



An Investigation of English Listening Strategies Employed by Lao EFL College Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate and compare the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students as classified by their genders and English proficiency. The samples were 71 third year English major students studying in the first semester of the academic year 2016 at Savannakhet Teacher Training College (STTC) in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. They were selected by using the table of Krejcie and Morgan and a simple random sampling technique. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire adapted from Gu (2004). The obtained data were analyzed by using mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test. The findings revealed that the use of English listening strategies of Lao EFL college students both in overall and each strategy was at a high level. Cognitive strategy was reported to use most, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and social affective strategy, respectively. In addition, the English listening strategies employed by these students classified by genders and English proficiency in overall showed statistically significant difference at 0.05 level.

Keywords : English Listening Strategies / Cognitive Strategy / Meta-Cognitive Strategy / Social Affective Strategy / Lao EFL College Students

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Statement of the Problem

Listening is recognised as an active activity that requires much attention to develop this complicated process. It plays an important role in communication as it is said that, of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). According to Devine (1982; cited in Prajanban, 2016), listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in. Gilbert (1989), on the other hand, notes that students from kindergarten through high school are expected to listen 65-90 percent of the time. Wolvin and Coakley (1991) conclude that, both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication. Listening is central to the lives of students throughout all levels of educational development. Listening is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1987). Both instructors and students acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings. Numerous studies indicated that efficient listening skills were more important than reading skills as a factor contributing to academic success (Wolvin and Coakley, 1991). Nevertheless, it is evident that listening is more important for the lives of students since listening is used as a primary medium of learning at all stages of education.

Listening strategies are another way for teachers and students used to improve their English listening skills, while many researchers search on learning strategies relating to listening strategies. Oxford (1990) conducts the research on learning strategies related to listening classified strategies into direct and indirect strategies. The indirect ways involve memory strategies, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies supported with language learning such as metacognitive, affective and social strategies. It is similar to Rubin (1994) who divides strategies into direct strategies such as creating opportunities to practice and indirect ways such as clarification, monitoring, etc. In addition, O' Malley and Charnot (1990) clarify three learning strategies, which include meta-cognitive, cognitive and social affective strategies. These strategies facilitate and improve the learning process of the students. When students put them into practice, they learn English associating with their daily activities in line with the topics studied in the classroom. The more students use strategies, the more effective they are to understand and to communicate in English. They are believed to be able to enhance learners' proficiency in learning other languages, and also develop their communicative competence and self-confidence. Strategies not only make the listeners better understand what they hear, but also help them deal with difficulties occurring in their listening tasks. In addition, listening strategies are effective in students at the time they are taking their lessons. Students have considered that the use of strategies is very helpful because these strategies increase listening, facilitate listening through practice, help to understand the topics, communicate among people and focus when listening. These reasons

require the support from the teachers since the students facilitate the learning process using their own teaching strategies.

As the importance of listening strategies mentioned above, many research works were conducted in order to offer an understanding to the general application of listening comprehension strategies (e.g. Bacon, 1992; Goh, 2002; Murphy, 1985, 1987; O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1993, 1996, 2003; Wu, 2007; Piamsai, 2011, Watthaharukiat, Chatupote & Sukseemung, 2012; Prajanban, 2016). These studies investigated the listening strategies used by the learners in all levels.

However, there is no research on listening strategies employed by English college students in Lao contexts. This research, therefore, aims to investigate and compare the English listening strategies that English major students studying at Savannakhet Teacher training College, Lao PDR used to develop their skills before. It is hoped that this study will be as the guidelines for English lecturers who teach the above college as well as the Teacher Training colleges all over Lao PDR to use the research results to adapt and develop the activities for improving the students' listening skills. Also, the students and English learners may use these findings to improve their English listening.

Research Questions

1. What are English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students?
2. Are there any differences between English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders?
3. Are there any differences between English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency?

Methodology

1. Population

The population of the study consisted of 86 third year English major students studying in the first semester of the academic year 2016 at Savannakhet Teacher Training College (STTC) in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. They enrolled in English Listening and Speaking Course.

2. Samples

The samples of this study were 71 third year English major students studying in the first semester of the academic year 2016 at Savannakhet Teacher Training College (STTC) in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. They enrolled in English Listening and Speaking Course. They were selected by using the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and a simple random sampling technique. In addition, the samples were divided into two levels of high and low English proficiency classified by the Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) of English courses. The samples who had got G.P.A. between 2.00-2.99 were placed in a low English proficient group (LEP) while

those who had got G.P.A. between 3.00-4.00 were placed in a high English proficient group (HEP). The total samples included 42 high English proficient students and 29 low English proficient students. There were 34 male students and 37 female students.

3. Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire which was adapted from Gu (2004). It consisted of two sections: personal profile and question section. In section one, the samples were asked to answer some general questions concerning themselves, including name, age, genders, and grade point average. In section two, the samples were requested to fill in the English listening strategy questionnaire with 46 statements. The 46 items were divided into three major sub-categories: meta-cognitive strategies (knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning activity), cognitive strategies (actual performance of language learning, such as inferencing, prediction, contextualization, using resources and perceptual processing), and social affective strategies (the regulation of feelings and attitudes such as anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and cooperation). The samples were asked to report their use of English listening strategy on a five-point scale by ticking the number: never true of me=1, rarely true of me=2, sometimes true of me=3, often true of me=4, and always true of me=5. The higher number indicated a more frequent use of the strategy concerned. The instrument was tried out with a non-sample group of 32 fourth year English major students at STTC who used to study the Listening and Speaking course. The reliability value of the questionnaire was 0.86 that can be used with the sample group.

4. Data Collection

Before the students started to work on the questionnaire, the researchers explained in Lao. The research data were kept in confidential. A consent form for taking a questionnaire was distributed to all students of the class. Only the students who agreed to participate in the study signed the forms. Then the participants completed the questionnaire. The students were allowed to ask the researchers about technical questions or unclear information in the questionnaire during the survey. The entire procedure of administering this part was about 30 minutes, including the time spent on instructions and consent forms.

5. Data Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed by using computer program software. The statistics used to analyze the obtained data were mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test. The interpretation of English listening strategies was proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) which were divided into three groups to understand the average scores of the questionnaire. The three levels of interpretation of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Three levels of interpretation proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995)

The key to understand average of usage group		
High	Always use	3.50 or above
	Often use	
Moderate	Occasionally use	2.50 to 3.49
Low	Seldom use	Below 2.50
	Never use	

Conclusion

1. English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students

The English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean, standard deviation and interpretation of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students (n=71)

English listening strategies	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Meta-cognitive strategy	3.68	0.72	High
2. Cognitive strategy	3.80	0.91	High
3. Social affective strategy	3.67	0.87	High
Total	3.72	0.66	High

As shown in Table 2, it reveals that the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students both in overall and each strategy were at a high level. The cognitive strategy was used most, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and social affective strategy, respectively.

2. Comparing the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders

A comparison of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 A comparison of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders

English listening strategies	Male (n=34)		Female (n=37)		t
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
1. Meta-cognitive strategy	3.85	0.82	3.53	0.59	1.86
2. Cognitive strategy	3.98	1.23	3.62	0.41	1.67
3. Social affective strategy	3.92	1.21	3.44	0.46	2.35*
Total	3.91	0.80	3.54	0.43	2.46*

*statistical significant difference at .05 level

As shown in Table 3, it reveals that the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders in overall showed statistically significant difference at 0.05 level. When considering each strategy, the social affective strategy showed statistically significant difference at 0.05 level while the rest strategies were not different.

3. Comparing the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency

A comparison of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4 A comparison of English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency

English listening strategies	Low (n=29)		High (n=42)		t
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
1. Meta-cognitive strategy	3.61	0.57	4.11	1.24	2.20*
2. Cognitive strategy	3.70	0.60	4.30	1.86	2.04*
3. Social affective strategy	3.65	0.93	3.78	0.48	0.69
Total	3.66	0.52	4.06	1.14	1.98*

* statistical significant difference at .05 level

As shown in Table 4, it reveals that the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency in overall showed statistically significant difference at 0.05 level. When considering each strategy, the meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies showed statistically significant difference at 0.05 level while the social affective strategy was not different.

Discussion

1. English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students

The findings revealed that the use of English listening strategies of Lao EFL college students both in overall and each strategy was at a high level. Cognitive strategy was reported to use most, followed by meta-cognitive strategy and social affective strategy, respectively. This may be explained by the fact that Lao EFL college students communicate in English all five weekdays, and they may use English listening in their daily conversation with teachers, friends or foreigners. Also, they mentioned that they practice English listening outside classroom such as watching TV, surfing Internet and listening to music. As a result, they used English listening strategies at a high level. Such a result of the highest strategy use of cognitive, it may be explained from the nature of these three types of listening strategies. According to O' Malley and Chamot (1990), only cognitive strategy is directly used in the process of listening skills, while meta-cognitive and the social/affective strategies are not directly

connected with the listening process. Therefore, students will pay much more attention to those strategies that can be directly employed and help them improve their listening proficiency. However, as meta-cognitive and social/affective strategies are only indirectly related to listening comprehension, these strategies are more liable to be neglected or underestimated by students in their listening activities. This finding is similar to Vandergrift (1993, 1996, 2003), Goh (1998), Chao (1997), and Prajanban (2016) who mentioned that the learners use more cognitive strategy than metacognitive and social affective strategies.

2. Comparing the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by genders

The findings showed that there are statistically significant differences at 0.05 level between male and female students in using the English listening strategies in overall and in social affective strategy. The findings are similar to Bacon (1992) and Vandergrift (1996) who reported that there are some differences in listening strategies used by students between the two genders. However, the present study indicated that the male students tend to use more frequency of English listening strategies than the female students which are different from the previous studies (i.e. Oxford & Nyiko, 1989; Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito & Sumrall, 1993; Oxford, 1993; Green & Oxford, 1995; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). These studies mentioned that females tend to use listening strategies more often than males. This could be explained that the Lao male students seem to be more brave to do things as compared with Lao female students. When they do not understand the listening texts, they explicitly ask their teachers and friends. Whenever they face the problems, they always talk and consult with the persons who know well and pay respect. However, the differences in the use of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies were not statistically significant. One possible reason is that both male and female students in this investigation are much the same in their cognition development, as they are about the same age and have similar language learning experience. It is not surprising that they employed more or less the same cognitive strategy and meta-cognitive strategy when performing the same language tasks.

3. Comparing the English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students classified by English proficiency

The findings showed that there are statistically significant differences at 0.05 level between high and low English proficient students in using the English listening strategies in overall and in meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies. Of the three major strategies, the main difference between the two groups lay in the much greater use of meta-cognitive strategies by high proficient level students. This result is consistent with Vandergrift's discovery (1997), in which he concluded that the major difference between successful and less successful listeners is students reported use of meta-cognitive strategy. This may be explained by the fact that when engaged in the act of listening, the high proficient level students appear to gain

more control of the listening process through the use of more meta-cognitive strategy. Moreover, it appears that high proficient level students are more able to verify continually and correct their comprehension as they are listening. The effective listeners are more aware of the processes underlying their own learning and seek to use appropriate learning strategies to control their own learning. In terms of the use of cognitive strategy, it is similar to Nunan (1996) and Jing (2013) who found that the high proficient students used more cognitive strategy than low proficient students with statistically significant different at 0.05 level. This is because the high proficient listeners seem to be more active, open and flexible; they used more strategies and had ability to know when to use which strategy. On the contrary, the low proficient listeners may pay too much attention to the text or on their own world knowledge, or they do not make a correspondent elaboration on the text information during the listening process. It appears that high proficient listeners adopt more of an approach of questioning and applying world knowledge to brainstorm logical possibilities before finally deciding on a conceptual framework that confirms predictions and remains congruent with further incoming data. Although the social/affective strategy used by more proficient listeners is a little higher than that of the less proficient ones, the independent-samples t-test showed that no statistically significant difference exists in the use of these strategies. We can, therefore, reach a conclusion that there is no difference in the use of socio/affective strategy between them. The reason for this can be various. One interpretation is that there are some unavoidable factors that influenced the validity of the investigation. It is also possible that the subjects have not filled in the questionnaire seriously.

Pedagogical Implications

1. The findings showed that the Lao EFL college students have common and discrepancy in using English listening strategies. Therefore, we should teach students in accordance with their aptitude and strengthen guidance and training of their listening strategy use.

2. The present study showed that English listening strategies employed by Lao EFL college students used listening strategies at the high level. Therefore, teachers should inform them the importance of listening strategies that all types of strategies can help them improve their listening skills.

3. Since the English listening strategies can help Lao EFL college students in listening task, therefore, English teachers should tell and teach them the advantages of listening strategies. Also, teachers should tell the students how to select and use the English listening strategies appropriately.

4. The results of this study proved that cognitive strategy use is of crucial importance for improving students listening ability. Teachers should, therefore, help language learners acquire and consciously focus on using the cognitive strategies.

5. This research revealed that meta-cognitive strategies are more directly related to a learning task and involve direct manipulation or transformation of the learning materials. Therefore, teachers should attach great importance to the training of meta-cognitive strategy use.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions for future research are given:

1. The present study conducted in the college level. The future research may be conducted at the different levels of students such as primary and secondary and university levels.

2. The present investigation compared the similarities and differences of English listening strategies classified by genders and English proficiency. It might be possible to compare the similarities and differences of English listening strategies classified by other factors such as the background and learning styles of students in the future research.

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