have listening lessons in their education.
2. To differentiate good listeners from the poorer listeners.

The purpose was to see whether the poor listeners could be good listeners through the listening strategies and if the poor ones could improve their own tactics for better listening.

Questionnaires and verbal reports were used to determine the type of the strategies or tactics they use.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

After a four-month period of experimentation, the final exam test scores, the student questionnaire, diaries, pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed statistically.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Although we have some new ideas about some cognitive and metacognitive differences distinguishing good listeners from the weak ones, it is still difficult to claim that there are some specific strategies which assure the success in listening skill. There can also be other claims that these successful learners as listeners did not have any difficulty in listening and this led them to use their own free style strategies. In other words, they were able to use any strategy because they could free their attention. The purpose of this study was not to define individual strategy use. So, therefore, individual development was not the focus of this study; on the contrary the group development (107 subjects) was the aim in the research. It was still interesting to see that individuals had a better score in the posttest compared with the pretest. 103 of the 107 subjects have shown a considerable improvement in the posttest in their overall listening ability after four months of listening strategy training. The mean score was 6.9 in the pretest and it was 10.2 in the posttest.

The first hypothesis of this study was to define the strategies the learners use in listening courses. From the data of this research (from the questionnaires, self-reports, and diaries) it was seen that the subjects use the following strategies:

- a. Inferencing
- b. Repetition
- c. Contextualisation
- d. Elaboration
- e. Resourcing
- f. Prediction
- g. Anticipation of details
- h. Auditory representation
- i. Selective attention
- j. Directed attention
- k. Comprehension monitoring
- l. Checking the current interpretation
- m. Comprehension evaluation
- n. Auditory representation
- o. Key word

The strategies used commonly are repetition, inferencing and resourcing because strategy training certainly helps the subjects but awareness raising (Chamot, 1995) should also be integrated with the instruction to enable the learners to apply their strategy training to the listening process.

The subjects in this study received detailed explicit strategy training. This was done in the classrooms with the sample studies and with the guidelines of the instructor teaching all of the four groups. So the success of the learners may also depend on the strategy instruction and also a different model was applied to the learners. They were given a table and wanted to improve it according to their needs.

It was thought that the learners could turn the abstract topic (the listening text) in to concrete information for better understanding first and applying the strategies better later. Of course forming a graphics table was not something limiting the students; it was open ended; they could use more or less columns or column labels. This was just as it was called in the lessons ‘Strategy Developing Table’. The table is as simple as helping the learners to turn the brain process or short-term memory input into a

representation that can prevent the loss of the data or give them a longer time for further processing. It was seen that the learners could apply the strategies more easily or more practically with the help of the table which is called as ‘Strategy Developing Table’ in this study.

The hypothesis whether the learners can learn the strategies with the help of instruction is verified through data obtained from the research. As mentioned above the explicit instruction has been seen to help to improve the current level of the subjects to a better level. But this study has also shown that instruction is not the only way to learn strategy use.

Learners use strategy without instruction. Although there is a common belief that learners need strategy training and Chamot (1995) sees strategy training as a must in the teaching of skills, it was observed from the learners’ self-reports that they could use the strategies before they were trained to do so. This was interesting because at the beginning of this study, natural strategy use was not a concept included into the research. While examining the data from the self-reports it was noticed that the subjects use some strategies such as repetition, translation and inferencing without instruction. This fact caused another idea that strategies are perhaps innate and the instruction can possibly be the trigger to initiate the strategies or in other words, strategies are like the treasure buried somewhere in the brain and instruction is like the treasure map and the guide to find or start them.

The problems the learners face were the second hypothesis in this study. It was seen from the diaries and self-reports of the learners that subjects had some difficulties which inhibited. The problems such as lack of knowledge, pronunciation and vocabulary comprehension problems are mainly the reason for insufficient input. The learners do not receive the right input or even if the input is enough they are not able to practice the input to convert into output except in formal situations such as written or oral examinations limited in the classroom. As Ellis states (2000), the more frequently a structure is used the easier it is to be acquired.

The other problems the subjects stated such as anxiety, health and stress mostly depend on the nature of the classroom atmosphere. Classroom situations can be changed by the instructor to decrease the problems above. The teachers are the ones making the class feel relaxed or not.

The speed problem depends on the nature of the subjects’ native language. Because the subjects’ native language (Turkish) is not as fast as the target language (English). This problem can again be reduced with the input flood. It was seen in this study that teachers using the warm up exercises before the lesson have more positive results. The use of the target language by the teacher during the lesson has also contributed to the important achievements of the learners in listening comprehension.

The third hypothesis is whether the teaching of the strategies actually helps poor listeners. The study showed that strategies certainly help the learners to improve their English. The pretest and posttest scores verified that the subjects whose level of English was poor before strategy instruction improved after the instruction training and the post test scores were satisfying.

In this study, it was found that learners somehow use listening strategies. Teaching the strategies in listening courses has a positive effect on the individual success of the learners. The poor learners can be trained to use either cognitive or metacognitive strategies and this will lead the trainers to teach the strategies or to trigger the strategies which the learners have difficulty in using. On the other hand strategy starters would contribute to the learners' abstract listening tasks. In addition, the poor students can be encouraged to use strategies with the appropriate training. Finally a listening course should never be seen as a mechanic relation between the learner and the cassette-player but as a means completing the other skills

As a result, as this study was limited to the preparation year students in English Language Teaching Department of Kazım Karabekir Education Faculty at Atatürk University, it would be beneficial to investigate the use of listening skill strategies at different years of the faculty of education. A better education in ELT depends on the use of learning strategies and the teacher trainers who include the teaching of strategies in their methodology courses will be the ones who contribute most to the goal of better education.

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