

# Study of English Listening Strategies and Fostering of Learner Autonomy

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**Abstract:** This paper first explores that listening is the weakest link in the four links which are listening, speaking, reading and writing in the context of English listening teaching in China, and points out the importance of studying listening strategies in listening teaching. It then elaborates that the learners lack autonomy and the ability of autonomous learning while learning English, especially English listening, and thus makes the learners lose interests of learning listening. It finally discusses a series of effective listening strategies through questionnaire and a comparative experiment. Through implementing these effective strategies, it can help enhance learner autonomy and foster the ability of autonomous learning while learning English listening.

## 1. Introduction

English listening is an important but relatively weak link in English teaching. With the development of the global economy, the status of English as an international language is further recognized, so the ability of input becomes more important. For English, the process of input is just the process of listening which has always been a difficult process for almost English learners. Many researchers have proposed a series of useful strategies through their study such as self-management, language skill training, and listening skills and so on.

This paper, it is to foster learner autonomy through strategies. It is hoped that learners can have interest in English listening while using these strategies, turning passive learning into active learning, and gradually develop a autonomous learning habit. Through this process, learners will no longer feel listening is a difficult study.

In this article, questionnaire and experiment are mainly used to further explain the strategies used in listening. At the same time, it also analyzes the present situation and the problems the learners come across while doing listening. Then it puts forward a series of acceptable and feasible strategies.

## 2. Study of English Listening Strategies Review

Study has proved that in modern communication, listening has accounted for 45% and stayed in the first place, speaking 30%, reading 16%, writing 9% <sup>[1]</sup>. Listening plays an important role in English teaching. Since 1990s, many foreign researchers have begun to be concerned about the listening strategies. In China, the study of English listening strategies stepped into the early stages of development in 1990s and at the end of 1990s, it stepped into a rapid development. Indeed, as the increase in the number of the research, people gradually recognize the importance of listening. However, how to enhance the capacity of listening is a rather difficult problem for researchers and teachers.

### 2.1 Definition of Learning Strategies and Its Research Methods

To study English listening strategies, learning strategies should be first referred, because listening strategies are important part of learning strategies. The researches on learning strategies are much earlier than listening strategies and its research methods are much systematic than the methods of listening strategies. The study of learning strategies began in 1970s. In 1975, Rubin opened the prelude to discuss language learning strategies in a paper entitled "What the Good Learner Can Teach Us". In the next 30 years, the study of learning strategies has made considerable

progress both in breadth and depth and the exploration points cover all aspects of research.

Several well-known foreign researchers put listening strategies into three categories: Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, Social and affective strategies<sup>[2]</sup>. In China, Wen Qiufang classified language learning strategies into two kinds: management strategies and learning strategies. Learning strategies can be further divided into traditional and non-traditional strategies. Traditional strategies include training strategy, veracity strategy and relying on native-language strategy; non-traditional strategies include functional practice strategy, fluency strategy and avoiding native language strategy<sup>[3]</sup>.

## **2.2 Relation between Listening Strategies and Fostering Autonomy**

Training the ability of English listening and speaking is one of the main contents of English teaching, some effective English listening strategies should be used to promote the verbal levels of learners. The traditional English teaching methods focus much on teaching grammar and vocabulary, but ignore listening, speaking and speech sounds teaching and thus make students feel very difficult when doing listening comprehension.

The function of language is for communication and the skill of listening is one important aspect of communicative competence. Listening is the core of communicative activity. Second, from language itself, if the learners have no ability of listening while learning a foreign language, their linguistic competence is not complete and directly affects actual exchange. At the same time, it also seriously hampers the development of other language skills. The importance of listening has become a consensus, so the research meaning of listening strategies is more profound.

As the main body of teaching activities, students are a very important link. The teaching is difficult to achieve desired effect without fostering and improving learner autonomy. In this more complex input process, the mental calm is particular important, so students should strengthen the training of mind in the process of listening<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **2.3 Research of Listening Strategies**

Mary Underwood<sup>[5]</sup> proposed three stages of teaching listening: pre-listening, while-listening, post-listening. Teachers should combined the characteristics of listening materials with reality, try to deal with the relationship of the three links and make good use of the teaching strategies. The pre-listening means the strategies used before listening. That is to help students find out the key points and difficult points. While-listening means the strategies used in listening. Teachers should train the students to concentrate on the main parts, select important information and get necessary information quickly. Post-listening means the strategies used after listening. The purpose is to help students self-examine and self-improve. Post-listening is a process to find out the mistake and correct it. Teachers can encourage students to record some difficult points from English listening so as to gather experience.

Giving students systematic training and guidance of listening strategies are important means to improve students' verbal level and the ability of autonomous learning and further study. This paper has put forward a series of listening strategies such as making predictions, note-taking, inferencing, memorizing better, improving pronunciation and intonation and so on.

## **3. Research on Autonomous Learning of English Listening**

Autonomous learning, by definition, refers to the learning capabilities to get into full play. It is also called self-assessment, independent learning, self-access, self-directed learning and learner-controlled instruction.

Although listening is an important language skill, it's widespread that learning effect is less efficient and the ability of autonomous learning is weak. In this paper, several ways are put forward to improve learner autonomy:

### **3.1 Position of Teachers**

In today's world, the roles of students and teachers have changed substantially. Autonomous

learning requires learner-centered teaching. Wenden <sup>[6]</sup> thinks that in fact learners should be allowed to be their own teacher and take charge of teachers' responsibility, but most learners are not fully prepared.

### **3.2 Teaching Strategies**

Limited classroom teaching is difficult to improve students' listening level in a short time. Letting students take initiative to solve the problems in listening such as self-understanding of vocabulary, grammar and cultural background, teachers should be fully prepared for teaching content, do meticulous design for teaching links, provide all kinds of opportunities for students thinking actively.

### **3.3 Study Habit**

Preview and review after class are important parts in learning and instructional improvement. Since students rarely do listening autonomously after class, teachers can provide students with effective listening materials, recommend world classic works such as films and television programs and other video materials in English, timely check their understanding of these materials, encourage students to speak to natives and take part in English corners so as to increase the interest in listening. In the post-listening stage, teachers should require students to review the content earnestly. First of all, when students come across the new subject matter in listening class, after class, the students can find relevant materials for practicing. In addition, students should adjust listening process and strategies.

### **3.4 Use of Internet**

Many colleges have English course online. According to the teaching requirements, teachers can arrange students submit listening practice in time and record the details of their learning. The teachers can leave a message in students' Dingding, QQ, E-mail or Wechat and give them some effective advice and encourage. In college English courses, students no longer rely on teachers to acquire knowledge. They can control their learning process according to their own learning style. If they come across any difficulties, they can seek for help online or find answers by themselves.

### **3.5 Keeping a Good State of Mind**

In this more complex input process, the mental calm is particular important, so students should strengthen the training of mind in the process of listening .

## **4. Research and Experimental Study**

This section mainly discusses some information of the experiment.

The survey is targeted at 100 students in Zhejiang University of Science and Technology including English major and non-English major students. Questionnaire consists of 10 questions. Questions relate to the factors that may have impact on listening. Through the questionnaire, it is hoped problems in listening can be analyzed and some effective strategies can be put forward. Such as Q1: In English learning, how much do you think of the position of listening in listening, speaking, reading and writing?

The experiment mainly researches the function of pronunciation and intonation in listening. It is hoped to know the importance of pronunciation and intonation in improving English listening. By random sampling, 10 students will be divided into two groups with 5 students each group. The two groups are called experimental group and control group respectively. The model is as follows:

Step1:

Experimental group: (random sampling) preliminary survey → students' English listening scores after learning a particular country's pronunciation and intonation → ultimate survey

Control group: (random sampling) preliminary survey → students' English listening scores without learning a particular country's pronunciation and intonation → ultimate survey

Step 2:

The listening material is about Indian English. Indian English has some main characteristics: (1) Indians always use present continuous. For example: I am understanding; she is knowing the answer. (2) Indians always simplify [th] into [t], [sh] into [s]. When they pronounce [t], it sounds like [d]. For example: the sentence I am thirty sounds like I am dirty.

Before the experiment, the students' English listening levels are tested, so it can be ensured they are on the same level. Before starting the listening, the experimental group will be familiar with the characteristics of the pronunciation and intonation of the country, India. At the same time, explain the features and difficult points to the students, so they will be prepared for the listening and not feel anxious. As to the control group, they will directly get into action without any preparation. They don't know what kind of voice they will hear. There are six different kinds of materials and all of them are from [www.putclub.com](http://www.putclub.com), but all are about India English. One kind of material has five questions, so there are thirty questions with each three points. Their results will be marked by A, B, C, D. A means the scores are above ninety; B means the scores are above eighty but below ninety; C means the scores are above seventy but below eighty; D means the scores are above sixty but below seventy.

#### Step 3:

From the results, it can be seen that the students get one A, three B and one C in experimental group, but in control group, they get two B, two C and one D. Obviously, pronunciation and intonation play an important part in listening and help the students improve their listening a lot. In form one, the students are familiar with India English, know the characteristics of their English and how their native speakers pronounce; they will prepare for that and pay attention to their language's features and difficulties. But in form two, the students have never contacted with this kind of language. For them, it is a new but strange language; they feel difficult and nervous while listening. So, listening strategies play an important role in improving learning effect.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to foster learner autonomy of English listening through study of listening strategies and help teachers of English to integrate their study and teaching with research. The improvement of listening needs the joint efforts of teachers and students. Teachers should continue to self-improve, select appropriate listening materials to help students overcome anxiety. Learners should build confidence, cultivate interest and enrich knowledge to improve listening.

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